An Analysis of the Naturalism of Frank Norris

James L. Loughlin

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DATE
AN ANALYSIS OF THE
NATURALISM OF FRANK NORRIS

By
James L. Loughlin

A Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in English

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1937
This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Committee of the University of New Mexico in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Long before Frank Norris was born (1870), a multitude of forces were at work shaping the civilization which was to form the background of his short life. Centuries before, the Reformation had occurred, and great minds since that time had been continually struggling to shape the confusion accompanying the new freedom into something compatible with the new universe in which the greater part of humanity found itself. Carl L. Becker, in one of a series of lectures at Yale University, has described the changes in thought since the middle ages.

In the thirteenth century the key words to knowledge would no doubt be God, sin, grace, salvation, heaven and the like; in the nineteenth century, matter, fact, matter-of-fact, evolution, progress; in the twentieth century, relativity, process, adjustment, function, complex. In the eighteenth century the words without which no enlightened person could reach a restful conclusion were nature, natural law, first causes, reason, sentiment, humanity, perfectibility.  

In America, between the date of the first settlement and the twentieth century, economic and social conditions underwent a somewhat similar rapid change. Colonial America was settled by fugitives from European life. They found relief from the torments which they had fled, and

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1Carl L. Becker, Heavenly City of the Philosophers (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), P. 47
were content to rest. Their one incentive was to avoid anything which might possibly upset the peace that they had found in the new country. But colonial America overlooked the fact that it was impossible for the life in the new country to remain static unless the population also remained static. The population did not remain static; therefore, it became necessary to establish a governed society, which in turn demanded concessions from the individuals whom it had to protect. Since the governing society was established because of the demands of progress, the nation could not remain static. The development of the nation was accompanied by expansion in external trade, which led to the War of 1812. The results of that war necessitated further adjustments in the new world to meet the new conditions which arose.

After the War of 1812 the older America found itself no longer strong enough to continue its fight to remain static; it was dying, and a younger generation of optimists fell heir to the land of unlimited potential wealth. A young America awakened, eager, confident, and ambitious. The reflective conservatism which had marked the America of colonial days became a silly foible of the older generation. Immigrants were pouring into the country from war-torn Europe, the wilderness to the west was being opened up, and

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1W. L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1920), II, 60-69
all that was required of a man to make money was that he be enterprising. The possibility of making money was incentive enough, and the surge westward commenced. With the influx of the adventurers, the pioneer settlements grew into towns and cities. America became the land of romance. Progress became the watchword, and in a remarkably short time an economic imperialism had sprung up.¹

America became a nation dominated by middle class imperialists.² The agrarian South was influenced by French humanitarianism. Its landed gentry recognised the necessity of harmony between labor and capital, it created a form of unity between the plantation owners and the slaves, but it disregarded the middle class. The industrial East retained the principles of individual freedom so dear to the colonists, and a natural alliance was formed between the East and the exploiters of the natural resources of the West, whose creed was every man for himself. The South, because it was agrarian, remained more static than the East, and political changes in the nation were brought about to meet the changing demands of the East for capital to exploit the West. The government developed with the

¹Perhaps "movement" would be the better word, because the exploitation of the country spread beyond the control of any attempts at guidance which might have been improvised.

East and the West rather than with the South. The intellectual
life of the East and West differed from that of the South,
and the nation as a whole reflected the thought of the
former union rather than that of the South. Such a condition
was not conducive to the harmony of the nation, and, as
this condition was aggravated, the Civil War was inevitable.

Since the results of the Civil War have great bearing
upon the development of the thought which was to be dominant
during the life of Frank Norris, it is pertinent to consider
them in relation to their effects upon American intellectual
life. The triumph of the North was a victory for the
individualists, but the latter found that they had created
an industrial state. It would appear that during the
flowering of New England, there had been little intellectual
life in the reckless East and West, that they had not given
thought to the destination of their mad rush of exploitation.
The Northerners had freed the slaves only to find themselves
enslaved to industrialism; they had crushed the social and
economic equalitarianism and humanitarianism and found
themselves in need of protection from the individualistic
industrialists. An aristocracy was formed by the Rockefellers,
the Morgans, the Goulds, the Vanderbilts, and other financial
leaders. The North and West had not ignored the middle
class; they were the middle class.

But the North and West had ignored the possibility
of either an aristocracy or a slave class. They found themselves with an industrial aristocracy which did not have the slightest semblance of equality either with the middle class or with the laboring class. There was an American aristocracy absolute in power and independent of responsibility. America had become a nation governed by economic conditions rather than by the intellect of the people. Recognition of the need for humanitarianism and equalitarianism, however, came too late. Despite constant efforts in the form of third party movements to establish these principles as essential elements in the government of the country, there has been no success except in cases in which humanitarian and equalitarian measures are temporarily required.

Twenty years after the Civil War, the hasty reconstruction of the nation was finished. The frenzy of the rush had disappeared, and the people had a chance to sit back and regard what they had accomplished. The result of their thoughtless rush was, they saw, a disappointment which left them a sadly disillusioned people. The democracy that they had planned was not apparent at all. Their optimism vanished. They became engulfed in pessimism much deeper than that of the colonists, for they had not even the peaceful security found by the settlers.1 The romantic spirit of the adventurers

died as had the spirit of colonial America.

The thought of a nation is expressed in its literature, for literary expression emanates either from that which is observed by the writer in the life about him or from his imagination; and even the inventions of his imagination are made possible by the life about him. The thought of America, its intellectual life after capitalism had been firmly entrenched as the dominant power in the nation, is reflected in its realistic literature. Idealism had turned out to be a foolish dream, and it was time to face the realities of life. The creed was still "every man for himself", but there were no longer vast expanses which every man might exploit for himself. It became a question of the survival of the fittest, and no quarter was given because none was expected. The spirit of optimism was replaced by a smirking cynicism, which found expression in the nation's realistic literature—realistic because of the insurrection of a dissatisfied, critical spirit which sought to erase the veneer of idealism that hid the true conditions of American life.¹

The new realism in the literature of the country did not become dominant without a struggle. There were still those who clung to the old romanticism, those who refused to believe that life in America was not all that it appeared

¹Harlan Hatcher, Creating the Modern American Novel (Farrar and Rinehart; New York, 1930), p. 8
to be on the surface, those who refused to believe that the old culture had been destroyed by the widespread exploitation of the country. During the period of exploitation New England alone had given thought to the retention of anything resembling culture. Consequently, New England remained the dictatorial power in cultural matters. The culture of New England, however, was out of step with the rest of the country. Its literary leaders had been reared in the hallowed tradition of the romantic past, to speak lightly of which was anathema. Longfellow, Lowell, Thaxter, Holmes were to Steadman, Stoddard, Aldrich, and the rest the embodiment of American culture. To change this traditional culture or to make it adaptable to the changing nation was unthinkable, for the presence of any situation which would demand an alteration of the traditional culture immediately implied that that situation was evil, not that the conception of tradition was wrong. Since New England persisted in living in the past, and refused to admit the presence of a changed America (despite the fact that it had itself become overrun with mills and factories), it was necessary for the rest of the country to go on without established cultural leadership.¹

The new literary realism was forced to struggle along

¹v. L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), III, 60-69
by itself. Since little thought had been given to culture in the nation as a whole, this construction of a new literature became a rather confusing task. A new culture had to be founded. When the traditional philosophy of New England was cast aside, America found itself with little or no philosophical principles upon which to build the new culture. Whatever native philosophy there was, emanated from speculation made possible by psychological research. William James, called the father of American psychology, did notable work, but the bonds of tradition colored his approach to his work. He averred that social and economic factors condition the individual's potentialities, but his ingrained faith in the power of the individual would not permit him to become pessimistic enough to profess hopeless determinism. It was G. J. Hall who was most influential in the educational system of the country. His theory that for each mental state and process there is an equivalent or correlate in the body or in nature was applied in the schools. Hall was an evolutionist who believed that there is no distinction between the mental and the physical. He believed that the development of children recapitulates the social life of primitive man. He correlated man with cosmic progress.

Is there any chief end of man, any goal or destiny supreme over others? . . . It is simply this—to keep ourselves, body and soul, and our environment, physical, social, industrial, etc., always at the very tip-top of condition. . .

It implies the maximum of vitality, life abounding,
getting and keeping right in the very center of the
current of creative evolution, and minimizing, destroying,
or avoiding all checks, arrests and inhibitions to it.¹

Nearly every phase of modern psychological development
entered this country under the guidance of Hall, and the
quotation given above indicates the influence of naturalism
upon him.

Beyond James and Hall and a few others, there was no
one to whom the realists in their search for the truths
of life could appeal. With the exception of the few
psychologists, America offered no philosophical basis for
the new culture. The intellectuals were forced to look to
Europe for new ideas. French naturalism, and subsequent
tenets derived from or related to it, were found to be most
agreeable.

"If nature be the work of God, and man the product
of nature, all that he has ever done or thought, must
be natural, too, and in accordance with the laws of
nature and of nature's God."²

The French saw the cosmos as one stupendous whole.
Their objective, as Montesquieu proclaimed, lay not in
harmony with the present, but in harmony with nature as a
whole.³ Rousseau elaborated upon this thesis by pointing
out that when a personal God had become inconvenient in the

¹G. S. Hall, "Confessions of a Psychologist," Pedagogical
Seminary, 8:92, Worcester

²John Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding.
A. Seth Pringle-Pattison, editor, London: Oxford University
Press, 1924

³Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, Spirit of Laws.
light of the substitution by science of a first Cause, God had revealed his purpose to men in a far more simple and natural way, through his works rather than through Scripture. The book of Nature replaced the Bible, and to the book of Nature the literary intellects went in search of Truth. Nature became God. The objective of life lay in harmony with Nature as a whole. Posterity became the Supreme Judge, and in thus denying the importance of the present it was possible to ignore the dictates of tradition and the conscience of the present.

William Dean Howells felt the imminence of this new naturalistic movement. Although he was himself too much under the influence of the New England ethical taste to permit his breaking the bonds of gentility, he lent encouragement to Stephen Crane and to Frank Norris. He understood that, if whatever is, is right, sex, divorce, and all the other conditions hitherto unmentionable could and should be mentioned, because such things are a part of nature as a whole, and that there should be enlightenment as to their proper position in regard to nature as a whole.

Stephen Crane is more widely known than is Frank Norris, though this greater fame is not altogether justifiable.

Crane's subject-matter was more acceptable to the general run of readers. Crane was influential in destroying the hold of idealism upon literature; he portrayed the horror of war and of the slums, and won acceptance for realism in fiction. From an intellectual point of view, however, his work is much more narrow than that attempted by Norris. It was Norris who first attempted to establish a philosophical basis for the new America, to justify the new America in the light of a naturalistic philosophy.
CHAPTER II

EARLY LIFE: FORMATIVE INFLUENCES AND TENDENCIES

All the biographical data in the following chapter has been obtained from Franklin Walker's account of the life of Norris, the only published biography of the novelist.\(^1\)

In 1867 Benjamin Franklin Norris, the son of a Michigan farmer, found that his energy and industry as a peddler of jewelry had in a dozen years brought him sufficient capital to open a shop of his own in Chicago and had made it possible for him to overcome the difference in temperament between him and his fiancée, Gertrude Doggett, so that he might lead her to the altar.\(^2\) The elder Norris was a typical American businessman of the nineteenth century, who had time to think of nothing but the pursuit in which he was engaged. His wife was an artistic person with an inherent love for the dramatic, a person bound up in intellectual and cultural pursuits which her husband could not understand, but which he admired in her, probably because her interests enabled him to place her upon a pedestal at the foot of which he could worship.

The first child of their marriage, a girl, died of

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\(^1\)Franklin Walker, Frank Norris (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1932)

\(^2\)Curtis Jedwin and Laura Dearborn, the leading characters in The Pit are created from the father and mother of Norris.
spinal meningitis three months after her birth. Benjamin Franklin Norris, Junior, the second child, was born on the fifth of March, 1870, in a modest house on Twenty-second Street in the South Side of Chicago. While they lived in this house, three more children, a girl and two boys, were born. The second daughter also died before the end of her first year during an epidemic of cholera infantum, from which Frank barely escaped.

The Chicago fire destroyed Mr. Norris' place of business. Norris was forced to begin again, this time in partnership with his former cashier, a young Scotchman named Allister. This firm grew with the returning prosperity which followed the Civil War, and became a leading wholesale jewelry house.

Norris planned to have his eldest son enter business, but the father's place in his home amounted to little more than that of provider. Mrs. Norris concentrated her talent for the artistic and dramatic upon her home and her children. During evenings in the home Mrs. Norris read aloud from Scott and Dickens and Browning and Meredith, and it was such an atmosphere that enriched Frank Norris' imagination. He created an imaginative world out of all the elements of the environment which his father's financial success made possible. In 1878 he was taken on a trip to Europe with his parents, and, although he was only eight years old,
it is not improbable that, because of his mother's ability to stimulate his youthful imagination, he profited as much from the round of museums, art galleries, and cathedrals as his father did, if not more. While Mr. Norris passed the plate in the Second Presbyterian Church, his wife followed the Episcopal High Church, and of course Frank became an Episcopalian, although never a very active or devout church member.

