

# FRANK NORRIS STUDIES

No. 11  
Spring, 1991

Copyright © 1991, The Frank Norris Society



Mrs. Jeannette Black Norris  
circa 1902  
*Courtesy of the Bancroft Library*

*McTeague* at Ninety: The Novel and Its Tensions  
Don L. Cook  
Indiana University

For nearly thirty years I have been teaching *McTeague* in my undergraduate survey of twentieth-century American fiction, lecturing, discussing, asking and answering questions, but I have never been able to fully satisfy my students' incredulity at the enormous variety and apparent incompatibility of the incidents and the techniques in the book. Yet, year after year, exit polls reveal that *McTeague* is among the students' two or three favorites of the dozen or so volumes assigned. I use the book in that course as a text with which to elucidate the influence of Darwinism and the introduction of literary naturalism into American fiction. But it cannot be the pedagogical utility that inspires my students' enthusiasm for the book. Nor is it the book's usefulness as literary exemplar that enlivens conversations among Norris enthusiasts and causes them to chortle over their favorite passages like old friends reminiscing at a thirtieth class reunion.

Reflecting on this phenomenon prompts one to ask, "What keeps this admittedly flawed book so perpetually interesting to talk about, to teach, to read for the first or for the tenth time?" One answer is, there is so much in this book; it's no wonder that it is not easily exhausted. Into a volume half the length of *The Custom of the Country* or *The Grapes of Wrath*, Norris packs not only a carefully argued thesis supported with multiple case histories, a vivid sense of place and time, a whole host of dramatic tableaux, symbolic scenes, and evidentiary sequences, but also an amazing profusion of throw-away lines, throw-away scenes, even throw-away characters. For instance, why does Maria Macapa say "Had a flying squirrel an' let him go?" Why don't Schouler's Irish setter, Alexander, and the Scotch collie from down the block fight when they get the chance? And who is Big Jim, the "immense Indian buck" of Inyo County, and what is he there for?

My students' responses suggest that there is a disconcerting but fascinating tension in the book between a clear, diagrammatically demonstrated thesis, and a profusion of details that stick in the mind not in spite of the fact, but because of the fact, that they seem so egregiously random. The combination makes the book both satisfyingly predictable and perpetually astonishing. An awareness of this unresolved tension between rational thesis and random effects is, I suggest, an essential part of the experience of reading this book, not just something to be overlooked or excused, but a crucial element of Norris's style and intent, or perhaps better said, of Norris's conception and execution of his fictions.

In an article for *The Wave*, published on 11 September 1897, Norris offered a particularly clear image of the way he approached his materials. He says:

The story writer's position in regards to the life of the world is like that of a maker of mosaics in front of a vast pile of tiny many-colored blocks. He don't make the blocks nor color them—the story writer does not invent nor imagine the parts of his story. Writer and mosaicist alike select and combine.... Little by little he pieces together that crude and rough design, gets everything to fit,

everything to harmonize;... A little polishing, a very little, for in roughness there is strength and in sharp contrasts, vividness; and there you are, a rounded whole....<sup>1</sup>

Norris's metaphor is particularly vivid because with it he evokes not merely some disembodied, abstract sense of the relationship between the imaginative artist and the created fiction, but an almost mechanistic conception of the prior existence of materials from which the writer is to construct his novel and of the severely restricted shaping of these materials into their intrinsic pattern. Norris specifies his relationship to "blocks," those discrete fragments, each with its own built-in color and texture, amenable to rearrangement and some polishing, but essentially unchangeable in shape, texture, and color. At one point in this *Wave* article Norris asserts, "Imagination! There is no such thing; you can't imagine anything that you have not already seen and observed." But six lines later he asserts, "Sometimes,....the design does not exist at all except in your brain" (p. 1117). If imagination consists only of memory of what one has "already seen and observed," is the design predestined? Is the story a Platonic conception or, perhaps, a Jungian memory stored "in your own brain" until the occasion for its use arises? I quote these passages not to extract from them some self-consistent formula or doctrine, but to focus on the tension in Norris's own attitudes toward authorship. Authorship seems to consist only of ordering the observed blocks of life; imagination to consist only of observation. And yet the pattern into which the blocks are arranged may exist nowhere but in the writer's brain. In fact, Norris is emphatic that an event's having really happened is the surest sign of its being unsuitable for fiction. As he says, "Fiction is what seems real, not what is real" (p. 1115). The most fundamental tension then in Norris's fiction, especially his earliest works, is between the author's ability, or responsibility, to identify and manipulate these discrete fragments of life as he encounters them, and his freedom to manipulate, invent, even imagine the fictional patterns they will take.

Growing out of this fundamental tension in Norris's conception of fiction are other tensions of a more concrete nature, all of which I hope to illustrate convincingly from the text of *McTeague*. In doing so I am obviously indebted to the work of such scholars as Ahnebrink, Dillingham, Kaplan, Lundy, Marchand, Walcutt, and most of all Pizer. I claim to have found no new pile of blocks, but at best to have rearranged those already uncovered into a pattern of what I call "tensions." The three tensions that I want to add to the underlying one I have already mentioned are, first, a tension between sociological documentation and ironic implication, second, a tension between visceral reality and bravura artistry, and, third, a tension between scientific objectivity and humane sympathy.

By the term "sociological documentation" I refer to the documentary details of geography, architecture, names, addresses, dates, pastimes, organizations, civic events and the daily routine of life on and around Polk Street: the details that add verisimilitude to this "Story of San Francisco." For instance, in his study of the making of *McTeague* and *The Octopus*, Robert D. Lundy cites such details as the existence of G.F. Roberts's candy store at 1301 Polk Street, which employed a salesgirl, "who had one thumb missing and was notorious for dispensing wares more appealing to young

men than candy."<sup>2</sup> Lundy's research reveals not only Norris's meticulous recreation of McTeague's neighborhood but also his weaving of verifiable details into the mental life of his characters. When Maria Macapa is planning her wedding dress, she asks Miss Baker to make her "something gay, like what the girls at the candy store wear when they go out with their young men."<sup>3</sup>

I refer also to Norris's literal adoption of incident and character from local events, often recorded in newspapers. Patrick Collins' murder of his wife in the cloakroom of the Felix Adler Free Kindergarten where she worked as a janitor, was given sensational coverage in the San Francisco *Examiner* of 14 October 1893. Lundy's case for Norris having used the kindergarten murder as a building block in his novel is entirely convincing. The newspaper not only capitalized on the ironic location of the murder, but portrayed Collins himself with a combination of pseudo-scientific analysis and satiric derision, supplying his motives and his mental processes. The *Examiner* reported:

The [murderer's] face is not degraded, but brutish. That is to say, he is not a man who has sunk, but one who was made an animal by nature to start with. The face is broad, the brown eyes are set wide apart, the nose is flattened at the bridge.... The jaw is heavy and cruel.... A grotesque egotism is at the bottom of all the concentrated selfishness which marks the character of all such brutes and pushes them into their crimes.... He killed his wife because she had inflamed him with a sense of injury which he considered, and doubtless still considers, thoroughly well grounded.<sup>4</sup>

The factual parallel between McTeague's murder of Trina and Collins' murder of his wife is obvious, but in his fiction Norris mutes the violence while the newspaper account gloats over every sensational detail. Collins is reported to have stabbed his wife thirty-nine times and left the knife sticking in her side. She dragged herself out of the kindergarten closet and down the stairs to the street where she died before a priest could arrive. But when McTeague attacks Trina, the physical violence is limited to three sentences.

