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Where Piggishness Flourishes: Contextualizing Strategies in Norris and London

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Few American writers of naturalistic fiction are hailed as subtle, either in thought or execution. Indeed, the term naturalism has been used in the past as a codeword by which *fin de siècle* American writers can be grouped as simplistic, melodramatic disciples of Darwin. Some of these characterizations of naturalism endure: Harold Kaplan was certainly not the first to describe *Sister Carrie* as "a classic of American naturalist fiction, a tribute to Dreiser's single-mindedness in reducing human action to simple responses."[1] Herbert J. Muller was not the last to question the technical precision of the naturalists: "their practice," he writes, "was often inconsistent and impure."[2]

Recently, however, there have been attempts to attribute complexity to naturalism, although those who champion its cause seem half-hearted at times: Lee Clark Mitchell, for instance, echoes the conventional wisdom that Norris's technique is "crude but powerful" before asserting that "the usual criticisms [of naturalism] seem to me misguided—those attacking mechanical characters, say, or excessive repetition, or disjunctive syntax. Instead of liabilities, these elements actively generate the narrative power of naturalism."[3]

While Mitchell's attempt to reinvigorate discussion of the naturalists' technical merits is commendable and overdue, the cavalier classification of their ideas deserves some redress as well. Writers such as London and Norris have long been stereotyped as reductive interpreters of a generic mass of nineteenth-century thought: London's dramatization of an indifferently harsh natural world and Norris's focus on genetic determinism are the near-dismissive generalizations often attached to their canons. Obviously, both did write works that employ these paradigms: *The Call of the Wild*, "To Build a Fire" and many other Yukon stories by London; *McTeague*, *Vandover and the Brute* and "A Reversion to Type" by Norris. They also produced works, however, that reflect other interests: London, for example, wrote a *künstlerroman* (*Martin Eden*), a chronicle of a man's search for the source of all knowledge ("The Red One"), and a host of science fiction stories; similarly, Norris's "The Puppets and the Puppy" humorously parodies philosophical debate while "Miracle Joyeux" is a fiercely funny, and probably blasphemous, story that offers a "decadent representation of Jesus."[4]

As the diversity of these writers has been undervalued, so also have the subtlety and complexity of the works by which they are best known. In Norris's *A Man's Woman* and London's *The Sea-Wolf*, the ideas of Darwin (and, to a lesser extent, Nietzsche and Spencer) are re-calibrated for fictional use, and while the results are ultimately mixed, both writers offer vigorous and often insightful analyses of late-nineteenth-century thought.[5] Both novels depict the Nietzschean *Übermensch*—London's Wolf Larsen and Norris's Ward Bennett—but, rather than uncritically reveling in these creations as the types of a grand abstraction central to each writer's thought, both works actively seek to contextualize and thus delimit the powers of these exceptionally strong, even atavistic, heroes.

That is, while both writers celebrate, in their own ways, the strength of their respective brutes, both make clear that these *über* men can excel *only* in primitive environments: Larsen lives and dies aboard the *Ghost*, where his strength guarantees his iron rule, while Bennett, uncomfortable with the complexities of the civilized world, returns to the Arctic where his physical prowess and single-mindedness combine to insure his survival. Despite their overwhelming successes in brutal surroundings, neither man can

successfully adapt to any alternate environment. Both *The Sea-Wolf* and *A Man's Woman* explore how one of the less controversial elements of Darwinistic thought—adaptation—plays a central role in the survival of any species; but they also focus on a more complex matter, how adaptation can prove maladaptation when environmental change occurs.

When London boarded the *S.S. Umatilla* for the Klondike in 1897, he took with him copies of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Both works figure heavily in *The Sea-Wolf*. While Wolf Larsen is referred to several times as "proud Lucifer," the novel's structure reveals that its author heeded Darwin's discussions of the importance of adaptation.[6] London uses Wolf Larsen, clearly a representative of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, to exemplify the dangers of failing to be adaptive, even for a mentally and physically superior man.[7] Conversely, Van Weyden begins his sea voyage as a "sissy"—his own term—but he is able to make a series of adjustments that enable him to survive and, ultimately, to defeat the far more powerful Larsen.