School was not an attractive place for Frank. He could not appreciate the benefits which might accrue as a result of adherence to its routine. He preferred The Lay of the Last Minstrel and his diary to mathematical problems, and his mother's hopes that her son would grow up to be a cultured gentleman must have been shaken when he refused to attend Bonique's Dancing Academy because he felt that he could not let his pal, "Pealy" McKay, down by condescending to wear a black velvet suit so that the girls at the school would think he was "nice".

In 1884 the family moved to California in order that Frank's father might have the benefits of the climate for his ailing hip. San Francisco provided a new, mysterious world for the fourteen-year-old boy to explore. Frank discovered new marvels that had not existed in Chicago: bananas, Chinatown, the Barbary Coast, and the ocean. This new world broadened the scope of his imagination, still
nourished by his mother's literary taste as she read to his younger brothers. Frank's home life appealed to him, and he spent much time directing the play of his brothers, and creating stories with which to lend enchantment to their games. Their lead-soldiers became personalities, and before long he began to write stories of their adventures, and to supplement the stories with sketches.

The elder Norris sent his son Frank to the Boys' High School, but, after a few weeks there had proved him incapable of a business career, he was sent, according to his mother's wishes, to the School of the San Francisco Art Association under the direction of Virgil Williams. Here too he shied at the monotony of the conventional exercises, which he neglected for subjects more colorful and active. Finally, in 1887, the father was convinced by the opinion of two friends, Dwight L. Moody, the evangelist, and George C. Stebbins, Moody's song-leader, that his son did possess artistic talent, and he agreed to take him to England to enroll in the Kensington School of Art. Frank and his father set out for London in June. When they reached Chicago, they received a wire bearing the news that Lester, Frank's younger brother, had died after an unsuccessful battle with diphtheria. Mrs. Norris, with her youngest son, Charles, and her niece, Ida Carlston, joined Frank and his father in Chicago. It was then decided
that the whole family would go abroad.

The school in London turned out to be a disappointment, and the Morrises sought better instruction for Frank in Paris. Frank enrolled in the Bouguereau studio of the original Julian Academy. There were no regular instructors at the studio, but well-known artists came regularly to criticize the students' work. Among those most familiar to Frank were Tony Robert Fleury, Lefebvre, and Bouguereau.

Morris never did qualify for the Beaux Arts. The most beneficial aspect of his sojourn in Paris lay in the atmosphere which he absorbed and in the characters whom he observed in the ateliers. He saw the kind of life which Americans ordinarily conceive as representative of Paris, yet he did not become steeped in sophisticated boredom. His romantic tendencies were enhanced during the time he spent in the old world atmosphere, but it is not safe to say that it was this environment which created his romantic attitude towards life.

Morris' father, disgusted with the French cuisine, returned to America soon after the family's arrival in Paris. Mrs. Morris and Charles, however, stayed with Frank for a year. Mrs. Morris, a most zealous patroness, endeavored to develop her son into a cultured artist. She took him to Rome, where they visited the art galleries and heard the Miserere sung in the Sistine Chapel. She read French
literature to him in an effort to counteract the argot which he had picked up in the atelier.

But Frank was still a boy of seventeen. The intellectual significance of that which he came into contact with mattered little to him. He was obsessed with the drama of life. His mother's reading served only to whet his appetite for the adventures of romantic heroes. His interest in art was probably a misdirected interest in the dramatic story behind the figures on canvas. He never could settle down to the routine of studio life. The technique of painting was of no interest to him. In San Francisco he preferred to spend his days at the Presidio with Ernest Feixotto, where they studied the horses of the cavalry barracks; in Paris most of his time was spent at the Jardin des Plantes, to which he was attracted by the animal life. He was concerned not with things themselves, but with the stories of things—what they did, what happened to them, what they might have done, what might have happened to them.

Frank's imagination was his most active faculty. In France the works of Flaubert rather than those of Flaubert or Zola caught his fancy. Though Zola was then at the height of his vogue, Norris was not aware that Zola existed. While he was abroad,

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1 Walker assumes that Norris did not know Zola in Paris on the grounds that Norris, who became so enthusiastic about the French naturalist five years later, could not have failed to show some of Zola's influence in what he had written in those last five years previous to that date.
his imagination carried him along with Froissart's "Gaston Phoebus de Foix". He lived in Froissart's adventurous Chronicles oblivious to the frightful Zola's L'Assommoir and La Terre.

Morris lived the adventures of the Chronicles literally. While the Morris family was in Paris, Charles was six years old. The death of Lester had left Charles without a playmate. Frank undertook the duties of amusing his younger brother. The characters of Froissart's book came to life again in the lead-soldiers with which the two boys played. Frank served the soldiers for the armies and these soldiers were used for the detailed re-enactment of the battles related in the Chronicles. To enhance the glamour of this play and to make it more interesting for his younger brother, Morris began to write stories to accompany the adventures of the lead-soldiers. The outstanding character in this picturesque narrative was called Gaston Le Foix, the product of Froissart's Gaston Phoebus de Foix. Frank became so engrossed in the story that he forgot it was a game; he was developing into a story teller.

In the spring of 1888, Mrs. Morris and Charles returned to America, leaving Frank to continue his studies in Paris alone. The departure of Charles did not lessen his interests in the adventures of Gaston Le Foix. We continued to send home to Charles each week a new chapter
relating the experiences of Gaston. The story provided
him with an idea for a painting. It would be a picture
of the Battle of Cracy.

This painting was to be huge and grand. The canvas
which he bought completely covered one end of his room.
Before he started his work, it was necessary for him to do
considerable research. He began making notes of the armor
at the Musée d'Artillerie of the Hôtel des Invalides and
also at the Musée de Cluny. His study was unusually minute.

His youthful impulsiveness led him to forget his
primary objective. He became so engrossed in his study
of the accoutrements of romantic knighthood that he devoted
all of his time to the study of mediaeval armor. He discarded
his canvas and wrote an article entitled "Clothes of Steel".
The painting was relegated to the position of illustrative
material in the article, which was a review of the development
of armor from its use by the conquerors of Rome to its
disuse because of the employment of gun powder in the
seventeenth century.¹

As has been mentioned before, it was the action and
drama rather than the paintings themselves which attracted
Norris. He developed the habit of creating stories to
vivify what he saw on canvas. This trait made it only a

¹His mother had the article published in the
San Francisco Chronicle, March 31, 1889.
step from painting to writing. The pictures had dictated the course of the stories but, as his skill in writing increased, the story became more important. The story began to determine the subjects of the pictures. Gradually he lost interest in the study of art, and began to devote most of his time to an incoherent novel which he called Robert d'Artois—an outgrowth of the Gaston Le Foix series. He had been sending the manuscripts home in installments. When Mr. Norris discovered that his son was not studying art as he had supposed him to be doing, he sent for him to come home.

Frank Norris returned to San Francisco with an old-world manner. Although he was no longer on historical ground, he determined to wed the romantic and picturesque of the fourteenth century with his daily life in the nineteenth. Once again his father decided to make a business man of him. He sent him to the University of California. Frank replaced the medieval adventure of his imagination with dramatization of the life at the university. He took the lead in planning pranks and in the traditional war-fare among the classes. The academic routine of college held little interest for him.

He did not find what he wanted in the curriculum of the English department. He became exasperated with the mere assimilation of second-hand ideas. He found no
assistance in his desire to develop his inherent creative ability. Encyclopedic knowledge did not appeal to him. He did not aspire to meet academic standards but wished to have his personal potentialities developed. As a result of his conflict with the methods of instruction, he left the University of California after four years, without a degree.

Despite his laxity in adherence to the scholastic routine, he did not neglect his writing. During his university career he contributed three poems, four sketches and two short stories to student magazines and published one poem and twelve short stories in newspapers and periodicals. During his first years at the university he retained his love for the romance of knight errantry. Later, as environment showed its effect upon the maturing youth his fanciful flights of imagination were replaced by the romance of his actual surroundings.

The most influential factor in this transition from the romance of the days of old to that of his contemporary world was his membership in the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity. His association with this group of "regular" fellows taught him to find drama in contemporary life. Mazing replaced ancient battles, medieval armor became collegiate garb, and football players became the bold knights.

While at odds with the English department he was contributing to a San Francisco newspaper. In a like manner
he neglected Macaulay and Carlyle in order to read Kipling and Zola. From Kipling, Norris learned that romance was much closer at hand than he had suspected. He began to discover life in San Francisco. So enthusiastic did he become that he discarded Scott and Froissart altogether. From that point his writing began to show signs of the new realistic influence.

Still it was his nature to be a romantic. He had found romance in contemporary life. Real life served not as a philosophical background but rather as an instrument with which to emphasize the energy in the drama of the life about him. His literary attempts during his last year in college are a combination of Kipling, Zola, Richard Harding Davis and Professor Le Conte. Kipling had been discovered by Americans in 1890. Norris became attracted to him at the end of his freshman year. Kipling had experienced what Norris was then feeling in his own nature. Here was the union of romance and realism. Kipling's stories were of his own locale and proclaimed the attractiveness of his own age. He was imbued with the fighting spirit of the Anglo-Saxon. Davis also was close to the spirit of Norris. He discovered drama in newspaper reporting—Norris' own field. Professor Joseph Le Conte, who at that time was teaching at Berkeley, was Norris' favorite lecturer. He found the drama of evolution—a story in life. It was at the university of
California, not in France, that he learned of Zola. It was natural for him to become enthusiastic about Zola because it was the complement of his transition from Froissart and Scott and medieval romance to the new romance which he had found in his contemporary life. He insisted that Zola was fundamentally a romanticist, as is indicated in an editorial which Norris probably wrote for the San Francisco 

_It is curious to note how persistently M. Zola is misunderstood... Naturalism, as understood by Zola, is but a form of romanticism after all. That Zola should be quoted as a realist, and as a realist of realists, is a strange perversion... To be noted by M. Zola, we must leave the rank and file;... we must separate ourselves; we must become individual, unique. (The naturalist takes no note of common people, common in so far as their interests, their lives, and the things that occur in them are common, are ordinary. Terrible things must happen to the characters of the naturalistic tale. They must be twisted from the ordinary, wrenched from the quite, but uneventful round of everyday life and flung into the throes of a vast and terrible drama that works itself out in unleashed passions, in blood, and in sudden death. The world of M. Zola is a world of big things; the enormous, the formidable, the terrible, is what counts; no tearful tragedies here...)

Everything is extraordinary, imaginative, grotesque even, with a vague note of terror quivering throughout like the vibration of an ominous and low-pitched diapason. It is all romantic, at times unmistakably so, as in Le Rêve or some, closely resembling the work of the greatest of all modern romanticists, Hugo. We have the same huge drama, the same enormous scenic effects, the same love of the extraordinary, the vast, the monstrous and the tragic... Naturalism is a form of romanticism, not an inner circle of realism... That Zola’s work is not purely romantic as was Hugo’s, lies chiefly in the choice of Millet... it is a school by itself, unique, somber, powerful beyond words._

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1An unsigned editorial on "Zola as a Romantic Writer" appeared in the _Eve_ on June 21, 1896. There was little question that it was written by Frank Norris.
In the four years that Norris spent at the University of California he did not obtain an education but this period did produce an intellectual change in the young man. During his freshman year he was a nineteen-year-old boy in love with the romance of old. This state of mind was reflected in the poetry of *Ivanna*, full of life, color, and incident; *At Peninsa*, A.D. 1250, the resolute stand of Margaret of Champagne against the Saracens; *Brunhilda*, which narrates the dragging to death of the Austrasian queen at the heels of her horse; and *Les Enervés le Juinages*.

For they were lifeless, sodden, numb,
Their ears are deaf—their tongues are dumb.
With leaden-lidded fishy eye
And open palms they lifeless lie.¹

After his freshman year, however, he forsakes this type of imaginative wandering. During his sophomore year he began to show the influence of Zipping and Zola. The zest for brutality which was to be so pronounced in McTeague was evident in *Le Jongleur de Taillebois*, an attempt at the "horror" tale. Six months later he wrote *The Day of the World*, which scoffs at the disillusionment of love.

In his junior year Norris wrote *Laath*, which was to develop into *Vandover and the Brute*. *Laath* marked the first deliberate step towards the extreme form of naturalism which was later to carry him away for a time while he was studying

¹Quoted by Walker, p. 35
at Harvard. The story will be discussed in connection with Vandover and the Brute.

During his first year at the University of California Norris was still in love with the mediaeval spirit. He posed as a dilettante to assure himself of his superiority over his fellow students whom he considered provincial. He could find little "life" in such a commonplace atmosphere, and it behooved him to attempt to bring back the gallant and romantic days of old.

In such a distracted attitude Norris wrote Ivernelle while he was a nineteen-year-old freshman. Ivernelle should be marked primarily for its story qualities. There is little melody in its octosyllabic verse, but the story is full of life and moves flowingly. It is a story told by an imaginative boy who has scented something of the vastness of life without having yet tasted any of its disillusioning seridness.

