Frank Norris Studies

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SPECIAL ISSUE

PERVERTED TALES

The essays in this issue were first delivered at a meeting of the Norris Society during the 1992 American Literature Association Convention in San Diego, California. Each focuses upon Frank Norris's "Perverted Tales," first published in the San Francisco weekly magazine, *The Wave*, in its Christmas 1897 issue (16 [18 December 1897], 5-7), and most recently reprinted in Donald Pizer's *Frank Norris: Novels and Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1986), pp. 1119-1133. Norris's six "tales" are parodies of influential authors of his day. The primary question addressed by each of the essays is, what then-well-known characteristics of the authors's styles and typical subject matters was Norris exaggerating for comic effect?

* * *

"The 'Ricksha That Happened": Norris's Parody of Rudyard Kipling

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> This is not my story. It is the story of my friend Kew Wen Lung, the *gong-toi*, who has his little green and yellow barber shop in Sacramento Street, and who will shave you for one bit, while you hold the shaving bowl under your chin. This price, however, includes the cleaning of the inside of your eyelids with a long sliver of tortoise shell held ever so steadily between his long-nailed finger tips.
>
> "Outward and Visible Signs: IV," 1894

The influence of Rudyard Kipling in the above passage is not apparent for many today. As with Robert Louis Stevenson, it is now difficult to measure the kind and quality of excitement for which Rudyard Kipling was responsible with Frank Norris's generation. Today we are not riveted to our chairs when reading his tales. But Condy Rivers, Norris's hero in the autobiographical *Blix* (1899), was; so too was the exceptional heroine Travis—exceptional in that *she* also revels in Kipling's close attention to real-world specifics and technical details in tales like "The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes" (*The Phantom Rickshaw*, 1889). This young lady's positive reaction to ultra-manly, down-to-earth Kipling is one of the ways in which she is measured as truly a "man's woman"—the highest compliment possible in the Norris canon. Put another way, her identity as a New Woman of the 1890s, rather than as a traditional bluestocking of the Browning Circle variety, is enhanced by her attraction to the writer who, like Stevenson, was then considered vulgar, brutal, and inartistic by the vestals of genteel culture.

For Norris's generation, Kipling was an experimental realist par excellence, as one finds when reading eulogiums such as John Palmer's of 1915. When championing the writer, however, Palmer felt compelled not to celebrate but to *rescue* him from this reputation. Arguing that Kipling is actually at his best when his imagination transcends empirical limitations, Palmer might be describing Norris or even Zola as he tries to modify Kipling's image: "We have here to make a last protest against a too popular fallacy concerning the tales of Mr. Kipling. Mr. Kipling's passion for the concrete, which is a passion of all truly imaginative men, together with his keen delight in the work of the world, has caused him to be falsely

regarded as a note-book realist of the modern type. He is [wrongly] assumed to be happiest when writing from direct experience without refinement or transmutation."[1] Kipling-as-mere-realist is thus as false as the image of Zola-as-realist that Norris similarly rejected in "Zola as a Romantic Writer" (1896).

We share this with Palmer and Norris: we now have no trouble seeing how *fanciful* were Kipling and other alleged "note-book realists" like Zola and Norris himself. Now free from the overreactions of the turn of the century, we properly perceive Kipling as a realistic-romantic or romantic-realist artist, like Jack London, Theodore Dreiser, and other moderns who have given the lie to the opposition between reason and imagination pictured in Poe's "Sonnet—To Science." Oddly enough, Kipling—like James Lane Allen—even fits the remarkably broad definition of literary naturalism discoverable in Norris's several commentaries on the sensibility as a synthesis of romanticism and realism. Palmer, at least, would not find this too extreme a categorization. When focusing on Kipling's taste for graphic and colorful descriptions of physical violence, Zola comes to mind; Palmer declares that "Mr. Kipling cannot conceal his delight in his competency to make war as nasty as Zola or Tolstoy have made it."[2] The Zola of *La Débâcle* and the Kipling of *Soldiers Three* and *The Light That Failed* had that in common; and Norris was not far behind in the representation of violence, for example, in *Moran of the Lady Letty* (1898) which was influenced by both Zola and Kipling's *Captains Courageous* (1897).

Just before he began the composition of *Moran*, Norris wrote his parody of the bespectacled colonial. It was not the first mention he had made of Kipling. Like Zola, Kipling was a standard by which Norris measured others in his fictions and literary essays. The special value of the parody is that, unlike most of those works in which his allusions to Kipling's works are general, Norris provides in the parody numerous details intelligible to other Kipling fans, thus making it clear just what individual works he had read and which he could assume were familiar to others. Further, the extraordinary specificity of many of Norris's allusions indicate the likelihood of repeated readings and even entries in notebooks (see the appendix below).

To employ in the parody Kipling's well-known method of indicating the termination or suppression of a digression—"But that's another story"—is as minimally significant as quoting today Kipling's "The Betrothed" to the familiar effect that a woman is only a woman but a cigar is a good smoke. To give the beginning of a Berkeley football cheer as the third epigraph and then cite it as a "*Barrack-room ballad*" is only to indicate Norris's awareness of that collection of Kipling's poems. Norris goes well beyond this level of familiarity.

Mrs. Hawkseye, for example, is Kipling's once well-known Mrs. Hawksbee, the charming light-comedy heroine given to witty conversation and clever, scheming behavior among her fellow colonials in stories appearing in *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1890) and *Under the Deodars* (1891). The parody's Mulligatawney, Lear-eyed, and Orf-of-this are keyed to three of Kipling's most successful characterizations of British soldiers. They are the inseparable three in question in *Soldiers Three and Other Stories* (1890) and in other collections as well: Mulligatawney, who is given the lion's share of dialogue in the parody, is Terence Mulvaney, a broadly drawn Irishman whose brogue Norris captures expertly; Lear-eyed is Jock Learoyd, a Yorkshireman; and Orf-of-this is Stanley Ortheris, a Cockney whose speech, like Learoyd's, is also rendered in dialect. Norris borrows freely from their dialogue: Mulligatawney echoes the reference to "'brutil an' licentious soldiery'" by Mulvaney in "The Courting of Dinah Shadd" (*Soldiers Three*) and Mulligatawney repeatedly paraphrases Mulvaney's statement, found in the same story and others, that "'I was a corp'ril then—rejuced afterwards, but a corp'ril then.'" Mulligatwaney's reference to a single man as "an ornament to the service" in the parody derives from Mulvaney's description of a "'clane man'" in "The Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney" (*Life's Handicap*, 1891). "Incarnation" is also the source of Norris's narrator's declaration that in Indiana "a man's whole duty is to like *doggo* and not *ekka* more than once a week, and to pray for war." Norris appears to make up many of the unintelligible terms with which the parody is saturated; but it proves easy to find Kipling actually using words like *Ryotwary* ("Tods'

Amendment," *Plain Tales*) and both *dacoit* and *puckarowed* ("The Taking of Lungtungpen," *Plain Tales*). Norris knew his Kipling.

As to the plot of the parody—Norris takes Mrs. Hawksbee and the three soldiers out of their original, local color contexts in their tales, and in the parody he drops them into the quite different environment featured in another collection of short stories from which he derived the parody's title. "The 'Ricksha That Happened" is an allusion to Kipling's "The Phantom Rickshaw" (*The Phantom Rickshaw*, 1889), whose atmosphere is that of the strange, the inexplicable, and—as is seen with an actual phantom rickshaw featured in the title story—the ghostly. Thus the parody begins with lighthearted observations on the manners and foibles of British military life in India and, midway, it veers into a broad burlesque of the Kiplingesque mystery tale once the character, Stepterfetchit, arrives on the scene. Stepterfetchit is half Kipling (the British soldier) and half a creation from Norris's Berkeley years when the name served as his "coon culture" *nom de plume*. Like Kipling's three soldiers, Stepterfetchit drinks too much; the Major and the narrator attempt to save him; as they arrive at his *dak-bungalow* the all-too-audible ticking of an eight-day clock is ominous, then terrifying; they have arrived too late, for Stepterfetchit has already killed his *jinricksha*—whatever that means, given the numerous denotations of that word in the parody. In this instance, Norris seems to be suggesting a bottle of *gin*.

The problem with determining meaning in the parody itself is the potential and frequently real problem in Kipling's too dialectal yarn-spinnings; the specifics-laden narratives featuring the credibly rendered, digressive monologues of Mulvaney, Ortheris, and Learoyd flirt with incoherence, and clarity frequently alternates with turbidity when they hold forth. These raconteurs are, after all, uneducated privates. Kipling makes them believable in their narrative behaviors; but credibility comes at the cost in accessibility that Norris makes plain.

The parody is, in one sense, a lampooning of Kipling's stylizations; at the same time, though, it is a testimony to Kipling's unique, immediately recognizable art. Imitation, of course, is the highest form of flattery and admission of influence; and Norris's 1896 story, "A Salvation Boom in Matabeleland," most positively bespeaks Kipling's sway.[3] It is set in South Africa, and one of its early sentences shows that the "Perverted Tales" parody is, in effect, one directed against Norris himself as well. Norris as Kiplingesque narrator states: "Ingodusi, who first told [this story], was an *induna* in Lobengula's pet regiment or *impi*, which afterward came to be the great *Imbezzu impi*." That is, it sounds as though we are in Kipling's India. We go on to read about "*Mahunda indaba*," a "*sjambok* of rhinoceros hide," "*Maghwheena*," "*assegais*," "*kirris*," and "*Umtagati*." Further, "A Salvation Boom" ends with a character crucified by the hands only on a telephone pole—seemingly a hallmark gesture on *enfant terrible* Norris's part, until one reads Kipling's "The Man Who Would Be King" in *The Phantom Rickshaw*. There a character named Peachey is crucified in an equally unique fashion: wooden pegs are driven through his hands into two pine trees. To be outrageous was a goal that both writers pursued.

