ROMANTIC ELEMENTS IN FIVE NOVELS OF
FRANK NORRIS

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ROMANTIC ELEMENTS IN FIVE NOVELS OF
FRANK NORRIS

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. ROMANTIC INDIVIDUALISM</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. SYMBOLISM AND IMAGERY</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. SETTING, ACTION, AND SENTIMENT</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Critics writing about the novels of Frank Norris have often pointed out that Norris uses both romanticism and naturalism in his works. Because of the presence of both these tendencies, Norris's work is difficult to categorize. In his biography of Norris, Franklin Walker has stated briefly the problem which faces anyone wishing to undertake a study of Norris: "Call Frank Norris realist and ignore Moran of the Lady Letty; call him romanticist and ignore McTeague; call him a romantic realist and escape by begging the question."\(^1\) As a summary of the problem embedded in Norris's works, Walker's statement is adequate, but it does not convey the whole problem. There are romantic elements in McTeague, and there are realistic elements in Moran of the Lady Letty; in fact, Norris's works seem to be a blend of romance and realism. But Norris is best known as neither a realist nor a romantic. Most often, he is considered the "father of fictional naturalism" in the United States.\(^2\)

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Ever since Norris first began to publish, critics have had difficulty in deciding whether his works should be called romantic or realistic. William Dean Howells, one of the first to recognize Norris's talent, wrote that *McTeague* indicated a changing attitude in American fiction and would bring a change from romance to realism in literature "with the overwhelming effect of a blizzard."³ However, Howells also saw in *McTeague* a "lingering love of the romantic," which results in "an anti-climax worthy of Dickens."⁴ Howells pointed out that Grannis and Miss Baker, *McTeague*'s neighbors, are an "elderly pair of lovers on whom Mr. Norris wreaks all the sentimentality he denies himself in the rest of the story."⁵

Another of Norris's contemporaries, Frederic Cooper, finds a mixture of romance and realism in Norris's work. In an article entitled "Frank Norris, Realist," Cooper refers to an "obstinate and often exasperating vein of romanticism running through all his [Norris's] work."⁶ Cooper believes that romanticism is Norris's "pet failing, his besetting sin, so to speak."⁷ Referring to the ending of *McTeague*, Cooper

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⁴Ibid., p. 242.  
⁵Ibid.  
⁶Frederic Cooper, "Frank Norris, Realist," *Bookman*, X (November, 1899), 236.  
⁷Ibid.
states that Norris occasionally sacrifices "not only truth, but even verisimilitude for the sake of dramatic effect." In a later article, a review of The Octopus, Cooper again refers to the "tendency which betrayed Norris into the melodramatic ending of McTeague," but he calls the equally melodramatic chapter of the death of S. Behrman in The Octopus "one chapter which goes far toward atoning for the shortcomings of the novel." This chapter, Cooper feels, "gives a glimpse of Mr. Norris at his best."

More recently, George W. Meyer has noted that numerous critics have stated that The Octopus "contains disparate elements which Norris could not fuse into a satisfactory artistic whole." Meyer writes that Pattee, Parrington, and Hicks have discussed such supposedly "disparate elements" as "a philosophy of determinism, a tragic action set in a vicious society, and an optimistic conclusion which suggests that good will triumph in the end." In other words, modern critics have found romance and realism (or naturalism) existing side

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8 Ibid.
9 Frederic Cooper, "Frank Norris's The Octopus," Bookman, XIII (May, 1901), 247.
10 Ibid.
11 George Meyer, "A New Interpretation of The Octopus," College English, IV (March, 1943), 351.
12 Ibid.
by side in Norris's The Octopus. They have also found romantic writing in other of Norris's works.

Fred L. Pattee feels that Norris was a naturalist, but he believes that Norris knew "that even naturalism to be effective must have a soul as well as a body, must have in it a drop of that magic something that defies the test-tubes of science—that something we often call romance." Applying this statement to all Norris's works, one can see that Pattee feels that Norris, though primarily a naturalist, used romantic elements in his writing.

Vernon L. Parrington cites romantic aspects of two Norris novels, McTeague and The Octopus. Parrington notes in McTeague the use of the symbol of gold to give the book dramatic unity, the use of a minor action (Maria and Zerkow), the use of foils (Grannis and Miss Baker), and the use of the "revenge motive" (Marcus Shouler). In The Octopus Parrington finds romance in the wheat symbolism, in the melodramatic death of S. Behrman, and in the statement of belief in a moral order which appears at the end of the book.

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14 Vernon L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought (New York, 1930), III, 331-332.

15 Ibid., p. 333.
Granville Hicks feels that *A Man's Woman* was the last of Norris's "purely romantic novels."\(^{16}\) But Hicks believes that Norris could never completely forsake romanticism and that in *The Octopus*, "Norris' old romanticism creeps in again and again, sheltered by the incoherence of his philosophy."\(^{17}\) Hicks, in referring to Norris's "incoherent philosophy," alludes to his belief that Norris himself was not certain whether he was writing from a romantic or naturalistic point of view.

It is not surprising that like Hicks many critics find Norris's works a combination of romance and realism, for at times Norris seems unsure of what he was trying to achieve. In a letter to Isaac Marcosson, written in November, 1899, Norris states that, "The Wheat Series will be straight naturalism with all the guts I can get into it."\(^{18}\) Less than a year later, September, 1900, Norris writes to Marcosson about *The Octopus*, the first book of the wheat series: "It is the most romantic thing I've yet done."\(^{19}\) Ernest Peixotto, a close friend of Norris, believes that beneath its outer skin


\(^{17}\)Ibid., p. 173.


\(^{19}\)Ibid.
of realism Norris's work betrays "the romantic spirit that colored all his early life and his earliest works."\(^{20}\)

The major problem in discussing Norris’s novels is one of definition. What makes a work realistic, naturalistic, or romantic? It is best to assume, as Richard Chase does in his study of the American novel, that the novel is by definition realistic, an attempt to portray life, and that naturalism is a special form of realism, often identified by its interest in a reality more sordid than the usual.\(^{21}\) In America the naturalistic writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were those who followed the general tradition of the French writer Zola. In the theory of Zola and his contemporaries, the ideal was "to place one's characters in a certain environment . . . and to observe and report without fear or favor how they reacted to natural laws."\(^{22}\) The novelist was "to maintain toward his material and his characters the detached, impersonal attitude of the scientific observer; the characters were to be pawns of impersonal deterministic forces outside their control, and thus individual responsibility and moral choice were impossible."\(^{23}\) The effect of such a doctrine

\(^{20}\)Ernest Peixotto, "Romanticist Under the Skin," Saturday Review of Literature, IX (May 27, 1933), 613.

\(^{21}\)Chase, The American Novel, pp. 185-186.

\(^{22}\)Ibid., p. 186.

is "to subtract from literature the whole notion of human responsibility." 24

Norris himself described his works as romances, and in doing so he was in earnest, as he was in everything he did and said. 25 In his collection of essays entitled The Responsibilities of the Novelist, Norris appears to be a romanticist by his own definition because of the way he views life—he sees the violent, the unusual, the adventuresome as "variations from the type of normal life," or romantic. 26 As Norris himself says, romance and realism are "not so much in things as in the point of view of people who see the things." 27 As the nineteenth century drew to a close, others were beginning to view romance much as Norris did. In an article entitled "The Domain of Romance," published in 1899, Maurice Thompson distinguishes between romance and realism: "Photography is realism; everything else is romance. The delineation of fact is realism; all else is romance." 28 In like manner, Norris believes that realism "notes only the surface of things." 29

26 Walker, Frank Norris, p. 80.
29 Norris, The Responsibilities, VII, 164.
To Thompson, "Romance is the translation of the meanings, the forces, and the possibilities of life into literature." For Norris, romanticism encompasses "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 penetralia of the soul of man."