Shortly after being plucked from the sea, London's narrator, Humphrey Van Weyden, witnesses a debate among the hunters aboard the *Ghost* that establishes a dichotomy that will persist throughout the novel. The hunters disagree "as to whether a seal pup knew instinctively how to swim."[8] One faction argues that it did, while the other contends that "the seal pup was born on the land for no other reason than that it could not swim, that its mother was compelled to teach it to swim." This debate metaphorically describes Humphrey. Born and reared on land, he cannot swim, either literally or figuratively. More important, however, the debate emphasizes the importance of environment: Life at sea is characterized by its cruelty, "its relentlessness and awfulness, . . . a soulless stirring of the ooze and slime" (p. 35); the land, by contrast, enjoys an entirely different set of rules and is the home of "feeble land-creatures" like Humphrey and Maud.

London explores this dichotomy by having a "landsman," "Sissy" Van Weyden, struggle to survive aboard the *Ghost*. The epitome of civilized unmanliness—as if being a literary critic were not indictment enough, he also has, according to Thomas Mugridge, "'a bloomin' soft skin, . . . more like a lydy's than any I know of'" (pp. 15-16)—Humphrey is forced to confront the vast differences between life on land and life at sea. An injury to his knee provides Humphrey with a thorough lesson that distinguishes the two venues: "on the land I would have been lying on the broad of my back, with a surgeon attending me, and with strict injunctions to do nothing but rest." In his new environment, however, he is told to "'tie a rag around it and it'll be all right'" (p. 40).

The brutality of life at sea is embodied by Wolf Larsen, the captain of what Humphrey describes as a "brute-ship" (p. 45). Larsen exudes "a strength we are wont to associate with things primitive"; he is "almost a god in his perfectness" and "an anachronism in this culminating century of civilization" (p. 75). Throughout the narrative, Van Weyden uses a variety of animals—tiger, shark, snake, gorilla—to characterize the massively strong captain of the *Ghost*. His subsequent actions reinforce Van Weyden's impression of him as a ruthlessly primitive man: he refuses to allow anyone to help the terrified Harrison as he dangles from the halyards eighty feet above the deck; he abandons Johnson and Leach to the open sea during a fierce storm; and, he punishes Mugridge for not wearing a clean shirt by dragging him through the water, where his foot is messily amputated by a shark.

Despite his epic brutality, Larsen also espouses a coherent philosophical system, a branch of materialism that Van Weyden finds "far more compelling than the subtly complex materialism" of his fellow landsman, Charley Furuseth (p. 83). For one thing, Larsen illustrates one of his points by nearly choking Van Weyden to death. But it is this philosophical bent that makes Larsen such an intriguing figure. He tells Van Weyden,

> "I believe that life is a mess, ... It is like yeast, a ferment. . . . The big eat the little that they may continue to move, the strong eat the weak that they may retain their strength. The lucky eat the most and move the longest, that is all." (P. 50)[9]

Armed with awesome physical power, Larsen has no difficulty enacting this philosophy. As long as he remains at sea—he touches ground only once during the novel—his brutal word is law.

But Larsen is aware that he can only rule in this atavistic, extra-social, and inhumane environment. In a telling early passage, he points out that, on land, his own authority would diminish while the puny and (at this point) effeminate Van Weyden would rule: "'You would go back to the land, which is a favorable place for your kind of piggishness. It is a whim of mine to keep you aboard this ship, where my piggishness flourishes'" (p. 52). This distinction—the sea as home to barbarism and the land as civilization's bosom—produces throughout the novel a tension that is ultimately mediated by the unlikeliest of heroes, Van Weyden. It also suggests that civilized society has somehow diluted the effects of natural selection, that indeed the Nietzschean overman—or the Spencerian materialist—can only flourish away from the levelling effects of civilization.

Through prolonged exposure to this primitive environment and to the tutelage of Wolf Larsen, Hump (renamed by his mentor) is transformed from milquetoast into a "man of power" (p. 358); he becomes sailor, navigator, hunter, shipwright—in short, a romantic hero. In fact, he takes to his studies in atavism so well that he tries to kill his teacher and is restrained only by the pleas of the ultimate civilized voice aboard ship, that of Maud Brewster.[10] As Van Weyden grows stronger, he becomes increasingly seduced by Larsen's philosophy and he evolves into something of a surrogate for his tormentor, adopting the latter's favorite metaphor: "'You are no longer the biggest bit of the ferment,'" he tells Wolf. "'You were, once, and able to eat me. . . . I am now able to eat you. The yeast has grown stale'" (p. 319). And when Larsen finally dies, the now-manly Van Weyden shocks Maud by appropriating the captain's laconic burial service that had so unsettled Humphrey early in his narrative: he too remembers only one part of service, "and that is, 'and the body shall be cast into the sea'" (p. 364).