In the mid 1890s, when he was not making clear his debt to others like Anthony Hope and Richard Harding Davis, Norris was revealing the adulation Kipling had inspired in him. Norris described himself as the "Boy Zola" later in his career. But he might easily have termed himself the "Boy Kipling" as well.

Notes

[1]*Rudyard Kipling* (London: Nisbet, 1915), pp. 98-99.
[2]*Rudyard Kipling*, p. 69.
[3]*The Wave*, 15 (25 April 1896), 5.

APPENDIX
Norris's Appropriations and Paraphrases from the Early Kipling Canon

FN: "—but that's another story."

RK: "But that is another story."
—"Three and—an Extra," *Life's Handicap*.

☼☼☼

FN: "'. . . with such brutil and licenshous soldiery. . . .'"

RK: "'If the brutil an' licentious soldiery av these part get seight av the thruck. . . .'"
—"The Courting of Dinah Shadd," *Soldiers Three*.

☼☼☼

FN: "'I waz only a recruity then.'"

RK: "'Wanst upon a time, as the childer-books say, I was a recruity.'"
—"The God from the Machine," *Soldiers Three*.

☼☼☼

FN: "'But I waz a corpril wanst. I was rejuced aftherwards, but I waz a corpril wanst,' . . ."

RK: "'I was a corp'ril then—rejuced afterwards, but a corp'ril then.'"
—"The Courting of Dinah Shadd," *Soldiers Three*.

"'I was a Corp'ril then. I was rejuced aftherwards, but, no matther, I was a Corp'ril wanst.'"
—"The God from the Machine," *Soldiers Three*.

"'Whin I was a Corp'ril—I was rejuced aftherwards—but, as I say, *whin* I was a Corp'ril, I was a divil of a man.'"
—"The Solid Muldoon," *Soldiers Three*.

"'. . . whin I was a Corp'ril. I was rejuced aftherwards—but no matther—I was a Corp'ril wanst.'"
—"The Daughter of the Regiment," *Plain Tales from the Hills*.

☼☼☼

FN: "'A single man . . . is an ornamint to the service.'"

RK: "'. . . but a clane man, such as is an ornament to his service. . . .'"
—"The Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney," *Life's Handicap*.

☼☼☼

FN: "Here a man's whole duty is to lie *doggo* and not *ekka* more than once a week, and to pray for a war."

RK: "'. . . I would lie most powerful doggo whin I heard a shot. . . .'"
—"'Love-O'-Women,'" *Many Inventions*.

"'Lay doggo—[i.e.,] lay quiet, with the other thirty men.'"
—"A Conference of the Powers," *Many Inventions*.

"'. . . I went out shooting with him in an *ekka* for the day. . . .'"
—"'Love-O'-Women,'" *Many Inventions*.

"Their duty is to keep themselves and their accoutrements specklessly clean, to refrain from getting drunk more often than is necessary, to obey their superiors, and to pray for a war."
—"The Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney," *Life's Handicap*.

☼☼☼

FN: ". . . 'when a mon is tewed wi' a lass he's *lokri* in a *bunder*. . . .'"

RK: "'Happen there was a lass tewed up wi' it. Men do more than more for th' sake of a lass.'"
—"On Greenhow Hill," *Life's Handicap*.

"'Happen there was a lass tewed up wi' him, too,' said he."
—"On Greenhow Hill," *Life's Handicap*.

☼☼☼

FN: ". . . either he dies with swiftness, which is bad, or lives with swiftness, which is worse or marries, which is worst of all."

"Mulligatawney is away annexing Burma."

RK: ". . . some . . . went away and annexed Burma . . . and some were married, which was bad, and some did other things which were worse. . . ."
—"The Mark of the Beast," *Life's Handicap*.

☼☼☼

FN: "People write and talk lightly of blood running cold and of fear and all that sort of thing, but the real sensation is quite too terrible to be trifled with."

RK: "People write and talk lightly of blood running cold and hair standing up, and things of that kind. Both sensations are too horrible to be trifled with."
—"The Mark of the Beast," *Life's Handicap*.

* * * * *

Frank Norris's "The Green Stone of Unrest"

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Parody was an extremely popular form of anti-romantic humor in the late nineteenth century. Like Mark Twain, Frank Norris, and Bret Harte, Stephen Crane wrote parodies, and he continued to write them throughout his career. Indeed, the first book-length study of Crane's fiction, Eric Solomon's *Stephen Crane: From Parody to Realism* (1966), an otherwise discerning work, tendentiously pursues the theme that Crane's most important novels and short stories adapted the conventions of the subliterature of his time to create parodic equivalents of popular fiction. Solomon emphasizes that Crane usually practices a more serious form of parody than Twain, Norris and Harte, a kind of parody that is not comical and deflationary but is directed toward positive and constructive ends.[1] Nevertheless, Crane did write humorous parodies, but he differed from these contemporaries in that he focused his attacks upon popular literary genres and forbore to take aim at individual writers. In "Why Did the Young Clerk Swear?" (1893) Crane ridicules the spurious eroticism of French fiction; "Some Hints for Play-Makers" (1893) derides popular melodrama, as Crane had done earlier in *Maggie*; "A Tale of Mere Chance" (1896) burlesques the Poe school of mystery and horror; and "A Self-Made Man," published in 1899 but written earlier, caricatures the Horatio Alger story. Crane's final and most ambitious foray into parody occurred at the very end of his life when he composed the greater part of the posthumous *The O'Ruddy* (1903), a lengthy satire of the Alexander Dumas school of romantic fiction, which he was still dictating on his deathbed.

Crane idiosyncrasies of thought and expression reflect his modernism. They exposed him to the attacks of traditionalists, making it inevitable that he in turn would be the most parodied American writer of his generation, although often superficially and ineffectively. From the publication of *The Black Riders* in May 1895, and with new emphasis after the appearance of the *Red Badge of Courage* in the fall of that year, Crane parodies, kindly or hostile, were ubiquitous in American newspapers and mass circulation magazines and, more especially, in the little magazines of the 1890s such as *Town Topics*, the *Philistine, Chips*, the *Bauble*, the *Lotus*, and the *Philosopher*. So that when Frank Norris of the *Wave* came to write "The Green Stone of Unrest" in December 1897, the conventions were well established.

The prose texts upon which Norris focused his parody were primarily *The Red Badge, Maggie*, whose beginning is alluded to in Norris' opening sentence, "A Mere Boy stood on a pile of blue stones," and "The Open Boat," which Norris read in its only periodical appearance in *Scribner's Magazine* (June 1897). Norris mocks the refrain echoing in the collective mind of the men in the dinghy: "'If I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees?'" which he paraphrases in the Mere Boy's laconic commentary "'If I'm goin' teh be shot . . . if I'm goin' teh be shot, b'Jimminy——.'" The characterizations of the Mere Boy and the "blue serge officer" indicate, of course, Norris's awareness of Crane's penchant for epithets rather than proper names.

Norris was also clearly familiar with a number of Crane's poems in *The Black Riders* or published in Elbert Hubbard's *Philistine*. The absurd green pebble, the animistic poplar trees, and the "pale wind" which "mentioned tremendous facts under its breath with a certain effort at concealment" in "The Green Stone of Unrest" suggest the theatrical imagery of *fin-de-siècle* Decadence in such poems as "There came whisperings in the winds" (*Black Riders*, XLIII), "I have heard the sunset song of the birches" (*Philistine*, January 1896), and especially "Each small gleam was a voice," which appeared in the *Philistine* in September 1895 under the title "A Lantern Song":

> Each small gleam was a voice
> —A lantern voice—
> In little songs of carmine, violet, green, gold.
> A chorus of colors came over the water;
> The wondrous leaf-shadow no longer wavered,
> No pines crooned on the hills
> The blue night was elsewhere a silence

When the chorus of colors came over the water,
Little songs of carmine, violet, green, gold.

Small glowing pebbles
Thrown on the dark plane of evening
Sing good ballads of God
And eternity, with soul's rest.
Little priests, little holy fathers
None can doubt the truth of your hymning
When the marvelous chorus comes over the water
Songs of carmine, violet, green, gold. (P. 124.)

