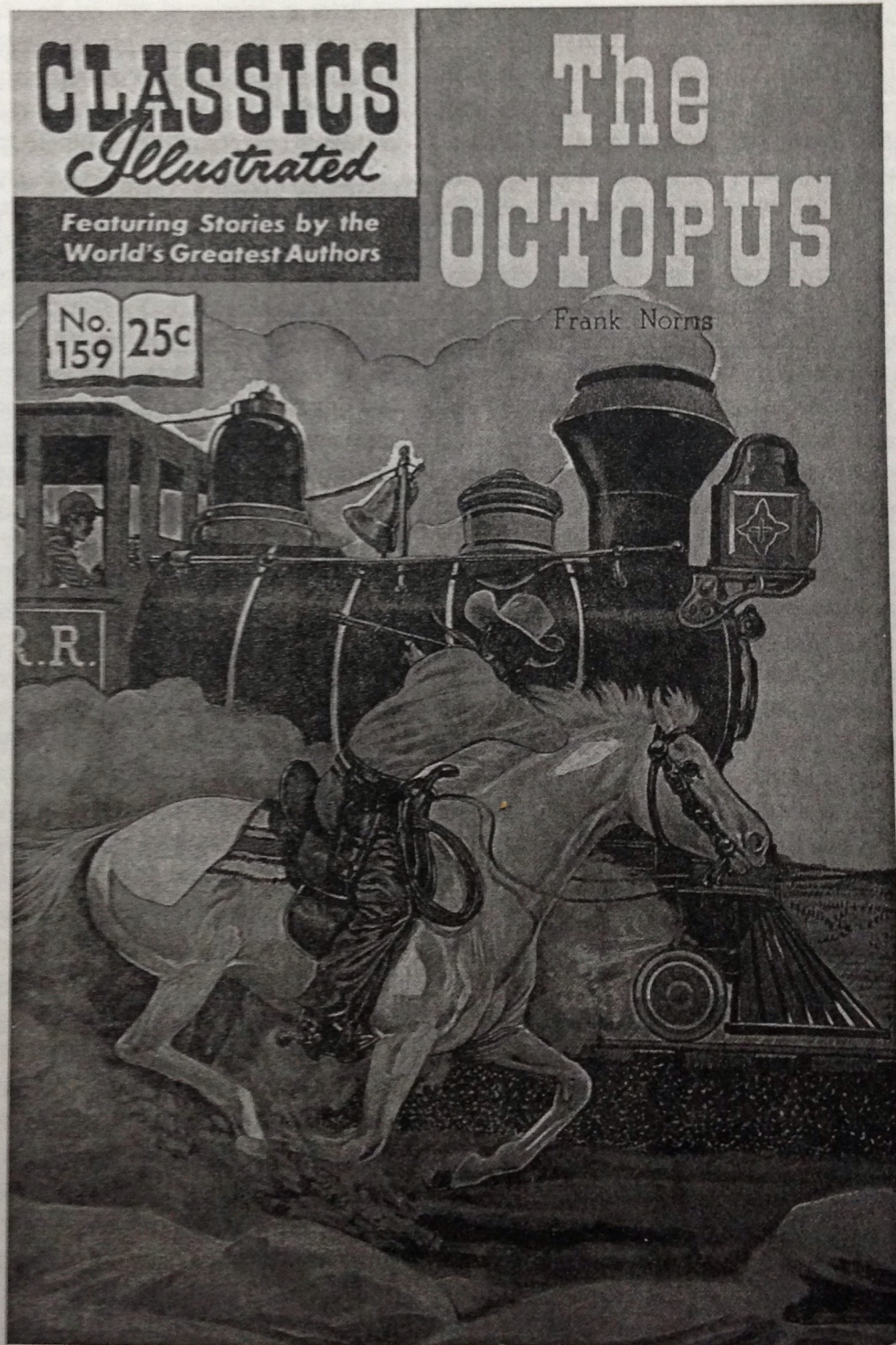


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# Frank Norris Studies

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## The Mesmeric Sources of Frank Norris's *The Pit*

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The few critics who have considered the relevance of entrancement and psychic powers to Frank Norris's works have almost always done so in an effort to explain Vanamee's mysticism in *The Octopus*. The lack of critical attention to abnormal psychology in *The Pit* is striking. The book, as Larzer Ziff noted, examines "the psychic consequences of the commercialization of American life," but critics, including Ziff, have ignored or hazarded only vague interpretations of the phenomena of second selves, multiple personality, hypnosis, hysteria, suggestibility, automatism, and panic that describe the characters and the market itself in the critical moments of the text.<sup>1</sup>