He kept his small dull eyes upon her, and all at once sent his fist into the middle of her face with the suddenness of a relaxed spring.... He came back at her again, his eyes drawn to two fine twinkling points, and his enormous fists, clenched till the knuckles whitened, raised in the air. Then it became abominable. (Pp. 524-525)

The horror is reflected in the reactions of the listening cat, "wildly terrified, his eyes bulging like brass knobs" (p. 525). But we see McTeague strike only one blow. Then we follow his preparations to flee to the mines, including his decision to take his canary with him rather than leave it to starve. "He took down the cage, touching it gently with his enormous hands, and tied a couple of sacks about it to shelter the little bird from the sharp night wind" (p. 526).

Trina's death is delayed for a page and a half and is then reported in two sentences: one visual image of the unconscious victim and one metaphor whose mechanical impersonality simultaneously increases the horror and insists upon the naturalistic

interpretation of her fate.

Trina lay unconscious, just as she had fallen under the last of McTeague's blows, her body twitching with an occasional hiccough that stirred the pool of blood in which she lay face downward. Toward morning she died with a rapid series of hiccoughs that sounded like a piece of clockwork running down. (P. 526)

The scene sticks in our minds less for the violence of the documented murder than for the juxtaposition of McTeague's animal fury and simple-minded affection and the reduction of Trina's death to a mechanical metaphor. Without reducing the documentary reality of the incidents and details, Norris embeds them in a matrix of impersonal, naturalistic irony invisible to the participants, and thereby all the more discomfiting to the readers.

The second tension, that between visceral reality and bravura artistry, is evidenced in Norris's determination to treat the raw realities of the contemporary urban life around him but to treat them through a set of literary devices or tricks that will transform mere realistic reporting into a startling exploration of what he called "the unplumbed depths of the human heart, and the mystery of sex, and the problems of life, and the black, unsearched penetralia of the soul of man."<sup>5</sup> In this gaudy formula Norris rejected the conception of naturalism as a branch of realism and placed it instead in the realm of romance, a genre he felt had been emasculated in modern fiction. But romance, as he conceived it, aimed at the revelation of the hidden impulses and deepest motives of mankind, eschewing boundaries of class, refinement, taste, or sex. While Norris rejected the mundane realism of William Dean Howells to embrace the greater range of romance, he did not forswear the serious and ameliorative mission of fiction. Instead he claimed that mission for romance, the genre within which he placed Zola's *roman expérimental*, and with the mission an untrammelled range, freedom, and style that can only be called operatic.<sup>6</sup> It was, ironically, in the *Boston Evening Transcript* that Norris published his well-known "Plea for Romantic Fiction" in which he denounced Howellsian realism as "the drama of a broken teacup, the tragedy of a walk down the block,...the adventure of an invitation to dinner" (p. 1166). You have been taught, Norris says, to think that

Romance should only amuse and entertain you, singing you sweet songs and touching the harp of silver strings with rosy-tipped fingers. If haply she should call to you from the squalor of a dive, or the awful degradation of a disorderly house, crying: "Look! listen! This, too, is life. These, too, are my children, look at them, know them and, knowing, help!" Should she call thus, you would stop your ears; you would avert your eyes, and you would answer, "Come from there, Romance. Your place is not there!" And you would make of her a harlequin, a tumbler, a sword dancer, when, as a matter of fact, she should be by right divine a teacher sent from God. (P. 1168)

Norris's invocation of Romance, in these semi-divine terms and in reference to dives and disorderly houses, represents rather neatly the tension in the novel *McTeague* between the sordid but

solid vitality, on the one hand, of Maria, Marcus, the Sieppe family, Frenna's Saloon, the car conductors' coffee-joint, the street fairs, and family picnics, and, on the other hand, the prolonged rhetorical cadenza with which Norris embellishes McTeague's rather rudimentary moral scruples over kissing the sedated Trina. Here I abbreviate that scene severely, but notice how Norris engorges the scene with a tumescent rhetoric equivalent to the grand operatic effects of Verdi, or perhaps better, of Puccini.

He was alone with her, and she was absolutely without defense.

Suddenly the animal in the man stirred and woke; the evil instincts that in him were so close to the surface leaped to life, shouting and clamoring.

It was the old battle, old as the world, wide as the world—the sudden panther leap of the animal, lips drawn, fangs aflash, hideous, monstrous not to be resisted....

The fury in him was as the fury of a young bull in the heat of high summer....

Below the fine fabric of all that was good in him ran the foul stream of hereditary evil, like a sewer. The vices and sins of his father and his father's father, to the third and fourth and five hundredth generation, tainted him....

But McTeague could not understand this thing. It had faced him, as sooner or later it faces every child of man; but its significance was not for him. To reason with it was beyond him. (Pp. 283-285)

This philosophical gnashing of teeth, this profusion of animal metaphors, this universalizing of the dentist's rut are all part of Norris's attempt to bring the high seriousness of art to visceral passions that he perhaps suspected were not artistic. He does it in every one of his novels, though most gaudily in *McTeague* and *Vandover*. Students generally appreciate it, for such authorial guidance leaves them in no doubt about what they are supposed to be noticing. More experienced readers may find it intrusive and/or amusing, but the cumulative effect is to increase the tension one feels between Norris's desire to produce serious High Art, and his determination to document the underlayers of life usually ignored or suppressed in romance.

As the art historian Linda Nochlin reminds us, one of the major innovations of late nineteenth-century realism was the insistence upon painting contemporary, urban subjects.<sup>7</sup> Painters had not only to develop new techniques with which to capture the vivacity of the city scene as it changed from moment to moment, but also to justify their subject matter as being worth recording on canvas. One senses in the work of the impressionists a tension between what they are trying to capture and their declaration that what they capture is indeed art. Without claiming that Norris is always successful in his similar attempt to transmute the vitality of Polk Street life into art, I do suggest that the attempt to do so creates in *McTeague* a major tension that is always unsettling and invigorating, and occasionally amusing.

The final tension in *McTeague* that I wish to identify is that

between scientific objectivity and humane sympathy. Of course, some of the ideas considered scientific in Norris's day now seem terribly simplistic and naive. One such idea is the theory of criminal physiognomy elaborated by Cesare Lombroso, which Norris apparently became familiar with through Max Nordau's *Degeneration*. Norris's initial description of McTeague combines ideas of criminal physiognomy with those of a debased heredity and a brutalizing environment:

McTeague was a young giant,...moving his immense limbs, heavy with ropes of muscle, slowly, ponderously. His hands...were hard as wooden mallets, strong as vices, the hands of the old-time car-boy. Often he dispensed with forceps and extracted a refractory tooth with his thumb and forefinger. His head was square-cut, angular, the jaw salient, like that of the carnivora. (P. 264)

In McTeague's father we see the suggestion of atavistic degeneration through drunkenness. "Every other Sunday he became an irresponsible animal, a beast, a brute, crazy with alcohol" (p. 263). Such degeneration was thought to be heredity. But more important than the accuracy or inaccuracy of the pseudo-scientific beliefs alluded to in the book is the heroic conception of the experimental novelist as a participant in the scientific investigation of human behavior and institutions. As Zola says in his essay "The Experimental Novel," "[The] Dream of the physiologist and the experimental doctor is also that of the novelist, who employs the experimental method in his study of man as a simple individual and as a social animal."<sup>8</sup> However fanciful the parallel that Zola draws, Norris responded enthusiastically to the conception of novel writing as a noble calling in which the writer becomes the experimental moralist, the objective recorder of contemporary life, and thus a contributor to a sounder system of justice, a more humane penology, a more complete understanding of the human range. The curiously affectless way in which some of the most horrendous details of the novel are reported derives from Norris's attempts to be the objective, scientific observer, not inventing fictions through which he moves imagined creatures, but dutifully reporting the results of scientific observation and experimental study. Chapter nineteen begins with the shockingly laconic observation, "One can hold a scrubbing-brush with two good fingers and the stumps of two others even if both joints of the thumb are gone, but it takes considerable practice to get used to it" (p. 509). As Trina falls increasingly the victim of her masochism and her miserliness, Norris, the objective experimentalist, remarks: "Trina's emotions had narrowed with the narrowing of her daily life. They reduced themselves at last to but two, her passion for her money and her perverted love for her husband when he was brutal. She was a strange woman during these days" (p. 479).