In Norris's view, even realism could be called romance: "The difficult thing is to get at the life immediately around you—the very life in which you move. No romance in it? No romance in you, poor fool. As much romance on Michigan Avenue as there is realism in King Arthur's court." To Norris, "life is better than literature," and the important thing is to be able to say of one's works, "By god, I told them the truth." But, although it may seem strange, "you may be able to say that life itself is not always true to life—from the point of view of the artist." Therefore, Norris, as an artist, is not interested in writing about "what life actually is, but what it looks like to an interesting, impressionable man." In writing about life one need not be concerned about accuracy, because "Accuracy is the attainment of small minds.

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32 Ibid., p. 16. 33 Ibid., p. 108.
34 Ibid., p. 18. 35 Ibid., p. 172.
36 Ibid., p. 173.
the achievement of the commonplace . . . . It is the truth that matters . . . ."\textsuperscript{37}

One can now see why Norris referred to himself as a romantic. As a naturalist he would have been committed to a "rigorous scientific consistency" which would have been "utterly alien" to his "dramatic, dynamic personality."\textsuperscript{38} In fact, Norris "probably found much of Zola's theorizing incomprehensible,"\textsuperscript{39} and authentic scientific naturalism was not what primarily attracted Norris to Zola's works.\textsuperscript{40} What Norris really admired was "Zola's largeness, his fondness for 'strong' situations and violent action."\textsuperscript{41} Because of his liking for these aspects of Zola, "Norris was being constantly led away from naturalism into a kind of romanticism, a romanticism which, revolting against the prudish restraints of the age, exploited the adventures and the elemental emotions of 'red-blooded' characters."\textsuperscript{42}

Most critics have their own ideas about the definition of romanticism, and no single definition satisfactory to everyone has ever been formulated; for this reason each writer who

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{37}Ibid., p. 174.
\item \textsuperscript{39}Ibid., p. 9.
\item \textsuperscript{40}Walter F. Taylor, \textit{A History of American Letters} (Boston, 1936), p. 313.
\item \textsuperscript{41}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{42}Ibid.
\end{itemize}
deals with romanticism must delineate his own definition. In this thesis, romanticism will be considered to be that writing which, in Norris's words, "takes cognizance of variations from the type of normal life." 43 Romanticism produces characters who are individuals with free will, who do have control over their lives, and not, as in naturalism, characters whose "fortunes are determined by two kinds of natural forces, heredity and environment." 44 Romantic writing makes use of symbols and imagery, and its themes show that man is not lost in a deterministic universe. The settings are vast and peopled with vital characters, not essentially sordid as are the settings of naturalistic writing. It is this writer's purpose to show, by the use of these criteria, that five novels of Frank Norris, The Octopus, McTeague, A Man's Woman, The Pit, and Vandover and the Brute, are essentially romantic in their treatment of character, their themes, and their use of setting, action and sentiment.

Although no single work has ever been devoted to a study of Norris's romanticism, several recent volumes have commented at least briefly on romantic elements in Norris's fiction. The authors do not always agree on why Norris used romantic elements, but all are certain that Norris's novels are as

43 Norris, The Responsibilities, VII, 164.
romantic as they are naturalistic. In The American Novel and Its Tradition, Richard Chase states that

Norris makes of his naturalism, even though it may seem to be merely a ruthless realism, a means of restoring to the novel some of the dramatic actions, mysteries, colorful events, and extreme situations, along with the mythic and symbolic motives, that used to be brought into the novel under other auspices. He does not, in other words, abandon the romance or the romance-novel; he merely recreates it and reconstitutes it on new grounds.45

Warren French, in his Frank Norris, writes that Norris's early identification as a naturalist came about when critics "had to seek a theoretical justification for works they found literally distasteful."46 French adds that Norris "borrowed the latest techniques of naturalism to give new impetus to the irrepressible tradition of American romanticism."47 French believes that Norris's "closest link is not with the imported naturalistic tradition but with the transcendentalist tradition."48 In his unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Romance and Realism in the Novels of Frank Norris," directed by Richard Chase, George W. Johnson points out that in most studies of Norris, his realism receives the greatest attention and that his "use of romance is either ignored or disparaged as a part of his heritage which ought to be repudiated."49

46 French, Frank Norris, p. 8.
Ernest Marchand, in Frank Norris, a Study, points out the struggle of Presley in The Octopus to reconcile reality and romance and suggests that the fictional struggle reflects Norris's own struggle, although Marchand does not concentrate on other romantic aspects of Norris. While it is not the purpose of this thesis to prove that Norris reconstituted romance in the novel or gave new impetus to romanticism, but to point out the romantic elements in five of Norris's novels, the above-mentioned studies have proven quite valuable to the present study for their discussions of Norris's romanticism.

Norris's background and character had much of the romantic in them and probably influenced his later writing. One of the greatest influences on Norris's life was his mother, Gertrude Doggett Norris. She had been an actress before she married Benjamin Franklin Norris, Sr., and she had loved her work; Norris had been able to persuade her to marry him only by promising that she could continue her stage career. She never returned to the stage, but she used her abilities as a thespian in her home. In the evenings she would read to her children from Scott, Dickens, and Stevenson, and Scott became Norris's favorite poet. When young Frank decided that he

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50 Ernest Marchand, Frank Norris, a Study (Stanford, California, 1942), pp. 35-39.
51 Walker, Frank Norris, p. 7.
52 Ibid., p. 21.
wanted to be an artist, his mother encouraged him and even went to Paris with him when he went there to study.53

Once in Paris, Frank Norris did not concentrate on his painting. Instead, he became intensely interested in the history of chivalry, the days of romance and great battles:

He passed the stalls filled with Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola, the proper food for one who was to become a naturalist, and plunged unhesitatingly into the romantic middle ages. It was not Zola's L'Assommoir nor Flaubert's Madame Bovary which won his heart, but Froissart's Chronicles. He lived and dreamed his favorite book; for the rest of his stay in Paris his companions were Philip of Valois and the King of Navarre, and his thoughts were concerned with events which happened five thousand years ago.54

He was fascinated by medieval armor, and his first published article, "Clothes of Steel," is illustrated with his own drawings.55 His love of the works of Scott is revealed in this article when he refers to Scott as the "greatest of all novelists."56 His long poem Yvernelle is a narrative in the manner of Scott and should be read as "the attempt of a nineteen-year-old boy in love with the spirit of feudalism to bring back the 'day of romance, quaint and old.'"57 Even when Norris was a student at Harvard and had become interested in Zola, the record of the books that he took from the library

53Ibid., p. 27. 54Ibid., p. 33.
55Ibid., p. 40. 56Ibid.
57Ibid., p. 47.
shows that he was still reading Stevenson (New Arabian Nights) and that he was reading George Eliot (Middlemarch). 58

Even Norris's appearance was romantic. At thirty-one he had hair that had already turned gray, an olive complexion that photographed quite dark, and a tall, heavy figure. 59 He thought enough of his own appearance to include a description of himself in one scene of McTeague. 60

The major novels of Frank Norris reveal his romantic tendencies, as the following examination shows. Norris's characters often are romantic individuals, basing their views of life on their physical and mental experiences, and are occasionally affected by the transforming power of love. Norris uses symbolism and imagery to disclose "transcendent ideas" or "absolute ideals" rather than to reveal scientific law through the action of a specific incident as a naturalist would do. The settings and action which Norris uses contain romantic elements, and he often injects sentimentality into his novels. Each of these romantic aspects of Norris's work will be discussed in the following chapters.

58 Willard E. Martin, Jr., "Frank Norris' Reading at Harvard College," American Literature, VII (May, 1935), 204.


CHAPTER II

ROMANTIC INDIVIDUALISM

One of the dominant ideas in the novels of Frank Norris is that of romantic individualism—"faith in the validity of the individual experience and mind as a source of knowledge and a guide to action." Norris's characters, through their experiences, develop a "larger view," which is the "attainment of a philosophical perspective." As each of the characters moves toward a new perspective, he begins to develop a generally optimistic outlook and learns the truth about things which have puzzled him. Norris's characters are also romantic in that they possess the free will which is necessary to their development. They are not at the mercy of a deterministic universe as would be the characters of a strictly naturalistic writer.