While life aboard Larsen's "carnival of brutality" (p. 110) transforms Hump—he writes that "I was becoming animal-like myself" (p. 86)—he is ultimately able, with Maud's help, to resurrect his higher principles without sacrificing his budding strength: "What of my new-found love, I was a giant," he tells us (p. 243). The result is a profoundly dualistic Humphrey Van Weyden: capable of a love so sublimely Victorian that, for decency's sake, he builds two huts on Endeavor Island, he is also capable of clubbing the hell out of a pack of seals. Finally, London seems to suggest that Van Weyden survives because of his adaptive skills, especially his social ability to cooperate with Maud, while Larsen fails because he cannot adapt. This equation is a striking one: a child of civilization and a pampered society weakling, Humphrey can adjust, and quickly, to the harshness of life on the *Ghost*, to the misery of several days in a rowboat on the open sea, and to the arduous task of survival on a deserted island. Meanwhile, the epitome of strength and intelligence, Wolf Larsen dies, unchanged, aboard the *Ghost*—a Nietzschean overman whose life is circumscribed by environment.

Norris came to roughly the same conclusion six years earlier in *A Man's Woman*, a novel generally dubbed his worst.[11] Despite its reputation, however, the novel features some engaging commentary on late nineteenth-century thought. Once more, the inability of an exceptional man to adjust is examined. Like Wolf Larsen, Ward Bennett cannot adapt to the demands of the civilized world, and the conclusion of Norris's novel has Bennett fleeing back to what is the relative security—for him, at least—of the Arctic.

Norris's physical description of Bennett emphasizes the raw power of his protagonist, who in many ways anticipates London's brutal sea captain. Where Larsen has a "massive build, with broad shoulders and deep chest" (p. 18), Norris describes the "great span of [Bennett's] chest and shoulders." Both men's faces reveal atavistic traits: Larsen's "jaw, the chin, the brow rising to a goodly height and swelling heavily above the eyes" are representative of his "large features and strong lines" (p. 24); similarly, Bennett's "great, brutal jaw, with its aggressive, bullying, forward thrust; the close-gripped lips, the contracted forehead, the small eyes" suggest the "resistless, crude force of the man."[12] Where Larsen is compared to a variety of animals, monsters, and gods, Bennett is introduced to us as an "ogre" (p. 27); he is also a "monster" (p. 199), and he possesses "bull-like strength" (p. 173). While he does not terrify his men as Larsen does, they realize that

their "minds, their wills, their efforts, their physical strength to the last ounce and pennyweight belonged indissolubly to him" (p. 13).

Just as London does six years later in *The Sea-Wolf*, Norris has his Nietzschean overman suited to live in a specific venue. While in the Arctic, where the novel opens, Bennett is "fittest" not only as an individual but as a leader who proves instrumental to the survival of his men. There, on the "primordial shore, back into the stone age, . . . [where] men and animals fought for the privilege of eating a dead dog" (p. 28), Bennett's judgment is unquestioned. The decisions he makes while in the Arctic are brutal but necessary, as evidenced by his abandonment of an otherwise healthy man whose sprained ankle precludes his keeping up with the others. All of the survivors would agree that they owe their lives to Captain Bennett.