Sir Caverleys sprang to the selle,
Yet paused to say, "Sir Hugh, farewell;
Unless I bring her back with me
Never again my face thou'llt see.
Let go the bit, my merry man;
Now, Bayard, to thy mettle strain."
An instant, the dropped drawbridge o'er,
The hoofbeats sound with hollow roar,
Arabelle on the causeway's stone,
A cloud of dust, and he is gone;
Gone like the whistling steel-sprung dart,
Gone like the tracked fleet-footed hart,
Gone like a witch o'er foss and fell,
To save his lady, Yvernelle: ¹

In this passage his imaginative, romantic nature and the effects of his mother's reading are immediately obvious. It is the influence of Scott rather than Zola which is apparent in Yvernelle. It is the old chivalrous story of the bold knight rushing to the rescue of his lady fair.

He looked not to the left nor right,
But sprang, and to his breast clasped tight
Fair Yvernelle, then pressed in bliss
Upon her yielding lips a kiss,
And tore the veil from off her head
And rent it to a ribboned shred. ²

At the time that Norris wrote Yvernelle, he was still his mother's boy. But the "savoir faire" of the dilettante pose which he had assumed crept into the poem with the typical collegiate disdain for the sentimental.

Idle it were to further dwell
On Coverlaye and Yvernelle,
She took the veil, as she did vow,
But 'twas the marriage veil, I trow. ³

During the latter part of his freshman year at California, Norris began to neglect the romanticists for Kipling, Davis, Zola, and the newspapers. The only story after the spring of 1891 written in the Yvernelle manner was Le Jongleur de Taillebois, but that showed a growing

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¹Frank Norris, Yvernelle, Canto 3 (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1928)
²Ibid.
³Ibid.
enchantment for the cruel and gruesome.

On June 1, 1891, "Son of a Sheik" was published in The Argonaut. "Son of a Sheik" is an imitation of Kipling's On the City Wall. Its story is told in the sub-title, "How a Parisianized Arab found that blood was thicker than Water." It is an amateurish attempt, but it teems with color. The opening paragraph of the story illustrates Norris's skill in creating the Kipling atmosphere. The second shows his romantic tendency to deal with the vast.

The smell of the warm slime on the Jeliffe River and the sweet, heavy, and sickening odour that exhaled into the unspeakable heat of the desert air from the bunches of dead and scorched water-reeds are with me yet; also the sight of the long stretch of dry mud bank, rising by shallow and barely perceptible degrees to the edge of the desert sands, and thus disclosed by the shrinkage of the Jeliffe during the hot months. The mud banks were very broad and very black except where they touched the desert; here the sand had drifted over them in light transparent sprinklings. In rapidly drying under the sun of the Sahara, they had cracked and warped into thousands of tiny concave oaks that looked, for all the world, like little saucers in which Indian ink has been mixed. (If you are an artist, as was Thavenot, you will the better understand this.)

Then there was the reach of the desert that drew off on either hand and rolled away, ever so gently, toward the place where the hollow sky dropped out of sight behind the shimmering horizon, swelling grandly and gradually like some mighty breast which, panting for breath in the horrible heat, had risen in a final gasp and had then, in the midst of it, suddenly stiffened and become rigid. On this colourless bosom of the desert, where nothing stirred but the waxing light in the morning and the waning light in the night, lay tumbled red and grey rocks, with thin drifts of sand in their rifts and crevices and blue-green cacti squatting or sprawling in their blue shadows. And there was nothing
more, nothing, except the appalling heat and the maddening silence.¹

In "Son of a Sheikh" Norris also began to show some signs of the effect of Zola upon him. He goes into realistic detail to produce a poignant picture of the sudden death of a warrior.

... On a sudden, a trooper of the Eleventh Cuirassiers came spinning round and round out of the brown of the battle, gulping up blood, and pitched, wheezing, face downward, into the soft ooze where the river licked at the bank, raising ruddy bubbles in the water as he blew his life-breath in gasps into it, and making it into gridiron patterns as his quivering blue fingers closed into fists.²

By the time that Norris had spent four years in college, he had disowned Yvonne and had begun to write McTeague. When he went to Harvard, he became serious about his writing. There he received sympathetic criticism and efficient tutelage from Professor Lewis E. Gates. The naturalism of Zola which had so violently appealed to his energetic youthfulness in clamor for action and animality was guided and encouraged. Although he did do some work on McTeague, he devoted the greater part of his time to Vandover and the Brute. Both of these novels are reactionary. To the college student who was settling down to the sincere consideration of life, naturalism became the outlet for the unfettered energy of his youth. Norris became enthusiastically absorbed with the Zola manner, and his in-

¹Frank Norris, The Third Circle, A Deal in Wheat and other stories (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1928) pp. 62-63
²Ibid., p.73
structors gave him a free rein. He submerged himself in naturalism and found McTeague and Vandover and the Brute, which he later tempered with Moran of the Lady Letty and Blix to fashion his masterpiece in the form of The Octopus and The Pit.

When Norris finished his fourth year at California, he had definite ambitions to become a novelist. But he felt himself to be unprepared. Consequently, it was decided by his mother that he should go to Harvard to study creative writing. In 1894 Norris went to Cambridge, where he spent a year in serious preparation for his career as a novelist.
CHAPTER III

THE DEVELOPMENT OF NORRIS'S IDEAS ABOUT THE NOVEL

Frank Norris, the novelist, was a composite of Norris the inherent romanticist, and Norris the product of his realistic environment. Farrington proffers the opinion that Norris began as a romantic and worked out of it slowly into realism. He also suggests that Norris may have written romances side by side with his more serious work, as a means of attaining popular acclaim. Walker evades the problem of classifying Norris' works by declaring that to call him a romantic realist would be to beg the question. Instead, Walker quotes Norris in "A Plea for Romantic Fiction".

Why should it be that so soon as the novelist addresses himself—seriously—to the consideration of contemporary life, he must abandon romance and take up the harsh, loveless, colorless, blunt tool called Realism? Now let us understand at once what is meant by romance and what by Realism. Romance, I take it, is the kind of fiction that takes cognizance of the variations from the type of normal life. Realism is the kind of fiction that confines itself to the type of normal life. According to this definition, then, romance may even treat of the sordid, the unlovely—as, for instance, the novels of W. Zola. Zola has been dubbed a Realist, but he is on the contrary, the very head of the Romanticists. Also, Realism, used as it sometimes is as a term of reproach, need not be in the remotest sense or degree offensive, but on the other hand respectable as a church and proper as a dean—as, for instance, the novels of Mr. Howells.

The reason why one claims so much for romance, and quarrels so pointedly with Realism, is that Realism stultifies itself. It notes only the surface of things. For it, beauty is not even skin deep, but only a

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1 W. L. Farrington, Main Currents in American Thought (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), III, 329
geometrical plane, without dimensions and depth, a mere outside. Realism is very excellent so far as it goes, but it goes no further than the Realist himself can actually see, or actually hear. Realism is minute; it is the drama of a broken teacup, the tragedy of a walk down the block, the excitement of an afternoon call, the adventure of an invitation to dinner... but to Romance belongs the wide world for range, and the unplumbed depths of the human heart, and the mystery of sex, and the problems of life, and the black, unsearched penetrations of the soul of men... Romance and Realism are constant qualities of every age, day, and hour. They are here today. They existed in the time of Job. They will continue to exist until the end of time, not so much in things as in point of view of the people who see things.¹

Morris's work shows little attempt to write deliberately either as a romanticist or as a realist. To call Morris a romantic realist would not after all, be to beg the question, for any futile effort to classify him as solely a romantic or solely a realist would be to argue in a vicious circle. Morris did merge the romantic with the realistic.

It is impossible to classify Morris as a romantic or as a realist because he is truly a combination of the two in his best works. As can be observed by inspection of the facts of his life, it is apparent that his nature was inherently romantic. His romantic tendencies were nurtured by his mother during his childhood, and, as we have seen, these tendencies persisted throughout his young manhood. According to his own definition, Morris was a romantic. That his nature was large and eager is evinced by his attempt

¹Quoted by Walker, p. 226
to portray the huge picture of the Battle of Crécy for the French Salon. "To romance belongs the wide world for range," he wrote, "the unplumbed depths of the human heart and the black unsearched penetrals of the soul of man." The vastness of the spectacle of life was to be his peculiar province.

He was by nature romantic, but his environment exerted a realistic influence upon him. It was not so much the environment of the world of affairs, but rather his personal environment. He was not affected so much by the capitalistic aristocracy which had taken hold upon American economic and social life as he was by intellectual influences with which he had personal contact. It was not the general critical revolution of the literary world so much as it was the influence of his acquaintance with the works of Kipling and Richard Harding Davis that caused him to find subject-matter in his contemporary world. It was not the desire to reform or to muck-rake, so common to the critical writers of his time, so much as the influence of Zola that led him to write the novel with a purpose. It was the influence of Professor Le Conte that led him to develop his naturalistic philosophy of life.

The romantic quality of boyishness was the keynote of Norris' personality. As Walker says of him,

... Occasionally a fortunate one [child] realizes the superiority of childhood and succeeds in
clinging to its advantages long after his companions have settled down into the snug pattern of their existences. Frank Norris was one of these.¹

Not only did Norris retain his youthful eagerness and enthusiasm for the drama in the life which was continually unfolded to him, ever-new and appealing, but the sincerity of youth never left him. This sincerity, this passion for conformity to the boy's way of truth-telling, made it an uncompromising duty for him to be correct in the slightest detail of that which he wrote about. He was conscious of the necessity to report faithfully each detail even before he had heard of Sola. In France it was the vividness of his research into the minutiae of medieval war-dress that caused him to forsake the painting of the Battle of Crevy for the writing of "Clothes of Steel". In later years it was this same devotion to sincerity which moved him to plea for information from Isaac Narcossian.

... If you have been involved in politics recently, perhaps you can give me a pointer or two. I am in a beautiful 'political middle' myself in 'The Octopus', the first of my set of three novels on the cheat question, which I have just started. You know this involves, in California, the fight between the farmers of the San Joaquin and the Southern Pacific Railroad. I was out there this summer getting what stuff I needed but I did not think I should need political notes. Now, I find that I do, and should have got 'em long ago. I have gone to work on this and have found

¹Walker, p. 1
out a good deal about politics and political 'deals' but I want to find out more.

"... Can you tell me just about how they would go about to get their men in? Do you think it could be done at all? What I am anxious to get hold of are the details of this kind of game, the lingo, and the technique, etc., but at the same time, want to understand it very clearly."

Morris was enthusiastic about his writing. It was his vocation, and, to him, the novel was a thing to be handled as an essential institution of humanity. The newspaper work which he found after leaving Harvard and his employment later with J. S. McClure's publishing house interested him only in that they provided him with sufficient money to prevent starvation while he wrote. Morris considered the novel as an ethical influence upon humanity which no writer could afford to treat carelessly and without consideration of its effect upon the reading public. His essay, "The Novel With a Purpose", discusses the principles which he followed in his mature works. He divided novels into those that tell something, those that show something, and the sociological novel, those that prove something—the latter being the highest development of the craft.

The Pulpit speaks but once a week, the Press is read with lightning haste and the morning news is waste by noon. But the novel goes into the home to stay. It is necessary for writers who can invade the heart's heart of thousands to wield such power rightfully. It is essential that the People hear, not a

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lie, but the Truth. It is the novelist’s duty not to
cater to the public whim for personal favor but to
tell the truth.¹

Whether or not it is to beg the question to call
Frank Norris a romantic realist, it is obvious that he ranged
the wide world and plumbed the depths of the human heart
in a romantic manner, and at the same time found drama in
a broken teacup, in the manner of the realistic school.
It would be convenient to agree with Parrington that Norris
began as a romanticist and worked out of his romanticism
gradually, but there are as many elements of romance in
The Octopus and The Pit, his latest works, as in Blix.
There is no chronological sequence to justify such an opin-
ion as that of Parrington. Blix followed McTeague, a vulgar
realistic novel, which caused the publishers to delete
several passages, by two years.

Parrington’s alternative suggestion, that Norris
wrote romance side by side with his realistic work in order
to receive remuneration for his writing, is merely conjecture.
Money was not his primary purpose in writing. The story
was the thing. This is apparent in a letter written to
Maccosson concerning Blix, which is considered as a romance.

My next novel is ‘Blix’. The ms. is just
finished and Doubleday has already put it in hand for
the coming season. It is as different from ‘McTeague’
as ‘McTeague’ was different from ‘Moran’. It is as-

¹R. T. Cooper, Some American Story-Tellers, (New
York: Henry Holt & Company, 1911)
sentially a love story. But what I have tried to do was to turn out a love story that should not slop over. No sentimentality—everything healthy and clean and natural. 'Blix' does not belong to any 'school' so far as I can see. It's not naturalism and it's not romanticism; it's just a story. Nothing very violent happens. There are no disagreeable people in it and it finishes—to my notion—happily.