In The Octopus, first published in 1901, three characters, Presley, Vanamee, and Annixter, may be called romantic. Each of these individuals undergoes a change in perspective which allows him to see "the Truth." Presley, at the beginning of


2Ibid., p. 470.
the novel, is a poet, thirty years old, visiting the ranch of his friend, Magnus Derrick. It is his desire to write an epic poem in thundering hexameters, praising "the West," but he cannot find the proper viewpoint. He wishes to "portray life" as he sees it, but at the same time he wants "to see everything through a rose-coloured mist."

He admires some of the people around him, the wealthy ranchers, but he cannot sympathize with the common people. Added to this inner confusion is the fact that although Presley strongly believes that he is surrounded by epic material, everywhere he turns he meets with the somewhat sordid conflict between the land owners and the railroad. Once, he feels that he has his poem in his grasp, but he witnesses the slaughter of a herd of sheep by a train, and the poem is gone. It begins to appear to Presley that goodness is ever at the mercy of evil, an attitude which is later strengthened by the massacre of several of his friends at the hands of the railroad men.

Presley, then, must change greatly before he develops his new philosophical perspective. He must learn to sympathize with the common people, he must reconcile reality (life as he sees it) and romance (life "through a rose-coloured mist"), and he must discover to his satisfaction the truth of good and evil. He does these three things as a romantic individual.

by his emotional and intellectual reactions to his experiences.

Presley's change begins in Caraher's saloon. Caraher, a "red" who constantly agitates against the railroad, is listening to Dyke, a blacklisted engineer, tell how the railroad has ruined him. Out of a job, Dyke has become a hop farmer, thinking to make a great deal of money. Just as he is to ship his first crop, however, the railroad raises the tariff, and Dyke is ruined. He cannot now support his mother or his small daughter. When Presley hears this tale, he realizes for the first time how greatly the lives of the people other than the ranchers are being affected by the machinations of the railroad. He also understands why he has not been able to complete his poem: "At the time when he had sought for it, his convictions had not been aroused; he had not cared for the People. His sympathies had not been touched. Small wonder that he had missed it." Now, because of what has happened to Dyke, Presley's sympathies have been touched. He begins to feel that he is "of the People."

Dyke's story also affects Presley in another way. Having stripped away the veil of illusion through which Presley has been seeing life, it enables him to complete his poem.

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5 Ibid.
Presley goes home after listening to Dyke, and a "mighty spirit of revolt heaved tumultuous within him." When Presley sits down to write in his journal, the words come to him "without searching." He suddenly sees that he has completed a poem, not a "vast, vague, impersonal Song of the West," but "The Toilers," a rather socialistic poem like Markham's "Man with a Hoe." (In fact, one of the characters remarks that he has seen a picture entitled "The Toilers.") Presley's poem is realistic, portraying life as he sees it, and it is of the people. Two of Presley's difficulties have now been resolved, and he is well on the way to developing his new outlook on life.

The experience which almost convinces Presley that evil inevitably triumphs over good is the massacre of his friends, Harran Derrick, Annixter, Osterman, Broderson, and Hooven, as they try to protect their land from the railroad. To Presley it seems that his friends have been destroyed by two great forces, the wheat and the railroad, and that "Men were mere nothings, mere animalcules, mere ephemerides that fluttered and fell and were forgotten between dawn and dusk." A conversation with Vanamee, however, changes Presley's attitude. Vanamee makes Presley realize that they have witnessed only the segment of a circle, not the full round.

6Ibid., p. 85. 7Ibid., p. 86. 8Ibid., p. 343.
and that good will come from the crises that they have seen. Annixter and the others are dead, but the wheat remains to feed the starving thousands in India, where it is being shipped. From this conversation comes Presley's new philosophical perspective. He is led to believe that "the individual suffers, but the race goes on . . . . The larger view always and through all shams, all wickednesses, discovers the Truth that will, in the end, prevail, and all things surely, inevitably, resistlessly work together for good." In the tradition of romantic individualism, Presley knows this intuitively, using his mind and experience as a source of knowledge, and resolves his final problem.

Vanamee is another character in The Octopus who discovers truth. A mystic and an ascetic who resembles a seer or prophet of Hebraic legend, he has the power to call people to him by the exercise of his will. He is a shepherd in the San Joaquin Valley, having just returned after an absence of many years; his desire is to learn the truth about life and death. His sweetheart had been raped and had died in childbirth sixteen years before Vanamee's return to the valley, and Vanamee has been a bitter man ever since. Father Sarria, the priest at the mission where Angèle is buried, knows what Vanamee must learn and tells him that "your dear girl was only a grain of humanity that we have buried here, and the

\[^9\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 361.}\]
end is not yet." Vanamee replies that it "'may all be as you say,'" but "'I have not learned it yet, in any case.'" The problem is clear—Vanamee must learn that death is not the end of life.

The change which comes in Vanamee's way of thinking is more dramatic than Presley's because it is more abrupt. Rather than going through a series of experiences and a gradual development, Vanamee is changed almost in an instant. In his great desire to have Angele back with him in the flesh, not in the spirit, Vanamee tries out his mysterious power, calling to her with his mind. To his surprise, there is an answer, and after several of his attempts, Angele stands before him. As Father Sarria tells Vanamee, the girl is not the Angele who died, but her daughter. It makes no difference to Vanamee, however. He has learned the truth; he has attained his "larger view":

Angele was not the symbol, but the proof of immortality. . . . Angele dying as she gave birth to her little daughter, life springing from her death—-the pure, unconquerable, coming forth from the defiled . . . . So Angele, so life, so also the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption. It is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness. It is raised in Power. Death was swallowed up in Victory.

Vanamee's change, like Presley's, comes about through knowledge

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10 Norris, The Octopus, I, 139.
11 Ibid.
based on personal experience. But because he is the first to develop a new outlook, it is Vanamee who is able to act as a guide to Presley's thoughts. Because he has changed, Vanamee can help Presley see that evil does not triumph over good inevitably. As he tells Presley:

Death is only real for all the detritus of the world, for all the sorrow, for all the injustice, for all the grief . . . . the good never dies; evil dies, cruelty, oppression, selfishness, greed--these die; but nobility, but love, but sacrifice, but generosity, but truth, . . . small as they are, difficult as it is to discover them--these live forever, these are eternal.\(^{13}\)

This is the full development of Vanamee's new philosophy, based on his mental and physical experience.

Buck Annxter, the third character in *The Octopus* to undergo a change in viewpoint as a result of his experience, learns the truth about love. At the beginning of the book Annxter is suspicious and afraid of "females." He considers women a waste of time. Annxter is proud of being known as a sharp and hard man. If anyone hates or fears him, Annxter is even prouder, because their hate and fear demonstrate his superiority over them. He admits to being a bully and regards the fact that many men would like to "down" him as an index of his abilities. Then Annxter falls in love with Hilma Tree. At first he fights against the feeling growing within him, not believing himself capable of love. Only after he makes what Hilma considers a crude proposition and is rebuffed

\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 344.
does he realize what has happened to him: "Why--I--I, I love her," he cried. Never until then had it occurred to him."\(^{14}\)

After Annixter discovers his love for Hilma, they are married. It then becomes evident that Annixter's whole outlook on life has changed as a result of his new experience. His perspective has shifted. He now wishes to help people rather than to hurt them. When Dyke is running from the law, it is Annixter who gives Dyke's mother and daughter a place to stay. Such an act of kindness would never have come from the old Annixter, but as he tells Presley:

> I was a machine before, and if another man, or woman, or child got in my way, I rode 'em down, and I never dreamed of anybody else but myself. . . . I've got a whole lot of ideas since I began to love Hilma, and just as soon as I can, I'm going to get in and help people, and I'm going to keep that idea the rest of my natural life.\(^{15}\)

It can be seen from the stories of Vanamee and Annixter that the idea of romantic individualism is closely related to another of Norris's favorite themes, the transforming power of love. Love, to Norris, is "the means by which the characters retain their human dignity and moral integrity in the face of impersonal, destructive forces."\(^{16}\) Annixter, for instance, is a romantic individual in that he has gained knowledge and a

\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 82. \(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 180.