Parody is an exaggerated replication of a style in order to satirize or ridicule stylistic mannerisms or distinctive qualities of thought, or both. Parodies of Crane in the 1890s often fixated upon his verbal exuberance, which Norris spoofs with esoteric words and neologisms—e. g., "pullulated," "obnublilated," "paranthine"—and upon his abusive use of color imagery. Indeed, it was a formidable task to satirize a writer who in this regard seemed so frequently to engage in self-parody, as in *The Red Badge of Courage* where a charge is described as "a blind and despairing rush by the collection of men in dusty and tattered blue, over a green sward and under a sapphire sky, toward a fence, dimly outlined in smoke, from behind which spluttered the fierce rifles of enemies." Crane's theatrical use of color was the single aspect of his impressionistic technique most frequently parodied by contemporaries. James Gibbons Huneker, for example, imagined how Crane's dispatch describing the Battle of Manila Bay might read:

> The American fleet came redly on like a bunch of waving bandana handkerchiefs. The air was full of prunes as a plum pudding. The whitish-green rattle of the rapid-fire guns was exacerbatingly shrill.
>
> The Spanish met the onslaught with a mauve determination. Ecruly they stood at the posts shepherds doggedly.
>
> The two fleets hurtled in a magenta hurtle. They feinted and thrust with a deep canary-yellow vigor. The battle looked like two overturned garbage-cans on a hot night. The shells whistled sealbrownly. The death screams of the Spaniards were full of purplish pink despair. One Spaniard with cerise voice like the aftermath of an aurora borealis screamed paintingly his desire to kill the Americanos.
>
> Then with a blackish white tremor, strong battleships sank greenly chromely black into the water. A gauntly greenish smell tore the air. The whole thing looked like a German pouring dark wine into a dingy funnel.
>
> Admiral Dewey had won.[2]

The Red Badge of Courage, upon which Norris's parody of Crane is centered, contains some 250 color words. Most of them are used in realistic description. There are the blue and gray of uniforms, the red of campfires, the yellow and orange of sunlight, and the green of forests. In his "blue stones," "seal brown" day, "vermillion valley," "mauve hilltop," "raw umber" road, and "pebbles, Naples yellow in color," Norris distinguishes Crane's penchant in *The Red Badge* for descriptions utilizing more obscure color words: "amber," "dun," "leaden," "mouse-colored," "tawny," "wine-tinted," "rose," and "sapphire." In the bizarre green pebble he satirizes Crane's enigmatic color metaphors, best exemplified by the notorious "The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer," but he does not ridicule, as Huneker does, Crane's frequently ineffective color synaesthesias, such as "red cheers," "black curses," or "the red, formidable difficulties of war."

A distinctive quality of Crane's impressionism is his awareness that the apprehension of reality is limited to empirical data interpreted through human consciousness. In his "London Impressions" Crane characterized understanding as a "cylinder of vision" in which the individual lives in a world distorted by the limitations of perception, "and what was passing beyond the dimensions of his cylinder no man knew." The subjective point of view in Crane's prose and poetry, manifested in a style that stresses awareness of immediate sensory and perceptual impressions and an emphasis upon the individual's need to decode experience, often impressed critics as solipsistic and led to parodies such as that of "I have heard the sunset song of the birches":

AFTER MR. STEPHEN CRANE

"I have smelled the sunset song of the lobsters—
"A scarlet melody in the chafing dish.
"I have tasted the breast of the canvass-back.
"At nightfall

"The oysters have rushed down me
"With the terrapin.
"These things have I eaten," quoth the gourmet,
"Possessing only mouth and nose.
"But you—
"You put tomato catsup on your salad."[3]

Even more successful is this lampoon of Crane's Greco-Turkish War reporting which originally appeared in the *Lewiston* [Maine] *Journal* and was reprinted in the *New York Tribune* on 18 May 1897:

I have seen a battle.
I find it is very like what
I wrote up before.
I congratulate myself that
I ever saw a battle.
I am pleased with the sound of war.
I think it is beautiful.
I thought is would be.
I am sure of my nose for battle.
I did not see any war correspondents while
I was watching the battle except
I. (P. 6.)

In the self-centered universe of Crane's characters nature is often personified. She appears to be sympathetic, indifferent, or malevolent according to their circumstances and moods. "The Green Stone of Unrest" represents a "pallid wind" that "communicated another Incomprehensible Fact" that "the poplars understood"; on the uplands where cloud shadows moved over the fields, "It was as if the Sky and Earth were playing a tremendous games of chess"; and "The large Wind evolved a threnody with reference to the seven un-distant poplars."

The Crane works that were available to Norris are replete with grotesque similes, which are another hallmark of Crane's subjective rendering of the external world. Maggie's mother "sat at a table eating like a fat monk in a picture." In *The Red Badge* the regiment is perceived to be "like one of those moving monsters wending with many feet." Columns of troops are "like two serpents crawling from the cavern of the night." Henry Fleming watches the retreat of a train of wagons that "fled like soft, ungainly animals." A colonel, berated by his commanding general, "perchance to relieve his feelings, began to scold like a wet parrot." Cannon "squatted in a row like savage chiefs," and they "belched and howled like brass devils guarding a gate." The man in "The Open Boat" who sheds his clothing as he bounds into the surf to rescue the cook when the dinghy is beached is "naked as a tree in winter." Here again, since parody depends upon exaggeration, Norris found it difficult to be more outrageous than his subject, but he accomplishes this wonderfully in depicting "the larger landscape, printed in four colors, like a poster"; "cannon, like voluble but non-committal toads with hunched backs [that], fulminated vast hiccoughs at unimpassioned intervals"; the army line that "obnubilated itself in whiteness as a line of writing is blotted with a new blotter"; the "pulpy white" "Thing . . . . beautifully spotted with red, like tomato stains on a rolled napkin"; and the yellow sun "dropping on the green plain of the earth, like a twenty-dollar gold piece falling on the baize cloth of a gaming table," clearly an allusion to the most notorious simile in Crane's fiction, "The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer."

Another aspect of Crane's style parodied by Norris, himself not irreproachable in this regard, was his tendency toward excessive detail and enumeration. Crane's work is replete with sentences beginning with "there was" and "there were" followed by a catalogue, as in an early story, "The Reluctant Voyagers," which remained unpublished until 1900: "There was a pug dog and three old women on a bench, a man and a maid with a book and a parasol, a sea-gull drifting high in the wind, and a distant, tremendous meeting of sea and sky."[4] This pattern is ably burlesqued by Norris: "If there were a thousand men in a procession and nine hundred and ninety-nine should suddenly expire, the one man who was remnant would assume the responsibility of the procession. The Mere Boy was an abbreviated procession." Also, The Mere Boy "observed an Army of a Million Men." When he is shot, he "had been struck with seventy-seven rifle bullets. Seventy had struck him in the chest, seven in the head." The many parodies of Crane which targeted this predilection for specificity are typified by Louis B. Coley's "Realistic Realism":

I walked
Placing one foot before the other.
Each step brought me two feet nine inches nearer my destination
And as I walked I looked
To the right
And left
And straight ahead.
I saw many things—
A woman sitting on a doorstep;
Two dogs fighting;
A cat lying in the sun;
A trolley car;
Three wagons and one cab;
Houses, barns, fences and fields.
I passed sixteen women
And five men.
One hour and twenty-five minutes from the time I started
I reached the end of my journey.
I then turned round
And walked back,
Moving my legs in the same manner as before.[5]

Crane's use of detail, however, was not usually for the purpose of achieving circumstantial realism but more often, especially in his earlier writing, to record shifts in centers of vision and awareness. Imitating Crane's terse, disjointed paragraphs, Norris captures in parody the nervous, elliptical quality of his prose and the often hallucinatory nature of his characters' perceptions. He depicts the progress of the Mere Boy from the time he allows "the idea of the green pebble to nick itself into the sharp edge of the disk of his Perception" until he becomes himself the object of someone else's distorted perspective, a "Thing," "pulpy white," with "blackish-yellow lips," a pastiche of the climactic chapel scene in *The Red Badge* where Henry Fleming confronts a rotting corpse and halts, "horror-stricken at the sight of a thing." Beyond doubt, in "The Green Stone of Unrest" Norris demonstrates that he was a close reader of Crane's work, whether or not he was author of other critiques in the *Wave* formerly ascribed to him: "Stephen Crane's Stories of Life in the Slums" and "Crane in London," attributions now discounted by Joseph McElrath in *Frank Norris and* The *Wave: A Bibliography*.[6]

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Notes

[1](Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 4-6.
[2]*Musical Courier*, 27 (3 August 1898), 20.
[3]*Bauble*. 2 (January, 1896), 7-8.
[4]*The Works of Stephen Crane*, ed. Fredson Bowers, 10 vols. (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1969-76), vol. 8, 16.
[5]*Philosopher*, 4 (August, 1898), 53.
[6](New York: Garland, 1988), pp. 11, 86-90, 140.

Harte, Norris, and "The Hero of Tomato Can"

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Bret Harte, so the saying goes, reversed the path of the sun. He rose in the west and set in darkness in the east. W.D. Howells recalled in 1900 that Harte moved from California "after the age of observation was past for him."[1] (Harte left his eye in San Francisco?) Frank Norris had made much the same point a few months earlier in a letter to the journalist Isaac F. Marcosson: "I have great faith in the possibilities of San Francisco and the Pacific Coast as offering a field for fiction," Norris wrote, but "Not the fiction of Bret Harte . . . for the country has long since outgrown the 'red shirt' period."[2] Shortly before his death, Norris's comment clearly implicated Harte: "We distinctly do not want [the red shirt type] to speak of his local habitation as 'these 'ere diggin's,' or to address us as 'pard' or to speak of death as the passing in of checks."[3] So far as Norris was concerned, Harte with his precious plots and bathetic endings represented all that was wrong with western American fiction.