* * *

What pleased me most in your review of 'McTeague' was the 'disdaining all pretensions to style.' It is precisely what I try most to avoid. I detest 'fine writing,' 'rhetoric,' 'elegant English,'—tommyrot. Who cares for fine style? Tell your yarn and let your style go to the devil. We don't want literature, we want life.1

There is used in all of Norris' books much biographical matter. Blix presents the circumstances which led to the writing of Moran of the Lady Letty. His elation with the yarns of the sea which he picked up in his wanderings about San Francisco illustrates his eagerness for the 'story'. Condé Rivera, the hero of Blix, who was Norris himself, was a reporter for the San Francisco Times. He was sent to interview the master of a whale-back steamer which was taking on grain for famine-stricken India. He went to the docks accompanied by Blix, the heroine. While there they fell into conversation with the mate, who was given cause by the sight of Blix to recount the tale of his love in the deep. He had been a deep-sea diver, and, once when a steamer had sunk, it had been his job to go down to search for the body of a beautiful young girl. He had found her, but she

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1Quoted by Marcusson, pp. 234-35
had looked so beautiful as she was that he had left her there to wait until the day of his sailor's burial when he would join her.

Morris, narrating the effect of the story upon Blix and Condy, writes of his own enthusiasm for the drama with which he found San Francisco replete.

"Oh, but the story of it!" exclaimed Condy as he and Travis (Blix) regained the wharf—"the story of it! Isn't it a ripper! Isn't it a corker! His leaving her that way, and never saying for any other girl afterward."

They were so interested in the mate's story that they forgot to take a car, and walked up Clay Street talking it over, suggesting, rearranging, embellishing;[1]... It was not for money that he wrote romance. It was his zeal for the story, for drama. His nature made it impossible for him to resist the appeal of the story in the life about him. "We don't want literature, we want life."

And he did not write literature. He wrote of life, the dramatic life which he saw everywhere. It mattered not whether it were romantic or realistic as long as it was a story. Morris responded sensitively to his emotions. He wrote as he felt. He wrote romance and realism and both together. If a story appealed to his sense of beauty, he wrote romance; if his animality was touched, he wrote cruel, frank realism; if both elements were factors in a story, his novels contained both romance and realism. It cannot be said that

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[1]Frank Norris, Blix (New York: International Association of newspapers and authors, 1901) p. 60
Norris wrote romance side by side with realism, because it is difficult to make a definite dividing line. Neither can it be said that Norris ever grew out of romance.

To evaluate properly the position of Norris in American literature, it is best to think of him as a boy who came to manhood and brought with him all the qualities of boyishness except the sophisticated disillusionment of hardened maturity. Norris is of great importance to America for the simple reason that he was not entirely of America; he possessed an objectivity which enabled him to analyze and criticize the dominant American attitudes. The old philosophy of New England had been undermined; industrial individualism was testing the faith of the people in American institutions; the work of a century of heroes had closed in the muck of the scandals of Fiske and Gould and Boss Tweed. Something had to be done about such a situation in the land of the millenium.

Something had to be done, but there was no one to do it. There was no one with the necessary intellectual equipment. Economic and political problems were the most serious, but two generations of exploitation had been sufficient to leave the critics unaware of the intimate bonds between those two bulwarks of American civilization. Literature had no political critics, no social philosophers.
During the last thirty years of the nineteenth century the critics and reformers began a literary revolution. Political satires written by such men as Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, notably *The Gilded Age*, and Henry Adams' *Democracy*, ridiculed the political mess. Clarence Leonard Hay and H. F. Keenan published economic novels having the thesis that individualism should be unrestrained but at the same time cognizant of the rights of others. Hjalmar Hjorth Boyeson, Robert Grant, and Edith Wharton led the social revolt. But these forms of criticism only tore down and expressed contempt for existing conditions. There was advanced no foundation for the new America. There was nothing upon which to build an American culture.¹

There was no native philosophy in America. It had to come from Europe, from Locke, from Montesquieu and Rousseau through Zola. The movement had to be started by an American untouched by the evils of the period, by one unlike Hamlin Garland, the Adams brothers, Henry and Brooks, and Henry James, who were either disillusioned, dissatisfied, or destructive. America needed youthful blood, someone who could make the characteristic idealism compatible with the new conditions. This leader had to be one untouched by the sordidness of American life. He had to be one who could

¹Farrington, V 3 pp. 169-182
look unbiasedly at actual life in America and recognize its true values. This man was Frank Norris, who had been brought up in the romance of his imagination and who had retained his youthful illusions and sincerity sufficiently to develop a philosophy of life confident and forceful—an American philosophy untainted by skepticism. Hatchet states that Norris and Crane together offered a solid foundation for building an American fiction, but he also points out that, while Crane appealed to the reading public with his method, style, and choice of material, it was Norris who interpreted the real forces at work in American life.¹

Norris was able to interpret the real forces at work in the nation because he had had little personal contact with the turmoil of political, social, and economic affairs. Norris was kept on the sidelines of the battle of life. From the position of an unconcerned spectator he was able to view the situation with the proper perspective. While he was a boy his imagination had been developed and his sense of the dramatic sharpened. As he became acquainted with Kipling and Davis, he learned to find a story in the events which occurred in his own everyday world. And later, not being affected to any great extent by the practicalities which caused so many of his contemporaries to become cynical, he found a philosophy of life which reconciled his romantic nature and the actual life which he had lived and observed.

¹Hatchet, pp. 16-20
The evolution of Frank Norris from a daydreaming boy to the philosophical writer of the novel with a purpose can be traced through his works. Works published while he was in college have little significance except to emphasize the fact that he was essentially a romantic looking for a story.

Parrington divided the works of Norris into three groups: (1) Romance--Blix, Mormon of the Lady Letty; (2) Naturalism--McTeague, Vandover and the Brute; (3) The Pit and A Deal in Wheat. The Octopus is placed between the two latter groups, but it appears preferable to consider it along with The Pit. These two books, part of a trilogy left unfinished because of the author's untimely death, give us a picture of the mature man, the naturalistic philosopher who offered the best solution of the American muddle. The Octopus and The Pit are both a combination of romance and philosophical naturalism and reflect the integrated man even as they foreshadow an integrated nation.

To understand the accomplishment and the position of Norris in American letters it is well to consider his works in chronological order and the conditions under which his fiction was written. This will prove a better method than attempting to judge his works solely as pure literature. His nature and his personal environment had much greater influence upon his writing than did any "school" of literature.
Criticism of the stories written by Norris must be related to the life of the man, for he was a pioneer, not a literateur typical of a particular clique. Norris was not concerned with "fine writing". The story was what he wanted.

The writing of Norris may be traced from Yvernelle, and The Son of the Sheik, products of the boy's fanciful, romantic imagination, through The Jongleur of Taillebois to Vandover and the Brute and McTangle. From these novels, which reflect the cruel, inconsiderate, energetic animality of youth, Norris levels down to the more sane and mature in Moran of the Lady Betty and in Blix. A Man's Woman, although melodramatic and hyperbolical, marks the end of his period of preparation for his crowning achievements, The Octopae and The Pit.
CHAPTER IV

THE McTEAGUE PERIOD

At Harvard Frank Norris was far from being the novelist who was later to give such impetus to the development of the American novel. He was still in the formative period.

It is impossible to ascertain just when Norris discovered Zola, but it was during the time he spent at the University of California. Many of his friends testify that while at Berkeley he was frequently seen about the campus with a French paper edition of Zola under his arm and was always ready to stop and defend the novelist, who to him embodied strength and truth, not obscenity.\(^1\) Traces of the influence of Zola may be observed in the short stories which he wrote at that time, notably in "Son of a Sheik", which has already been commented upon.

Although Norris did forsake Scott and Froissart for Kipling, Davis, and Zola, it cannot be said that this was a revolt against his earlier favorites. It did not involve a change in the man. Rather his adoption of these new literary models was another step in the progress of his development. He relegated the style of Scott and Froissart to a place among the things of childhood, but not their spirit. That he did not give up romance altogether, but strove to mould the romantic spirit with the modern realistic

\(^1\)Walker, p. 62
style may be brought out by referring again to the editorial concerning Zola and his naturalism. "Naturalism, as understood by Zola, is but a form of Romance after all."

Nevertheless, for the time he had become so obsessed by the power of naturalism that he was overwhelmed by it. The result was _Vandover and the Brute_ and _McTeague_, which were replete with the cruelty and sordidness commonly associated at that time with the works of the naturalistic school.

Norris, however, understood Zola better than he understood naturalism. He did not appreciate the meaning of the philosophy behind the word. He was not aware that naturalism was a deterministic philosophy which made the individual the pawn of the forces of society and of the tenets of science—a robot directed by heredity and environment. Norris saw Zola as a crusader challenging a puritanical society to tear down the shams of convention and to present a story which was life and truth, and which could be so enjoyed.

When Norris wrote _Vandover and the Brute_ and _McTeague_, he was not a philosophical thinker. He was an enthusiastic youth determined to portray the facts and to prove that there was romance in everyday life if one chose the right point of view. In his zeal he was preparing the way to make possible the injection of optimism into a disillusioned American outlook, but he was not aware of the influence he
was to have upon the American way of living. He was concerned only with the story. "We don't want literature, we want life." And it was in his determination to present life—to show the drama and romance of it—that he turned to naturalism as a means of conveying life in its realistic detail, for, to him, life was romantic because it was real.

The divorce of his parents during his last year at Berkeley, although it by no means left him destitute, tended to bring about the recognition of the necessity for independence, and caused him to sympathize with the less fortunate classes. Released from his father's threat to make a businessman of him, Norris was able to give more attention to his literary career and to lay the foundation for the work he was to do at Harvard.

He became thoroughly acquainted with San Francisco. His increasing sympathy for the lower strata of society enabled him to consider the drama in the life of Polk Street. He noted the habits and conversation of drunkards and prostitutes of the Barbary Coast, the dress and behavior of the crowds of working people who attended the Mechanics Fair, and in his penchant for detail, an aptitude already expressed in Paris, he absorbed the drama in a type of existence which he had never before deemed worthy of his attention.

Still he remained subjectively unaffected by his experiences. Norris was not tainted by naturalistic dis-
illusionment, for in the boyishness which he retained throughout his lifetime he was interested only in the story which might be found. It was at this time that he issued the decree.

... that no one could be a writer, until he could regard life and people, and the world in general, from the objective point of view—until he could remain detached, outside, maintain the unswerving attitude of the observer.¹

With these ideas of where drama, a story, was to be found and a passion for Zola's method of presenting them, Norris went to Harvard to learn how to put his plans into effect.

Norris's success in realism was effected by his insistence upon minutely correct detail. The cruelty and horror of his naturalism was founded upon the theme, which under nearly all of his writing at that time, that beneath the veneer of civilization man is a brute. A copy of Lauth, written in his junior year at California, is not available, but Walker's discussion of it makes clear the fact that Norris was not a naturalist because he understood or accepted the naturalistic philosophy.

... The tale is in two parts, of which the first is a vivid account of an attack upon the Chatelet in mediæval Paris in which Lauth, a young student, takes part. In the thick of the fray Lauth kills a man with his arbalist. "At the sight of blood shed by his own hands all the animal savagery latent in every

¹Walker, p. 89
human being awoke within him. He could kill. In the
twinkling of an eye the pale, highly cultivated scholar,
whose life had been passed in the study of science and
abstruse questions of philosophy, sank back to the
level of his savage Celtic ancestors. His eyes glittered,
he moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue, and
his whole frame quivered with the eagerness and craving
of a panther in sight of his prey." Here appears a
favorite theme to be used from Vanover and the Brute
to The Octopus—the presence of the brute beneath the
veneer of civilization ...

Laouth is mortally wounded in the fight, and the
first part ends. The second opens with Jacquemart de
Chavannes, Doctor of Medicine and closest friend of
Laouth, speculating upon the nature of death ... Chavannes,
who does not believe in a soul, decides that
the life is still in the body, and with the aid of
Anselm, a reluctant divinity student, determines to
make it active once more. Together they work over the
body ... Slowly, surely, Laouth returns to life and his
former self; but one day he cries out, "This is not I;
where am I?" After which he falls upon the floor,
foaming and wallowing. The cry is the beginning of a
steady decline. "From this time on the process of decay
became rapidly more apparent; what little lustre yet
lurked in the eye went out, leaving it dull and
fish-like; the expression of the face lost all sem-
blance to humanity; the hair grew out long and coarse and
fell matted before the eyes. The nails became claws,
the teeth fangs, and one morning, upon entering the
room assigned to Laouth, Chavannes and Anselm found him
stripped, groveling on all fours in one corner of the
room, making a low monotonous growling sound, his
teeth rattling and snapping together." The process
continues until Laouth becomes "a horrible shapeless
mass lying upon the floor. It lived, but lived not
as do the animals or the trees, but as the protozoa,
the jelly-fish, and those strange lowest forms of
existence wherein the line between vegetable and
animal cannot be drawn." Finally the disease and decomposition
sets in.