This objective tone is so pervasive, and so oddly paired with the frequent purple passages of operatic excess, that it finally has an ironic, almost satiric, effect. Students sometimes object to what they regard as Norris's callous, sarcastic, and even playfully sadistic attitude toward his characters. And indeed sometimes the tone is carried to an extreme that suggests parody. When Trina draws all of her money out of Uncle Oelbermann's business, her coolly observed, clinically described celebration is so grotesque that Erich

Von Stroheim's expressionist filming of the scene actually diminishes the disturbing physicality of this image of sensual greed.

[Trina] bolted the door with shaking fingers, and emptied a heavy canvas sack upon the middle of her bed. Then she opened her trunk, and taking thence the brass match-box and chamois-skin bag added their contents to the pile. Next she laid herself upon the bed and gathered the gleaming heaps of gold pieces to her with both arms, burying her face in them with long sighs of unspeakable delight. (P. 514)

Norris's intention in this objective report of aberrant behavior is, I think, neither satiric nor parodic. His attitude is best indicated by the words he puts into the mouth of his personification of Romance. "Look! listen! This, too, is life. These, too, are my children, look at them, know them and, knowing, help!" (p. 1168).

It has long been remarked that realism, whatever its intention, inevitably turns to meliorism; the accurate portrayal of life arouses in the reader or viewer the realization that life not only could be, but should be, better. The meliorative impulse is certainly strong and conscious in Zola's naturalism and in Norris's as well. The implication in Norris's fiction is that once the true conditions of human life are looked at, without discreet restraint, sentimental camouflage, or pious moralism, the emerging truth will render pleas and tears unnecessary. The most powerful protest against injustice should be its accurate depiction. Given this rationale, the combination of clinical objectivity and gothic detail in Norris's descriptions is logically coherent, even though it vibrates in a tonal tension that often obscures the benevolent humanism that motivates Norris.

I would suggest then that the fascination with *McTeague* that readers have experienced for ninety years is best understood by recognizing and frankly admitting the book's unresolved tensions: a tension between sociological documentation and ironic implication, a tension between visceral reality and bravura artistry, and a tension between scientific objectivity and humane sympathy. All three of these contribute to a general tension between rational thesis and apparently random effects. I think that the unresolved tension between aim and means experienced by Norris in writing *McTeague* results in an unrelieved tension between expectation and astonishment experienced by the reader in confronting *McTeague*. But I think that it is not the settled questions but these unsettling tensions that keep calling us back to this naturalistic romance.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>"Fiction is Selection," *Frank Norris: Novels and Essays*, ed. Donald Pizer (New York: Library of America, 1986), p. 1116; page references are hereafter cited in the text.

<sup>2</sup>"The Making of *McTeague* and *The Octopus*," Ph.D. Diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1956, p. 9. Quoted in *McTeague*, ed. Donald Pizer (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977), p. 265.

<sup>3</sup>*McTeague* in *Novels and Essays*, p. 414; page references are hereafter cited in the text.

<sup>4</sup>Reprinted in the Norton *McTeague*, pp. 260-261.

<sup>5</sup>"A Plea for Romantic Fiction," *Novels and Essays*, pp. 1168-1169; page references are hereafter cited in the text.

<sup>6</sup>It is interesting to notice that Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* was first produced in 1890 and Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* in 1892, both within three years of Norris' residence in Paris. The explorations of the emotional lives of non-aristocratic characters and the summary revenge and physical violence of the librettos place them squarely in the tradition of "opera verismo", generally acknowledged to have been influenced by Zola's fiction. The parallel throws light on Norris's ideas of the applications of romance to low life and perhaps on his conception of the style proper to naturalistic romance.

<sup>7</sup>*Realism* (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 111.

<sup>8</sup>*What Was Naturalism?*, ed. Edward Stone (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1959), p. 56.

#### Norris Notices in *The Conservator*

Jennifer Anderson

Texas A&M University

Robert C. Leitz, III

Louisiana State University in Shreveport

Though Horace Traubel (1858-1919) is best known in literary circles for his close friendship in Camden, New Jersey, with Walt Whitman, he was also founder and editor of *The Conservator*, a monthly magazine published in Philadelphia from 1890 to 1919. Initially *The Conservator* sought to promote the aims of the followers of the Ethical Culture movement in their philosophical assault on systematic beliefs and the mystical elements of orthodox religion. After 1894, however, Traubel changed the focus of the magazine from the radical ideas of the ethical culturalists to a kind of boosterism for Walt Whitman and the propagation of Whitman's beliefs on social, political, and gender issues. *The Conservator* also contained many book reviews, and among these are four which Traubel wrote: *The Octopus* (13 [January, 1903], 171-172); *The Responsibilities of the Novelist* (16 [August, 1905], 90); *The Third Circle* (20 [April, 1909], 28); and *Vandover and the Brute* (27 [September, 1916], 92-93).

In each, the Whitman influence is evident, whether in Traubel's use of rhetorical devices found in the poet's works, his often expansive proclamations, his affinity for Norris's panoramas (which he felt were both visual and spiritual), or his insistence on a truthful presentation of life (showing both the "roses" and the "weeds").

Traubel's reviews were published subsequent to an obituary of Norris written by Julie A. Herne (1881-1955), the oldest daughter of the American actor and playwright James A. Herne. "Frank Norris" appeared a little over a month after Norris's 25 October death (13 [December, 1902], 152). Herne's claim in the penultimate paragraph, that Norris was a Whitmanian singer of the "big, free, wondrous life of our country," may have been the impetus for Traubel's "late day" assessment of a significant portion of the Norris canon.

None of these five pieces has been previously cited in any Norris bibliography. Arranged chronologically below, they are reprinted as they appeared in *The Conservator*, with a bracketed *sic* twice indicating a typographical error. The quotation at the

beginning of Herne's eulogy is from Plautus, *Bacchides*, IV, vii.

\*\*\*\*\*

Frank Norris

*"Whom the gods love die young."*

News of the death of Frank Norris comes like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky. To American letters his early loss is inestimable. He attained his artistic maturity at an age when most men are undeveloped. It is certain that had he lived he would have achieved still greater things—would have surpassed every other American novelist. Even as it is, he will rank as preeminently powerful in an era of great novelists.

His right to such rank lies now in but two books—*The Octopus* and *The Pit* (unpublished)—where, had he been spared, many still greater might have asserted that right. *The Epic of the Wheat*, which was his promise—and what a noble promise!—must stand as his monument. Many would be glad to die leaving such a monument. Strong and brilliant as were Norris's earlier books, they gave no intimation that he possessed such splendid powers, and in *The Epic of the Wheat* they are outshone. The sun of its genius puts out their candles.