But in the allegorically named home of civilization, "the City," Bennett meets circumstances that require a finesse he neither possesses nor understands:

> For long periods of time he had been isolated from civilisation, had been face to face with the simple, crude forces of an elemental world—forces that were to be combated and overthrown by means no less simple and crude themselves. He had lost the faculty of dealing with complicated situations. To resort to expedients, to make concessions, was all beyond him. For him a thing was absolutely right or absolutely wrong, and between the two there was no gradation. (P. 144)

The climax of the novel forces Bennett to confront this ambiguous world, when he learns that his loved one, a nurse, has been ordered to attend his best friend, a typhoid patient. Forced to choose between friendship and love, Bennett's unsubtle mind casts about unsuccessfully for a compromise; he ultimately sacrifices his friend for his woman, but very nearly loses her love in the process. Donald Pizer notes that the effect of this scene is that "reader at last loses patience with everyone concerned, including Norris."[13] Although Pizer is undoubtedly right in his assessment, the clumsiness of the scene may be less an indictment of Norris's skill as a writer than a result of his attempt to capture Bennett's utter confusion when confronted with a decision that requires something other than a primal response.

By way of contrast, Bennett's primitivistic method for dealing with the world, regardless of context, is best epitomized in the scene where he clubs Lloyd Searight's horse to death with a geological hammer.[14] Although the case can be made that Bennett had limited choices, the incident nevertheless exemplifies his consistently crude but straightforward responses to difficult circumstances.

> There was a primitiveness, a certain hideous simplicity in the way Bennett had met the situation that filled her with wonder and with even a little terror and mistrust of him. The vast, brutal directness was out of place and incongruous at this end-of-the-century time. (P. 105)

Anticipating London's description of Humphrey's rite-of-passage slaughter of the seals on Endeavor Island, Norris illustrates Bennett's uncomplicated mindset with this event. Indeed, clubbing animals to death seems to be a requisite emblem of atavistic behavior for both London and Norris.

Apparently, both writers envision women as the most likely temperers of atavistic natures. While the love of a good woman keeps Hump from regressing to Wolf Larsen's level of primitiveness, however, Norris's heroine only briefly tries to domesticate her man. She ultimately realizes that he must eschew civilization and return to the "primordial desolation" (p. 38) of the Arctic. For him to "play the man's part," he must re-engage "that horrible, grisly Enemy far up there to the north, upon the high curve of the globe, the shoulder of the world, huge, remorseless, terrible in its vast, Titanic strength. . . . The monster that defended the great prize, the object of so many fruitless quests must be once more attacked" (p. 244).

She comes to this conclusion only after another character points out the complete inability of Ward to adapt to civilized life. Lloyd reasons that the advice of a man Bennett had saved in the Arctic must be followed if Ward can ever prosper again. This man, Adler, increasingly alarmed at the behavior of his captain, has told her:

> "I'm thinking as there's something wrong, main

> wrong with the captain these days besides fever. He's getting soft—that's what he is. If you'd only known the man that he was—before—while we was up there in the Ice! . . . Why, what will become of the captain now if he quits? He'll just settle down to an ordinary stay-at-home, write-in-a-book professor. . . . Make him be a Man and not a professor." (Pp. 237-38)

Lloyd does make Ward be a "Man and not a professor," and the novel closes with Bennett returning to the Arctic, where the limitations of civilization can have no effect on his life.

Apart from the low regard both novelists seem to have for professors and literary critics, these two novels share an even more fundamental element. They both suggest that the place for a Natural Man is the Natural world. Humphrey Van Weyden may be right when he writes that "because of [Maud] the strength was mine to win our way back to the world" (p. 329), but one has to wonder how long he will be able to stand the restrictive social world from which Wolf Larsen once liberated him. Norris put maladaptive Bennett back where he belongs; one wishes that London had included an epilogue in his own voice, indicating how Van Weyden fared after he was no longer absorbed by the telling of his tale.

Notes

[1]Harold Kaplan, *Power and Order: Henry Adams and the Naturalist Tradition in American Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 85.

[2]Herbert J. Muller, *The Spirit of Tragedy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 275.

[3]Lee Clark Mitchell, *Determined Fictions: American Literary Naturalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. xvii. For another less than enthusiastic defense, see June Howard, *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), p. 182: "Questions of value have not been a central concern in this study, and to take them up in any detailed way would require laying yet another theoretical groundwork. But I hope it has been apparent that I enjoy and esteem these novels and that I think they are generally underestimated."

[4]Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., *Frank Norris Revisited* (New York: Twayne, 1992), p. 132.

[5]Their works have been compared before, particularly *The Sea-Wolf* and *Moran of the Lady Letty*. A number of readers have noted similarities between the two novels, some even accusing London of having "stolen" the idea from Norris, who, in turn, is accused of "stealing" the idea from Kipling. In any event, the purpose of this essay is to stand *The Sea-Wolf* against Norris's *A Man's Woman*, a comparison not yet made.