"Now, what does it all mean?" asked Anselm.
"For a time Laouth lived, but the soul being taken away,
the whole body with the life it contained began
successively to drop back to the lower forms of existence.
At first, he existed merely as a dull and imbruted man;
soon he fell to the stage of those unfortunate whose
minds are impaired or wholly gone; he became an idiot.
At the time when he so savagely bit and snarled at you he had reached the level of the ape; from that stage he fell to that of a lower animal, walking upon all fours, savage, untameable; thence he passed into the lowest known forms of life such as possessed by the sponge and the polyp, and thence to the second and final death. The soul of man is the chiefest energy of his existence; take that away and he is no longer a man. 1

This quotation from "auth is certainly not Zola's philosophy. It is written in Zola's style, but the philosophy is that derived by Norris from Professor LeConte. Vanover and the Brute and McTeague have been called naturalistic novels. They are naturalistic because of the style of the author, not because of the philosophy which he tried to express. When Norris went to Harvard he simulated Zola's method of picturing life, cold and heartless, but he did not write French naturalistic philosophy. His philosophy was that which he had absorbed from Professor LeConte. There was nothing cynical about him. He saw life as a pulsating, dramatic experience, not a predetermined period of helplessness in which any act of man was no more than a futile gesture.

The new American philosophy had to come from Europe, but it had to come indirectly. The individualism of America could not be reconciled to the acceptance of a theory of complete dependence upon external circumstances. Because

1Walker, pp. 73-75
of their faith in the power of the individual, Americans could not countenance the thought that their entire existence was predetermined and beyond the control of their most sincere efforts at guidance.

Before Norris wrote the epic of the wheat, American intellects found themselves on the horns of a dilemma. There seemed to be no alternative other than European philosophy. But since that was unacceptable, American literature deteriorated to a state below that of the French realism. While Europeans, inured by time to subjugation, could accept a deterministic philosophy with a shrug of the shoulders and an indifferent smile, Americans, not being able to acquiesce in such a fate, were able only to complain and ridicule.

Fortunately Norris was burdened by none of these intellectual problems. He was not rendered cynical and ineffective by the oppression of American life, because he had no subjective contact with it. A writer must "remain detached, outside, maintain the unswerving attitude of the observer." He did not investigate European philosophy, because it did not occur to him to do so. He was a boy looking for drama and adventure. He found the drama of life in the evolutionary teachings of LeConte; he found the scenes and the acts in American life. His idea of the brutality beneath the surface of mankind, which he obtained from LeConte rather than Zola, and his Zolaistic method of
portraying it were in tone with the new realism. Not only his style made his novels attractive, but his point of view, which differed from that of Zola. Norris struck a note of realistic style which rang pleasingly in the ears of the cynical and the despondent, but he also gave them something to think about.

Norris did not, however, achieve this successful combination of stylistic and intellectual appeal until he wrote *The Octopus* and *The Pit*. At Harvard he became efficient in the Zola style, but he did not write naturalism philosophically. It was not until the uncontrollable spark of youth had settled down to a steady flame that he was able to give the American people a book that would demand their attention and at the same time revive their faith in ideals.

The purpose in the theme of Norris' first novels was not to promote a better way for humanity to live. Norris had little time for philosophical reflection. What was most important to him at this time was the faithful reporting of detailed facts. This was what the young Norris regarded as truth. In *Vendover and the Brute* and *McTeague* the thesis was a non-constructive illustration of Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest. They are simple presentations of the actual facts and conditions devoid of any interpretation of them in relation to the art of living. He was beginning to express what he thought to be
the elemental forces of life, but the effect of these forces upon society and upon the men and women living in society was not to be considered until he had attained a more mature perspective. The Harvard period was one during which he polished his style and acquired facility in putting his ideas on paper; but no profound philosophical theories came until he had mellowed with age.

One should think of *Vandover and the Brute* and *McTeague* as naturalistic novels, but naturalistic only in point of style. *Vandover and the Brute*, his first work in this type of any length, is an elaboration of "Leuth", which has been quoted. In this novel Norris followed the style of Zola more closely than in any of his later works. Its theme is drawn from "Leuth*. *Vandover and the Brute* is a drama of degeneration illustrating Norris' evolutionary theory of the two natures in man. Norris, according to his brother, Charles Norris, was "inspired, to a large degree, by the immorality of the undergraduates with whose lives he was familiar." The story centers about a character whom Norris thought that he himself might come to resemble, and tells of his life from birth to his ultimate deterioration into a hopeless victim of lycanthropy, a mental state which causes him to become like a dog. It portrays, in the vivid

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1Quoted by Walker, p. 97
manner of Zola, the gradual physical and moral decay of Vandover's sensitive nature.

That Norris at the time of writing *Vandover and the Brute* was not a naturalistic philosopher is, however, obvious in the book. The theme of "survival of the fittest" is taken care of by the presence of Charlie Geary, the "strong" in contrast to Vandover, the "weak". The last scene shows Vandover cleaning the waste from beneath the sink in a house which Geary, with his masterful will and ruthless ego, had stolen from him. Although very much emphasis is placed upon determinism as the cause for Vandover's degeneration, Norris fails to work this theme out logically or artistically. The weakness of the composition lay in the fact that Norris gave Vandover freedom of choice, but invented deterministic causes for his downfall to which it was not logical for the character whom he had created to respond. Norris, when he wrote *Vandover and the Brute*, was too much an optimistic American youth to make compatible a deterministic theory which made all of man's acts inevitable and moral, and his youthful training which had ingrained in him a sense of sin and retribution. Because he was not a naturalistic philosopher, he failed to achieve the objectivity required in a naturalistic novel.

*McTeague, like Vandover and the Brute*, is a psychological study of primordial instincts. It was begun while
Norris was a senior at Berkeley, but for some reason was laid aside until after Vandover was finished. In this novel Norris succeeded in dealing objectively with the amoral. McTeague is a study of the individual in relation to his immediate environment. Norris found it easier to adhere to the deterministic attitude because his chief character was presented as an individual handicapped with a sluggish mentality and inherited tendencies towards viciousness.

Polk Street called him the "Doctor" and spoke of his enormous strength. For McTeague was a young giant, carrying his huge shock of blond hair six feet three inches from the ground; moving his immense limbs, heavy with ropes of muscle, slowly, ponderously. His hands were enormous, red, and covered with a fall of stiff yellow hair; they were hard as wooden mallets, strong as vices, the hands of the old-time car-boy. Often he dispensed with forceps and extracted a refractory tooth with his thumb and finger. His head was square-cut, angular; the jaw salient, like that of the carnivora.

McTeague's mind was as his body, heavy, slow, to act, sluggish.¹

In so far as the style was a matter of concern, McTeague received widespread critical approval. It was condemned, however, as a dangerous book. The present-day reader would find nothing at which to lift an eyebrow, but in 1899 the discussion of sex in a novel was a violation of taboo. McTeague is pure realism. Vulgarity and brutality permeate the book from beginning to end. After the appearance of the first issue, public sentiment forced the publishers

¹Frank Norris, McTeague, (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1928) p. 3
to alter the original page 103. This deleted section is quoted by Walker.

The questionable episode came at the end of the Orpheum party to which the dentist took his fiancée, Trina, her mother, and her younger brother "Owgooste." The expurgated page reads as follows:

"However, while the unfortunate Irish comedian went through his 'act' to the backs of the departing people, Mrs. Steppie woke Owgooste, and got her 'things together.'

'Save der programme, Trina,' whispered Mrs. Steppie. 'Take ut home to popper. Where is der hat of Owgooste? Haf you got mein handkerchief, Trina?'

"But at this moment a dreadful accident happened to Owgooste; his distress reached its climax; his fortitude collapsed. What a misery! It was a veritable catastrophe, deplorable, lamentable, a thing beyond words! For a moment he gazed wildly about, helpless and petrified with astonishment and terror. Then his grief found utterance, and the closing strains of the orchestra were mingled with a prolonged wall of infinite sadness.

'Owgooste, what is ut?' cried his mother, eyeing him with dawning suspicion; then suddenly: "What haf you done? You haf ruin your new Vauntleroy costume!" Her face blazed; without more ado she smacked him soundly. Then it was that Owgooste touched the limit of his misery; his unhappiness, his horrible discomfort, his utter wretchedness was complete. He filled the air with his doleful outcry. The more he was smacked and shaken, the more he wept.

'What—what is the matter?' inquired McTeague.

'Trina's face was scarlet. 'Nothing, nothing,' she exclaimed hastily, looking away. 'Come, we must be going. It's about over.' The end of the show and the breaking up of the audience tided over the embarrassment of the moment.

The incident was replaced by a page describing McTeague's difficulty in finding his hat."

The critics who catered to the public taste condemned the novel. But McTeague was enthusiastically welcomed by those conscious of the change that was taking

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1Walker, pp. 221-22
place in the nation and in its literature. McTeague was the American counterpart of European realism that had been so eagerly awaited. Theodore Dreiser commended Norris for "a peculiar sensitiveness to the variations and pitiable inevitabilities of such lives and incidents as are set forth in this book." Dreiser called him "a keen, and more inspired observer, and a painter of the greatest skill—sensitive, vigorous, daring, and with a palette as colourful as life itself." 

When Norris wrote McTeague, he was all that Dreiser said of him and more. Seldom has the underlying quality of an individual's character been brought to the surface more picturesquely than by Norris in his portrayal of Zerkow, the greedy junk-dealer, lusting in the gluttonous luxury of the idiotic housekeeper's wonderful tale of the service of gold plate.

"Tell us about it again," said Zerkow, his bloodless lower lip moving against the upper, his claw-like fingers feeling about his mouth and chin. "Tell about it; go on."

He was breathing short, his limbs trembled a little. It was as if some hungry beast had scented a quarry.

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But what misery Zerkow endured as he listened to her tale! For he chose to believe it, forced himself to believe it, lashed and harassed by a pitiless greed that checked at no tale of treasure, however preposterous. The story ravished him with delight. He was near someone who had possessed this wealth. He saw someone who had seen this pile of gold. He seemed near it; it was there, somewhere close by, under his eyes, under his fingers; it was red, gleaming, ponderous. He

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1McTeague, Introduction
gazed about him wildly; nothing, nothing but the sordid junkshop and the rust-corroded tins. What exasperation, what positive misery, to be so near it, and yet to know that it was irrevocably, irrevocably lost! A spasm of anguish passed through him. He gnawed at his bloodless lips, at the hopelessness of it, the rage, the fury of it.

"Go on, go on," he whispered; "let's have it all over again...."

"A million dollars," he muttered in his rasping guttural whisper, his finger-tips wandering over his thin, cat-like lips. "A golden service worth a million dollars; a punch-bowl worth a fortune; red-gold plates, beaps and piles. God!"

Such is the tone of McTeague. The bestial desire with which Zerkow longs for gold is the same barbaric passion with which McTeague longs for Trina. In fact the movie adapted from the book was entitled Creed.

McTeague succeeded notably in Americanizing realism. It is an exceptionally fine piece of detailed reportorial work. McTeague was an unconscious imitation of French naturalistic philosophy, but it is not an example of Norris' naturalistic philosophy. The book lacked the spiritual force which entered into his works at a later date and gave to them the human quality. William Dean Howells recognized this shortcoming. Howells discussed this point in a review of the novel.

Mr. Norris has, in fact, learned his lesson well, but he has not learned it all. His true picture of life is not true, because it leaves beauty out. Life is eualid and cruel and vile and hateful, but it is noble and tender and pure and lovely, too. By and by he will put these traits in, and then his powerful scene will be a reflection of reality;
by and by he will achieve something of the impartial fidelity of the photograph. In the meantime he has done a picture of life which has form, which has texture, which has color, which has what great original power and ardent study of Zola give, but which lacks the spiritual light and air, the consecration which the larger art of Tolstoy gives. It is a little inhuman, and is distinctly not for the walls of living-rooms, where the ladies of the family sit and the children go in and out. This may not be a penalty, but it is the inevitable consequence of expansion in fiction.  

Howells' criticism of the novel affirms the observation that Norris was not a finished naturalistic philosopher when McTeague was written. It is quite obvious that by achieving "the impartial fidelity of a photograph" Howells did not mean a journalistic array of details without consideration for relative values. Rather he meant that Norris, as he became more mature, would be able to portray life properly interpreted, evaluated, colored, and emphasized in its true proportions.

That Norris was influenced by Howells' criticism to give more heed to the intellectual side of his work is very possible. Norris was acquainted with Howells and took notice of Howells' opinion of McTeague. The criticism was acknowledged in a letter written in March, 1893: "Need I say how delighted I am over your review? . . . . It has encouraged me more than anything that has ever been said of my work."  

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1 Quoted by Walker, p. 228.