Particularly striking is the lack of attention to mesmerism or hypnosis or more generally "magnetism" in *The Pit*, for Corthell, with whom Jadwin is compared throughout the book, is a mesmerist. Just as Jadwin puts his uncanny magnetic powers to use in the marketplace and gains occult influence over his peers, over the market, and seemingly over nature itself, so Corthell succeeds in mesmerizing Laura—a development curiously ignored by critics of the book. Like Jadwin, who at the height of his powers controls the price dial of the Board of Trade with his hand, Corthell controls his subject through his fingertips and hands.<sup>2</sup> "Invisible ether" flows from his fingertips.<sup>3</sup> Norris or a peer at *The Wave* had described this "invisible ether" in "What Mesmerism Is," an account of a hypnotist's performance on a popular San Francisco stage; and theories of etheric influence, although no longer scientifically current, had long dominated popular accounts of mesmerism.<sup>4</sup> That Corthell is a mesmerist is clear once we realize that he is based less on Bruce Porter, a good friend of Norris and a stained-glass artist like Corthell—a source suggested by Norris's biographers and unquestioned by critics—than on two other popular figures Norris knew well: Emile Gallé, one of the major figures of *fin-de-siècle* decorative arts in France, and Svengali, the mesmerizing pianist and villainous seducer in George Du Maurier's runaway hit novel *Trilby* (1894).

As a young art student in Adolphe-William Bouguereau's studio in Paris in 1889, Norris would have been intimately familiar with Gallé's Salon and Exhibition works, his new ideas on the identity of art and the *psychologie*

*nouvelle*, and his dissension that year from Bouguereau's Society of French Artists. Like Corthell, Gallé was a stained-glass artist and a passionate spokesman for the *art nouveau*. Like Corthell, Gallé repudiated Bouguereau.<sup>5</sup> Like Corthell, who "kept himself far from the fighting [of the Board of Trade], his hands unstained, his feet unsullied," who passed his life "in the calm, still atmosphere of art, in the cult of the beautiful, unperturbed, tranquil; painting, reading, or, piece by piece, developing his beautiful stained glass," Gallé described the applied arts as providing "an atmosphere of tranquility," a "sanctuary," an "amphitheater of refuge" from the "poisonous, artificial atmosphere" of the modern "age of industrialization."<sup>6</sup> (It is on the basis of such views that most critics have contrasted Corthell and Jadwin, reading the novel as an invidious comparison of the effeminate and aloof aesthete and the masculine business realist.) Corthell's exegesis of the somber painting hanging in Jadwin's rotunda, how its figures are symbols evoking deeper, more ambiguous realms of the artist's vision, reiterates Gallé's Symbolist conception that art must "capture the impalpable," "penetrate the depths," and conjure forth the "latent spirit beneath phenomena."<sup>7</sup> Because they have not looked beyond Bruce Porter as a source for the character of the artist, critics have failed to recognize the importance of hypnotism to Corthell's art and to his collusion with Laura in the adulterous organ scene in chapter 7—a scene of sublime (and subliminal) revelation twinned with Jadwin's market epiphany just a few pages after it. For Gallé, updating an old analogy, conceived of his art precisely as an art of hypnotic suggestion. As Debora Silverman has argued, Gallé's aesthetic ideas were directly informed by the psychological researches of Charcot and Bernheim, the reigning authorities on hypnotism and hypnotic suggestion. Artworks were to be "agents of suggestion, hypnotic 'inducers' of the 'dream state,' and releasers of alternative, often hallucinatory, mental conditions, what he had once called nuanced metapsychoses."<sup>8</sup> If Corthell's music "reached some hitherto untouched string within [Laura's] heart, and with resistless power twanged it so that the vibration of it shook her entire being," it is because, for Gallé, the vibratory force of art stimulated similar "vibrations in the spirits" of those who experienced it; art functioned "like secret voices that respond to our inner vibrations."<sup>9</sup> If music for Corthell is "one soul speaking to another soul," a psychic sympathy between composer and listener, it is because, for Gallé, art "effected in the

viewer, by 'emotional contagion,' the same state of feeling expressed by the artist."<sup>10</sup> Gallé's notion of "emotional contagion" was taken from Bergson, who popularized the idea in his famous 1889 *Essai sur les Données Immédiates de la Conscience* that in the experience of art, we surrendered our minds to "the indefinable psychological state experienced in the other."<sup>11</sup> At its best, art produced a "perfect responsiveness, in which we realize the idea that is suggested to us and sympathize with the feeling that is expressed."<sup>12</sup> For Bergson, such perfect responsiveness was the very state produced by the hypnotist, a state he knew well as an observer of and participant in clinical experiments with hypnosis in the 1880s. The irresistible "contagion" of the aesthetic experience was "a refined and in some measure spiritualized version of the processes commonly used to induce the state of hypnosis."<sup>13</sup>