\(^{16}\)Charles G. Hoffman, "Norris and the Responsibility of the Novelist," The South Atlantic Quarterly, LV (October, 1955), 514.
guide to future action by his response to a great experience in his life, a love which transforms him from a misanthropic man into one who wants to help people in any way that he can. Vèname's, too, is changed by love. Because the daughter of the dead Angèlé loves him as her mother had done, he is able to see that his bitterness and self-pity have been wrong and that "the good never dies." Even Presley is, in a way, changed by love, love for his fellow man. After he completes his poem, "The Toilers," he does not publish it in one of the magazines which he admires, nor does he take money for its publication. It is printed in the daily newspaper so that it may be read by the common people for whom Presley now feels sympathy because of Dyke's story. The "impersonal, destructive forces" of naturalism are at work in each character's life, but love causes each to adopt an optimistic outlook; both remain romantic individuals who base their views on personal experience and their emotional reaction to the experience.

Published in 1902 as the second volume of his projected wheat trilogy, The Pit is not as naturalistic as many of Norris's novels. Although it was Norris's most popular novel when it first appeared, critics today tend to view it as "a provincial melodrama" which indicates that Norris "had made his peace with genteel society." The Pit is the story of

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Curtis Jadwin's attempt to corner the wheat market and of its effect on his mind and his marriage. Jadwin, like Presley, Vanamee, and Annixter in *The Octopus*, undergoes an experience which transforms his philosophical perspective and gives him knowledge of himself.

Beginning life in a family of poor but honest farmers, Jadwin does not seem destined for wealth; his rise to fortune is rapid, however, after he reaches Chicago and begins to deal in real estate and occasionally in wheat. His future wife, Laura Dearborn, sees him as a colossal figure, engaged in the "Battle of the Street," and to her he appears to be a fighter, unknown and unknowable to women as he was; hard, rigorous, panoplied in the harness of the warrior, who strove among the trumpets, and who, in the brunt of conflict, conspicuous, formidable, set the battle in a rage around him, and exulted like a champion in the shoutings of the captains.

Even to his business associates Jadwin appears almost larger than life. As Landry Court, one of his aides, says, "There's no man--no, nor gang of men--could down him. He's head and shoulders above the biggest of them down there. I tell you he's Napoleonic. Yes, sir, that's what he is, Napoleonic, to say the least." Unfortunately, Jadwin himself begins to develop the idea that he is something out of the ordinary, "Napoleonic," "conspicuous and formidable." He begins to

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speculate in wheat, after promising not to do so, and the hold of the pit on him is soon "worse than liquor, worse than morphine";\textsuperscript{21} he begins to believe that he can "control the Chicago wheat market" and that he is "stronger, bigger, shrewder" than "the arrogant, sneering Bears, all the men of the world of the Board of Trade."\textsuperscript{22} Having developed such an attitude, Jadwin becomes interested solely in his business, almost ruining his marriage. Because of the mental strain he undergoes, his mind nearly snaps. To survive, he must learn the truth about himself, that he cannot do the impossible. No man has ever succeeded in cornering the wheat market, and Jadwin is no exception.

The experience which causes Jadwin to alter his outlook is a devastating one for him. He is "beaten at last, the Great Bull! Smashed! The great corner smashed! Jadwin busted!"\textsuperscript{23} After he recovers from the shock of his failure, Jadwin realizes his mistake in "'living according to a wrong notion of things'"\textsuperscript{24} and plans to make a new start in life in the West. He knows now that no one man can corner the wheat, as he tells his wife: "'The wheat cornered itself. I simply stood between two sets of circumstances. The wheat cornered me, not I the wheat.'"\textsuperscript{25} With this realization comes the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 123.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 268.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 378.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p. 400.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 402.
\end{itemize}
knowledge of what his business activities have done to Laura, and Jadwin promises not to cause their marriage to suffer again. Because of his experience in the wheat pit and his reaction to it, Jadwin has developed a new outlook on life; he knows that he is not really superior to other men, and he now considers the feelings of his wife as well as his own.

Laura Dearborn Jadwin undergoes a similar experience, for her view of life is changed by the transforming power of love. Ernest Marchand feels that the epic story of the wheat in The Pit is "weakened by the too-close rivalship of the personal love story of Curtis Jadwin and Laura Dearborn," but, as Warren French points out, since most of the story is about Laura and her problems, "it would be odd for a novelist to devote most of his book to a side issue." It is apparent that in the story of Laura Dearborn, Norris is again manifesting his belief in romantic individualism and in the power of love to change a person's life.

Throughout most of The Pit Laura is a self-centered woman, interested only in her own thoughts and problems. She believes that love is only for other people, and she agrees to marry Jadwin solely because he is so persistent that she cannot refuse him. Page, Laura's younger sister, asking whether Laura loves Jadwin, receives this reply: "Indeed not.

26Marchand, Frank Norris, p. 82.
I love nobody . . . . I wouldn't give any man that much satisfaction."\(^{28}\) Laura's attitude changes slightly after her marriage, and she and Jadwin are happy for a time, doing things together which they enjoy. Then Jadwin begins to speculate in wheat. Laura takes little interest in his business, and her pride is hurt as Jadwin spends less and less time with her. As Jadwin becomes more and more involved in his attempts to corner the wheat, Laura tries one last gambit to win him back; she makes him promise to spend her birthday, June 13, with her. Unhappily, June 13 is the day that Jadwin's fortunes in the wheat pit collapse. He fails to return home at the promised hour, and Laura, her selfish pride hurt more deeply than ever, decides to run away with Corthell, an artist. However, Laura does not leave; she gains instead awareness of her selfishness.

Two things happen which cause Laura to change her attitude and understand that she has been wrong. First, and possibly most important, is a conversation that Laura has with Page on June 13. Page tells Laura that it is not Jadwin who has failed her but she who has failed Jadwin by not taking an interest in his work. Laura begins to wonder whether she has been wrong: "Was it--after all--Love, that she cherished and strove for--love, or self-love?"\(^{29}\) Laura, who had once said that love was "less a victory than a

\(^{28}\) Norris, The Pit, IX, 159.  
\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 387.
capitulation," knows that she has not "ordered her life upon that ideal."\textsuperscript{30} Her change in outlook has begun, but Laura is still determined to leave Jadwin if he does not come as he has promised. Jadwin has forgotten the birthday, but he does return home, a broken man. Seeing him, Laura knows that she cannot leave him at such a time. He is, after all, her husband, and she at last is ready to admit that part of the fault in their marriage has been hers. Her perspective has changed, and she whispers as she and Jadwin leave for the West: "'A capitulation and not a triumph, and I have won a victory by surrendering.'\textsuperscript{31} Laura is no longer striving for self-love and a victory over her husband; she has realized her selfishness and now wishes to devote herself to Jadwin and to gain his love. Love has changed her life, and she begins to see for the first time what love means.

Exemplifying Norris's idea of romantic individualism, both Curtis and Laura Jadwin undergo awakening experiences which develop in them self-awareness and new outlooks on life. Both realize the futility of continuing their marriage on the basis of self-love and superiority, and they are ready to order their lives according to the right "notion of things."

\textit{McTeague}, Norris's first book, was written mostly in 1892, but not published until 1899.\textsuperscript{32} Early reviewers of the book

\textsuperscript{30}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 388. \textsuperscript{31}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 397. \textsuperscript{32}Chase, \textit{The American Novel}, p. 188.
found it distasteful. An anonymous reviewer for *The Independent* wrote that the book had "no moral, esthetical, or artistic reason for being."\(^{33}\) Another, writing in *Outlook*, found "skill and virility of description" wasted on a story of a life with no "spiritual significance."\(^{34}\) Modern critics, on the other hand, believe *McTeague* to be the best of Norris's work. Malcolm Cowley feels that *McTeague* "retains more vitality and clear-sightedness than any of Norris' later novels,"\(^{35}\) and Richard Chase states flatly that "*McTeague* is Norris's best book."\(^{36}\) In *McTeague* Norris uses a kind of romantic individualism different from that in *The Pit* and *The Octopus*. McTeague changes, but he changes for the worse; he is changed by love, but the change does not last long. Present also in *McTeague* is the theme of the regenerative power of love, in the story of Trina and McTeague and even more obviously in the story of Grannis and Miss Baker.