2 In The Life In Letters of William Dean Howells, (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1928) v.2 p. 102
Whether or not Howells' criticism had any effect upon Norris' attitude towards his work, the stories, Moran of the Lady Letty and Blix, are tempered with a more thoughtful note.
CHAPTER V

TRANSITION

After Norris left Harvard, he decided to go to Africa in search of experience which might help him in his later writing. He tried to get a contract with *Harper's Weekly* as a correspondent covering the British difficulties with the Boers in South Africa. Finally he made arrangements with the *San Francisco Chronicle* to publish his letters. His related experiences, among them attendance at the Johannesburg defeat of Dr. Jameson, Rhodes' lieutenant, are representative of his creative ability and his gift for reporting in vivid detail.

The South African adventure tended to make Norris more cosmopolitan and to increase his consciousness of world affairs. While there he also experienced an attack of tropical fever which later added to the complications which brought on his death.

Upon his return to San Francisco Norris joined the *San Francisco Wave*. The minute observation and effective expression required in journalism served as excellent preparation for his writing career. Besides the routine work of the newspaper, Norris spent much time writing feature articles dealing with life in San Francisco, and sketches and stories which he later enlarged in his novels.

The life which Norris, the journalist led in San
Francisco is related in the autobiographical novel, Blix.
In Blix Norris tells of the circumstances which led to
the writing of Moran of the Lady Letty.

Although Moran of the Lady Letty was published be-
fore the appearance of McTeague, it is a product of a
later period in his life. Whereas McTeague resulted from
the college boy's burst of energy which took the form of
naturalism, cruel and realistic, Moran of the Lady Letty
was inspired by the yarns of Captain Joseph Hodgson, the
retired "Captain Jack" of Blix. McTeague was finished
while Norris recuperated from the attack of fever after
his return from South Africa. Moran of the Lady Letty was
written after he had begun to find the romance in San Fran-
cisco's byways—which only a newspaper reporter would have
occasion to find.

The discovery of Captain Hodgson brought back the
Kipling influence. Captain Hodgson had sailed the seas
since he was seventeen, and during that time had gathered
a wealth of slyly tales. At the time Norris found him, he
was in charge of the Fort Point Coast Guard station. And
as is recounted in Blix, Norris and his fiancée, Jeannette
Black, the original Blix, spent hours listening to the
narratives which the old sailor recounted.

Moran appeared in weekly installments in the Wave
as Captain Hodgson told his stories. Moran was the modern
Brunhilda of his freshman year in college imbued with the old Viking spirit. It was the saga type of story of his boyhood garnished with hugeness and brutality. The story was built around a physical encounter between a society youth and a barbaric Norse maiden, wherein the girl learns to love by being conquered, and the boy is regenerated by contact with the primitive.

Morris' vitality and the effects of Professor Le Conte upon his personality are reflected in a letter written to Harry H. Wright, who was reading the newspaper installments.

... You're quite right about Wilbur, he is a mere nit until after we get into a fight with the beach-combers for the ambergris. That makes a man of him. My game was to (have) them all nits and bring out Moran in full value. You see the thing is hardly more than a sketch. ... Moran is the only excuse for the yarn. ... You know Moran and Wilbur have a most god-awful fight in the next chapter. In the fight with the beach-combers, she gets to fighting 'Besarky' crazy in the head, j'know, and turns on Wilbur. He fights back like a good fellow and does her up. That cracks her spirit—you see and then she begins to love him—savvy.

Morris retained his love for the primitive, and it was to stay with him throughout the rest of his short life. But the ending of Moran of the Lady Letty is decidedly different from that of McTeague. The despondency and despair of Sola were laid aside. The fury of unbridled nature was broken and guided to a calm and peaceful happy ending.

Moran of the Lady Letty was read by S. S. McClure. McClure wrote and told Norris that he would publish the

1Quoted by Walker, pp. 162-3
story. McClure also suggested that Norris come to New York to write for McClure's Magazine. In New York Norris knew few friends and had little money. These conditions furthered his ambitions to work hard. He completed Moran of the Lady Letty and set about the composition of Blix.

When Norris left for New York, he was in love with Jeannette Black, a sub-debutante whom he had met in the fall of 1896. This affair calmed his reckless flights of energy even as Wilbur had tamed Moran. In Blix he states that "Blix had steadied him, and a certain earnestness and seriousness of purpose, a certain strength he had not known before, came swiftly into being."

Blix is not a great novel, but it is important in the study of Norris' development. It covers the period spent in San Francisco after his return from South Africa. McTeague was completed during this time. Blix explains the tempering of the crude realistic manner of McTeague. The experiences recounted in Blix brought him nearer to the true naturalism of his maturity than he had been at any time while writing McTeague.

As has been pointed out, McTeague was a naturalistic novel from the critics' point of view, but not from that of the authors. It is generally agreed that Norris in his boyishness imitated Zola only in style because that style so...

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1Frank Norris, Blix, (New York: International Association of Newspapers and Authors, 1901) p. 284
aptly fitted the viciousness of the evolutionary theories he had inherited from Professor Le Conte. The imitation of Zola’s naturalism was incidental and unconscious.¹

During the Blix period he did not give up his conception of the animal in man. This period is the beginning of a maturing process. Earlier he had written of man as a brute, savage and wildly uncontrollable. His youthful enthusiasm had carried him off in a burst of animal energy just as he had flown with Froissart. Never before had he given time to thought, for Frank Norris had always been a boy.

His association with Miss Black, with its accompanying responsibilities, did not dull his boyish joie de vivre, but his recklessness was curbed. He was forced to direct his acts in consideration of others, which condition gave rise to thought concerning the meaning of what he did or did not do. He became acquainted with the human side of life.

The influence of Miss Black upon Norris is inestimable. Shortly before he met her he wrote in a review of a contemporary novel:

"... The idealists will close their eyes to the fact that after all men and women are only human. Even the word human is misleading. Is it

¹Marcosson, p. 239
not even truer that so-called humanity still is, and for countless generations will be, three-fourths animal, living and dying, eating and sleeping, mating and reproducing even as the animals?"¹

But beginning with Blix his work reveals that about two-fourths of the animal in his personality had been replaced by Jeannette Black. Vandover, who drifted through life to tragedy, was the man Norris believed he himself might become. Condy Rivers, the hero of Blix, was Vandover saved from the tragedy to which his unguided bursts of animal enthusiasm (characteristic of the collegiate Norris) might have led him. Condy Rivers, Norris of the post-college period, was saved by his love for Blix, Jeannette Black. This love filled him with "a certain strength which he had not known before."

When Norris emerged from his recuperation in the mountains, he had nothing in particular to do and had little incentive to do it. He found several of his old friends in San Francisco, and became something of a boulevardier. There were horses, women, and poker to be played, and Norris nonchalantly made the rounds.

The insistence of his mother forced Frank into the life of San Francisco society. At a sub-debutante dance he met the seventeen-year-old Jeannette and began to carry on what he considered an inconsequential flirtation. "Be-

¹Quoted by Walker, p. 148
cause she was so very pretty, so unaffected, and so good-natured, he had found means to see her three or four times a week." Thus Norris speaks of Condy's meeting with Blix.

But the sophisticated playboy found Blix to be different in more ways than one.

"Ah, now!" exclaimed Travis, with a brusque movement, "there's another thing we must talk about. No more foolishness between us. We've had a jolly little flirtation, I know, and it's been good fun while it lasted. I know you like me, and you know that I like you; but as for loving each other, you know we don't. Yes, you say that you love me and that I'm the only girl. That's part of the game. I can play it"—her little eyes began to dance—"quite as well as you. But it's playing with something that's quite too serious to be played with—after all, isn't it, now? It's insincere, and, as I tell you, from now on I'm going to be as true and as sincere and as honest as I can."

"But I tell you that I do love you," protested Condy, trying to make the words ring true.

"... Condy Rivers, look at me straight in the eye. Tell me, do you honestly love me? You know what I mean when I say 'love.' Do you love me?"

"No, I don't!" he exclaimed blankly, as though he had just discovered the fact.

"Now," added Travis, "we don't need to have the burden and trouble of keeping up the pretenses any more. We understand each other, don't we?"

"... Why—why—Travis—by Jingo! Travis, I think I'm going to like you better than ever now."

After that little episode had straightened things out for the two young people, they disregarded the routine of social parties and functions. They disdained the conventional life of society as a hypocritical existence to be avoided as a menace to their integrity. Norris and

1Blix, pp. 38-39
Miss Black roamed the streets of San Francisco and played together, not as man and woman, but as two people thoroughly enjoying life.

They contrived a plot to write to two people advertising for mates in the personal columns of a newspaper, and arranged for them to meet at a restaurant. The plan succeeded. In Blix the situation was altered a bit. The man was pictured as Captain Hodgson. The couple married and Condy and Blix found them. Subsequent visits to the coast guard station of which "Captain Jack" was in command reveal the circumstances which led to the writing of Moran of the Lady Letty.

During that summer Norris and Jeannette did all the things that they really wanted to do, oblivious to the format etiquette of conventional society. The break from their acquaintances threw them closer together. They went fishing together, played poker, and soon had grown utterly dependent upon one another. They grew to know each other, intimately. Jeannette learned to understand Frank and to appreciate his literary problems. He found her to be understanding, alert to his work, and helpful.

The time came, however, for Frank to go to New York and for Jeannette to leave for school. As the date of their separation became imminent, the realization of their need for one another suddenly dawned upon both of them. Norris re-creates the climax of their affair in Blix.
Condy had found out that he loved Blix just in time to make the pain of parting more keen. But he could not tell her because they had made an agreement not to be sentimental, and he knew that she did not love him. It was torture for him, but he did love her because that love had made a man of him—had given him such strength that he could be silent. Despite his fortitude Blix knew what had happened to him.

"You know—know—know what?" he exclaimed, breathless.

"That you have been pretending that you did not love me. I know that you do love me—I know you have been trying to keep it from me for fear it would spoil our good times, and because we had made up our minds to be chums, and have 'no more foolishness.' Once—in those days when we first knew each other—I knew you did not love me when you said you did; but now, since—oh, since that afternoon in the Chinese restaurant, remember?—I've known that you did love me, although you pretended you didn't. It was the pretense I wanted to be rid of; I wanted to be rid of it when you said you loved me and didn't, and I want to be rid of it now when you pretend not to love me and I know you do."

The months that Norris spent with Jeannette Black in San Francisco had been months of romance and adventure. Norris, when he went to New York in response to McClure's call, was a changed person. He himself was not quite sure what had happened to him, but he did realize that he had a different point of view. In March, 1899, he replied to Marcoussis's review of *McTeague*, and spoke of Blix, which he

\[1\text{Blix, pp. 315-16}\]
wrote in New York a year after the events narrated took place.

My next novel is 'Blix.' The ms. is just finished and Doubleday has already put it in hand for the coming season. It is as different from 'McTeague' as 'McTeague' was different from 'Moran.' It is essentially a love story. But what I have tried to do was to turn out a love story that should not slop over. No sentimentality--everything healthy and clean and natural. 'Blix' does not belong to any 'school' so far as I can see. It's not naturalism and it's not romanticism; it's just a story. Nothing very violent happens. There are no disagreeable people in it and it finishes--to my notion--happily.

* * * There is no dirt in it, none of the grime and grubble of the Polk Street business, unavoidable as they were.1

Norris still contended that "we don't want literature, we want life." He still maintained that truth was the all-important factor in the novel. But he was ready to make the concession that the grime and grubble of Polk Street was not absolute truth despite the fact that they were unavoidable in a novel such as McTeague.

After Norris had been in New York for a while, he met William Dean Howells, with whom he became quite friendly. His association with Miss Black helped Norris recognize the meaning of Howells' criticism of McTeague, in which he observed that Norris' true picture of life was not true because it left beauty out. There is little doubt that these two people, Howells and Miss Black, taught him what the word "human" really signified. After he left San Francisco and became acquainted with Howells, Norris' work began to assume the integrity which was so painfully lacking in

1Marcosson, pp. 234-5
McTeague. Blix was a reaction from his San Francisco adventure. But A Man's Woman, which followed, not only vibrated with energy and keen understanding of primitive forces, but was marked by the injection of human qualities into the characters.

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A Man's Woman is the story of the clash of two characters of extraordinary power. Ward Bennett is an indomitable arctic explorer, and Lloyd Seabright is a conscientious, determined nurse. The clash occurs when Bennett returns from an expedition and, fearing that Miss Seabright will contract typhoid if she goes through with her resolution to take a hopeless case, breaks her spirit by preventing her from accomplishing what she considers her duty.

Christopher Morley is amused by the combination of evidences of Norris' genius with a wood-pulp plot.1 Walker calls it a homeless orphan. A Man's Woman is not a commendable novel when judged objectively, but it is a case in point to show that his best work resulted from the combination of a Zolaesque style tempered by an original philosophy.

Rather than being a homeless orphan, A Man's Woman has a very definite place in the development of the finished

1Frank Norris, A Man's Woman, (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1923) foreword
novelist. Its composition was his first step towards the blend of the bestial McTeague and the human Blix.