One is reminded of Zola in the style and minor treatment of Norris's work, but in the last analysis it is only to Hugo that he can be compared. Not since the trilogy upon "religion, society, nature," of which *Les Misérables* is the most profound and famous book, has so vast and inclusive a theme as *The Epic of the Wheat* been contemplated by any novelist. Hugoesque, too, was that marvelous constructive facility by which Norris was able to entangle a score of lives in one web of tragic destiny—to picture each life so that it stands before the reader, palpitating with vitality, humanity, from its most trivial detail, in act or personality, to its highest aspirations and noblest achievements. Osterman dresses like a dandy and jokes like a minstrel and dies like a hero. Annixter, the biggest figure in modern fiction, coarse and brutal—"this poor, crude fellow"—undergoes a regeneration more subtle but as sublime as that of Jean Valjean. As with Hugo, the smallest detail or most trivial event has a bearing upon the working out of the story. In imagination, in dramatic instinct, and in the power to handle a great situation, Norris was superb. How thrilling is the incident of Dyke's flight and capture, how unique and masterly the description of Annixter's vigil over the growing wheat; as, with the dawn of day, and the dawn of love in his heart, "the morning abruptly blazed into glory upon the spectacle of a man whose heart leaped exuberant with the love of a woman, and an exulting earth gleaming transcendent with the radiant magnificence of an inviolable pledge."

But Norris owed nothing to Zola or Hugo, Kipling or Tolstoi, though something of the qualities of each may be found in his pages. He was individual and American; he sang the big, free, wondrous life of our country, and its titanic strength got into his work. It was indeed an epic that he wrote, this story of the growing of the wheat on the wide plains of California, and of the evil ways in which it is sent forth to feed the world. For, moving as is the human story, we are never allowed to forget the existence of the wheat itself, as it is planted and harvested. And what a tragic harvesting was there!

Frank Norris set for himself a colossal plan, but in *The Octopus* and *The Pit*, at least, he achieved it to the end. For now there are only two books. The great trilogy is an unfinished epic. The full story of the wheat will never be told. It is tragic that a man so young and so gifted should pass away. In the face of his death we ask the rebellious question, why must this thing be? But there is no answer from the eternal silence. We can never know.

Julie A. Herne.

\*\*\*\*\*

*The Octopus*

It may be a late day to talk of this early book. But I have just come to it. I enjoy my first experience with Norris. I have read some of his short stories. But nothing before this really got hold of me. Norris makes me feel roomy. He excites my self respect. That is the triumph of the best books. Norris may easily be criticised. I can see a hundred frailties and incongruities in *The Octopus*. But as weighed against its virtues they are not entitled to consideration. Norris sees things in a large way. His epic traces the conflict between the farmer and the railroad. He makes great use of detail but never with a detail result. By the time Norris is through with his detail you have arrived with him at the hilltop and can survey a vast beyond. Norris is a story teller only incidentally. His story is interesting in itself. But you never stop with the story. You are eager for its philosophy. This is the reverse of the common impulse. The philosophy if it is made palpable becomes an offense. Norris spread himself over the vast wheat fields and suffered himself their harvested woes. The dramatic incidents of his narrative contain unusual syllogisms. This thing is happening every day east and west, asserting the same lesson and effect, in some form or other. All is leading to the master result. Norris caught the episode in all the features both of its hope and its horror. He does not scruple to present this death struggle in the ferocity of its inevitable despair. It is cruel. But it is true. Here is America at war with itself. Here have the plains come into the maw of the gambler. The railroad is the symbol. But the soul of man is back of all. The soul of man that does the evil. The soul of man that will turn this evil to good. The tangle of *The Octopus* is the tangle of civilization. Meet the agony of the farmer and you answer the general plaint. Near and far is one. Norris diagnosed the hour. The way is dark. But there is a beyond in the full sunlight. Norris is dramatic. He sees the picture in the large. He is symbolic. Annixter and the wheat were reborn in the same self annunciation. It is a powerful elixir. Norris is not an artistic fabian. He goes great lengths with his big fist. There is a lawlessness in Norris which imparts a grateful relish to his story. The story comes to nothing as a story. But the drama is played out to a world conclusion. You do not feel as if you had been fooling with tableaux after following this recital. You feel as if you had had a bath of blood. Norris leaves you with excited pulse. You are convinced. But you are not satisfied. Here is America. America still fighting its brute self. But you know that this America in fulfilling one destiny is prophesying another.

T.

\*\*\*\*\*

### The Responsibilities of the Novelist

Norris did better than call for an American art. He wrote several American books. Norris is a good answer to his own call. Norris surveyed the field. What had been done for America? I have kept my ear to the ground. I wanted to hear if Norris ever named Whitman. Not once. Norris should have known Whitman. He should have been able to see that Whitman was the first sufficient American voice. Norris disdained the idea that America has to go to Europe for material. The material is right here. Have you sense enough to use it? The best material is right where you are. Where are you? It does not matter. Is there anything in all known history to make the unsung American epic look cheap? The treasure is at hand. Draw on it. Norris but repeats for the novel what Whitman has said for the poetry of the States. A man with the American present does not need to retreat to any European past. Are we to turn the American pockets inside out and say: See, the pockets are empty? The environment or the background is not the subject. The artist is the subject. There is everything to see. Have you eyes? We talk about romance. Well, take romance, too. Do you need to borrow romance of the older worlds? Romance is not in the thing you see but in the eye that sees. No artist hunts for subjects. Subjects crowd his house. Subjects knock at his front door. Romance comes easy to the artist. He is indifferent about geography. I do not doubt the mine. Can you work it? Do not despair of the life you know. That life is as good life as any life. If you cannot do brave things with the life you know you are not likely to do brave things with the life you do not know. Norris made his protest for to-day. For here. For things we do not need to retreat into history to see or advance into prophecy to see. For the wheat pit. For the railroad octopus. For Mulberry Bend. For gambling, thieving and bankruptcy. For the struggle of people who live with a problem that threatens their destruction. Norris says this is not too much for romance or too little but just enough. That is why I wonder why Norris never saw Whitman anywhere and reached over and shook hands with him. The fact is Norris was just starting off. Just got his ship under way. Just did a thing or two. Just traveled a few miles. Then his earthship went down. It was tragedy to see that ship go down. It would have been worse than tragedy if the ship had not set out at all. Norris just did a thing or two. But his thing or two will last. I am not sorry Norris is dead. I am glad he is alive. It is everything in a world of dead books for books to be alive.

T.

\*\*\*\*\*

### The Third Circle

Frank Norris was made for big results. He was still only trying his tools when he died. And yet Norris was not only a promise. He left conclusive work behind him. He lived long enough to produce books that make us wish he had lived longer. In *The Third Circle* we find Norris in the making. His apprentice work. When a young man Norris worked on the *San Francisco Wave*, to which he contributed the stories here collected. I don't think there is much

of *McTeague* or *The Octopus* suggested in these preliminary sketches. They are superficially interesting. But they possess no more than a curio value. Taken in their own right they would never have been republished. If the author was not so well known because of his more matured writing it would never occur to anyone to suggest that *The Third Circle* is entitled to attention. Now I see Norris people discovering Norris cosily enveloped in this inconsequential background. The critics are too shrewd for anything in seeing out of the backs of their heads. Norris was shaping fast when the end came. I still somehow stand by [sic] *McTeague* as the most brutally virile demonstration of his genius. For panoramic magnificence, for huge historic animation, for immense symbolism, for interiors of glowing consuming emotion, *The Octopus* will always remain isolated in the Norris calendar. And of course *The Pit* has dramatic elements that I do not discourage. I cheerfully repeat my conviction that Norris had projected in his epical trilogy of the wheat a narrative of the mass movements of modern democracy which was far and away the most striking design announced in our native art. But the fact remains that he was struck down with his plan half-fulfilled. More than that, *The Pit* falls far below *The Octopus* in majesty of immediate power. But *McTeague* still faces me with its cruel symbolism. Haunts me. Will not let me off. When I take *McTeague* for what it means in social integration I commence to understand the scope of Norris's insight. In *A Man's Woman* the same amplitude of vision is brought into play. Norris always laid things out on a liberal scale. Size, size, size. That's written all over and under and through his books. Size, size. Not graceless bulk. Size. Poised perfect capacity and roominess. The early scribbles in no fashion disclose this characteristic even in remote clues. Norris had no sickly cloying fondness for foreign themes or for the inane inspirations of American parlors. He preferred the thick of the fight where the stake is life or death.