Richard Chase believes that the reason for the abstractness of the character of McTeague is his tendency to be semilegendary; "we should have to change our feeling about him if his name were Joe McTeague, say, instead of apparently just plain McTeague."\(^{37}\) This abstractness makes McTeague

\(^{33}\)"Literature," *The Independent*, LI (April 6, 1899), 968.  
\(^{34}\)"Books of the Week," *Outlook*, LXI (March 18, 1899), 646.  
\(^{35}\)Cowley, "Naturalism's Terrible *McTeague*," p. 32.  
\(^{36}\)Chase, *The American Novel*, p. 188.  
\(^{37}\)Ibid.
appear to be larger-than-life. He is a blond giant, well over six feet tall, powerful enough to extract a tooth with his thumb and finger. Chase calls him the "spiritual father" of Tarzan\textsuperscript{38} because of his similarity to such a hero in size and strength. Part of McTeague's abstractness comes also from the comparisons with beasts which Norris makes, presenting the favorite naturalistic idea of the brute within. Thus, McTeague is romantic in a fictional sense, larger than life and archetypal, though not in the sense that he undergoes a change in attitude because of his experiences. Trina does manage to change McTeague when their love first develops; he begins to read the newspaper and to hold opinions, to drink beer from bottles, and to change his shirt more than once a week. But as Trina more and more puts her love of money ahead of her love for McTeague, he is quick to fall back into his old habits, although he has come to dislike steam beer and to enjoy clean collars. Love could have transformed McTeague, but Trina takes her love from him before it has a chance.

On the love of Old Grannis and Miss Baker, however, nothing intrudes. These are the two elderly lovers deplored by Howells but who modern critics feel reflect "a welcome note of optimism in a generally grim book."\textsuperscript{39} Love causes the two old people to change their attitudes toward one another and to share their lives rather than to live in loneliness.

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{39}French, Frank Norris, p. 66.
Grannis and Miss Baker are residents in the building where McTeague lives. They are painfully shy and afraid to speak to one another; each is afraid that the other will think him forward, if he speaks. Everyone in the building is aware that they are secretly in love with each other, although the elderly man and woman would die of embarrassment if they were aware that their secret was known. They "keep company" by drawing their chairs close to the wall that separates their rooms and then going about their evening tasks, Grannis binding pamphlets and Miss Baker making tea. They are finally brought together, partly by a dog fight that fails to materialize and partly by the efforts of their neighbors, but it is still almost more than they can bear to speak to each other. Their love does not have to change them much; it has only to make them bold enough to speak what they feel.

It is Miss Baker who makes the first decisive move in their relationship. Old Grannis sells his pamphlet-binding device, and he feels lonely and useless because he and Miss Baker can no longer "keep company" as they had done when he was working on his binding. When Miss Baker enters his room and offers him some tea, tremblingly afraid that he will think her "bold," Grannis realizes that Miss Baker loves him, and the thought gives him courage. He tells her that he used to pull his chair close to the wall and makes her admit that she did the same. Then he kisses her: "Far from the world
and together they entered upon the long retarded romance of
their commonplace and uneventful lives."\(^4^0\) Love makes the old
couple at last confess their feelings, and Norris leaves the
impression that their love is the most important event in
their lives; it gives them human dignity.

Thus in McTeague we find two types of romantic
individualism illustrated. McTeague is romantic in the
fictional sense; he is the blond giant, the archetype, the
superman driven to murder. And he is changed by love, although
only slightly and impermanently. Grannis and Miss Baker are
also transformed by love; drawn out of their shyness, they
finally give voice to the feelings that they have long wished
to make known. In A Man's Woman, written after McTeague and
before The Octopus, Norris again presents two kinds of romantic
individuals, those who are larger than life and those who are
changed by love.

A Man's Woman has been called Norris's "only really bad
book,"\(^4^1\) and it has been dismissed as a "trivial adventure
story."\(^4^2\) Norris himself was dissatisfied with the novel,
calling it the "theatrical sort with a lot of niggling analysis
to try to justify the violent action of the first few chapters."\(^4^3\)

\(^4^0\) Norris, McTeague, VIII, 280.

\(^4^1\) Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the American Novel

\(^4^2\) French, Frank Norris, p. 84.

\(^4^3\) Marcosson, Adventures in Interviewing, p. 237.
He felt that it was "very slovenly put together" and that there were "only two real people in all its 100,000 words." These "two real people" are Lloyd Searight and Ward Bennett, who, like McTeague, are larger than life. As an early reviewer wrote, they are "an impossible man and an impossible woman . . . in an impossible situation . . . . That is, they are the freaks of nature, not her normal products." Also, because of their love, they develop new understanding of themselves and of each other.

Ward Bennett is even more the "spiritual father" of Tarzan than McTeague, being just as strong, just as big, but slightly more intelligent than McTeague. Bennett is an Arctic explorer who, when his ship is wrecked and his expedition is forced to try to escape over the northern ice fields, can drive his men unmercifully to save as many of them as possible. When one of the men falls, seemingly unable to rise, Bennett kicks the man until he gets up to continue the journey. When another man wishes to stay behind and help his dying friend, Bennett threatens him with a dog whip. Finally, Bennett and five others, including his best friend, Ferriss, are rescued.

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44 Ibid.

45 "Notes of a Novel Reader," The Critic, XXXVI (April, 1900), 352.
Lloyd Searight is also an unusual character. Though she is quite wealthy, she works as a nurse in a nursing service which she has founded. She is not moved by philanthropy, however; she merely wishes to do things which she considers important. She sees death and disease as enemies which must be conquered, and she has devoted her life to the healing of the sick. She is the kind of woman who can force her new husband to return to what she knows was a "life of prolonged suffering, where death came slowly through days of starvation, exhaustion and agony hourly renewed," because she knows that his return is necessary if he is to live a "normal life."

Aside from their larger-than-life aspects, however, Bennett and Lloyd are romantic individuals in that they share experiences which cause them to gain self-knowledge. Lloyd Searight at first thinks that she loves Ward Bennett, but when he makes her leave the bedside of a dying patient, she begins to hate him. Her strong will has been broken, and her most prized possessions, character and integrity, have been destroyed. Bennett is to blame. She tries to regain her integrity by telling the other nurses that she has deserted a patient and by doing what she considers the "right things." She is still unhappy, however, and it is only when she decides to nurse Bennett through his bout with typhoid that she

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realizes that she is still in love with him. Seeing him ill and realizing that he might die, Lloyd suddenly knows that Bennett means more to her than her ideas about character; her outlook changes. More important than integrity is Bennett's life. She no longer wants to work for her own happiness; Bennett's happiness is more important than her own. With this realization, "the delight in living returned to her." 47 Instead of feeling vaguely unhappy and uneasy, Lloyd is glad to be alive. Instead of regarding Bennett as just another patient, she sees him as someone who must be saved at all costs.

If love has a great effect in Lloyd's life, it has an even greater effect in Bennett's. After his illness, which follows closely the death of Ferris, a death Bennett believes he has caused, Bennett becomes apathetic about his work in the Arctic. He decides to devote himself to the writing of books about his experiences and to making a home with Lloyd, now his wife. Adler, his former shipmate, sees Bennett's new attitude as a great tragedy:

He's getting soft—that's what he is. If you'd only known the man that he was—before—while we was up there in the ice! That's his work, that's what he's out for. There ain't nobody can do it but him . . . . Why what will become of the captain now if he quits? He'll just settle down to an ordinary stay-at-home, write-in-a-book professor . . . 48

Adler cannot tell his thoughts to Bennett, because he is afraid

47 Ibid., p. 192. 48 Ibid., p. 203.
of his captain, but he tells Lloyd, who has already begun to have misgivings about Bennett's giving up his life's work. She knows that if Bennett's life is to have meaning, he must again go north. The experience which rekindles Bennett's desire to be the first to reach the North Pole takes place soon after he recovers from his illness. A group of businessmen comes to his home to ask him to lead an expedition as soon as they can raise the twenty thousand dollars necessary to finance it. When Lloyd hears this offer, she promises that she will give the money herself. Bennett looks at her, and "all her love for him, all her hopes of him, all the fine, strong resolve that, come what would, his career should not be broken, his ambition should not faint through any weakness of hers... called to him in that long, earnest look of her dull-blue eyes." 49 At this moment Bennett understands what he must do, and he knows that Lloyd also understands. Ridding himself of apathy, he becomes the man that he once was, one of those "great, strong, harsh, brutal men--men with purposes, who let nothing, nothing, nothing, stand in their way." 50 Bennett sees that Lloyd loves him so much that she is ready to sacrifice anything, money and their life together, so that he can do his work in the Arctic, and this realization gives him the knowledge of what he must do.