The plot of A Man's Woman was of wood-pulp quality, because Norris laid aside the Zola-like construction which might have carried him down to degeneration. In McTeague he had mastered the deterministic technique. Now he had human qualities which would struggle against the forces of nature. This was a new aspect of human nature to him, and it is not surprising that the story became a melodrama. Norris retained his faith in the power of primitive forces. The book is plentifully sprinkled with such words as "diapason", "bourdon", "primordial" and others, conveying the impression of brute strength; the capitalized word, "Enemy", symbolized the menacing hand of death on the ice floes and in the operating-room. But in A Man's Woman nature became a force outside man. The characters were offered not as beasts, but as human beings fighting against the forces which would destroy them. In Norris's previous naturalistic work the struggle had been between two beasts; and the stronger beast, not the stronger human being, was victorious. In A Man's Woman the human element entered to fight against the brutality of nature. It is the story of the clash of two characters of extraordinary power, but in the clash neither subdues the other. They both rise above their animal natures to meet as human beings.

McTeague had found himself destitute; the beast in
him had taken charge and he had murdered his wife and taken her money. Bennett found himself and his men destitute in the frozen North. The situation appeared hopeless, the beast in him strained to go mad, but the man prevailed.

Bennett stood looking. Before him lay his task. There under his eyes was the Enemy. Face to face with him was the titanic primal strength of a chaotic world, the stupendous still force of a merciless nature, waiting calmly, waiting silently to close upon and crush him... "But I'll break you, by God! believe me, I will."  

It was the force of the human nature of the characters in *A Man's Woman* that conquered the power of their animal natures, Lloyd did not submit to the over-powering strength of the man-beast as Trina had submitted to McTeague. When Trina thought of McTeague, she knew that "he had only to take her in his arms, to crush down her struggle with his enormous strength, to subdue her, conquer her by sheer brute force, and she gave up in an instant." But it was not so with Lloyd. Norris had learned something from Jeannette Black. Lloyd wanted more than physical passion. The animal in Bennett was repulsive to her. Bennett had used brute force to prevent her from going to her patient as he moaned for help. Lloyd saw only an animal ravenously clutching her to him for himself. After that she could not love him because she believed that, if he could not respect her human character, her human courage, her human consciousness of

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1 *A Man's Woman*, p. 5
duty, he could not be human himself. It was hard for Lloyd to think that her love had vanished. She tried desperately to think of him as the man she had thought him to be when she had professed her love for him.

But it was all of no effect. That Bennett was worse than dead to her. The Bennett that now came to her mind and imagination was the brutal, perverse man of the breakfast room at Medford, coarse, insolent, intractable, stamping out all that was finest in her, breaking and flinging away the very gifts that he had inspired her to offer him. It was nothing to him that she should stand degraded in the eyes of the world. He did not want her to be brave and strong. She had been wrong; it was not that kind of woman he desired. He had not acknowledged that she, too, as well as he—a woman as well as a man might have her principles, her standards of honour, her ideas of duty. It was not her character, then, that he prized; the nobility of her nature was nothing to him; he took no thought of the fine-wrought texture of her mind. How, then, did she appeal to him? It was not her mind, it was not her soul. What, then, was left? Nothing but the physical. The shame of it; the degradation of it! To be so cruelly mistaken in the man she loved, to be able to appeal to him only on his lower side. . . .
The Bennett she had known and loved had been merely a creature of her own imagining; the real man had suddenly discovered himself; and this man, in spite of herself, she hated as a victim hates its tyrant.1

The story is a failure because Norris resorted to melodrama in order to bring about the reconciliation of the protagonists. Bennett is caused to perceive dimly the significance of what he has done. Lloyd is sent from the hospital to nurse him through a serious illness, learns that he is human after all, and proceeds to develop him into a mighty human being.

It was difficult for Norris because it was dif-

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1A Man's Woman, pp. 148-9
ferent. The struggle, had it been written in the Moran period, would have ended differently. Lloyd would have submitted to the stronger animal. She would have loved Bennett after he had prevented her from performing her duty. But Norris made her hate him after his conquest because he was not human. Lack of experience with human qualities forced Norris to resort to the melodramatic.

A Man's Woman is not an important novel in American literature. It is important in the life of Frank Norris. It was a signal of the approach of The Octopus and The Pit, which marked the fruition of Norris' powers.
CHAPTER VI

THE OCTOPUS AND THE PIT

By 1899 Norris had attained the finesse and polish for which he had so seriously striven. Now he was ready for something big, and he struck an idea "as big as all outdoors." He had determined to write a novel which would measure up to the standards of McTeague. It was to deal with man's struggle with nature. McTeague had been a personal novel, but now he planned to write the American novel, a sociological novel. Norris decided to include the conquering of the frontier and the phenomenal growth of business enterprise which had transformed the country.

Such a wide field would require a series of novels. Nature had to be compacted into one symbol which would embrace all phases of the evolution of the nation. Norris chose wheat to be the symbol. He planned to show that nature produced the wheat, and guided its progress around the world. The epic of the wheat would be written in a trilogy illustrating the dominance of nature, through its agent, wheat, over the producers, the distributors, and the consumers.

The trilogy was never completed because of Norris' death. The first two, however, are an expression of the typical naturalism of Norris. It was not a cynical, desp-
nature, but it perceived her as a benevolent mother. It justified American individualism by explaining that the successful exploiters were inevitable bound to the wheel of fortune when it swung to its apex. It reassured Americans who wished to believe forever in the possibilities of the future. It pictured nature as a bountiful philanthropist ready to smile upon those who complied with her laws, frowning only when attempts to frustrate and domineer over her were made.

The Octopus is an allegory of symbolism which Norris preached with inspirational fervour. To Norris, wheat was God, and he spelled the word with a capital letter throughout the book. The octopus symbolizes the railroad-capitalism--stretching out its tentacles to grasp everything within reach. The conflict comes between the railroad and the wheat-growers. The railroad conquers because "Wheat" settles the confusion. It is bigger than either the growers or the railroad, but it preserves the railroad and destroys the farmers who try to control it, because the railroad is needed by the wheat in its journey around the world.

The course of the story runs in analogy with the course of human thought since the Reformation and ends with the complete "enlightenment". Norris tells of the experiences of Presly and Vanamee, who observe the power of the wheat, submit, are enlightened in the "Truth", and are made whole. Together Presly and vanamee develop in analogy with
man's movement towards "enlightenment"—from introspective spirituality, through idealism, through pure materialism to "Truth". The "poisonous" spirituality of the imagination is overcome, the hang-over from indulgence in the delusions of fantasy is cleared, and the "vision" is made apparent.

Presly observed the working of nature in relation to society as a whole; Vanamce found the position of man in the mechanism of the god. Norris set out to write a novel with a purpose, which he had discussed in the essay previously mentioned. He planned to write a novel which would go into the home to stay—a novel which would effect the lives of those who would read it. To make the lesson which it taught more emphatic, Norris created Presly, a person possessing a temperament which might not be moved except by the force of a great power. When Presly would humble himself before nature, it was to be immediately concluded that the strength of nature must be indomitable. Presly is offered to the reader as a person whom Norris considers unfortunately deluded:

... nervous, introspective, possessing a mental life not at all the result of impressions and sensations that came to him from without, but rather of thoughts and reflections germinating from within. ... His temperament was that of the poet; when he told himself that he had been thinking, he deceived himself. He had, on such occasions, been only brooding.¹

So Norris shows us refinement—a refinement that lies not in transcending reflection. That is self-deception. That is the invalid germination of thoughts from within. Introspection is contrary to the proper mental life, which is the result of the material impressions and sensations that come from without. There is no thought that germinates from within; such activity is not thinking, but brooding.

Norris commenced with the establishment of the hypothesis that man must not withdraw from the activity of nature, but should become a part of that mechanism. In order to make this argument more pointed, he pictured Presly as a man so engulfed in the darkness of spirituality accumulated by generations of humanity that he was able to distinguish no more than a blur of harsh outlines and crude and violent colors. Step by step Norris imparted to him the ability to discern the real significance of the functions of nature which he saw operating about him.

Presly wandered through the countryside and observed the coming of the harvest season. It seemed as though "the earth after its period of reproduction, its pains of labor, had been delivered of the fruit of its loins." Presly might then have recognized nature as a loving personality, but he was forced to watch the struggle between the railroad and the ranchers. The suffering of the ranchers touched him, and there arose the problem of reconciling such cruelty with the beauties of nature. Norris allowed Presly to retain his idea of the greatness of man until the full force
of the "Truth" dawned upon him. He created instance after instance to emphasize the contrast between the harmony of nature and the constant discord among mankind. Presly became occupied with the problems of the people because there was the problem of life.

Gradually Presly's faith in human nature, judged by what he saw around him, was shaken. He visited a decayed and dying town, which, until the railroad came, had witnessed the fierce and brilliant life of cattle-raising. There he ate, and fell into conversation with a Spanish-American centenarian who told Presly tales of the days of the past. Presly was given cause for reflection.

All his doubt and uncertainty returned to him. Never would he grasp the subject of his great poem. Today, the life was colorless. Romance was dead. He had lived too late. To write of the past was not what he desired. Reality was what he longed for, things that he had seen. Yet how to make this compatible with romance.  

Here is a picture of Norris' own struggle. He had searched for romance in reality, and Presly must find it as he had found it. Norris toys with Presly, throwing him back time and again into the old introspective life, with thoughts and reflections germinating from within. Subtly building up an atmosphere permeated with the naturalistic spirit. Norris causes Presly frequently to make misinterpretations, in order that the futility of the latter's mental state and the irrefutability of naturalism may finally be brilliantly clarified.

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1The Octopus, pp. 22-23
Vanamee relates to Presly the adventures of his nomadic life in the great Southwest. Presly realizes that "Life," "Truth" is there, but the "poison" ingrained in his mind drives him back for a transcendental interpretation. When vanamee advises that, rather than write about it, he should live in it, Presly demurs. He cannot lose himself in Vanamee's desert. He must retain his individuality.

Presly began to feel the strength of the wheat—its universality, the effects of a drought on the prairies of Dakota, a rain on the plains of India, a frost on the Russian steppes, a hot wind on the llanos of Argentina. Still he persisted in the belief that "Truth" was to be found in man alone—in his rational defense against and victory over the various factors which would ravage him.

Presly is a spectator of the fight between the ranchers and the railroad. This clash is between man and man. Norris builds the story around this incident in order to illustrate the futility of men's fighting one another for something which they can never dominate.

Once more Presly's faith in human nature is shaken by the revelation of the true colors of his friend and benefactor, whom he has admired as a man of principle. Presly fought on the ranchers' side because he sincerely believed in the righteousness of their cause. He learned, however, that they themselves were concerned only with the acquisition of personal wealth and magnitude. After a talk with Shelgrim, the president of the railroad, Presly discovered
that the capitalists were no more at fault than the ranchers.

"Believe this, young man," exclaimed Shelgrim, laying a think powerful forefinger on the table to emphasize his words, "try to believe this--to begin with--that Railroads build themselves. Where there is a demand sooner or later there will be a supply. Mr. Derrick, does he grow his wheat? The Wheat grows itself. What does he count for? Do I build the Railroad? You are dealing with forces, young man, when you speak of Wheat, and the railroads, not with men. There is the Wheat, the supply. It must be carried to feed the People. There is the demand. The Wheat is one force, the Railroad, another, and there is the law that governs them--supply and demand. Men have only little to do in the whole business. Complications may arise, conditions that bear hard on the individual--crush him maybe--but the Wheat will be carried to feed the people as inevitably as it will grow. If you want to hasten the blame of the affair at Los Muertos on any one person, you will make a mistake. Blame conditions, not men."

And to make the "Vision" more definitely fixed in Presly's mind, Norris has him listen to Vanamoo once more.

"Death and grief are little things," he said. "They are transient. Life must be before death, and joy before grief. Else there are no such things as death and grief. These are only negatives. Life is positive. Death is only the absence of life, just as night is only the absence of day, and if this is so, there is no such thing as death. There is only life, and the suppression of life, that we, foolishly, say is death. 'Suppression,' I say, not extinction. I do not say that life returns. Life never departs. Life simply is. For certain seasons, it is hidden in the dark, but is that death, extinction, annihilation? I take it, thank God, that it is not. Does the grain of wheat, hidden for certain seasons in the dark, die? The grain we think is dead resumes again; but how? Not as one grain, but as twenty. So all life. Death is only real for all the detritus of the world, for all the sorrow, for all the injustice, for all the grief... Presly, the good never dies; evil dies, cruelty, oppression, selfishness, greed--these die; but nobility, but love, but sacrifice, but generosity, but truth, thank God for it, small as they are, difficult as it is to discover them--these live forever, these are eternal... What is it, that remains after all is over,

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1The Octopus, pp. 575-76
after the dead are buried and the hearts are broken? Look at it all from the vast heights of humanity—'the greatest good to the greatest numbers'. What remains? Men perish, men are corrupted, hearts are rent asunder, but what remains untouched, unassailed, undefiled? Try to find that, not only in this, but in every crisis of the world's life, and you will find, if your view be large enough, that it is not evil, but good that remains.¹

Norris has here stated the assumption upon which his theory is based. Nature lives longer than man. It always remains, not because it is a perpetual gift from the Almighty to all mankind as long as there is mankind, but because it itself is truth. It is not truth relative to man, not truth by the mere reason of its existence in being. It is Absolute Truth.