[6]In his conclusion to *Origin*, Darwin argues that "the more complex organs and instincts have been perfected . . . by the accumulation of innumerable slight variations, each good for the individual possessor. . . . [T]here is a struggle for existence leading to the preservation of profitable deviations of structure or instinct" (*Darwin: A Norton Critical Edition*, 2nd edition, edited by Philip Appleman [New York: Norton, 1979], pp. 108-09).

[7] London clearly gleaned Larsen's philosophy directly from his reading of Nietzsche: "Life itself," Nietzsche writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Chicago: Regnery, 1955), p. 201, "is essential assimilation, injury, violation of the foreign and the weaker, suppression, hardness, the forcing of one's own forms on something else, ingestion and—at least in its mildest form—exploitation." Note how this passage, particularly Nietzsche's inclusion of the term "ingestion," serves as the linch-pin of the eating imagery Larsen uses to characterize his power. For a fuller discussion of London's interest in Nietzsche, see Michael Qualtiere, "Nietzschean Psychology in London's *The Sea-Wolf*," *Western American Literature*, 16 (1982), 261-78.

[8]*The Sea-Wolf* (New York: Macmillan, 1904), p. 41. Subsequent page references to this edition appear in parentheses.

[9]This imagery—evolutionary ferment, sources not yet determined—shows up seven years earlier in Norris's writings of 1897 and 1898, including "A South-Sea Expedition," *The Wave*, 16 (20 February 1897), 8; "Among Cliff-Dwellers," *The Wave*, 16 (15 May 1897), 6; "'The First Born,'" *The Wave*, 16 (22 May 1897), 4; "An Opening for Novelists," *The Wave*, 16 (22 May 1897), 7; "Japan Transplanted," *The Wave*, 16 (31 July 1897), 6; "'Boom,'" *The Wave*, 16 (7 August 1897), 5. Norris's use of this imagery was first noted by Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., who has generously allowed me to make use of his research.

[10]For discussions of Maud's role in re-civilizing Hump, see Charles N. Watson, Jr., "Sexual Conflict in *The Sea-Wolf*: Further Notes on London's Reading of Kipling and Norris," *Western American Literature*, 11 (1976), 239-48, and Susan Ward, "Social Philosophy as Best-Seller: Jack London's *The Sea-Wolf*," *Western American Literature*, 17 (1983), 321-32. Also, Sam Baskett, "Sea Change in *The Sea-Wolf*," *American Literary Realism*, 24 (1992), 5-22, sees Hump's transformation as a move toward androgyny.

[11] McElrath calls it Norris's "least successful novel" (*Norris*, p. 90). Others are less kind: Donald Pizer finds it

"tedious" (*The Novels of Frank Norris* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966], p. 86); Don Graham proclaims it "Norris's worst novel" (*The Fiction of Frank Norris* [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978], p. 5; and, a contemporary reviewer, bristling at Norris's inclusion of the graphic details in his description of a hip excision, writes, "A novel is neither a chamber of horrors nor a surgical journal" (*New York Times: Saturday Review of Books and Art*, 49 [10 February 1900], 82).

[12]*A Man's Woman* (New York: Doubleday & McClure, 1900), p. 132. Subsequent page references to this edition appear within parentheses.

[13]Pizer, p. 110.

[14]If we read *A Man's Woman* in the context of Nietzschean thought, it is interesting to note that the last sane work of the German philosopher, *Twilight of the Idols*, is subtitled "How One Philosophizes with a Hammer."

Frank Norris and William Cullen Bryant

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When in Frank Norris's *The Octopus* Presley responds to the enthusiastic reception of his socialist poem "The Toilers" by asking himself if "he [was] actually the 'greatest American poet since Bryant,'" he reveals both his own naivete and Norris's irony.[1] Presley may have thought William Cullen Bryant a great poet; Norris did not. After the gun battle at the irrigation ditch, in Presley's impassioned speech to the partisan crowd at the opera house, he provides a context for the ranchers' stand against oppression by surveying America's battles for freedom. He therein describes his view of the true visage of Liberty in language, or imagery, strikingly reminiscent of Bryant's similar description in his poem "Antiquity of Freedom," again indicating the high status of this chief among the Fireside Poets. His Bryant-echoing speech, however, is largely inchoate and ineffectual. It proves one more example of Norris's attempt to deflate the reputations of those nineteenth-century American poets so revered by the members of the University of California English department whose literary taste he disdained (see "The 'English Courses' of the University of California"[2]).