49 Ibid., p. 235.  
50 Ibid., p. 71.
Ward Bennett and Lloyd Searight, then, are in the same tradition of romantic individualism revealed in Norris's other novels. They gain self-knowledge and awareness from their experience, and their lives are changed by the power of love. They are also romantic in the fictional sense, like McTeague, in that they are extraordinary individuals, possessing strength and talent beyond the commonly accepted limits.

**Vandover and the Brute** is an unfinished novel, written while Norris was at Harvard but considered too strong for the public taste and not published until 1914, twelve years after Norris's death. An attempt at a naturalistic novel, it is not successful, chiefly because Vandover is not at the mercy of a deterministic universe. There is no evidence of defective heredity or environment to account for Vandover's weakness of will, as Cooper points out,\(^{51}\) and the novel is the story of "a conflict between Vandover's free and responsible spirit and a series of circumstantial influences which win out over him largely because of his culpable moral weakness."\(^{52}\)

In other words, Vandover, possessed of free will, is able to make a choice between the needs of the body and the needs of the soul. The idea of "the division of man's nature between

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\(^{51}\)Frederic Cooper, "Vandover and the Brute," *Bookman*, XXXIX (June, 1914), 445.

\(^{52}\)Charles Child Walcutt, *American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream* (Minneapolis, 1955), pp. 119-120.
body and soul," says Edward Wagenknecht, "is foreign to the whole spirit of naturalism." Rather, it is a characteristic of romantic individualism.

Vandover's freedom of choice is made clear throughout the novel. In naturalistic doctrine one has no choice; his fate is determined by heredity or environment. Vandover has a choice to make between his two natures, the better side of himself or the brute, and Vandover allows the brute to take control:

And with the eyes of this better self he saw again, little by little, the course of his whole life, and witnessed again the eternal struggle between good and evil that had been going on within him since his earliest years. He was sure that at the first the good had been the stronger. Little by little the brute had grown, and he... had allowed the brute to thrive and grow...

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The conflict within Vandover is won by the brute not because of Vandover's heredity or environment but because "it would be hard, it would be disagreeable to resist, and Vandover had not accustomed himself to the performance of hard, disagreeable duties." Though Vandover has the free will necessary for his salvation, he is too weak to make the right decision, or any decision at all. He merely allows his nature to pull him this way and that until one side or the other takes control.


55 Ibid., p. 24.
The theme of the transforming power of love is implicit in *Vandover and the Brute*. Vandover is not changed by love, nor does he develop a new philosophical perspective, but the possibility that he might always exists, at least for a time in his life. Vandover's struggle is with his own nature, and no one helps him. In the end he becomes a victim of himself and is little better than an animal. But Norris makes it clear that Vandover could have been saved by the love of Turner Ravis:

There was no denying that when he had first known her he had loved her sincerely. Things were vastly different with him when Turner had been his companion; things that were unworthy, that were low, that were impure and vicious, did not seem worth while then; not only did they have no attraction for him, but he even shunned and avoided them. He knew he was a better man for loving her; invariably she made him wish to be better.56

When Vandover alienates Turner, he loses the last influence for good in his life, and his degeneration is certain.

Although Norris never specifically recorded what the phrases "romantic individualism" and "the transforming power of love" meant to him, an analysis of his major novels makes his meaning clear. His characters have experiences which alter their philosophical perspectives, like Presley and Vanamee, or give them increased knowledge of themselves, like Curtis and Laura Jadwin. Also, his characters possess free will and are not victims of heredity or environment.

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56 Ibid., p. 189.
although Jadwin and McTeague are brought low by forces seemingly beyond their control. Though not all of Norris's characters are romantic individuals, the majority rely on their instinctive reactions to experience to bring order to their lives; and the experience on which they rely is quite often one of love.
CHAPTER III

SYMBOLISM AND IMAGERY

To even the casual reader of his novels it is evident that Frank Norris makes extensive use of symbolism and imagery which are essentially romantic. Naturalistic writers also use symbols and images but in a manner different from that of romantic writers. The basic distinction between the two methods as stated in Thrall and Hibbard's *A Handbook to Literature* is that naturalism shares with Romanticism a belief that the actual is important not in itself but in what it can reveal about the nature of a larger reality; it differs sharply from Romanticism, however, in finding that reality not in transcendent ideas or absolute ideals but in the scientific laws which can be revealed through the action of individual instances.¹ Norris uses symbolism and imagery in what, according to this definition, is a romantic way—that is, to point out the transcendent nature of certain forces, to reveal "transcendent ideas" and "absolute ideals," and to indicate the inner nature of his characters and the forces by which they are confronted. Also, when writing at his best, Norris uses details for their

symbolic significance, not for their own sake as would a strictly naturalistic writer.  

The title of The Octopus aptly illustrates one aspect of Norris's use of romantic imagery; metaphorically speaking, the railroad is the octopus, its tentacles reaching out over the state of California to crush and strangle the wheat ranchers. By his title Norris indicates the parasitic nature of the railroad before the reader even begins the novel. Norris's writing is not characterized by subtlety; he extends his metaphor to further demonstrate the maleficence of the railroad as "the leviathan, with tentacles of steel clutching into the soil, the soulless Force, the iron-hearted Power, the monster, the Colossus, the Octopus." 

When Norris wishes to vary his epithets to demonstrate the brutal, overwhelming power of the railroad, he calls it "the iron monster" or "the iron-hearted monster of steel and steam." References are made to the "Cyclopean" appearance of a train at night. Such images not only make the destructive nature of the railroad clear, they pass judgment.

On the other hand, the images which Norris uses to describe the earth, the farm-land, are of an entirely different type. Believing that nature is benign, although unconsciously, and

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2Edward Wagenknecht, "Frank Norris in Retrospect," The Virginia Quarterly Review, VI (April, 1930), 317.
3Norris, The Octopus, I, 48.
that ultimately it produces "good,"\(^4\) Norris uses images which suggest creative vitality. For example, Norris employs the "Mother Earth" symbol to show both the productivity and power of nature. In the planting season the farmers perform the male function of impregnating the soil during the ploughing:

It was the long stroking caress, vigorous, male, powerful, for which the Earth seemed panting. The heroic embrace of a multitude of iron hands, gripping deep into the brown, warm flesh of the land that quivered responsive and passionate under this rude advance, so robust as to be almost an assault, so violent as to be veritably brutal. There, under the sun and under the speckless sheen of the sky, the wooing of the Titan began, the vast primal passion, and the two world-forces, the elemental Male and Female, locked in a colossal embrace, at grapples in the throes of an infinite desire, at once terrible and divine, knowing no law, untamed, savage, natural, sublime.\(^5\)

At harvest time, "the great earth, the mother, after its period of reproduction, its pains of labour, delivered of the fruit of its loins, slept the sleep of exhaustion, the infinite repose of the colossus, benignant, eternal, strong, the nourisher of nations, the feeder of an entire world."\(^6\) Through his sexual imagery, Norris has given a clear picture of a vast, organic "world-force," possessed of tremendous energy, a colossal entity of unconscious goodness; out of her own passion and for her own satisfaction, "the great earth, the mother," has joined with the "elemental Male" to produce the wheat.