T.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Vandover and the Brute

The beauty of *Vandover* is not in its grace but in its hideousness. It's not all the truth. But it's all true. Norris had a wonderful imagination. Yet he left nothing to the imagination. He dug into the ground. He turned up some of the foulest earth. But he never defiled the mess with perfume. No man was more sensitive to cleanliness. Yet no man was more sensible of dirt. But he never misnamed his qualities. He didn't fool with the virtues to make them vices, nor with the vices to make them virtues. He's not always arguing with himself about his characters. He don't indulge in unceasing introspection. Nor does he pad his story. It's like a direct sail to somewhere with all the winds and currents in your favor. He don't take you aside and whisper any secrets in your ears. What he's saying he'd say to anybody. *Vandover* is an unapologetic figure. It affects no compromise. As a novelist Norris disdained opportunism. He begs nobody's pardon. He asks nobody's leave. He just does an honest job. But he don't claim that the job's agreeable. His people are not beatific. *Vandover's* career is all down stairs. It's all descent. *Vandover* was not malign. He wasn't even vicious. He was weak. He was always stumbling. He never comes to any agreements with himself. He carries on an eternal quarrel within. Who's guilty in

such tragedies? Not the victim, certainly. Something in the social order. What? Who knows? I dont. Yet we all make our guesses. A man cant toy with his bad and good. He cant say nothing matters. He's got to know that everything matters. With the failures on every side we cant make light of the hidden hand which pushes men and women over the cliff into the rapids. There was plenty of heaven in Vandover's hell. But there was too much hell in his heaven. He made terrible fights against the inevitable. But he always broke at the crisis. He finally said to his fate: "Do anything you choose with me: It's no further use." He was never big enough to be saved. He was never little enough to be damned. It's curious that at his worst, and his worst [sic] was very bad, he was never wholly brute. And it's also curious that at his best, and his best was never good enough, he never was wholly man. He started somehow wrong. Or his father and mother did. Or his social order did. His far ancestry, perhaps. Something started wrong. He got into this cursed current. And he was a goner. Nothing he did to struggle to a landing place again got him there. It's quite the average thing to say no man's got any right to be that sort of a man. But we must look deeper than that for causes. We must rather say no society's got any right to be that sort of a society. We give birth to children spoiled at the start. We make bankruptcy impossible to avoid. We used to blame it on God and leave the settlement with the Devil. But we cant do that any more. Now we're compelled to blame it on the social chaos and undertake the settlement ourselves. Vandover was born crooked. Or trained crooked. He was never instructed in any sustaining ideals. Not much was missing. But the little that was missing was fatal. There may only be a tiny screw missing out of a watch. But that screw is as important to the watch as the watch is to the screw. The littlest man is as important to the universe as the universe is to the littlest man. The littlest element in character is as important to character as character is to the littlest element. You cant skip. And you cant be skipped. Some little turn in the road might have directed Vandover's vehemence from destruction to salvation. Norris is accused of being pitiless. So he is. But so are the natural laws. So is gravitation. If you lean too far over the mountain side you'll go over. That's pitiless. But it's also pitiful. Norris is pitiless in his truths and pitiful in his warnings. He's pitiless as judge and pitiful as judgement. He's as pitiless as fate and as pitiful as aspiration. But he's loyal to his picture. It's horrible. It makes your flesh creep. You cant sleep nights as you read it. You ask him: "Did you need to do this?" No. He didn't need to. But doing it he did it right. Doing it he did it without undoing it. We're told this sort of work is no part of the task of art. But this is a late day in which to limit the field of art. Anything belongs to art that art knows how to handle. You can have the pretty sickly things too if you want them. But here are also the ugly well things. You can prefer the esthetic. But you cant avoid the shameful. You can prefer your garden of roses. But you cant avoid the weeds and the ivies venomously poisoning those who touch them. Norris is literal. In McTeague and in Vandover he's unrelieved. He never breaks loose in these stories in the sublimated symbolism which gives *The Octopus* an unquestionable grandeur. But why should he tell a story that can tell itself? Why should he give a title to a picture when the picture gives the observer its own title? Yes: nothing could be more graphically nasty than Norris's sketch of Vandover. It revels in its filth. It glorifies its

own degradation. It's like some rotten sea dashing its putrid waves up the shore. Yet it possesses a certain majesty, too. Like the edicts of an inexorable court. Like the falling of a crushing weight. Like the murderous earthquake. Like cataclysms. Like the birth of worlds out of exploding nebula. Norris didn't live to perfect this book. It wasn't printed till two years ago. It's marked by many technical contradictions. But nothing it may fail to do can count anything against the thing it has done. It's like a bitter draught. We object to taking it. But it does us good to take it. We dont want to believe it possible. And yet we've got to believe it possible in order that we may believe other things possible. Though this may be Norris at his crudest it's also Norris at his strongest. Emerson says that the cloud is one of the sun's most transcendent effects. When we contemplate the Vandovers and are puzzled we try to think of the Devil as one of God's most transcendent effects. If all the failures are finally failures and all the successes are only successes of the day how did we manage to survive all the past, you and I, all of us, and get where we are? How? How? But Norris, they say, is an artist of cesspools. He prefers corruption to purity. He'd rather deal with sinners than with saints. His universe has the devil in it but no god in it. He's afflicted with a sort of scavenging spirit. He looks for bad and of course finds it. Why dont he look for good? He'd find that, too. And art, at any rate, belongs to grace not to the cripple. No writer has any reason for using an ugly word as long as there's a pretty word left. Even if the pretty word wont just say what he wants to say it'll say it well enough. And so no artist has any excuse for choosing an offensive theme as long as any ingratiating theme is left.

T.

### **Frank Norris's *Blix*: Jeannette Black as Travis**

Joseph R. McElrath, Jr.

*Florida State University*

*Blix* has long been recognized as an autobiographical novel featuring an exaggerated but essentially true self-portrait, together with the story of Norris's increasingly serious relationship with Jeannette Black in 1897. It is true to Jeannette's biography as well. As she explained to biographer Franklin Walker in 1930, much of the characterization of the heroine, Travis Bessemer, was an accurate reflection of her appearance and personality, though "Blix" was not one of Norris's pet names for her (Franklin Walker Collection, Bancroft Library). How much Norris exaggerated Jeannette's experience as a young woman still in her teens remains unclear. It is not certain that she, like Travis, was motivated by demeaning encounters with inebriated swells to drop the role of budding socialite for the sake of embracing the identity of a liberated "New Woman." What is clear, however, is that the sub-debutante who met Norris in the autumn of 1896 was pursuing an active social life—and, as it turns out, an eminently visible one. Indeed, according to the social columns in the San Francisco weekly, *The Wave*, she was by early 1896 already a part of a circle worthy of attention. More noteworthy, vis-a-vis analogues between Norris's experience and that represented in *Blix*, Jeannette disappeared from the same columns at just the right time: as will be seen,



one is no longer informed of her progress after 8 May 1897. Like Blix, one surmises, Jeannette had decided to take her life in a new, unconventional direction.