The "revelation" did not grow upon Vanamee as it did upon Fresly. It burst upon the former in a brilliant metaphor. Vanamee had been desperately in love with Angele, who met a tragic death while love was still in bloom. He gave up his life in despair and wandered aimlessly wherever the mood of the minute directed him. He became a mystic and believed that some spiritual power could bring her back to him. For years he struggled with his grief. Norris bestowed upon him powers of mental telepathy, and Vanamee finally decided to attempt their use to get in touch with Angele. Its force directed Vanamee to the graveyard where Angele was buried. All through the spring he spent the evenings lying and waiting for her to come to him. As the spring grew richer and richer, Vanamee felt Angele nearer and nearer. Then one night it

¹ The Octopus, pp. 635-36.
happened.

... She stood before him, a Vision realized. ... She emerged from out the invisible. ... She, a creation of sleep, was asleep herself. ...

Called forth from out the darkness, from the grip of the earth, the embrace of the grave, from out the memory of corruption, she came into light and life, divinely pure. ... Years had made no difference with her. She was still young. It was the old purity that returned, the deathless beauty, the ever-renaissance, the eternal consecrated and immortal youth. ...

... She was gone.

Sarria (the Priest) was there. "I saw her. It was your Angele's daughter." ... ...

... It was she. Death was overcome. The grave vanquished. Life, ever-renewed, alone existed. Time was naught; all things were immortal but evil; all things eternal but grief.

Suddenly the dawn came. ... At length, he paused upon the crest of a hill overlooking the ranchos, and cast his eye below him to the southward. Then suddenly flinging up his eyes, he uttered a great cry.

There it was. The Wheat. The Wheat. In the night it had come up, ... Why had he not had the knowledge of God? Thou Fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die. So the seed had died. So Angele died. And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body shall be, but bare grain. It may chance be of wheat, or of some other grain. The wheat called forth from out the darkness, from out the grip of the earth, of the grave, of cut corruption, rose triumphant into light and life. So Angele, so life, so the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in dishonour. It is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness. It is raised in power. Death was swallowed up in Victory.¹

This is a remarkable description of the coming of spring; a most ingenious paraphrase of the Bible—original sin, the resurrection of the dead, and life everlasting; a sermon to which American society of the 1900's would append, "Amen". The function of "Nature" was made clear. In this single aspect of life Vanamee saw all things—

¹The Octopus, pp. 391-92
reality, eternity, "Absolute Truth." He saw that nature was not a manifestation of God, but "God Itself". Evil is not evil, but only a condition that good may ensue. Resurrection was seen as the transmission of energy to a different form of being. Eternity was understood as continuity.

Vanamee's "enlightenment" was a personal experience more restricted than Presly's. Vanamee was a poet by nature. Presly was a poet by intent. The former searched for Truth in relation to himself and his personal problems. Presly was concerned, not only with himself, but with all mankind, all being.

Norris elucidates the personal factor of naturalism through Vanamee. The broader, more extensive side, its relationship to mankind in general is symbolized in the character of Presly. Presly is shown the effect of wheat upon the entire valley and upon its inhabitants. He is made to understand that nature is more powerful than man. His acquaintance with Vanamee enables him to adjust the conscious personality of man, which is so sensitive in himself, to the unitary function of nature as a complete entity. He attains the larger view that nature as a whole is good despite the apparent forcefulness of temporarily misunderstood conditions, which because of their immediacy seem evil.

Whether or not one would quarrel with Norris' philosophy, it cannot be denied that he has presented a picture of the thoughts and opinions of his time. He has showed us
the confusion and distress in which the intellectuals found themselves. He has interpreted the meaning of men's actions, and offered a solution. There is no evil according to Norris. So those who suffer and are crushed because of the good fortune of others are, personally, perhaps in an unfortunate position, but they contribute through Nature's law, to the 'greatest good for the greatest number.' Thus Norris made it possible for the capitalists to justify themselves in their individualism, and the rest could remain optimistic in the hope that some day their position would be favorable.
The Pit, the second novel of the trilogy, bears a resemblance to the general pattern of the first, but there is a technical improvement over The Octopus. The elements of this novel are knitted together more closely, and are interactive. Curtis Jadwin, the central figure of The Pit, dominates the action, and every part of the story is tied up in some manner with him. He dominates all the action but that of Norris' redoubtable wheat.

The Pit was Norris' second step in the establishment of the universality of the power of wheat. This second member of the trilogy follows the work of production and deals with distribution. It was the author's purpose to show that the "Wheat" is as inconsiderate of the financiers as it had been of the ranchers. The Pit serves to illustrate further the futility of man's attempt to master the deity, "Nature." This time the body of financial brokers replaces the ranchers of the productive areas. The financial interests are personified in Curtis Jadwin, who submits to the enticements offered by speculation and rises to the pinnacle of the financial world whence he is brushed to oblivion by the imperturbable arm of the almighty "Wheat".

Norris allowed Jadwin to reach the heights of human power in order that the epic victory of wheat might be the more impressive. Not only Jadwin, but his wife, his friends, and his financial followers are implicated in the attempt to dominate the "Indifferent invincible", and all suffer accord-
ingly. Norris is less harsh in *The Pit*, but there are broken, nervous wrecks, a suicide, and, in general, an atmosphere of despondency and helplessness.

This story signifies the presence of the "Wheat" in its ever-prevailing strength even among those who have never actually seen it. It is the picture of the trading center, Chicago, which Norris symbolizes as the heart of the wheat, the pulsating terminal of the wheat in its journey throughout the universe.

Hatcher calls Norris' description of Chicago the poetic spirit of the day.¹ Norris did understand the real forces at work in American life. He caught the reckless, hectic spirit of blind adventure, and enclosed it between the covers of his novels.

It was Empire, the restless subjugation of all this central world of the lakes and the prairies. Here, midmost in the land, beat the Heart of the nation, whence inevitably must come its immeasurable power, its infinite, inexhaustible vitality. Here, of all cities, throbbed the true life—the true power and spirit of America; gigantic, crude with the crudity of youth, disdaining rivalry; sane and healthy and vigorous; brutal in its ambition, arrogant in the new-found knowledge of its giant strength, prodigal of its wealth, infinite in its desires. In its capacity boundless, in its courage indestructible; subduing the wilderness in a single generation, defying calamity, and through the flame and the debris of a commonwealth in ashes, rising suddenly renewed, formidable, and Titanic.²

¹Hatcher, p. 17
Regardless of the validity of his philosophy, Norris' books did offer a foundation for the building of an American fiction. In The Octopus he portrayed Nature as the deity of his contemporary world. In The Pit he proceeded with the presentation of Nature's "church militant". He analyzed the fundamental attitudes of his American fellowmen. He followed their actions, and interpreted those actions in the light of a naturalistic theory of evolution—a philosophy which favored the brave and the strong, and then only when the brave and the strong complied with the dictates of nature.

Curtis Jadwin is the typical man of his time, forceful, impulsive, and reckless. Norris created Jadwin as a man who believed that his destiny was guided by the fateful hand of nature. When luck was with him, there was no question of his success. He had no moral code, but Norris donated that in the end to make the "point" of the story.

Norris taught Jadwin to learn to observe and to act in accordance with the dictates of Nature. He found that, when he ignored such dogma, he was punished unbiassedly by the almighty god, "Nature". His transgressions were not evil in themselves, but evil only as they were untimely. Jadwin learned that Nature is indefatigable and indomitable. It can neither be frustrated nor overcome. As long as man remains within the bounds of his own sphere, anything goes. But once he tampers with the routine dominance of "Nature," "Nature"
crushes him.

So the egotistical Jadwin does as he pleases. He uses his riches for his personal indulgence, for the purpose of dominating his fellow men. He indulges all of his whims to the limit. He laughs when he is told that his tactics are starving millions of Europeans by depriving them of their wheat supply. But his laughter is soon cut off because "Nature", providing "the greatest good for the greatest number", must look after those Europeans.

When Jadwin tried to frustrate the function of "Nature," he had to be punished. Laura, his beautiful, haughty, heroic, innocent wife, was punished with him. She suffered through no fault of her own, but "Nature's" inevitability could not save her. Had she been spared, the greater number of Europeans would have suffered.

Norris offered Nature as a deity for the skeptical America which, in rebellion, was becoming cynical, losing respect for basic values, and in danger of discarding the principles upon which the nation was founded. Whatever the objective validity of Norris' philosophy, it caught the tone of contemporary life. He made it possible to reconcile the prevailing conditions with American ideals, and he set the pace for a truly American literature.

Norris was not a naturalist in the sense that the term is related to Zola. He prevented American literature
from becoming Zola-like--cynical, despondent, sterile in its subjection to fate. He adopted Zola's style to reproduce the restlessness, the drive, and the drama of American life, but he added something to Zola's naturalism. He did not, as Farring-
ton says, grow out of romanticism; he grew out of the McTeague type of brutal naturalism. McTeague was the cue for Dreiser, Hemingway, Dos Passos, and the rest of the sensuous novelists. McTeague was a masterpiece of the naturalistic style for which American writers groped in their efforts to create the im-
pression of hectic activity with which America teemed, but it was not the finished product of Frank Norris. The Octopus and The Pit show that Norris found romance and drama and a place for American ideals in a philosophy of naturalism.

Frank Norris may be remembered because he was the first to attempt an interpretation of the position in which America found itself after it had evolved into a nation. He did not find nature a cruel and vengeful master. Norris did see the struggle against the forces of nature to be futile, but he did not stop there in despair. He did not conclude that a code of morals was a useless carry-over of a deluded mankind. He re-interpreted the basis of human ethics. Lincoln Steffens, the foremost muckraker of the 1900's, a man typical of his period, searched the world in a vain effort to find the basis for the ethical code to which mankind complied. ¹ Norris found nature

¹Lincoln Steffens, Autobiography
to be a kind guardian and generous benefactor. It was not use-
less for him to consider what was right and what was wrong. He
offered a moral code which declared that man did have a path of
righteous conduct to follow. He demanded that man act in har-
momy with the laws of nature or else suffer the consequences.
Morris presented the nation with an impersonal deity, but an om-
niscient deity which rewarded or punished as the acts of man
merited.

Morris lowered the status of the individual; he em-
phasized the responsibility of society. He observed that na-
ture only reacts to conditions strong enough to disturb her
"Nirvanic calm"—conditions which could be brought about only
by a sufficiently large number of people. Jadwin alone could
not have gained control of the wheat. It was the acquiescence
of his colleagues and the American Farmers, who welcomed the
high price of wheat, that made it possible to shut off the
supply of grain in Europe.

In Europe the state has risen to dominance over the
individual; the state has become an indomitable force and
the individual is no more than an amoebic part of the state.
But Norris, while did bring out the importance of social re-
sponsibility, offered a philosophy thoroughly American. He
did not re-hash European social philosophy; he knew very little,
if anything, about it. In fact there are no indications that
he ever was a student of philosophy. He never studied philo-
sophy, other than in LeConte's biology class, while he attended
school. And while he worked for McClure, there was no time. Norris was merely an observer who looked for the story behind the picture. The story he found in the development of America resulted in the philosophy expressed in The Octopus and The Pit. Norris did not look at a European picture. He saw America and wrote an American story.

The naturalistic philosophy in his last two novels show the influence of Europe, but indirectly. The theory of evolution which Le Conte had taught Norris came from Europe, but Norris learned it in America. He knew nothing of the results of the adoption of naturalism in Europe. Norris applied the theories which he had learned to the only life he knew well. In America he had inculcated into his soul the tradition of individual achievement. In France he had been a dreaming youngster unaware of the age-old acceptance of class differences. As a result, his ultimate social philosophy was tempered with individualism. It did not segregate the people into inevitable classes; it provided for a homogeneous mankind. His philosophy provided for the possibility of an individual's moving from one class to another according to the dictates of nature. It was not necessary for the individual to subject himself in despair to the state of servitude or nobility into which he happened to be born. Norris' philosophy justified hope. It was American.

It may not be too bold to offer the opinion that the work of Frank Norris saved America from autocracy and the
peril of dictatorship. Had a more intellectual mind succeeded in establishing a philosophical basis for the new America, it is quite possible that he would have been forced to adopt the European social philosophy unreservedly. Norris did not seek a new philosophical foundation. He merely interpreted what he saw. He found a meaning in American life. Frank Norris found the answer to life for Lincoln Steffens, Jack London, and the more-serious writers who were destined to carry on the construction of a truly American literature.

Norris met an untimely death on October 25, 1902, when complications which set in after an appendectomy undermined his vitality. The trilogy was left uncompleted, but he had done enough. It is impossible to estimate what Norris would have accomplished had he lived, but he had shown the way. It would have been difficult to go much farther in his day.


Howells, Mildred, editor, *Life in Letters of William Dean Howells*


Norris Frank, Blix. New York: International Association of Newspapers and Authors, 1901.