If Corthell's ideas and statements about art are taken from the psychological aesthetics of Emile Gallé, his character and his relationship to Laura are taken from one of the most popular novels ever written about hypnosis, George Du Maurier's 1894 *Trilby*. *The Pit* specifically and overtly reiterates key images and narratives of Du Maurier's mesmeric romance, in which the evil machinations of a mesmerist are framed by a droll account of Bohemian life in the Latin Quarter of Paris. Norris, like everyone else in America, read the book and knew it well.<sup>14</sup> Readers of *The Pit*, still flush from a nationwide *Trilby* craze in 1894 and 1895, would have quickly recognized that Corthell is based on Svengali, Du Maurier's mesmerizing pianist and villainous seducer, and that Corthell's adulterous affair with Laura is based on Svengali's mesmeric seduction of the lovely, innocent *Trilby*.

There is ample evidence that Norris was personally familiar with the psychic and psychological research that determines *The Pit's* central conceits. When Norris studied in Paris in 1889, the French interest in hypnosis, inflamed by national debates, sensational court trials, and major scientific congresses, was at its most acute. At home, Norris researched hypnosis and the "New Psychology" for technical passages in McTeague and for pieces in *The Wave*. *The Wave*, in fact, like many popular magazines in the 1890s, is filled with articles and reviews, some signed by Norris and others attributed to him, about spiritualistic and psychic phenomena. Norris was an avid reader of fiction writers who were preoccupied with psychic research, and he was close friends with men such as Hamlin Garland, John O'Hara Cosgrave, Gelett Burgess, and Bruce Porter who were fascinated by, even

professionally devoted to, psychic research and hypnosis. Garland, for example, was chief investigator of the American Psychical Society. And at Harvard's social clubs, it is possible that Norris met Morton Prince, the nation's foremost psychotherapist whose investigations into the several changing selves of his patient, "Miss Beachamp," would become a national sensation in 1906.

The mesmeric sources of *The Pit* are significant. While a fuller analysis is beyond the scope of this brief article, I want to suggest that in writing *The Pit*, Norris was interested in writing an American *Trilby*, a story about mesmeric subjection and psychic influence, but that unlike Du Maurier's book, Norris's study of mind control and second selves would be, as Norris put it, "American," "modern, typical and important."<sup>15</sup> He turned to the wheat pit in Chicago because that was the site par excellence for an epic study of the modern mesmerist, the speculative titan. Financial speculation, of course, flourished in other countries, but it was nowhere so identified with national imagination and art as in America—and at the turn of the century, America's speculative imagination was identified with Chicago.<sup>16</sup> And, as the eminent economist Alfred Marshall observed, the Board of Trade was "as representative of modern ideas as the wheat field and the loaf of bread are of the unchanging elements in human life."<sup>17</sup> Norris understood market speculation—at least Jadwin's gifted, almost unconscious art of it—as a fundamentally occult, psychic activity. Like many observers of the organized exchanges at the turn of the century, he understood the marketplace to be a psychic arena, an epic stage on which mesmerists spread occult influence and market mediums surrendered to the mesmeric passes of a vast Invisible Hand. The market was a stage on which clairvoyants, in tune with transcendental laws and forces, divined the "futures" of the world's wheat crops. As crowd psychologists and popular New Thought "success" writers frequently observed, the market was a site where the laws of hypnosis and suggestibility worked on a vast, social scale, where the latent automatism of men's—and the market's own—"second" selves was controlled by the will of speculative titans and let loose in manias and panics.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Larzer Ziff, *The American 1890s: Life and Times of a Lost Generation* (New York: Viking, 1966), 273. On entrancement and psychic powers in Norris's works, see Robert D.

Newman, "Supernatural Naturalism: Norris's Spiritualism in *The Octopus*," *Frank Norris Studies*, No. 4 (Autumn 1987): 1-4; Charles L. Crow, "The Real Vanamee and his Influence on Frank Norris's *The Octopus*," *Western American Literature*, 9 (March 1987): 131-39. A dissertation devoted to Norris and other naturalists' use of supernaturalism does not even discuss *The Pit* (Martha Smith, "A Study of the Realistic Treatment of Psychic Phenomena in Selected Fiction of William Dean Howells, Hamlin Garland, Henry James, Frank Norris, and Theodore Dreiser," University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1972). On *The Pit* and "second" selves, a widely recognized effect of mesmerism, see Barbara Hochman, *The Art of Frank Norris, Storyteller* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988).