\(^4\)French, Frank Norris. p. 102.
\(^5\)Norris, The Octopus, I, 125-126.
\(^6\)Ibid., p. 44.
The wheat itself is a third transcendent force in *The Octopus*. The product of nature, it works relentlessly for the good. In spite of the massacre of Annixter and the other ranchers, in spite of the machinations of the railroad, the wheat fulfills its purpose. Presley sees that his friends are destroyed, and his outlook on life is greatly altered:

**But the WHEAT remained.** Untouched, unassailable, undefiled, that mighty world-force, that nourisher of nations, wrapped in Nirvanic calm, indifferent to the human swarm, gigantic, resistless, moved onward in its appointed grooves. Through the welter of blood at the irrigation ditch, through the sham charity and shallow philanthropy of famine relief committees, the great harvest of Los Muertos moved like a flood . . . .

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The imagery in this passage portrays the wheat as a force, a "world force" like the earth, that cannot be stopped until its destiny is complete; it is "resistless," and no massacre or committee can stop it. The wheat also takes on special symbolic significance as a creative force in its relationship to the theme of the transforming power of love, creative in the sense that it conveys a vital lesson to two characters in *The Octopus*. At the instant that they change their philosophical perspectives, both Vanamee and Annixter are aware of a connection between the lesson they learn and the wheat. When Vanamee sees Angèle's daughter, he also sees the new growth of wheat and perceives a bond between the two:

There it was. The Wheat! The Wheat! In the night it had come up. It was there, everywhere, from margin to margin.

7 Norris, *The Octopus*, II, 360.
margin of the horizon. The earth, long empty, teemed with green life. Once more the pendulum of the seasons swung in its mighty arc, from death back to life. Life out of death, eternity rising from out dissolution. There was the lesson . . . . The wheat called forth from out the darkness, from out the grip of the earth, of the grave, from out corruption, rose triumphant into light and life. 8

So also had Angèle risen from the dead, in the form of her daughter, and Vanamee learns that death is not the end of life, by his own experience and by the lesson of the wheat. On the same night that Vanamee sees Angèle's daughter, Annixter discovers that he is in love with Hilma. Like Annixter's life, the earth has been barren; but just as he admits to himself that he loves Hilma, Annixter sees that the earth is "no longer bare," and that the land is "no longer barren, no longer empty, no longer dull brown." 9 Unknown to Annixter, the seed of love had long been planted in his life, but in one night it had come forth. So it was with the wheat:

The little seed long planted, germinating in the deep, dark furrows of the soil, straining, swelling, suddenly in one night had burst upward to the light . . . . The earth, the loyal mother, who never failed, who never disappointed, was keeping her faith again. Once more the strength of nations was renewed. Once more the force of the world was revivified. 10

Annixter's love for Hilma, the love of man for woman, is like the wheat in another way. Both are the "strength of nations" and the "force of the world."

8 Ibid., pp. 106-107. 9 Ibid., p. 82.
10 Ibid., pp. 82-83.
Although there are many examples in *The Octopus* of Norris's use of details for their symbolic significance rather than for their own sake, two will suffice for illustration. The names of the wheat ranches, for instance, are unusual. The Derricks' ranch is El Rancho de Los Muertos—the ranch of the dead—a seemingly meaningless name. But at the novel's end, Harran Derrick has been killed by the railroad men; Lyman Derrick is morally dead, having betrayed his father, brother, and the other ranchers to the railroad; Magnus Derrick is spiritually dead, his drive and fiery nature crushed as he submits to the railroad's demands. The name of Annixter's ranch, Quien Sabe—who knows—is symbolic of the attitudes of Presley, searching for knowledge of good and evil; of Vanamee, discovering the truth of life and death; and of Annixter himself, learning about love. Another detail used for its symbolic significance is the crate of rifles seen by Hilma and Annixter as they return from their honeymoon. Hilma thinks that the box contains a wedding present, but inside is potential violence, the eruption of which leads to Annixter's death. Like Annixter in his newly married and happy state, the rifles in the crate are for the present harmless; but when the violence in Annixter awakens, the guns are used. Hilma's marriage is ended by what she thought to be a wedding gift.

The central force of *The Pit* is again the wheat, and the title, like that of *The Octopus*, is symbolic. The "pit" is
the room where the wheat trading takes place and where much of the action of the novel lies, but, says Warren French, it is also "the pit toward which people are hurled as the indulgence of their self-love causes them to attempt to thwart what the author [Norris] calls 'the resistless forces of nature.'"\(^\text{11}\) This second pit is where Curtis Jadwin finds himself after his reckless speculation nearly destroys him, and it is where Laura Jadwin is heading before her love for her husband changes her outlook. The pit literally referred to in the title is located within the Board of Trade Building and is usually described in images suggesting a whirlpool:

> Endlessly, ceaselessly the Pit, enormous, thundering, sucked in and spewed out, sending the swirl of its mighty central eddy far out through the city's channels. Terrible at the centre, it was, at the circumference, gentle, insidious, and persuasive, the send of the flowing so mild, that to embark upon it, yielding to the influence, was a pleasure that seemed devoid of all risk.\(^\text{12}\)

Jadwin is drawn into this pit, not seeing the dangers which lie ahead of him. After his speculative ventures fail, he finds that the pit is not as gentle as it has seemed: "The roar was appalling, the whirlpool was again unchained, the maelstrom was again unleashed."\(^\text{13}\) Norris uses battle images also to describe the pit and the traders. Laura pictures Jadwin as

\(^{\text{11}}\) French, Frank Norris, pp. 115-116.  
\(^{\text{12}}\) Norris, The Pit, IX, 73.  
\(^{\text{13}}\) Ibid., p. 357.
"exulting among the captains" as he engages in the "Battle of the Street," and Jadwin's aides are referred to as his "soldiers." At the end of the day the floor of the pit is littered with trash: "It was the débris of the battle-field, the abandoned impedimenta and broken weapons of contending armies, the detritus of conflict, torn, broken, and rent, that at the end of each day's combat encumbered the field." By the use of the whirlpool and battle images, Norris suggests the confusion and rivalry which exist in the trading pit and which he describes effectively in some of the novel's best scenes.

In The Pit, as in The Octopus, the wheat is pictured as a powerful, "resistless" force, and it is again described in imagery suggesting an overwhelming flood. The physical presence of the wheat is never felt in The Pit, but the wheat is there nonetheless, entirely capable of ruining Jadwin's speculative plans:

> Something, some infinite immeasurable power, onrushing in its eternal course, shook the Pit in its grasp. Something deafened the ears, blinded the eyes, dulled and numbed the mind, with its roar, with the chaff and dust of its whirlwind passage, with the stupefying sense of its power, coeval with the earthquake and glacier, merciless, all-powerful, a primal basic throe of creation itself, unassailable, inviolate, untamed.

Here again, as in The Octopus, the wheat is a transcendent force, vital, powerful, indifferent to man, finding its way

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14 Ibid., p. 98.  
15 Ibid., p. 371.
to India where hungry thousands await its life-giving sustenance. Norris makes it clear that the wheat is like any other natural phenomenon, the earthquake, for example, over which man has no control: "Almighty, blood-brother to the earthquake, coeval with the volcano and the whirlwind, that gigantic world-force, that colossal billow, Nourisher of the Nations, was swelling and advancing." 16

The wheat, which in The Octopus has special significance as a creative force, seems in The Pit to have become a destructive force, apparently destroying Jadwin:

The wheat had broken from his control. For months, he had, by the might of his single arm, held it back; but now it rose like the upbuilding of a colossal billow. It towered, towered, hung poised for an instant, and then, with a thunder as of the grind and crash of chaotic worlds, broke upon him, burst through the Pit and raced past him, on and on the eastward and to the hungry nations. 17

But the wheat is not what destroys Jadwin. He destroys himself by "standing between two sets of circumstances." By trying to corner the wheat market, Jadwin is momentarily preventing the wheat from reaching "the hungry nations." Although the wheat cannot be stopped for long, in Norris's view, Jadwin is opposing nature by impeding its progress for even a short while. His downfall is the result of his own vanity, believing that he could control the wheat.