Thirty years after he had startled the academists in New England with such tales as "The Luck of Roaring Camp," Harte's tired and tested formula was ripe for parody. Though he continued to trade on his name and early reputation until his death in 1902, Harte had long since become in the opinion of many reviewers his own best parodist.[4] "I grind out the old tunes on the old organ and gather up the coppers," he once admitted to his wife.[5] In his perverted tale "The Hero of Tomato Can," Norris would burlesque the profitable, if monotonous, tradition of gold-rush romances epitomized by "The Outcasts of Poker Flat."

one of the seven original stories Harte wrote for the *Overland Monthly* early in his career.

The particular targets of Norris' satire were the fastidious habits and mock-chivalrous death of Harte's gambler John Oakhurst. As Harte's story opens, Oakhurst steps into the main street of Poker Flat and wipes the red dust of the town from his "neat boots" with his handkerchief. After he is expelled from the town by a vigilance committee, he "bestirred himself in dusting his black clothes, washing his hands and face, and other acts characteristic of his studiously neat habits." Later, when the gambler is trapped with the other outcasts in a mountain blizzard, he piles a supply of wood beside their cabin before slipping into the forest and killing himself. As the story ends, a search party comes upon a "deuce of clubs pinned to the bark" of "one of the largest pine-trees" in the gulch, with Oakhurst's epitaph "written in pencil, in a firm hand":

BENEATH THIS TREE
LIES THE BODY
OF
JOHN OAKHURST,
WHO STRUCK A STREAK OF BAD LUCK . . .
AND
HANDED IN HIS CHECKS. . . .

"And pulseless and cold, with a Derringer by his side and a bullet in his heart, though still calm as in life, beneath the snow lay he who was at once the strongest and yet the weakest of the outcasts of Poker Flat."[6]

Norris's John Oak-hearse is, if possible, even more prissy and delicate than Harte's gambler. As Oak-hearse leaves the bar of the Tomato Can hotel in the first paragraph of Norris' tale, he opens "a dainty manicure set" and begins "to trim and polish his slender, almost feminine finger nails, that had been contaminated with the touch of the greasy cards." He returns to his hotel, "dodging an occasional revolver bullet" and "stepping daintily" over a "few unburied corpses" en route. His valet brings him the London and Vienna papers "ironed, and scented with orris root." At dinner, he orders a caviar sandwich, the last one in the house, just before a lady with "a lustrous pair of eyes" orders one, too, at which "his pale face became even paler" and he writes a note "begging [her] to accept the sandwich from one who had loved not wisely but too many." Norris' story ends by echoing Harte's almost verbatim: A search party comes upon "an ace of spades (marked) pinned to the bark" of "one of the largest pine trees" in the gulch, with Oak-hearse's epitaph "written in pencil with a firm hand":

Here lies the body
of
JOHN OAK-HEARSE,
who was too much of a gentleman
to play a
Royal-flush
against a
Queen-full

"And so, pulseless and cold with a Derringer by his side and a bullet in his brain, though still calm as in life lay he who had been at once the pest and the pride of Tomato Can." As William J. Hug concludes, "Oak-hearse and his exploits burlesque a character type and story pattern which reappear consistently throughout Harte's fiction: the seemingly callous, anarchistic Westerner, free of moral and social constraints, who chooses to sacrifice himself in a redemptive act sentimentally embodying genteel mores."[7]

Not only did Norris explicitly parody Harte in "The Hero of Tomato Can," he extended the parody in chapter 21 of *McTeague*, which he was completing at the time. As a prospector in the region around "Gold Gulch" with a partner named Cribbens, McTeague is the perfect "parodic contrary" to Harte's sourdough miner.[8] In effect, Norris deconstructs Harte's formula in this part of his novel with his own naturalistic version of the gold-rush romance. Much as *The Sea-Wolf* has been described as "Elizabeth Barrett Meets Wolf Larsen,"[9] this chapter of *McTeague* may be fairly called "Tennessee's Partner Meets Émile Zola." Similarly, in his late comic story "The Passing of Cock-eye Blacklock" (1902), Norris again lampooned Oakhurst's demise, though the story as a whole parodies elements of Owen Wister's *The Virginian*. Norris's villain Blacklock is not a cattle-rustler like Trampas but a "fish-shooter"; that is, he drops dynamite into rivers to kill the trout he gathers and

sells in Sacramento. One day his "pup dog" retrieves one of the sticks which blows "a big enough hole in the ground to bury a horse an' wagon, let alone Cock-eye," as the cowboy yarnspinner explains. "So we planted him there, an' put up a board, an' wrote on it:

Here lies most
of
C. BLACKLOCK,
who died of a'
entangling alliance with a
a
stick of dynamite.[10]

This paragraph epitaph is, in fact, something of a parting shot at Harte, who had died in England only two months before the story was published.

Still, Norris was not unqualifiedly critical of Harte. He noted in an 1897 sketch for *The Wave* that "of course one has read a good deal in Bret Harte" about the neighborhoods on Telegraph Hill,[11] and he apparently planned to publish a collection of short stories the same year under the title *Ways That Are Dark*—an allusion to Harte's poem "Plain Language from Truthful James" or "The Heathen Chinee."[12] Above all, Harte's "condensed novels"—travesties of works by such writers as Cooper, Dickens, and Hugo—no doubt inspired the very form of Norris's "perverted tales," even to the elliptical dashes in the authors' names. However sophomoric they may seem today, Harte's "condensed novels" were hailed as "the best prose parodies in the language" as late as 1882, when his reputation was at its lowest ebb.[13] Ironically, in "The Hero of Tomato Can" Norris imitated Harte—the sincerest form of flattery, after all—even as he parodied him.

Notes

[1]W. D. Howells, *Literary Friends and Acquaintances* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1900), p. 299.

[2]*Frank Norris: Collected Letters*, ed. Jesse S. Crisler (San Francisco: Book Club of California, 1986), p. 58. Norris's comment on Harte was published by Doubleday as early as 1899 in promotional copy for the original edition of *McTeague* (see *Frank Norris: The Critical Reception*, ed. Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., and Katherine Knight [New York: Burt Franklin, 1981], p. xxii).

[3]"'The Literature of the West': A Reply to W.R. Lighton," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 8 January 1902; rpt. in Willard E. Martin, Jr., "Two Uncollected Essays by Frank Norris," *American Literature*, 8 (May 1936), 192; and in *The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris*, ed. Donald Pizer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), p. 104.

[4]Linda Diz Barnett, *Bret Harte: A Reference Guide* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980), pp. 129, 132, 147, *passim*.

[5]*The Letters of Bret Harte*, ed. Geoffrey Bret Harte (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1926), p. 154.

[6]*The Outcasts of Poker Flat and Other Tales* (New York: New American Library, 1961), pp. 112-123.

[7]William J. Hug, "*McTeague* as Metafiction? Frank Norris' Parodies of Bret Harte and the Dime Novel," *Western American Literature*, 36 (November 1991), 220.

[8]Hug, 221.

[9]Robert B. Pearsall, "Elizabeth Barrett Meets Wolf Larsen," *Western American Literature*, 4 (Spring 1969), 3-13.

[10]*Century*, N.S. 42 (July 1902); rpt. in Norris, *A Deal in Wheat and Other Stories* of the New and Old West (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1903), pp. 79-98.

[11]"Among Cliff-Dwellers," *The Wave*, 16 (15 May 1897), 6.

[12]Eleanor M. Davenport, "Some Younger California Writers," *University of California Magazine*, 3 (November 1897); rpt. in *Frank Norris: The Critical Reception*, pp. 7-8.

[13]*San Francisco Chronicle*, 2 July 1882, p. 6.

Norris's "Van Bubbles' Story": Bursting the Bubble of the Davis Mystique

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It is important to recognize that when Norris wrote the Van Bubbles piece parodying Richard Harding Davis in 1897 he was still a relatively young writer, just then entering into his artistic maturity. His work for the San Francisco *Wave* reveals an artist who, while learning to manipulate the linguistic and stylistic tools of his craft, was actively seeking a subject matter that would sustain him. By this time, Norris had moved beyond his collegiate fascination with medieval romance. Influenced in part by Davis's immensely popular realistic fiction, stories concerned primarily with the everyday adventures of the upper-class, Norris had abandoned the old-style romanticism that had produced *Yvernelle* (1892), "The Jongleur of Taillebois" (1891), and "Lauth" (1892), and was writing a more modern fiction dealing with realistic characters and

situations. He had turned away from attempts to produce high romance, and in pieces like "Man Proposes," "Little Dramas of the Curbstone," and the series entitled "Outward and Visible Signs," Norris instead provided readers with social portraiture and a careful analysis of interpersonal relationships. It was these features that would become the trademarks of his later work.