<sup>2</sup>Frank Norris, *The Pit: A Story of Chicago in Collected Works of Frank Norris* (1928; Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat, 1967), volume 5, 318, 330.

<sup>3</sup>*The Pit*, 237.

<sup>4</sup>*The Wave*, 15 (15 August 1896): 7.

<sup>5</sup>*The Pit*, 236.

<sup>6</sup>*The Pit*, 59; Emile Gallé quoted in Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 300.

<sup>7</sup>*The Pit*, 236; Gallé, quoted in Silverman, 232.

<sup>8</sup>Silverman, 239. <sup>9</sup>*The Pit*, 239; Silverman, 235, 234.

<sup>10</sup>*The Pit*, 240; Silverman, 300.

<sup>11</sup>Bergson quoted in Silverman, 90.

<sup>12</sup>Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, ed. J.H. Muirhead (London: Allen, 1950), 14. See also Silverman, 89-90, 301. As artists penetrating the surface of the visible, material world and mining the fluid, unstable realm of value found there, Corthell and Jadwin are more alike than different. Norris linked the "sixth sense" of the artist and of the financier in his apprentice and critical writings as well as in *The Pit*. For an American statement on this "sixth sense" which likewise links Corthell's art and Jadwin's speculative idealism and which is clearly taken from Bergson's theorization of art as hypnosis, see Paul Tyner, "The Sixth Sense and How to Develop It," *Arena*, 10 (June 1894): 37-51: "In art . . . the truth is the quality of the poem, the picture, the statue, or the musical composition—that is, its essential reality—is a thing beyond demonstration in terms of physical or material analysis. Like faith, it is 'the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen.' It is sensed not by eyes, or ears, or hands, but by the sixth sense. We appreciate the beauty of a poem or a picture only in so far as we can place ourselves in sympathy with the thought or emotion of the poet or painter—so far as we can think the same thought, or experience the same emotion, that is expressed in the poem or the picture."

<sup>13</sup>Bergson, 14-15. Corthell's account to Laura of the enthralling effect of music reiterates Bergson's notion of suggestion. "Of all the arts," says Corthell, "music . . . is the most intimate.

. . . Because [the composer's] soul was heavy and broken with grief, or bursting with passion, or tortured with doubt, or searching for some unnamed ideal, he has come to you—you of all the people in the world—with his message, and he tells you of his yearnings and his sadness, knowing that you will sympathize, knowing that your soul has, like his, been acquainted with grief, or with gladness; and in his music his soul speaks to yours, beats with it, blends with it, yes, is even spiritually married to it" (240-41). Bergson, in a passage immediately following his identification of art and hypnotism, observes that "in music, the rhythm and measure suspend the normal flow of our sensations and ideas by causing our attention to swing to and from between fixed points, and they take hold of us with such force that even the faintest imitation of a groan will suffice to fill us with the utmost sadness. If musical sounds affect us more powerfully than the sounds of nature, the reason is that nature confines itself to expressing feelings, whereas music suggests them to us" (Bergson 15).

<sup>14</sup>He was thrilled to go to the opening performance of the play version in Boston (Franklin Walker, *Frank Norris: A Biography* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1932], 93). Norris's own droll portrait of student life in the Latin Quarter clearly recalls *Trilby* ("Student Life in Paris," *Collier's Weekly*, 25 [12 May 1900]: 33). As a journalist for *The Wave* in 1896, Norris interviewed actress Maude Odell who played *Trilby* ("*Trilby* and Princess Flavia," 15 [10 October 1896]: 8), and Norris was probably the author of an unsigned article about Du Maurier's writing methods ("*Du Maurier's Methods*," *The Wave*, 15 [24 October 1896]: 5).

<sup>15</sup>Letter to Isaac F. Marcossou, November 1901, in *Frank Norris: Collected Letters*, ed. Jesse S. Crisler (San Francisco: Book Club of California, 1986), 173.

<sup>16</sup>See, for example, Clare Virginia Eby, "Representative Men: Businessmen in American Fiction, 1875-1914," dissertation, University of Michigan, 1988, or Carl Smith, *Chicago and the American Literary Imagination, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

<sup>17</sup>Alfred Marshall quoted in Morton Rothstein, "Frank Norris and Popular Perceptions of the Market," *Agricultural History*, 56 (January 1982): 58.