To see clearly what is transpiring from the perspective of a century later, when William Cullen Bryant does not so readily come to mind for the reader of *The Octopus* who is gauging literary and intellectual greatness, two illustrations from Norris's literary essays are apropos. Each makes evident Norris's rejection of his former Berkeley professors' literary role models, those Eastern establishment sacred cows, the venerable bearded poets of New England.

In "An American School of Fiction" (1902) Norris argues that the bookishly derivative New Englanders had not produced a truly American literature:

> It seems to me that it is a proposition not difficult to prove that the United States of America has never been able to boast of a school of fiction distinctly its own. . . . I suppose that the nearest we ever came to an organized school of native-born Americans, writing about American things, from an American point of view, was in the days of Lowell, Longfellow, Holmes, Whittier and the rest of that illustrious company. But observe: How is this school known to literature? Not as the American school, but as the New England School. . . . And New England is not American.[3]

In "The 'Nature' Revival in Literature" (1902) he is even more pointed regarding the stifling patrician influence of Bryant's literary bedfellows:

> The New England school for too long dominated the entire range of American fiction—limiting it, specializing it, polishing, refining and embellishing it, narrowing it down to a veritable cult, a thing to be safeguarded by the elect, the few, the aristocracy.[4]

Presley's paean to Liberty at the opera house is ineffectual precisely because it is inadvertently attuned to the sensibilities of a much more elite, more sophisticated, patrician audience—described by Norris above—than the essentially plebeian and plainspoken one he is addressing. Declares Presley,

> "For we conceive of Liberty in the statues we raise to her as a beautiful woman, crowned, victorious, in bright armour and white robes, a light in her uplifted hand—a serene, calm, conquering goddess. Oh, the farce of it, oh, the folly of it! Liberty is *not* a crowned goddess, beautiful, in spotless garments,

victorious, supreme. Liberty is the Man In the Street, a terrible figure, rushing through powder smoke, fouled with the mud and ordure of the gutter, bloody, rampant, brutal, yelling curses, in one hand a smoking rifle, in the other, a blazing torch.

Liberty is . . . born in the very height and heat of battle, born from death, stained with blood, grimed with powder. And she grows to be not a goddess, but a Fury, a fearful figure, slaying friend and foe alike, raging, insatiable, merciless, the Red Terror."[5]

Bryant's comparable address to Freedom in "Antiquity of Freedom" seems more than coincidentally similar in its elaborate conceit:

O FREEDOM! thou art not, as poets dream,
A Fair young girl, with light and delicate limbs,
And wavy tresses gushing from the cap
With which the Roman master crowned his slave
When he took off the gyves. A bearded man,
Armed to the teeth, art thou; one mailed hand
Grasps the broad shield, and one the sword; thy brow,
Glorious in beauty though it be, is scarred
With tokens of old wars; thy massive limbs
Are strong with struggling. Power at thee has launched
His bolts, and with his lightnings smitten thee;
They could not quench the life thou hast from heaven;
Merciless Power has dug thy dungeon deep,
And his swart armorers, by a thousand fires,
Have forged thy chain; yet, while he deems thee bound,
The links are shivered, and the prison-walls
Fall outward; terribly thou springest forth,
As springs the flame above a burning pile,
And shoutest to the nations, who return
Thy shoutings, while the pale oppressor flies.[6]

While eschewing Bryant's blank verse, Presley retains the declamatory emotion, the prophetic, seer-like didacticism, the overwriting. Although it is a poem that Norris leaves to the reader's imagination, Presley's "The Toilers" would seem to be a verse replica of this prose counterpart and yet another echo of Bryant's poetry. Furthermore, Presley's speech reprises his own derivative poem that had itself been subject to parody upon its appearance:

> It was discussed, attacked, defended, eulogized, ridiculed. It was praised with the most fulsome adulation; assailed with the most violent condemnation. Editorials were written upon it. Special articles, in literary pamphlets, dissected its rhetoric and prosody. The phrases were quoted—were used as texts for revolutionary sermons, reactionary speeches. It was parodied; it was distorted so as to read as an advertisement for patented cereals and infant's foods. Finally, the editor of an enterprising monthly magazine reprinted the poem, supplementing it by a photograph and biography of Presley himself.[7]

Two years later *The Pit* gave further evidence of Norris's ironic attitude toward Bryant's reputation as a model poet to be revered and imitated. For it is Bryant's "Thanatopsis" that Page Dearborn turns to in a morbid revelation of her lugubrious penchant for death.[8] Ingenuously, she quotes to her sister Laura the passage she has assiduously copied down in her journal: "Yet in a few days, and thee the all-beholding sun shall see no more."[9] Even Laura, so vulnerable to her own romantic excesses, must suppress a smile over Page's callow protestations.

While there is, in fact, little question that Presley's journal entries, poem, and speech to the opera house crowd owe much of their content and form to the more contemporary poet Edward Markham and his popular poem "The Man With The Hoe" (1899),[10] Norris also had an eye and ear to the poetry of the more distant past. Presley, at least in his volatile speech, becomes a more prosaic, plebeian version of William Cullen Bryant and offers one more example of Norris's argument for plain-spoken truths over elegant literature.

Notes

[1]In *The Complete Edition of Frank Norris* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran and Company, [1929]), vol. 2, 108. Some four years earlier (in the 18 December 1897,

Christmas issue of *The Wave*) Norris had already demonstrated his penchant for parody mixed with malice and affection in his extended treatments of Rudyard Kipling, Stephen Crane, Bret Harte, Richard Harding Davis, Ambrose Bierce and Anthony Hope. See "Perverted Tales" in *Frank Norris of "The Wave"* (San Francisco: The Westgate Press, 1931), pp. 77-100.

[2]*The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris*, ed. Donald Pizer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 6-8; the currency of Norris's point of view is indicated by the reprinting of this 1896 essay in *The Origins of Literary Studies in America: A Documentary Anthology*, ed. Gerald Graff and Michael Warner (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 133-135.

[3]*Complete Edition*, vol. 7, 147-148.

[4]*Complete Edition*, vol. 7, 107.

[5]*Complete Edition*, vol. 2, 161-262.

[6]In *Poetical Works of William Cullen Bryant* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1896), p. 199.

[7]*Complete Edition*, vol. 2, 108.

[8]Don Graham mentions in passing Norris's reference to "Thanatopsis." See *The Fiction of Frank Norris: The Aesthetic Context* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1978), p. 144.

[9]*Complete Edition*, vol. 9, 158. Page has also misquoted Bryant's lines which read: "Yet a few days, and thee / The all-beholding sun shall see no more. . . ." Jesse Crisler has suggested another possible connection between Norris and Bryant, claiming that Norris may have owned Bryant's translation of Homer's *The Iliad*. If so, Presley's (and Norris's) reading of Homer could have been shaped by Bryant. See "Norris's 'Library'," *Frank Norris Studies*, No. 5 (Spring, 1988), p. 10.

[10]See my "Frank Norris and the Arts of Social Criticism," *American Literary Realism*, 24 (Spring, 1981), 77-89.

Zola's Publications in English in the United States, 1876-1902

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Frank Norris has been often described as the "American Zola." Indeed, he dubbed himself the "Boy Zola," and scholars have long known that he read his mentor in the original French; copies that he owned may be seen in the Frank Norris Collection at the Bancroft Library (see "Norris's 'Library'," *Frank Norris Studies*, No. 5 [Spring, 1988], pp. 5, 9). But it is also likely that he read as well English translations available to the American public. The *American Catalogue of Books* reveals that, during Norris's lifetime, Zola's writings were widely available in translation in the United States, despite—or perhaps in part because of—his reputation in the Anglo-American world as one who boldly went beyond the pale of Victorian morality. The following is a list, alphabetically arranged by title, of the translations published in the United States between 1876 and the year of Norris's death, 1902—all of which are possible sources of influence worthy of consideration in any study of Norris.

Abbé Mouret's Transgression. Pastime Series. Chicago: Laird, 1890.