Presented below is the record of Jeannette's social calendar and a catalogue of her wardrobe. The entries indicate a much higher social status than one might expect, given Jeannette's explanation to Walker that Norris's mother had hoped that her son would make a more socially distinguished marriage. For Nettie Black was clearly one of the belles and an acquaintance of other distinguished young ladies with whom Norris associated: Rose Hooper and Anna Lawlor.

1 February 1896

"The Bal poudre and leap year cotillion given by the members of the Saturday Fortnightly was a really charming entertainment. However becoming or otherwise powder or patches may be to the maidens of larger growth, it is irresistible when carried off by the 'sweet sixteeners.' ... The prettiest of the maidens were Miss Jessie Cheever, Miss Black, Miss Lathrop, Miss Helen Spaulding, Miss Charlotte Field, and Miss Grace Sabin. Miss Black is a striking-looking girl, with deep, brown eyes, blue-black hair, and clear, olive complexion.... All the girls wore powdered hair, some had their locks glittering with diamond dust, which soon transferred itself to the dress suits of the lads, and covered the floor..." (The Gossip, "Splashes," *The Wave*, 15, 10).

17 October 1896

"The first meeting of the Saturday Fortnightly was held in Lunt's Hall on October 10th. It was a jolly affair and decidedly informal. There girls were all simply dressed in dainty dimities or dotted swisses. The cotillion was led by Mr. Webb Jennings and Miss Nettie Black. Although it was Mr. Jennings' maiden effort, he showed himself most efficient, and was complimented by Mr. Greenway. The figures were on the marching order, but a new cross figure, which was exceedingly pretty, was introduced. I was rather amused at one little episode that occurred. It appears that the young people have a habit of rising out of turn and 'sneaking' into the figures, which puts the leader out and confuses things generally. They attempted this on Saturday evening, but Mr. Jennings very quietly blew his whistle, ordered the interlopers to their seats and started the figure anew. The girls were chiefly from the younger set. I did not see any of the debutantes and only a sparse sprinkling of the older girls.

"Miss Nettie Black looked charming in a soft white mull frock. She is a tall brunette with fine eyes and wavy brown hair" ("In Society," *The Wave*, 15, 12).

21 November 1896

"The Saturday Fortnightly waxeth hourly in popularity, and I am told that Miss Gertie Bates is literally besieged with requests for invitations. The last meeting was an exceedingly jolly affair, and I noticed any number of pretty new frocks. The girls belonging to this club are among the most attractive in town, and on Saturday evening there was quite a sprinkling of debutantes. Of these I noticed especially Miss Helen Wagner in a pink silk gown, plaited quaintly.... Miss Florence Stone, a tall, stunning girl with a fine

carriage, in white, and Miss Lucy Jackson in blue chiffon. Among the prettiest of the maids there were Miss Laura Bates in blue dimity, Miss Mae Moody in a flowered Dresden silk, Miss Rose Hooper in white, Miss Eva Moody in pale pink, Miss Nettie Black in white, brightened by cerise ribbons; Miss Marie Messer and Miss Marietta Havens. Little Miss Anna Lawlor was bewitching in a Nile green frock, which set off her bright coloring most effectively. Perhaps the handsomest girl present was Miss Bertha Dolbeer, who was exquisitely gowned in pale sea foam silk and chiffon. The german was led by Mr. Al Russell alone" ("In Society," *The Wave*, 15, 10).

28 November 1896

"The usual meeting of the Saturday Fortnightly Cotillion Club took place last week.... The german was led by Mr. Howard Adams and Miss Georgie Smith, who executed some very pretty figures. Mr. Adams is the best leader among the younger set, and appears to understand the art of arranging and engineering intricate figures. Among the prettiest of the girls were Miss Ethel Dixon, a tall brunette, who was gowned in pale orange silk; Miss Charlotte Field, in white tulle over green; Miss Blanche Norman, in white organdie over lavender; Miss Annie Lawlor, in pale blue and white; Miss Gertie Bates, who is considered the best girl dancer, was in white with yellow ribbons, and Miss Kate Power, in white. Perhaps the honors of belledom may be said to be divided between Miss Florence Stone and Miss Nettie Black" ("In Society," *The Wave*, 15, 12).

12 December 1896

"The Saturday Evening Dancing Class was not so well attended as usual, owing to the epidemic of colds now raging among the maidens. The german was capitally arranged by Mr. Donald Smith and Miss Bernice Drown. The figures, on the marching order as usual, were superintended by Mr. Howard Adams. The floor was excellent and the music more inspiring than usual. Of the girls who attracted my attention were Miss Bernice Drown, in white tulle; Miss Edith Stubbs, in pale pink organdie; Miss Nettie Black, in white, with pink ribbons; Miss Marie Messer, in green and white; Miss Kittie Duval, in white mousseline de soie; Miss Agnes Simpson and Miss Electa Smith, in white swiss with yellow ribbons" ("In Society," *The Wave*, 15, 10).

19 December 1896 (Christmas issue)

"The meeting of the Saturday Fortnightly was not so well attended last week, owing partially to the Horse Show, which prevented the older set from putting in an appearance. The cotillion was led by Mr. Douglas McBride and Miss Anna Lawlor. The figures were very simple but pretty, and Miss Lawlor looked charming in a dainty frock of white organdie trimmed with lace. The dancing of the members of this class is especially worthy of attention. They appear as though treading on air and are both graceful and sprightly. Miss Marie Messer is one of the best dancers, and I am told that she is among the most intelligent girls in the class. Miss Charlotte Field is a tall, stylish looking girl, with brown eyes and creamy complexion. She wore an effective costume of Dresden organdie over pink silk. Miss Edna Dickens is one of the prettiest girls in the class, and looked fetching in a pale pink frock. Miss

Nettie Black wore black organdie and green ribbons. Miss Crowell, white organdie over green satin. Miss Van Wyck wore a soft white frock, with bright ribbons. Miss Gertrude Palmer looked charming in white organdie over pale blue. Of the older girls the Misses Moody looked handsome in lavender and pink silk" ("In Society," *The Wave*, 15, 22).

2 January 1897

"I was utterly worn out on Saturday morning....I ...decided to go to the Fortnightly, when lo, mamma appeared and said I should not. Of course that made me obstinate, and at 9 sharp I was speeding down to Lunt's Hall in my coupe. The decorations were still fresh and lent a festive air to the scene. The hall was crowded and some lovely gowns were worn. Mr. Howard Adams and Gertrude Bates led the cotillion and introduced some new figures, which were quite complicated, but very pretty. I am always glad when any change is made, as the driving and marching figures follow one another with the regularity of clockwork, and are as tiresome as papa's best stories. I never saw Bertha Dolbeer look so pretty. In my eyes she is one of the belles of the debutantes, and I admire her even more than I do Bernie Drown. She wore a very pretty frock of pale blue. Mae Moody, her cousin, also looked very sweet; Gertrude Van Wyck made an effective picture in a pale pink gown; Marie Messer looked as bright and vivacious as usual in a bright red frock. I wish I had Marie's brain, the boys say she is so intelligent, and I am only piquant and amusing. Well, we can't have everything, I suppose. Ethel Dickson is a handsome girl too, and as jolly as possible. She wore a white China silk gown. Nettie Black also looked fetching in white swiss, with tight red sash and ribbons..." (Miss Cricket, "A Debutante's Diary," *The Wave*, 16, 10).