## When Norris Went "South"

Jesse S. Crisler

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On 5 August 1898,<sup>1</sup> Frank Norris returned from Cuba where he had spent several harrowing months as a correspondent covering the Spanish-American War for *McClure's Magazine*, which had dispatched him

southward on his first major assignment. The rather spectacular aftermath of that charge for Norris, both personally and professionally, is familiar to students of his biography. Just after his return he confessed in a letter to his old friend Ernest Peixotto that harsh reality had unceremoniously burst the bubble of anticipated splendor: "There is precious little glory in war . . . it's only horrors that come to you . . . and nothing of the finer side."<sup>2</sup> In this letter he also mentioned the debilitating fever he had contracted while in Cuba, the effects of which eventually complicated the infection that ultimately killed him a scant four years later. As for his profession, the Cuban incident yielded four articles: two, "Comida: An Experience in Famine" and "With Lawton at El Caney," appeared within a year of his return, while the others, "Untold Thrilling Story of Santiago's Surrender" and "On the Cuban Blockade," despite his efforts to place them, languished for over a decade after his death until their posthumous publication.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Norris gave his eye-witness account of the battle at El Caney in an interview, entitled "Witnessed the Fall of Caney," for the *San Francisco Chronicle* on 28 August 1898,<sup>4</sup> only days after his arrival in San Francisco to recuperate in more ways than one from Cuba.

Thus, the effects of his exciting venture in Cuba upon both his health and his career can be traced through the remainder of his life. For example, his ailing constitution allowed him, while convalescing, to spend many pleasant hours with his fiancée-to-be, Jeannette Black, in a late summer idyll of two months that would be described in part in *Blix*. The relatively speedy publication of two articles derived from his experiences during the war gratified his mounting desire not just to see his name in print but also to have it linked to journals with the kind of national circulation that the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Century*, which printed the respective articles, enjoyed. His description in *The Octopus* of the gun fight at the irrigation ditch and its pathetic consequences was rooted in personal experience during the Santiago campaign. To make too much of Cuba and its result for Norris, then, seems impossible, which doubtless explains why Norris's wartime episode is both well-known to and continues to garner attention from his critics.

Ironically, Norris's earlier stint as a foreign correspondent in South Africa has not received similar positive scrutiny, a situation all the more inexplicable since, unlike *McClure's Magazine* which never carried anything Norris wrote anent Cuba despite having enlisted him to cover the conflict there, the *San Francisco Chronicle* amply

rewarded the efforts of its "special correspondent" by running a series of his articles on "The Picturesque Side of African Life" almost simultaneously with its conscientious coverage of its reporter's apparent disappearance after reaching Cape Town on 4 December 1895.<sup>5</sup>

A murky chapter in Norris's life, his brief exploit in Africa has plagued commentators since Franklin Walker's ostensibly full and detailed but actually vague and undocumented chronicle of Norris's African excursion in his 1932 biography.<sup>6</sup> For example, while the date Norris departed from San Francisco to begin executing his reportorial duties has been determined,<sup>7</sup> precisely when he returned to California after fulfilling his assignment for the *Chronicle* remains problematic: though he registered as a guest at the luxurious Hotel del Coronado in San Diego on 25 February 1896,<sup>8</sup> he had not yet arrived in San Francisco by 9 February, when, at long last, an article in the *Chronicle* disclosed why he had not communicated with his distraught mother for over two months.<sup>9</sup> An unexplained period of three weeks during which he must have returned, of course—but when?—therefore exists.

This unsolved mystery in turn presages other questions about the affair. What was Norris doing while his mother thought him "lost"? Did he, as the *Chronicle* implies, accompany Jameson's party from Cape Town to the Transvaal, or did he make his way alone?<sup>10</sup> Regardless, what happened on the journey? If he was wandering around various parts of South Africa, as seems likely, how did he manage to post his dispatches regularly to San Francisco? Even the exact number of those dispatches has prompted query. Explanations for many of these questions and others like them will perhaps never be known, but nearly a decade's work by Joseph R. McElrath resulting in three admirably fashioned bibliographic studies since 1988 definitively answers the last while also suggesting that South Africa may have played as significant a role in Norris's life and subsequent work as did Cuba a year later.<sup>11</sup>

Previous bibliographers have variously noted six or seven newspaper articles which Norris produced based on his experiences in Africa. Part of this discrepancy occurs because of simple miscounting. In their bibliographies Joseph Katz and Kenneth Lohf and Eugene Sheehy listed six such articles on South Africa published in the *Chronicle* between 19 January and 15 March 1896.<sup>12</sup> Joseph Gaer, on the other hand, also included six under the heading "South African Articles" in his much earlier work, but one of these actually did not appear in the

*Chronicle*; then in a later section grouping titles by year of publication Gaer noted two other South African pieces printed by the *Chronicle*,<sup>13</sup> one of which Katz and Lohf and Sheehy overlooked, meaning that the three studies together account for seven *Chronicle* pieces. Yet all of them were wrong, as Robert Morace demonstrated when he discovered an eighth.<sup>14</sup>