Yet, as "Perverted Tales" shows, Norris utilized his tenure at *The Wave* to experiment with a variety of styles and voices, switching in these pieces from his standard *Wave* material to carefully crafted literary parody and satire. The fact that he was willing to publicly satirize writers currently enjoying far more secure reputations than his own reflects Norris's self-confidence in his own abilities, and his growing need to step out of the shadows of his literary mentors. The additional fact that he was able to mimic the various styles of his subjects with such accuracy suggests that he was more than familiar with their collective works. Certainly this is true in Davis's case, for repeatedly Norris self-consciously recognized the novelist's considerable influence. In his 1895 article "Our Unpopular Novelists," Norris laments what he sees as the absence of talented American writers, as represented by William Dean Howells and "our own dear Harding-Davis."[1] The following year, in his short story "His Sister," Norris writes of young Strelitz, a struggling young writer whose career can only be recognized as representing Norris's own. Walking about in search of real-life melodrama from which to craft his "Dramas of the Curbstone," Strelitz observes with growing despair that the characters whom he encounters on the streets have already been "done to death" by other authors.[2] Most noticeable among Strelitz's catalogue of character types are Davis's own Cortlandt Van Bibber and Eleanor Cuyler. When Norris eventually left San Francisco in pursuit of the type of fame Davis enjoyed, he brought the memory of his mentor's influence with him. This can be seen most readily in Norris's characterization of writer Condy Rivers, the romantic lead in the quasi-autobiographical novel *Blix* (1899). Rivers, whose career and sensibilities, like Strelitz's, bear remarkable similarity to those of Norris, is described as having "suffered an almost fatal attack of Harding-Davis."[3]

Norris's infatuation with Davis's work was at the time not uncommon. Davis was one of the most widely-read American writers of the 1890s. His impact upon the values of the upper-class reading public is difficult to overestimate. Achieving near-instant popularity with "Gallagher: A Newspaper Story" in 1890, Davis quickly established a lasting reputation not only for his vivid and uniquely impressionistic journalism, but for his light-hearted satirical fictions centered upon the day-to-day exploits of the upper class. Davis's subsequent publication of *Van Bibber and Others* (1892), *The Exiles and Other Stories* (1894), *Three Gringos in Venezuela* (1895), and the adventure novel *Soldiers of Fortune* (1897) solidified his position as a major cultural voice of the period. As such, he persistently advocated a proper attention to the old-world notions of decency, morality, and manners. By the turn of the century, Davis had become the standard for American manhood, his name synonymous with the word "gentleman." This identification became so absolute that *Life Magazine's* Charles Dana Gibson used Davis as his model for the Gibson-man illustrations. Davis's influence became such that his fiction, specifically but not exclusively the Van Bibber tales, evolved into the socialite's equivalent of the Bible. Because Davis's heroes and heroines were always the epitome of propriety, etiquette, and form, the conduct of his leading men had become that expected of all proper and genteel young men, and that of his leading ladies for all respectable and eligible young women.

For those unfamiliar with Richard Harding Davis the man, it may help to imagine him as Ernest Hemingway without the emotional baggage of twentieth century fatalism. A journalist by trade, an adventurer by choice, Davis commanded the American public's imagination by traveling all about the world as a special correspondent for one major newspaper or another, falling into and surviving one ridiculously dangerous adventure after another, and then returning home to write about them all. Davis's credo taught the necessity of action, of individual achievement, and the need for these achievements to be recognized and

appreciated by those less capable. His life was a constant stream of self-imposed challenges, and self-achieved successes. Here was a man who helped to found his university's football team, and then proceeded to score that team's first touchdown. Here was a man who sailed down the Congo, who accompanied a Whitechapel police-sweep for Jack the Ripper, who once went undercover disguised as a criminal to infiltrate a neighborhood gang, who served as special correspondent during the Cuban Insurrection and the Greco-Turkish War, and who once rode with Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders.[4]

Davis's enduring characters are each essentially fictional representations of the various aspects of his own personality. His most notable man of action is Robert Clay, the superman of *Soldiers of Fortune*. Like Davis himself, Clay strides boldly through life, a self-made man of singular achievement. Clay represents the paragon of manhood, the ultimate gentleman adventurer. As such, he fervently believes in the moral correctness of propriety and good sportsmanship. His past, again similar to Davis's own, is gilded with the medals earned by his own sweat and blood, his own perseverance and daring.

In contrast to Robert Clay stands Cortlandt Van Bibber, the gentleman socialite of the Van Bibber tales. Van Bibber, unlike Clay, is not modeled after the traditional epic hero, but he still represents Davis's sensibilities in that he is ever attentive to his own standing among the idle-rich. Van Bibber's extraordinary concern for ettiquette and manners, his often comic preoccupation with social obligations and form, consistently provide the potential for mishap that supports the various narratives. The dangers that Van Bibber faces primarily threaten his reputation within the socialite community. His great task throughout his adventures is to extricate himself from the ludicrous social situations into which he falls, while maintaining a modicum of decorum and respectability.

This is the essence of the man and the work upon which Norris brings his satirical guns to bear. The parody's title, "Van Bubbles' Story," is certainly not an accident, for here Norris intends to burst the bubble of the Davis mystique. Norris borrows the parody's general form and etiquette expressions from a number of the Van Bibber stories, most noticeably "Van Bibber's Man Servant," "Van Bibber and the Swan Boats," and "The Cynical Miss Catherwaight." Drawing from these and others, Norris exaggerates Van Bibber's need to maintain grace and decorum while under stress. But here the satirical emphasis is centered not only upon the Van Bibber character, but upon Davis himself and his own extravagant reputation as the gentleman adventurer.

Norris pulls Davis into his own fictional landscape, effectively making him a character in one of his own stories. "Young Charding-Davis," as he is called, finds himself in a typical Van Bibber predicament: he discovers to his upper-class chagrin that he mistakenly wears his serving man's "unfashionable" trousers. Worse, Charding-Davis wears these trousers to a dinner party at the home of the "Girl He Knew." This faux-pas establishes the basic comedic tension for the piece, for of course Charding-Davis will eventually be discovered.

What follows is a rapid succession of whimsical exaggerations satirizing Davis's achievement-centered sensibilities. Young Charding-Davis, dressed to impress in the ridiculous combination of his Yale sweater, football knicker-bockers, and Soudanese Arab headdress, entertains the other guests with casual descriptions of his many medals—one given "for leaving the country in twenty-four hours," another "for conspicuous egoism in the absence of the enemy," and a third "from a pawn broker for four dollars." With all the "becoming modesty" of his counterpart Van Bibber, Charding-Davis toys "gracefully with his golf stick" as he demonstrates "a new football trick he had just patented." And, in a moment of rather broad comedy, Charding-Davis tosses a "Skye terrier into the air" and bats it "thoughtfully the length of the room with his golf stick, after the manner of Heavyflinger of the Harvard Baseball nine."

Like both Davis and his fictional surrogate Robert Clay, Norris's Charding-Davis has done virtually everything there is to do, and of course he has done them well. He has hunted elephants in Africa, has swum the Whirlpool Rapids, and has fought in the Middle East. By exaggerating the actual events of Davis's life, Norris's shakes his finger with light

sarcasm at his hero, at a man whose actions, many believed, were only eclipsed by his remarkable ego. Though widely accepted as the voice of his era, Davis did have his critics, and Norris draws upon these dissenting opinions. Davis's detractors usually referred to him as an over-opinionated war correspondent and a journalist who often made more news than he reported. In a direct reference to this reputation, Charding-Davis admits to having instigated "the late Greek War in order to make news for the New York papers" and "organizing an insurrection in South America for the benefit of a bankrupt rifle manufacturer who wants to dispose of some arms."

But even this superman can be undone, or so it seems. Late in the narrative Van Bubbles enters the story for the first time. Having listened to Charding-Davis's self-serving reminiscences, and determined to deflate this monstrous ego, Van Bubbles begins with a brief story of his own. He remarks that earlier that day he happened upon a former valet, currently working for "one of New York's back-parlor heroes," who was in a bit of trouble. This valet revealed to him that both his and his master's clothing had been somehow exchanged and that currently this "hero" was wearing the valet's own trousers. Van Bubbles, knowing from the trousers the identity of the "hero," has brought them to the dinner-party, and at this point places them upon the table, suggesting that Charding-Davis might find them "of some interest." Charding-Davis's unfashionable indiscretion is here discovered. Humiliated, he is obligated to leave the company of the now mortified "Girl He Knew," and the rest of his more tasteful and fashionable peers. Had the story ended here, Norris would have left his readers with the comic irony that Davis was done in by one of his own characters, in effect, by his own over-inflated sensibility. However, to be true to the popular image, Norris has to allow Charding-Davis to succeed, for Davis in his own life never seemed to fail, and the lives of his characters, despite whatever difficulties they might have encountered, most always worked out for the best. Thus, when the broken Charding-Davis returns home, he finds two notes awaiting his arrival. The first is from "the Most Beautiful Woman in New York offering him her hand and fortune," and the other, "written on the back of a ten thousand dollar check," is from "the Editor of the Greatest Paper in the World begging him to accept the vacant throne of the Nyam-Nyam of Khooinooristan in the capacity of Special Correspondent." Once again, Charding-Davis emerges triumphant.

Charding-Davis's defeat and subsequent rise, absurd as they are, serve as the comic centerpiece of the story. Davis himself, like the parody he inspired, was very much the conservative social adept. Yet again, he was also this fantastic figure of terrific action for whom nothing ever seemed to go wrong. And for many of Davis's contemporaries this duality was a source of great puzzlement and humor. For his part, Norris constructs the story's major satiric premise upon the rather ironic and bizarre self-contradiction that a man of heroic action like Davis—who always stands alone, who thinks nothing of risking his life on a whim—can allow himself to be so easily controlled by the social proprieties. And, in light of his persistent fascination with Davis, a man whose career and fiction he strove to emulate, Norris's amusement is itself ironic. Though Norris here finds considerable humor in Richard Harding Davis as the self-styled over-achiever, as the man who was indeed too large for real life, it was Davis who served as his principal role model when Norris himself became a gentleman adventurer during his trip through South Africa in 1895-96.