16 January 1897

"On Saturday Arthur, Leila and I went to the Fortnightly, and simply made things hum. There were dozens of pretty girls, and we all had to be as bewitching as possible. You see we have not only to cross swords with the popular older girls, like Laura Bates and last year debutantes, but there are several of next season's debutantes who make quite formidable rivals. Let me see, who were the prettiest of the maidens—I fancy there were about a dozen in all. Miss Mollie Hind, who led with Mr. Douglas McBride, looked exceedingly well; May Weldon, a dark girl of medium height, who is quite handsome, wore a pretty white frock, brightened with red ribbons. Gertie Bates wore a simple little blue organdie frock. Gertrude Van Wyck looked charming in blue and white chiffon. Edith Stubbs was in pale pink moire poplin—a lovely gown and exceedingly becoming—the Stubbs girls always dress well. Marie Oge wore white silk, trimmed with red; Lucy Jackson, a tall blonde, looked stunning in pale blue flowered silk; she and Bernie Drown were the belles, I think. They are quite a contrast—one so dark, the other such a perfect blonde. Jeannette Black wore flowered organdie with rose-colored ribbons. Charlotte Field, Anna Lawlor and Mollie Hind were the most popular of the girls" (Miss Cricket, "A Debutante's Diary," *The Wave*, 16, 10).

6 February 1897

"At the Saturday night dancing class the young people always

gather in numbers, and one sees there innumerable pretty girls and the brightest and most enthusiastic youths. Last Saturday's affair was no exception to the rule. Howard Adams led with Miss Edna Van Wyck for his partner. The figures were of the marching order, and every one had a good time. I noticed some very effective costumes—Miss Gertie Bates in grey silk, Miss Margaret Cole in white mull over blue silk, Miss Jeanette Black in green organdie over green silk, Miss Gertie Van Wyck in blue silk, Miss Ethel Dickson in yellow, and Miss Edna Van Wyck in pink organdie over pink silk" ("In Society," *The Wave*, 16, 10).

20 February 1897

"The Saturday Night dancing class met on the evening of the 13 inst. Mr. William Smith led the cotillion, and introduced some new figures. New figures are more welcome than ripe cherries nowadays. The usual array of girls looked even more charming than usual. Miss Mae Moody was in orange satin; Miss Florence Stone wore gray silk; Miss Emma Butler was in flowered Dresden silk. I noticed also Miss Marie Messer in white organdie. Miss Jeanette Black in white silk, Miss Forman in cream colored silk, Miss Gertrude Bates in white Swiss, Miss Anna Lawlor in green silk and mull" ("In Society," *The Wave*, 16, 10).

27 April 1897

"... I went to the Saturday Fortnightly's closing cotillion, which was delightful. All the girls wore new, fresh frocks, and looked exceedingly well. It was held in the Native Sons' Hall, a cozy place, all delicately decorated in white and gold. As the german was a military affair, swords and flags were conspicuous on all sides. The figures were on the marching order, and quite pretty. Laura Bates and Lieutenant Kilburn led. Among the prettiest of the maidens were Gertrude and Edna Van Wyck. Gertrude wore white swiss with blue ribbons, the waist trimmed with ruffles and insertions. Edna's frock was of pale pink dotted swiss with baby waist. Ida Gibbons wore a charming organdie with pink ground and dainty pink flowers. Bernie Drown looked lovely in pale yellow taffeta, the waist trimmed with chiffon. Marie Oge looked sweet in pale blue; Rose Hooper wore a soft white organdie trimmed with lace and insertion with pink roses. She looked exceedingly well, as did Nettie Black in black organdie" (Miss Cricket, "A Debutante's Diary," *The Wave*, 16, 9).

1 May 1897

"On Saturday afternoon ... I ... packed my grip, and caught the five boat to Berkeley. The Fiji boys gave a dozen of us a dinner at their fraternity house, and we had great fun. Edna Dickens, Edith and Beulah Stubbs, Nettie Black, Ethel Parker, Gertie Bates, and Charlotte Field were there. Afterwards we all went to the play given by the 'Skull and Keys' at the McDonough Theater. Phew! I never saw so crowded a house, and as for smartness, the first night at the Opera was not in it. Numberless light waists and dark skirts, but nothing remarkable was observable in the dressing. Mrs. Tom Magee chaperoned a party of young people, including Helen Hopkins, Lawson Adams, Carl Crockett, etc. The McNutts had a box party. I noted Ruth McNutt and Edith Preston, who are among the

belles of the future. Then there was Clara Hamilton, and Joe and Jack Sullivan. Sarah Dean, with a party, had another box, and endless other people. The play was dull, flat, and unprofitable—not in it with the last year's show. That was really fun. I don't see why the boys chose 'London Assurance.' It is all very well in its way, but 'Varsity plays are infinitely better adapted to amateur effort, at least that is Miss Cricket's humble opinion.

"... I am going to a dance at Stanford to-night. Quite a party of us are going down to stay at the Sigma Nu's house. Jessie Cheever, Florence Stone, Nettie Black, May Crowell and your Miss Cricket..." (Miss Cricket, "A Debutante's Diary," *The Wave*, 16, 10).

8 May 1897

"Now for my own quiet pleasures. I had a splendid time at the Stanford dance, and found the 'Cardinal' boys almost as fascinating as the 'Blue and Gold,' but not quite. Then on Sunday we all went to Trocadero and beyond there for a ride; it was a glorious day, and we had much fun. On Monday morning the usual crowd of us went to the Lurline [Baths]—Gibbons, Emma Butler, Nettie Black, Marie Wells, Charlotte Moulder and a number of men. Mae Moody seems to be the best swimmer, and is delightfully fearless in the water, but I think Marie Wells looks the prettiest of the set; her complexion is so fresh and her hair seems to caress her face, it curls round so. Then in the evening, we all went to [John Philip Sousa's opera] 'El Capitain' and enjoyed it so. There were ever so many theater parties. Every one in town seemed to be there, and yet Arthur, who went with the Bohemian Club fellows to the Tivoli, said there was a very goodly gathering there, too ..." (Miss Cricket, "A Debutante's Diary," *The Wave*, 16, 10).

### Current Publications: Update

Thomas K. Dean  
University of Iowa

Presented here is a seventh installment designed to complement *Frank Norris: A Reference Guide* (1974). The arrangement of items is chronological and alphabetical within years. Please forward new and omitted items to Thomas K. Dean.

Frohock, W.M. "Frank Norris." In *Seven Novelists in the American Naturalist Tradition: An Introduction*. Ed. Charles Child Walcott. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974, pp. 55-91. Reprinting of Frohock's essay originally published as *Frank Norris* in the University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers series, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969.

Perosa, Sergio. *American Theories of the Novel: 1793-1903*. New York and London: New York University Press, 1985, pp. 212-219, *passim*. Provides contextualization of Norris's theory within a 19th-century framework. Norris's theory of a serious and socially committed fiction eventuated in a concept of the novel in which romance was an extension and intensification of realism.

DeMott, Robert J. *Steinbeck's Reading: A Catalogue of Books*

*Owned and Borrowed*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1984, pp. 84-85. Lists *McTeague* and *The Octopus*, as well as Kathleen Norris's *Mother: A Story*.

Hamilton, David Mike. "The Tools of My Trade": *The Annotated Books in Jack London's Library*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986, p. 216. Lists *The Octopus*.