Enter McElrath. His *Frank Norris: A Descriptive Bibliography* in 1992 chronologically presented all of Norris's then known work, thereby laying to final rest misconceptions concerning the number of South Africa pieces, their titles, and their places of publication. In 1988, his *Frank Norris of The Wave* explained why only a paragraph on Cecil Rhodes in a longer column entitled "Tales of the Day" could have been written by Norris,<sup>15</sup> thus adding more material to the record of what Norris wrote as a result of having roamed Africa, in much the same fashion that the known existence of his two other South African *Wave* pieces, "Rhodes and the Reporters" and "Jack Hammond in Johannesburg and Pretoria," already had.<sup>16</sup> But the *coup de grâce* occurred in 1996 with the publication of McElrath's and Burgess's *The Apprenticeship Writings of Frank Norris, 1896-1898* which for the first time gathered in one place all of Norris's South African *Wave* journalism along with two short stories, "A Salvation Boom in Matabeleland" and "The Strangest Thing," both likewise set in Africa, and a third, "Execution Without Judgment," which, though it does not take place in Africa, is told in part by Miller, the same Australian reporter whom Norris had cast several months earlier as the cheeky narrator of "The Strangest Thing."<sup>17</sup>

Suddenly, a minor biographical episode assumes major proportions: to dismiss cavalierly or even merely to minimize the effect of Africa on Norris now seems irresponsible. During or immediately following his stay there, Norris wrote the eight articles for the *Chronicle*, illustrating seven of them himself; he sent another article to *Harper's Weekly*, which had also retrained him as a correspondent;<sup>18</sup> he contributed the two full-blown pieces, the paragraph, and the three short stories to *The Wave*; and all of this, save for two of the stories, he did in but a few months. Over three years after this flurry of publishing activity South Africa furnished other grist for Norris's creative mill in the form of yet another article discovered by Robert C. Leitz, III, in the San Francisco *Examiner*: "A Christmas in the Transvaal."<sup>19</sup> If Charles G. Norris's pronouncement on the dust jacket of a 1920 reprinting of

*Moran of the Lady Letty* (1898) that the novel was "Based on Fact," and McElrath's speculation that this statement indicates that "while its events occurred in California and Mexico, *Moran's* autobiographical roots were [Norris's] early 1896 adventure" are correct,<sup>20</sup> then Norris's time in South Africa affected not only his non-fiction to a degree greater than has yet been realized but also his fiction. One might even surmise that, following Cuba, he remembered the marketing and publishing strategies South Africa had already taught him.

Of course, only a complete and readily available edition of all of Norris's work will clarify the full extent of his South African experience, or even of his Cuban trip, in his writing. In the meantime, the fugitive pieces from *The Wave* now accessible in McElrath's and Burgess's *Apprenticeship*—when coupled with the compelling notion regarding *Moran's* being based upon Norris's own adventure, McElrath's earlier justifications for the determination of which publications comprise Norris's *Wave* canon, and the total record of Norris's writing McElrath offers in the 1992 descriptive bibliography—enjoin Norris scholars to take a hard look at the impact of an exotic junket on a still fledgling regional writer manfully struggling for national recognition.

### Notes

This essay expands upon a presentation made at the 1997 American Literature Association annual conference, in a session devoted to the significance of Frank Norris's 1896-98 writings for the San Francisco weekly magazine, *The Wave*.

<sup>1</sup>Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., "Norris's Return From Cuba," *American Literary Realism*, 5 (Summer 1973): 251.

<sup>2</sup>*Frank Norris: Collected Letters*, ed. Jesse S. Crisler (San Francisco: Book Club of California, 1986), 52.

<sup>3</sup>"Comida: An Experience in Famine," *Atlantic Monthly*, 83 (March 1899): 343-48; "With Lawton at El Caney," *Century*, 63 (June 1899): 303-309; "Untold Thrilling Story of Santiago's Surrender," *New York Sun*, 13 July 1913, section 7, 1-2; "On the Cuban Blockade," *New York Evening Post*, Final Edition, 11 April 1914, Part III, 6.

<sup>4</sup>"Witnessed the Fall of Caney," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 28 August 1898, 8; Joseph Katz discovered this interview, reprinting it in "Frank Norris on the Battles of El Caney and San Juan Hill," *Studies in American Fiction*, 12 (Autumn 1984): 217-22.