Notes

[1]"Our Unpopular Novelists," *The Wave*, 14 (5 October 1895), 7.

[2]"His Sister," *The Wave*, 15 (28 November 1896), 7.

[3]*Blix* (New York: Doubleday & McClure,1899), p. 19

[4]For additional biographical information, see Scott C. Osborn & Robert L. Phillips, Jr., *Richard Harding Davis* (Boston: Twayne, 1978), and Gerald Langford, *The Richard Harding Davis Years* (N.Y.: Rinehart & Winston, 1961).

The Romantic Realism of Bierce and Norris

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By Christmas of 1897, when Frank Norris published "Ambrosia Beer," he was already so securely

established in his own style that he was comfortable about composing this transparent parody of a Bierce story that spoofed a writer who had very likely influenced him. If one looks at Norris's mature stories, it is difficult to see any connection at all between them and Ambrose Bierce's, and were it not for the parody there might not be any clue to suggest a connection.[1] But the fact that Norris selected Bierce to parody encourages us to look and consider, and when we do what we find are reasons to suspect that Norris possibly imitated Bierce in at least one of his early stories but that the more lasting and significant effect of contact with Bierce's stories might have been manifested in the development of Norris's theory of literature.

"Ambrosia Beer" follows Bierce's story, "One of the Missing," so closely that there can be no doubt of the target of the parody. The most obvious similarity is that of plot. "One of the Missing" deals with Jerome Searing, a Union sniper who is trapped, during a shelling, in the ruins of a building in enemy country in such a way that only his right arm is free to move. When he regains consciousness, he notices a ring of bright metal right above him. He soon identifies the ring as the muzzle of his rifle pointed directly at his forehead. At first he is fearful that any move he makes may discharge his piece, but after suffering the anxiety of imminent death for what seems to him an interminable time, he succumbs to terror. Failing to manipulate a board to push aside the rifle barrel, he at last regains some composure and decides to bring on the inevitable. He manages to thrust the board against the trigger and release it. He dies, not of a bullet—for the rifle had discharged earlier—but of imagination. Twenty-two minutes later a Union squad headed by his brother finds him in the wreckage. So violent had been his fear, however, that it had aged him beyond recognition. Looking at the unfamiliar corpse, in fact, the brother concludes that the body had been "[d]ead a week."

The protagonist in "Ambrosia Beer" is Sterling Hallmark,[2] a militant leader of the Total Abstinence Union who is so trapped in the ruins of a saloon he is wrecking that when he recovers consciousness he looks up to see a ring of bright metal. He identifies it as the spigot of a beer keg only two inches above him and it is aimed directly at his lips. Only his right arm is free and he finds that he is able to clasp the spigot. A horrible thirst then tortures him to the point that he can no longer resist the strain. Driven by desperation he turns on the spigot. A rescue crew releases him an hour later, roaring drunk, and sends him to City Hall in a patrol wagon. He sobers up enough during the ride to realize "that he could not stand the disgrace," draws a pistol, and fires a shot into his brain. Meanwhile, back at the saloon, one of the rescuers smashes in the keg of Ambrosia Beer that had pinned down Hallmark. It is full of dust and rusty nailheads. "'Empty for over a year,' he exclaimed in tones of bitter disappointment."

In addition to plot similarities and the uses of imaginary time and danger, there are several more subtle touches. Both stories, for example, have ironic endings. Also, where Bierce's story explicitly states that the string of events which lead up to Searing's entrapment is predestined, "decreed from the beginning of time,"[3] "Ambrosia Beer" jocularly explains that the saloon building "collapsed because it was necessary it should do so at that precise instant for the purposes of this tale." Bierce repeatedly and specifically likens Searing to a rat, a murderer who took pleasure in "making a widow or an orphan or a childless mother" (33).[4] Hallmark's "rathood" is established through implication; he is depicted as a male Carrie Nation, a spoilsport who enjoyed raiding saloons.

Although "One of the Missing" is not one of Bierce's best stories, it is better than the above summary indicates. It is an acute psychological study of Searing's mind and personality. It is also a searching study of how fear deceives the mind, and it analyzes the paradox of how a cold-blooded agent and familiar of death could go to pieces when it appeared to be his turn to die. Even more subtly, the story embodies a moral position; it grimly and ironically suggests the operation of a principle of justice: those that live by the sword will perish by it.

The one serious story by Norris which appears to owe the most to Bierce is "The Jongleur of Taillebois," written when Norris was twenty-one. It appeared in the Christmas 1891 issue of the San Francisco *Wave*.[5]

Its publication date preceded by several weeks the commercial distribution of Bierce's *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* in January of 1892, so whatever familiarity Norris had of Bierce's stories when he wrote "The Jongleur" had to have come from his reading of them when they first appeared over a period of several years in the San Francisco *Examiner*. "One of the Missing" was first published therein in March 1888. If we are correct in seeing some resemblance to it, as well to other Bierce stories, in "The Jongleur of Taillebois," then Norris must be credited with being one of the first contemporary authors to read Bierce closely, study his style, and imitate his techniques. Let us look, then, at "The Jongleur."

It appears to be a romantic tale, set in twelfth-century England and France. It opens with an extended and graphic account of the murder of one Yéres by the young man, Amelot. Amelot was a knight to whom "war was a trade. . . . He lived by his lance, he took life that he might live" (11). His slaying of Yéres, however, was gratuitous and heartless. Terrified and guilt-stricken by what he had done, Amelot dragged the body of Yéres to a circular pit which had already been dug by serfs to transplant a large black pine, and he buried the corpse in it. The next day the serfs set the pine in the hole. The rest of the story romantically and supernaturally develops the idea that murder will out. Fifteen years later, while Amelot is travelling in the same forest, a sudden storm breaks a tree which topples on Amelot and permanently cripples him. It is the same black pine. The tree is later sawed up and lumber from it is sent all over Europe. One piece finds its way to Cremona, where it is made into a viol; two others go to Paris, where one becomes part of a portcullis and the other part of a gallows.[6] By eerie coincidence, Amelot meets up with these pieces later in his life. They lead to his retributive execution when the viol he is playing compels him to make a public confession of the murder of Yéres, when his attempt to escape law officers is blocked by the portcullis, and finally when he is hanged on the gibbet.

"The Jongleur" is strongly reminiscent of Poe—especially "The Black Cat" and "The Imp of the Perverse"[7]—but it also very possibly shows an influence of Bierce in the powerfully explicit opening scene of violent death, in its use of destiny, in its grim moral, and in its concluding scene where Amelot, though half-conscious, is aware of everything that is happening to him as he is prepared for hanging. The Bierce stories one is reminded of are "One of the Missing," which he recalled to parody in "Ambrosia Beer," and "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." The influence of Bierce would have been practically inescapable for Norris, and even without "Ambrosia Beer" it would have been extremely unlikely that a talented young California writer like Norris would not have paid close attention to Bierce's daring and impressive achievements in the realm of the short story.

Bierce was the best known and respected author of California. His stories and opinions appeared weekly in the San Francisco *Examiner*, the most prominent newspaper of the West Coast, where they received wide circulation. He also published several of his stories in *The Wave*, in which Norris also published. The editors liked Bierce and very probably would have called Norris's attention to his work. But any student of literary style aware of Bierce, and especially an aspiring neophyte author like Norris, would have been impressed by the effects Bierce achieved through his pioneering use of shocking "realism" and grim irony. Hence it is not in the least surprising that Norris would have imitated some aspects of Bierce's style, first in seriousness and later in jest. But the obvious resemblances just noted are only surface features of the Norris and Bierce tales; there was more to both authors.

A deeper connection between the two authors may be inferred from their similarity of views on the subject of romance. Because Bierce portrays suffering and death so clinically, graphically, and unsentimentally, he is routinely considered "realistic," a category he despised. He defined "realism" in his *Devil's Dictionary* as "n. The art of depicting nature as it is seen by toads. The charm suffusing a landscape painted by a mole, or a story written by a measuring worm." It is odd, in fact, that Bierce is generally regarded as one of our foremost realists when he never missed an opportunity to state his opposition to "the school of Howells" and its emphasis upon probability. On the contrary, he praised romance for

allowing the writer's thought to range "at will over the entire region of the imagination—free, lawless, immune to bit and rein" (*Devil's Dictionary*). While it might be conceded that however much he looked down upon realism his writing nevertheless closely resembles it, simple prudence should lead us to question whether or not we might have missed something "non-realistic" in Bierce's fiction, and to perhaps doubt the accuracy of our tendency to pigeonhole it and so much other late nineteenth-century fiction as realism.

Both "realism" and romanticism are sufficiently vague and relativistic terms impossible to restrict absolutely to particular literary periods and to deny to all others. Students of literature know that "realism"—that is, an "objectively" accurate and often disillusioning depiction of life—occurs frequently in works of the early nineteenth century, that romantic fiction continued to thrive in the late part of the century, and that their respective colorations and values have shifted over time. If Norris read Bierce's stories as they came out in the *Examiner* in the place of "Prattle," Bierce's popular weekly column of opinion—literary as well as philosophical and political—he almost certainly also read "Prattle" in the intervening weeks. In "Prattle," Bierce repeatedly expressed literary opinions like the following, originally published on May 22, 1892:

> Fiction has nothing to say to probability; the capable writer gives it not a moment's attention, except to make what is related *seem* probable in the reading—*seem* true. Suppose he relates the impossible; what then? Why he has but passed over the line into the kingdom of romance, the kingdom of Scott, Defoe, Hawthorne, Beckford and the authors of the *Arabian Nights*—the land of the poets, the home of all that is good and lasting in the literature of the imagination.