Lawlor, Mary. "'Life' and 'Literature' in Frank Norris's Cowboy Tales," *Prairie Winds*, Spring-Summer 1986, pp. 34-40. Explores how Norris dealt with his troublesome dialectic of "life" versus "literature" by utilizing narrative distancing, making the storyteller a rough wilderness man rather than utilizing his own voice.

"*McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*." In *The Cambridge Handbook of American Literature*. Ed. Jack Salzman and others. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 157-58. Plot summary.

"Norris, Frank." In *The Cambridge Handbook of American Literature*. Ed. Jack Salzman and others. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 178. Biographical sketch.

"*The Octopus: A Story of California*." In *The Cambridge Handbook of American Literature*. Ed. Jack Salzman and others. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 181. Plot summary.

"*The Pit: A Story of Chicago*." In *The Cambridge Handbook of American Literature*. Ed. Jack Salzman and others. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 194-95. Plot summary.

Verma, S.N. *Frank Norris: A Literary Legend*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1986; distributed by Advent Books, New York. Analysis of Norris's writings within traditional historical/social/philosophical contexts of determinism, arguing that Norris emerges as the head of the American naturalistic movement.

Gardner, Joseph. *Dickens in America: Twain, Howells, James, and Norris*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988, pp. 358-417. Traces direct and indirect Dickensian influences in Norris's novels.

Hakutani, Yoshinobu. "Richard Wright and American Naturalism," *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 36 (1988), 217-226. Wright is a naturalist following Dreiser's tradition of aspiration in the face of adversity, rather than Norris's tradition of Zolaesque pessimistic determinism.

Harland, Paul W. "'Disconcerting Poetry': James's Use of Romance in *The Wings of the Dove*," *English Studies in Canada*, 14 (1988), 310-325. Norris links romance with moral authority in "A Plea for Romantic Fiction."

Kaplan, Amy. *The Social Construction of American Realism*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988, pp. 6, 131, *passim*. Mentions Norris's "strange amalgam of romance and realism . . . in relation to the unstable language of financial speculation" (p. 6),

and Norris as a means of advertisement for Doubleday (p. 131).

Kazin, Alfred. *A Writer's America: Landscape in Literature*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988, pp. 197, 209, 211-212. In *The Octopus*, Norris sees the opulent California landscape as representative of the unfinished struggle for existence.

McElrath, Joseph R., Jr. "The Deconstruction of a Bibliography: The Frank Norris Canon," *South Central Review*, 5, No. 2 (Summer, 1988), 51-61. Many attributions to Norris of writings not signed by him have resulted in bibliographies which do not offer an empirically verifiable description of his canon.

—. "Frank Norris." In *American Literary Critics and Scholars, 1880-1900*, volume 71 of *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. Ed. John W. Rathbun and Monica M. Greco. Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1988, 168-79. Describes Norris as literary critic, mainly in terms of his role as a theorist concerning Naturalism. Lists Norris's publications and provides a selected list of writings on Norris as critic.

—. "Ovid's Halcyone-Ceyx Myth in Frank Norris's *The Pit*," *Classical and Modern Literature*, 8 (1988), 319-323. Allusions to Ovid's Halcyone-Ceyx myth are essential to the characterization of Laura Jadwin as the faithful wife. They confirm the likelihood that Corthell did not successfully seduce her in chapter 8. (Response to Joseph Katz, "Eroticism in American Literary Realism," *Studies in American Fiction*, 5 [1977], 35-50.)

McQuade, Donald. "Intellectual Life and Public Discourse." In *Columbia Literary History of the United States*. Ed. Emory Elliott and others. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, pp. 715-732, *passim*. Norris's work figures in a literature responsive to America's development as a corporate society.

Michaels, Walter Benn. "Frank Norris, Josiah Royce and the Ontology of Corporations." In *American Literary Landscapes: The Fiction and the Fact*. Ed. Ian F.A. Bell and D.K. Adams. London: Vision Press, 1988; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989, pp. 122-151. See chapter 6, "Corporate Fiction," of Michaels' *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

Milton, John R. "Approaches to Region/Place: A Conversation with Wallace Stegner," *South Dakota Review*, 26, No. 4 (Winter, 1988), 63-75. Mentions *The Octopus* and wheat cultivation in California, illustrating the difficulty of marking the line between the Midwest and the West.

Mitchell, Lee Clark. "Naturalism and the Languages of Determinism." In *Columbia Literary History of the United States*. Ed. Emory Elliott and others. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, pp. 525-545. Norris's determinism is not pessimistic but a Social Darwinism emphasizing inevitable human progress.

Riggio, Thomas P. "Down Hill": A Chapter in Dreiser's Story about

Himself," *Dreiser Studies*, 19, No. 2 (Fall, 1988), 2-21. Presents the text of "Down Hill," part of a long autobiographical essay describing Dreiser's depression after the publication of *Sister Carrie*. Dreiser refers to Norris several times, regarding the 1900 publication of the novel.

Roripaugh, Robert. "The Writer's Sense of Place," *South Dakota Review*, 26, No. 4 (Winter, 1988), 111-120. Attempts to disprove Norris's claim in "A Neglected Epic" that the West has produced no significant literature.

Seamon, Roger. "Naturalist Narratives and Their Ideational Context: A Theory of American Naturalist Fiction," *The Canadian Review of American Studies*, 19 (1988), 47-64. "Naturalism is the distinctive outcome of a complex interaction between a recoverable ideational background and a peculiar narrative form" (p. 47). Norris's critical ideas about story and purpose figure prominently in this theory.

Sundquist, Eric J. "Realism and Regionalism." In *Columbia Literary History of the United States*. Ed. Emory Elliott and others. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, pp. 501-524, *passim*. Norris is part of a group of writers who gave Western writing a mythic dimension.

Ware, Elaine. "Struggle for Survival: Parallel Theme and Techniques in Steinbeck's 'Flight' and Norris's *McTeague*," *Steinbeck Quarterly*, 21 (1988), 96-103. Many close parallels in plot, character, and theme suggest that *McTeague* influenced Steinbeck's story "Flight."

Wüstenhagen, Heinz. "Stephen Cranes [sic] 'Das rote Siegel,'" *Weimarer Beiträge*, 3 (1988), 413-424. Mentions Norris's parody of *The Red Badge of Courage*, "The Green Stone of Unrest" section of "Perverted Tales."

Abbott, Craig S. "Reflexive Revision in Frank Norris's *McTeague* and *A Man's Woman*," *Frank Norris Studies*, No. 8 (Autumn, 1989), pp. 9-10. Norris's revisions of *McTeague* and *A Man's Woman* depict the characters working in limited space, alluding to Norris's own textual space constraints while revising.

*Frank Norris Studies* is a publication of the Norris Society and is issued twice per year for the members. Membership for individuals requires the payment of dues of ten dollars per year to The Frank Norris Society, Department of English, Florida State University, Tallahassee FL 32306-1036 (904-644-1522). Library subscriptions at the same rate may be directed to this address or initiated through the EBSCO or FAXON subscription services.

Manuscripts should be addressed to either of the editors: Jesse S. Crisler, Division of Language, Literature & Communication, Brigham Young University-Hawaii Campus, Laie, Hawaii 96762; or Robert C. Leitz, III, Department of English, Louisiana State University in Shreveport, Shreveport LA 71115. Members of the Editorial Advisory Board include: Don L. Cook, Indiana University; Charles L. Crow, Bowling Green State University; William B. Dillingham, Emory University; Donald Pizer, Tulane University; and Barbara Hochman, Ben Gurion University of the Negev. Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., Florida State University, is the managing editor.