<sup>5</sup>As was noted in Crisler, "Norris's Departure for Johannesburg," *Frank Norris Studies*, No. 3 (Spring 1987): 4-5, the

student newspaper of the University of California ran a brief untitled paragraph explaining Norris's assignment for the San Francisco *Chronicle* (*The Berkeleyn*, 5, No. 43 [1 November 1895], 4). Crisler also found several articles in the *Chronicle* which monitored the worry of Norris's mother, Gertrude Doggett Norris, regarding her son's whereabouts ("Norris in South Africa," *Frank Norris Studies*, No. 7 [Spring 1989], 4-7). These articles originally appeared in the *Chronicle* as "Friends of Frank Norris Anxious," 25 December 1895, 16; "Norris Reached Cape Town," 28 December 1895, 12; "Norris Is Now Believed To Be Safe," 12 January 1896, 18; and "Norris Could Not Cable," 9 February 1896, 17.

<sup>6</sup>Franklin Walker, *Frank Norris: A Biography* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1932).

<sup>7</sup>In "Norris's Departure for Johannesburg," Crisler established this date as 28 October 1895.

<sup>8</sup>McElrath and Crisler discovered that Norris had signed the hotel's guest register on this date; the register is now in the library of San Diego State University.

<sup>9</sup>"Norris Could Not Cable," reprinted in Crisler, "Norris in South Africa," 6-7.

<sup>10</sup>"Norris Is Now Believed To Be Safe," reprinted in Crisler, "Norris in South Africa," 6.

<sup>11</sup>*Frank Norris and The Wave: A Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1988); *Frank Norris: A Descriptive Bibliography* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992); *The Apprenticeship Writings of Frank Norris, 1896-1898*, ed. Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., and Douglas K. Burgess, 2 vols. in one (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1996).

<sup>12</sup>Joseph Katz, "The Shorter Publications of Frank Norris," *Proof*, 2 (1973): 155-220 (see 178); Kenneth A. Lohf and Eugene Sheehy, *Frank Norris: A Bibliography* (Los Gatos, Calif.: Talisman Press, 1959), 53, 55-56, and 63.

<sup>13</sup>Joseph Gaer, *Frank Norris (Benjamin Franklin Norris): Bibliography and Biographical Data* (Berkeley: California Literary Research Project No. 3, 1934), 9 and 15.

<sup>14</sup>Robert A. Morace, "A Critical and Textual Study of Frank Norris's Writings from the San Francisco *Wave*," dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1971, 134. In order of their appearance in the *Chronicle*, the eight articles are "A Californian in the City of Cape Town," 19 January 1896, 19; "From Cape Town to Kimberley Mine," 26 January 1896, 1; "In the Compound of a Diamond Mind," 2 February 1896, 10; "In the Veldt of the Transvaal," 9 February 1896, 1; "The Uprising in the Transvaal," 9 February 1896, 17 (overlooked by Katz and Lohf and Sheehy); "The Frantic Rush from Johannesburg," 1 March 1896, 8; "A Zulu War Dance," 15 March 1896, 1; and "A Steamship Voyage with Cecil Rhodes," 19 April 1896, 15 (overlooked by Gaer, Katz, and Lohf and Sheehy, reprinted in *The Apprenticeship Writings*, vol. 1, 13-18).

<sup>15</sup>*Frank Norris and The Wave: A Bibliography*, 55-56; "Tales

of the Day," *The Wave*, 15 (18 April 1896), 16, para-graph 5, is reprinted in *The Apprenticeship Writings*, vol. 1, 13.

<sup>16</sup>"Rhodes and the Reporters," *The Wave*, 15 (11 April 1896), 5, reprinted in *The Apprenticeship Writings*, vol. 1, 1-3; "Jack Hammond in Johannesburg and Pretoria," *The Wave*, 15 (20 June 1896), 5, reprinted in *The Apprenticeship Writings*, vol. 1, 78-82.

<sup>17</sup>"A Salvation Boom in Matabeleland," *The Wave*, 15 (25 April 1896), 5, reprinted in *The Apprenticeship Writings*, vol. 1, 18-22; "The Strangest Thing," *The Wave*, 16 (3 July 1897), reprinted in *The Apprenticeship Writings*, vol. 2, 8-13; "Execution without Judgment," *The Wave*, 16 (2 October 1897), 5, reprinted in *The Apprenticeship Writings*, vol. 2, 151-55.

<sup>18</sup>"Street Scenes in Johannesburg During the Insurrection of January, 1896," *Harper's Weekly*, 40 (7 March 1896), 233.

<sup>19</sup>"A Christmas in the Transvaal," San Francisco *Examiner*, Christmas issue of the *Sunday Examiner Magazine*, 17 December 1899, 6, reprinted in Robert C. Leitz, III, "'A Christmas in the Transvaal': An Addition to the Norris Canon," *Studies in American Fiction*, 8 (Autumn 1986): 222-24.