Well ahead of his time, Bierce refused to be encased in the "iron maiden" of realism, and his stories, going against the current like his opinions, must have been recognized by Norris as successful examples of how romance and realism could be blended in works of the imagination so intense and interesting as to cause disbelief to be suspended.

It is for this kind of blending, and not the external trappings of shocking realism, that Norris may be chiefly indebted to Bierce. In Norris's famous 1901 essay, "A Plea for Romantic Fiction," he makes a valuable distinction of romance from realism. Romance he defines as "the kind of fiction that takes cognizance of variations from the type of normal life"; realism as "the kind of fiction that confines itself to the type of normal life." Realism, he says, is a "harsh, loveless, colorless, blunt tool."[8] It is not necessary here to argue the enduring validity of his definitions; it is sufficient to note that Norris is in substantial agreement with Bierce, and that the two constitute a very small and perhaps unique minority. Who else among their contemporaries shared their open hostility to realism and their favorable opinions of romance?

Norris quickly progressed from the obvious and external trappings of romance—the use of medieval setting, exotic and learned allusion, high-flown language, and supernatural coincidence—to modern setting and conventional diction. But what he kept was a notion of literature that "takes cognizance of variations from the type of normal life." Bierce said it could be done and showed him that it could be done. Henceforth, Norris as well as Bierce blended romance with realism and demonstrated that success in literature demanded not obedience to some confining theoretical formula, but to imaginative truth—"free, lawless, immune to bit and rein."

In a 1902 essay on literature, Norris distinguished between an author who *constructs* stories "to achieve a given effect"—a technical accomplishment that chiefly interests readers in the "ingenuity of the author"—and one who *explores* "the consistency and humanity of his personages."[9] By the time he wrote "Ambrosia Beer," therefore, Norris could in good conscience parody the *constructive* externals of Bierce's style, for he had long since progressed beyond the need to imitate the stylistic distinctions of him or any other author. But as a perceptive student of the literature of his day he had been imaginative in the way he apparently assimilated Bierce's deeper and more vital insights about literature and used them first to create original characters of his own and then to *explore* both the logic of their personalities and the mysteries of their human nature.

* * *

Notes

[1]I am unaware of any mention of Norris in Bierce's writings, and Professor M.E. Grenander, in a 13 May 1992 letter to me, finds no reference to Norris in any item of her large collection of Bierce's correspondence.

[2]The name "Sterling Hallmark" might be a mischievous allusion to George Sterling, a minor poet much under the influence of Bierce, and also fond of liquor.

[3]*The Collected Writings of Ambrose Bierce*, ed. Clifton Fadiman (N.Y.: Citadel, 1946), pp. 30-40. The pagination of subsequent quotations from this edition is cited in parentheses.

[4]The earliest newspaper version of "One of the Missing" and the version in *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1892) read "it is the business of a soldier to kill. It is also his pleasure if he is a good soldier" (32). The standard *Collected Works* version replaces "pleasure" with "habit."

[5]*The Wave*, 7, Christmas issue [19 December 1891], 6-9; erroneously dated 16 July 1892 in volume 10 of *The Complete Edition of Frank Norris* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1928), 3-20. Quotations below are from *The Complete Edition*, with the pagination cited in parentheses.

[6]"Taillebois" means "cut wood" and is therefore very appropriate to the destined means by which Amelot is brought to judgment.

[7]The unreliable narrator of "The Imp of the Perverse" mistakenly labels as perverse a human impulse to want justice to be done that is so deep in the psyche that it can cause a criminal to confess his crime. "The Black Cat" depicts a situation in which this impulse is projected by a murderer on a cat.

[8]*The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris*, ed. Donald Pizer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), p. 76.

[9]See "Salt and Sincerity," *Literary Criticism*, p. 202.

Frank Norris Parodies Anthony Hope

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One does not immediately think of Frank Norris when parody is the subject, but "I Call on Lady Dotty: From the Polly Parables," his hit in "Perverted Tales" at Anthony Hope's *The Dolly Dialogues* may be worth pausing over in view of its linkages of Victorian with American literary currents and eddies and as a specimen of Norris's own aims and methods. By the time that Norris's parodies of well-known writers appeared in the Christmas number of *The Wave*, 18 December 1897, much had occurred in the way of a revival of the dialogue as a literary form during the nineties in general, and, in particular, in the bracketing of Anthony Hope with that form—of which more will follow. Of Norris's six "Perverted Tales," just two treated British authors, Kipling and Hope. Their names, however, had become household words among the literate of the English-speaking world some years previous to the appearance of Norris's parodies. Moreover, the works of these two had been especially influential upon Norris in his apprenticeship as a fiction writer, and so it was but natural that he should, after the manner of many other American writers, parody those whose writings had inspired his own productions. By this point in his career, Norris had been avidly experimenting with the short-story form, he had familiarized himself with the works of other well-known short-fiction writers of the day, and therefore it is no wonder that the "Perverted Tales" take humorous aim at writers whose successes in the field were widely recognized.[1]

In my estimation, the dialogue as an 1890s mode of literary expression derives essentially from the witty fiction of George Meredith, an exceedingly popular elder-statesman author during these years, as well as the plays of Oscar Wilde. The more amorphous background of classical education curriculum in Great Britain over the preceding centuries doubtless contributed its share to interest in dialogue writing. These impulses fused with numerous miniaturizing tendencies of the nineties cultural milieu to emerge as one felicitous literary type of the period, as some examples may reveal. Hope's *Dolly Dialogues* came out originally in the *Westminster Gazette*, one of London's popular tabloids, during 1893-94. They attracted such widespread attention that the same publisher brought them out in hardcover form in the latter year. The reviewers of Hope's book, and there were many, collectively praised the wit and form in these dialogues. Hope's were by no means the only dialogues to appear during the nineties, though. Harold Orel has recently reminded us that Hubert Crackenthorpe, another darling of the early 1890s, published "an early form of the dialogue story":

"Modern Melodrama" was a tale that appeared in no less a publication than the first volume of *The Yellow Book*, where it assisted in earning that quarterly notoriety as the oriflamme of decadence. The same volume included another dialogue story by a contributor whose name quickly came to be associated with the new, the "modern," and the daring in literature, Ella D'Arcy, *quondam* sub-editor for the periodical. Her story, "Irremediable," has been remembered as one of the outstanding pieces of short fiction from the decade. Like Crackenthorpe, she quickly gained reputation for stories of bleak realism, although several years previously, writing as "Gilbert H. Page," she published comic dialogue stories in the popular London *Argosy*.[2] Dialogues, indeed, came to pepper the pages of newspapers and literary magazines, along with many remarks, pro and con, as to their worth in literary culture. They quickly migrated across the Atlantic, providing standard features in American periodicals of the 1890s.

Elsewhere we may run onto interesting commentary that addresses dialogues as customary fare of the period. In the *Illustrated London News* of 16 November 1895 (p. 614), for example, appears a review of *Dialogues of the Day*, ed. Oswald Crawfurd. Anthony Hope's contributions to that volume are designated "little plays," and their "dramatic" elements are highlighted. The commentator adds that the dialogue is indeed an important literary form, one to be carefully cultivated, an opinion that echoed Crawfurd's editorial pronouncements in *Chapman's Magazine of Fiction*. Another such collection, *Urban Dialogues*, by Louis Evan Shipman, was noticed in the *Chicago Tribune* for 6 March 1897 (p. 10). These tales have "sharp points, and they offer some exquisite studies of human nature, masculine and feminine." The popularity of dialogues is also attested by their recurrence in widely circulating magazines, such as *Black and White*, the Pall Mall, and St. James's and Westminster *Gazettes* in England, and in American newspapers like the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Buffalo Commercial*, and, to be sure, the San Francisco *Wave*.

The dialogue rapidly came to center in humor, which its quick-paced conversations enhanced, and Anthony Hope's *Dolly Dialogues* offered a continuing humorousness, which nonetheless presented a kind of serious commentary on social situations. Hope was repeatedly touted as the author of this book and of *The Prisoner of Zenda*, and his work, along with that of Kipling and Richard Harding Davis, among others, was intensely admired by young Frank Norris. Thus as no mean part that "impressive body of apprentice work" produced during Norris's stint on the *Wave* staff, it was but natural that the budding author should turn out dialogues, mostly comic, and that he would follow in the footsteps of many another contemporary writer in shifting quickly to a parodic stance in regard to some of his own literary idols.[3] Furthermore, Norris's acquaintance with such shock-the-bourgeoisie ventures as the *Chap-Book* and *The Lark*, and with Gelett Burgess, Porter Garnett, and other like-minded writers and artists acted as a catalyst for his attempts at breaking with stultifying traditions. So writes Franklin Walker in his biography (pp. 134 ff.), and such *jeux d'esprit* on Norris's part led to his composing the "Perverted Tales."