Abbé's Temptation. Translated by J. Stirling. Philadelphia: Peterson, 1879.

Albine; or, the Abbé's Temptation. Translated by J. Stirling. Philadelphia: Peterson, 1880.

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Notes from Members

George Monteiro (Brown University) calls our attention to a Canadian review of Franklin Walker's biography of Norris and identifies the author, E.K.B, as E.K. Brown. The review appeared in *The Canadian Forum*, 13 (May, 1933), 318.

FRANK NORRIS, by Franklin Walker (Doubleday, Doran & Gundy; pp. xvii, 318; $3.00).

The San Francisco fire of 1906 destroyed most of the manuscripts and letters of Frank Norris. His biographer, a patient and skilful investigator, has been obliged to rely mainly upon the recollections of the family and friends of his subject, and to give free rein to conjecture where these recollections fail. The chief value of the book is not, however, in its minute numerous additions to our knowledge of the facts but in its presentation of character. Norris stands before us as a slapdash militant person, always on the march but seldom very clear as to the goal. The relation of the characters and incidents in the novels, especially in *McTeague* and *Blix*, to their parallels in Norris's experience is Mr. Walker's outstanding contribution to criticism.

E.K.B

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Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV, with thanks for the assistance of *Frederick R. Carl*, adds three new items to the record of reviews and notices of Norris's novels:

Anon. "Moran of the Lady Betty [*sic*]: a Story of adventure off the California coast, by Frank Norris," *Philadelphia Telegraph*, 24 September 1898; rpt. *Book News*, 17 (September, 1898), 162.

A story of adventure off the California coast. The author is a young San Franciscan. The Story is fresh and original, having to do with a young Norwegian woman who has followed the sea with her father and knows no other life.

*

Editorial note regarding Gouverneur Morris, "Yellow Men and Gold," *Adventure*, 1 (November 1911), p. 1.

Among all the stories of adventure there are a few that stand out in every reader's memory—"Robinson Crusoe," "The Three Musketeers," "The Prisoner of Zenda," for instance, in their respective fields. We all think first of "Treasure Island." Then after a time came "Moran of the Lady Letty," Frank Norris's fine tale of the Pacific, named by many as the best adventure story since "Treasure Island." Morris's story is the best since "Moran."

*

Frederick Taber Cooper, "The Dearth of Ideas and Some Recent Novels," *Bookman* (New York), 38 (1914), 541-542.

. . . *The Valley of the Moon* resembles a "commissioned replica" of *Blix*. London's book is an "object lesson" in [his] chief faults, and serves to explain why we must continue to rate the little we have of Norris, the unfulfilled promise of his brilliant youth, higher than the best of Mr. London. Not that the substance in the present volume forms in any sense a close parallel to

Blix—on the contrary, they are miles apart, in mood, in environment, in philosophy of living. But they have just one thing in common: they are both of them intimate studies of a young man and a young girl, who love in clean, honest natural fashion, and who plan and save, and make up their minds to share comparative poverty together, and trust to love to tide them over the rough places. Blix and Condy Rivers are taken from the same walks of life as Frank Norris himself. . . .

***

James B. Stronks has been following the events leading up to the recent production of the opera *McTeague* by the Chicago Lyric Opera. Thanks to him, the Norris Society office at Florida State University now has a bulky file of prepresentation publications as well as many of the reviews and articles focusing upon the opera and individuals who collaborated in its making and performance. Thanks go to Jim for making such research resources available. Those interested in like adaptations of Norris's works will want to know that a video version of the film *Greed*, with a musical score, is available for sale from local dealers; it will be listed as an MGM film. D.W. Griffith's adaptation of "A Deal in Wheat," entitled *A Corner in Wheat*, is also available as a 16 mm. film from the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

***

The American Literature Association will hold its annual convention in Baltimore, 28-30 May 1993. Sessions on Norris, Crane, Dreiser, London, Wharton, and like authors of interest to members will occur. Those who have not attended an ALA convention may expect a pleasant surprise: the primary focus is upon individual authors; the themes are decidedly "literary" and largely a-political; and, best of all, the ALA convention does not resemble the MLA convention. An information sheet is enclosed.

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Society members *Charles Kaplan* and *Joel Myerson* on Frank Norris Street, San Francisco.

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