<sup>20</sup>*The Apprenticeship Writings*, vol. 1, xviii and xli, n. 17.

## Frank Norris's Portrait of Joaquin Miller in *The Octopus*

Joseph R. McElrath, Jr.

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It has been twice suggested that Frank Norris was describing California poet Joaquin Miller when demonstrating to a savvy 1901 readership what and whom he had in mind when he addressed the matter of artistic fakery on the west coast. In his unsurpassed contextual study of Norris's personality and art, *The Fiction of Frank Norris: The Aesthetic Context*, Don Graham identified Miller as the likely model for one of several unnamed poseurs lampooned in *The Octopus*: "The bearded poet, perspiring in furs and boots of reindeer skin," who "declaimed verses of his own composition about the wild life of the Alaskan mining camps."<sup>1</sup> Observed Graham, "Miller affected a variety of Western styles, including bearskin capes, bowie knives, and a particularly outlandish Spanish concoction featuring high-heel boots, red or yellow shirts, scarves, and a sombrero."<sup>2</sup> Norris's description, then, seemed to fit. About the outfit more suitable for the Arctic than San Francisco, however, Graham could not be absolutely certain, and he allowed that Jack London—who had posed dressed in Arctic garb for a

photographer—may have unwittingly contributed that detail to a composite portrait of the artist as charlatan.

A decade later, Benjamin S. Lawson insisted more strongly on "The Presence of Joaquin Miller in *The Octopus*."<sup>3</sup> For him there was no doubt that "a certain bearded poet, recently back from the Klondike,"<sup>4</sup> was Miller; for, Miller was one of the better known "Argonauts" by virtue of his having written at length for periodicals about the rush that followed upon the discovery of gold at Klondike Creek in 1896. Indeed, Lawson even chides Graham for expressing a tad of uncertainty about the matter—though he, himself, could not do more than dress Miller in a sombrero and serape.

Now, yet another decade later, it is at last possible to establish firmly the fact of Miller's presence in *The Octopus*—thanks to the dogged persistence of actress Blanche Bates, "the very clever, very fascinating star and leading lady of the Frawley Company" described by "Hilyard" in an 1899 issue of *Leslie's Weekly*.<sup>5</sup> The article "Joaquin Miller's Arctic Suit" makes it plain that Miller was the very man at whose expense Norris waxed droll.

On 8 November 1898, Miss Bates visited the songster of the Sierras because she had heard about and just had to see the costume in question. Disappointment was hers, however, when her carriage stopped before his home near San Francisco. She was greeted by the poet sporting a beard that extended to his chest and found him dressed in—what was for Miller—more conventional garb. "He wore a suit of velvet corduroy, the color of it that brown of brown bees in the sun. A pale, yellow chrysanthemum was in his button-hole, and a hint of neckwear—a delicate Japanese silken trifle of the shade of the chrysanthemum; his trousers were carelessly half-tucked in the wrinkled top of his boots." But Miss Bates persisted, and she did see the famed outfit, as did later many another fan of the poet and, perhaps, Norris himself. As is related by the pseudonymous author of "Joaquin Miller's Arctic Suit," Miller planned to wear it throughout "his season of lectures in the East before starting on his journey around the world."

What Blanche Bates saw on 8 November 1898 was something considerably more gorgeous but just as ridiculous as the performance dress of the unnamed poet fussed over by Mrs. Cedarquist in *The Octopus*:

the muck-lucks that come to the knees, the vest made of the fur of the sea-dog, the silk-lined reindeer cap, a bear-skin wrap that was lined with orange silk, and, most of all, the wonderful coat

made outside of the spotted fur of the baby reindeer, and inside of the fur of the reindeer full-grown. It had buttons of solid Klondike nuggets of many hundred dollars' value, two long rows of them, fastened on with copper wire the way the Alaskan Indians sew on buttons. It was ornamented also with the tooth of a young walrus, and with many of their costly fur-tails that women covet for their capes.

How preposterous Miller must have appeared may be inferred from a half-tone in *Leslie's Magazine*. Miller remains in his bee-brown velvet corduroy suit. But he talked Miss Bates into donning the outfit and then posing with him.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>(New York: Doubleday, Page, 1901), 313.

<sup>2</sup>Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1978), 79-80.

<sup>3</sup>*Frank Norris Studies*, No. 6 (Autumn 1988): 1-3.

<sup>4</sup>*The Octopus*, 312.

<sup>5</sup>88 (9 March 1899): 187.

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