The *Dolly Dialogues* revolve around the flirtations of young, wealthy, and idle Mr. Carter with Miss Dolly Foster, who quickly marries Archie Mickleham for the main chance (he's richer than Carter), but who continues to toy with Carter. They dally on the verge of, but never commit, adultery. Dolly is, of course, physically attractive, intensely vain and self-centered, as well as observant of all outward conventions and forms that elicit society's approving nods. Her conversations with Carter involve comparisons of her appeal with that of other women for him and for other men. She obviously dominates and bluffs her spouse who, after the manner of good British upper-class husbands, spends much time at his club or at tasks of agricultural improvement, thereby leaving Dolly fairly free to gossip with and tease Carter. Their conversations, the "dialogues," are mixtures of empty interchanges centered in social maneuvering and rife with veiled salaciousness. They also sound like the outpouring of youthful mischief-making that characterized much in 1890s art, as is evident in Aubrey Beardsley's graphics. Appearance or mention of series characters enlivens the sketches. In the last segment Carter leads us to believe that he and Dolly

consummate their affair, but, in the true surprise conclusion of typical dialogue progression, he awakens at last from what proves to have been a pleasant dream.

Norris's "I Call on Lady Dotty: From the Polly Parables," is far more brief than Hope's sketches. The hero, Mr. Carterer, presses his unmistakable attentions upon Lady Dotty. She loves him "a little" and he loves her "a great deal," as he tells us. Calling upon her when she is supposedly "not at home" to visitors and her husband is at his club, he engages her in chat heavy with sexual innuendo and about the dissatisfactions in marriage, particularly as they bring about loneliness for the wives. The physical side of sexuality is more emphatic in Norris's sketch than it had been in Hope's.

Norris takes potshots at Hope's kinds of situations, stylistic mannerisms, and transparent naming. Hope's *Dolly Dialogues* had lampooned Victorian extravagances in customs prevalent in upper-class social life, a kind of distillation into more intensely comic delineations of the subject-matter treated at greater length decades earlier by Thomas Carlyle and by Matthew Arnold, most notably in the latter's *Culture and Anarchy* (1867), first published serially in the *Cornhill Magazine*. Interestingly, Arnold's critique of the English social and intellectual system was quickly satirized in Frederic Harrison's significantly entitled essay, "Culture: A Dialogue," which appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* (November 1867), and in which we encounter a technique adumbrating the dialogues at the end of the century.

Norris's "I Call on Lady Dotty" is no slavish pastiche of Hope; readers familiar with the *Dolly Dialogues* would have anticipated the hints of sexual irregularities—unrewarded to be sure—that permeate his tale. But none of Hope's sketches portrayed actual theft, nor did they give such prominence to the servant class as Norris did. So Norris goes beyond the "mere" imitation that typifies much other parody, according to a recent student of parodic methodology.[4] He obviously incorporates what may be read as serious social implication into his sketch.

Situationally, Norris remains close to his model. Mr. Carterer in "I Call on Lady Dotty" visits his inamorata, whose name may be an intentional colloquializing of "Dorothea," just as "Dolly" may be—and was in Hope's dialogues. Norris's Carterer is clearly more hotly sexual than Hope's protagonist-narrator was; what the British author only suggested in the way of the physical, Norris turns into actual bodily contact. After some suggestion that his absence from this beloved lady's presence was occasioned by dalliance with his laundress—a hit at the crossing of class lines and the promiscuity of servants, which proves ultimately to have been the girl's tardiness in returning suitable garments for the gentleman to wear in public—Carterer sits down to tea, Lady Dotty quickly nestles in his lap, but they are almost immediately disturbed by the entrance the lady's maid, appropriately named "Negligee." The girl literally leads him down the back stairs as Lady Dotty's husband unexpectedly returns to interrupt their tryst. In the darkness Carterer flirts outrageously with Negligee, kisses her ardently, and later learns that she has stolen his scarfpin and watch. The name of that "delicious young creature," as Carterer designates her, is fraught with subtleties. Deriving from the past participle of the French verb "neglect" or "be indifferent to," it combines deftly with the more familiar usage of a negligee being a woman's garment for intimate wear. So intent on amour was Carterer that—delightfully to us, if not to him—he gave little heed to his valuables, never suspecting that the girl might be mulcting him. Norris's concluding sentence recalls many of Hope's surprising or "reader-you-fill-in-the-blank" endings: "As I say, Negligee is a delicious young creature. But a man never knows the usefulness of his watch until he is without it—to say nothing of his scarfpin." We are left to mull what may have happened in the dark stairwell between this pair so significantly named; "Carterer" implies an occupation as a tradesman (a repairer of wheels), and thus, perhaps, hints that he's something of a dullard, while (given Norris's contextualizing of it) the girl's reminds us of allures and dangers in sexual liaisons. Both names resonate with additional implications, his suggesting the trade view of Negligee as an article for consumption, hers the temptingly spicy morsel which may leave an unpleasant aftertaste. Carterer's anticipated use of the "creature" envisions but one

aspect of her nature (gratifying animal sensuality), heedless that she may have equally predatory-commercial designs upon him. We might well wonder if Norris had read the "Library Notes" in volume 13 of *The Wave* for 29 December 1894, where a commentator remarks that Hope's Dolly is "delicious" but "no saint" (18). All in all, "I Call on Lady Dotty" is not simply one more of those "reflected" *Dolly Dialogues*, as J.W.T., another critic in *The Wave*,[5] termed the many imitations of Hope's book, but a finely wrought bit of comic art in its own right.

Such ambivalences as this segment of Norris's "Perverted Tales," with all of their Christmas-story latitude in intention and response, are found as well in more serious contexts in his longer fiction, and there, often they have none of the rollicking comedy that we discover in these early parodies. Like many another American author, Frank Norris incorporated into the burlesquing of his literary heroes a modicum of sobriety that would resurface as a far more impinging substance in his novels after he had "left off larking in the decadent manner," to quote Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., and Gwendolyn Jones.[6] To cite just two examples from *Blix*, a work possibly in process during the same time as the composition of the "Perverted Tales," we might note that in chapter 2 Condy wonders about Travis and himself: "Had they played out the play, had they come to the end of each other's resources?" He continues to think about her physical attractiveness—just as Carterer had thought about Negligee, although from a rather different perspective. Evidently the links between drama and fiction had not departed from Norris's imagination. Perhaps there are affinities, too, between the Carterer of Norris's comic sketch and the dissolute Jack Carter in *Blix*, who is mentioned in no comic context.[7] Thus this cluster of apprentice writings should not be overlooked in considerations of his developing literary art. Not without forethought did Donald Pizer include the "Perverted Tales" in his collection of Norris's literary criticism; they furnish a variety of thinking about art and the artist.

Notes

[1]I cite Norris's text from pp. 180-82 of *The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris*, ed. Donald Pizer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1976); and Hope's *The Dolly Dialogues* (New York: Henry Holt, 1894). Norris's experimenting in diverse forms during his stint with *The Wave* is demonstrated in Oscar Lewis's "Introduction" to *Frank Norris of "The Wave"* (San Francisco: The Westgate Press, 1931; rpt. Folcroft, Pa., Folcroft Press, 1979), pp. 10-11; Franklin Walker, *Frank Norris: A Biography* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1932; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), pp. 155-157; Joseph R. McElrath, *Frank Norris Revisited* (N.Y.: Twayne Publishers, 1992), pp. 12-20; and McElrath and Gwendolyn Jones, "Frank Norris, Decadent Humorist: The 1897 Version of 'The Joyous Miracle'," *Documentary Editing*, 14 (March 1992), 11-14. Norris's earlier experimenting in dramatic and comic writing is outlined in Jesse S. Crisler, "Norris and the *Blue and Gold:* The Novelist as College Man," *Analytical & Enumerative Bibliography*, N.S. 4, Nos. 2 & 3 (1990), 110-128.

[2]Orel, *Victorian Short Stories* (London: J.M. Dent, 1987), p. xiii; *The Critic* (New York), 15 June 1895, pp. 432-433. See also my "Ella D'Arcy: A Commentary with a Primary and Annotated Secondary Bibliography," *English Literature in Transition*, 35, No. 2 (1992), 179-211; and "Ella D'Arcy, First Lady of the Decadents," *The University of Mississippi Studies in English*, N.S. 10 (1992), 238-249.

[3]William B. Dillingham, *Frank Norris: Instinct and Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), p. 33. Relevant comment on the readiness for parody during the period may be found in "Books of the Day," *Chicago Tribune*, 1 February 1896, p. 13; "Books and Authors," *Buffalo Commercial*, 10 June 1897, p. 7; and "The Library Nook," *Buffalo Commercial*, 21 July 1897, p. 5.

[4]Margaret A. Rose, *Parody/Metafiction* (London: Crown Helm, 1979), pp. 17-26.

[5]28 March 1896, p. 8. Interestingly, another observer, reviewing Clyde Fitch's *Some Correspondence* for "Library Notes," *The Wave*, 15 (5 September 1896), 12, writes pertinently (regarding Norris's achievement) that it is time we ceased crying "cribbed Anthony Hope" and remembered that he "founded a school of dialogue which may be followed as legitimately as a school of music or painting."

[6]"Frank Norris, Decadent Humorist," 14.

[7]*The Argonaut Manuscript Limited Edition of Frank Norris's Works* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1928), volume 3, 15-17.

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