In The Pit Norris again uses details for their symbolic significance. He describes the litter on the floor of the

16 Ibid., p. 357. 17 Ibid., pp. 375-376.
wheat pit, the "hay, peanut shells, apple parings, and orange peel, with torn newspapers, odds and ends of memoranda, crushed paper darts,"\(^\text{18}\) to show that here is the "débris of the battle-field," not just to pile up naturalistic detail. Norris describes the figure of Hargus, "a very old man, bleared-eyed, decrepit, dirty, in a battered top hat and faded frock coat, discoloured and weather-stained at the shoulders,"\(^\text{19}\) not to revel in an unpleasant description but to show what happens to a man who tries to corner the wheat. Hargus is a foreshadowing of what almost happens to Jadwin. When Laura moves her books to Chicago and begins putting them in her library, Norris lists authors and titles, again not for the sake of detail but to reveal Laura's character. She reads Scott, Dickens, Eliot, Jane Eyre, and Wanda, by Ouida, and is thus revealed as one with a romantic nature, romantic in the sense that she does not read the "modern" realists who do not appeal to her temperament.

In McTeague factual details which take on special symbolic significance are more numerous and more important to the meaning of the book than in any other of Norris's novels. Throughout McTeague Norris gives concrete details which do much more than emphasize a sordid environment; many of the items he describes become symbols which illustrate the avarice

\(^{18}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 98.} \quad ^{19}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 77.}\)
of Trina, McTeague, Zerkow, and Marcus Shouler, victims of their own greed. The gold tooth which McTeague buys to hang outside his office represents his desire to have wealth, to possess gold. Maria Macapa's mythical family fortune in solid-gold dinnerware finally results in her murder by Zerkow, although it probably never existed; here Norris may be commenting on the power even of imagined wealth to bring destruction. McTeague's canary in its gilded cage is symbolic of McTeague, Trina, Zerkow, and Marcus, as it feebly cries out "in its little gilt prison." All four characters are in prisons of their own making; McTeague, driven to murder by his greed, is found in the end handcuffed to a dead man in Death Valley; Zerkow, having murdered Maria for her non-existent treasure, is sought by the police and found drowned, weighed down by a sack of junk which he thinks to be gold; Trina, killed because she puts the love of her little hoard of money above her love for her husband, dies needlessly; Marcus, driven by revenge, pursues McTeague into Death Valley and dies there, never getting the money he believes rightfully his own.

Norris uses animal imagery to show the inner nature of McTeague. He has a jaw "like that of the carnivora," and he resembles "the draught horse, immensely strong, stupid, docile, obedient." When McTeague is roused, however, he is

20 Norris, McTeague, VIII, 3.
anything but docile, and Norris's animal images reveal McTeague's savage nature. When treating Trina's tooth, McTeague experiences strange longings as he sees her unconscious in his dentist's chair. He is like the "young bull in the heat of high summer," and his desire is "the sudden panther leap of the animal, lips drawn, fangs aflash, hideous, monstrous, not to be resisted." When hurt in a wrestling match with his friend Marcus, McTeague cries out with "the hideous yelling of a hurt beast, the squealing of a wounded elephant." Although presenting a favorite naturalistic idea, the "beast within," Norris does so romantically. That is, there is very little in McTeague's environment or heredity which causes him to be bestial--Norris is not presenting a scientific law as the naturalist would do, but characterizing, by use of animal imagery, one man as animalistic.

To illustrate the unpleasantness of life on Polk Street, where McTeague lives, Norris uses images related to the sense of smell. McTeague's room exhales "a mingled odour of bedding, creosote, and ether." From his window, McTeague often inhales the "acrid odour of ink." But Norris also uses pleasant aromas in his work. McTeague is attracted to Trina for her smell as much as for her beauty. He loves the smell of her hair and her neck; once he spends the night in

\[21\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 26.} \quad 22\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 200.} \]
\[23\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 4.} \quad 24\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 5.} \]
her room: "With what a delicious odour was it redolent!
That heavy enervating odour of her hair . . . ." 25 When he
opens her closet, he sees all her dresses and recognizes each
one:

As he stirred them a delicate perfume disengaged itself
from the folds. Ah, that exquisite feminine odour! . . .
All at once, seized with an unreasoned impulse, McTeague
opened his huge arms and gathered the little garments
close to him, plunging his face deep amongst them,
savouring their delicious odour with long breaths of
luxury and supreme content. 26

A Man's Woman and Vandover and the Brute do not lend
themselves to a discussion of Norris's romantic symbolism and
imagery, the former because it is an undistinguished novel and
the latter because it was never finished. They are important,
however, because they show that even at his worst there was
some element of the romantic in Norris's symbols and images.
In A Man's Woman, for example, death plays an important part;
therefore Norris is interested in the character of death as it
appears to Lloyd Searight. To illustrate her feelings,
Norris uses personification. Death is "the Enemy" which
Lloyd must fight "hand to hand." 27 It seems to lurk and leer
at her from dark corners, and when Bennett is about to die,
death is "ready to leap, ready to strike, to clutch at her
throat with cold fingers and bear her to the earth, rending
her heart with a grief she told herself she could not endure

25 Ibid., p. 67.  
26 Ibid., pp. 68-69.  
27 Norris, A Man's Woman, VI, 2.
and live."28 Here Norris uses imagery to indicate the inner nature of a force with which his characters must deal; no naturalistic law is revealed, but the savage nature of death is made clear.

Had Norris finished Vandover and the Brute, he would probably have strengthened the symbolic meaning of many passages and otherwise improved the book. As it stands, he uses animal imagery much as he does in McTeague, not to point out defects in Vandover's heredity or environment but to show the true quality of one side of Vandover's personality. Again Norris deals with an individual for the purpose of showing what happens in that one person's life, not to seek a scientific law of behavior.

Vandover, like McTeague, is partly animalistic, but Vandover is aware of his brutish qualities, even when he is a child and "the brute began to make itself felt, and a multitude of perverse and vicious ideas commenced to buzz about him like a swarm of nasty flies."29 As he grows older, he needs only a glimpse of a prostitute to feel the immediate stirrings of "the animal and the beast in him, the evil, hideous brute."30 After all the influences for good have passed from Vandover's life, his father being dead and Turner

28 Ibid., p. 194.
29 Norris, Vandover, V, 8.
30 Ibid., p. 44.
Ravis having realized that she does not love him, Vandover is almost completely possessed by the brute; and the picture Vandover now presents is even less pleasing than that earlier of the young man giving in to his evil nature. Vandover becomes like a wolf. On occasion he runs naked, "back and forth along the wall of the room, upon the palms of his hands and his toes."\(^{31}\) Swinging his head from side to side, he utters a raucous cry, "coming more from his throat than from his lips. It might easily have been the growl of an animal."\(^{32}\) Again Norris presents the idea of the "beast within," but again it is a specific case, not one to be applied to man in general as a naturalist would have presented it.

A close reading of the major novels of Frank Norris reveals how he uses imagery and symbolism effectively in the romantic tradition to suggest the inner nature of his characters and to point out the nature of the outer forces with which these characters have to deal, although in his lesser novels he uses fewer symbols and images—and uses them conventionally. It is also apparent that in his better novels Norris often uses specific details for their symbolic significance rather than for their own sake.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 272.

\(^{32}\) Ibid.
Writers of romantic fiction often try to achieve in their settings the "quality of 'bigness' in its double reference to size and intensity,"\(^1\) as well as a "sense of vitality and richness."\(^2\) Both of these aspects are present in the settings used by Frank Norris. He emphasizes "bigness" by choosing backgrounds that are vast and indicative of huge force and power. Vitality and richness are found in his descriptions of nature and city life, as he depicts scenes full of visual details, sounds, odors, emotions, and action. In some cases the setting and a character being described are associated—an identification of the individual with nature.

The *Octopus* contains a striking example of such an identification of an individual character with nature through the use of setting. Angele, Vanamee's sweetheart, has died before the story begins, but Vanamee's thoughts give a clear picture of what she had been like. Her parents had owned a seed ranch, "planted thick with roses, violets, lilies, tulips, iris, carnations, tube-roses, poppies, heliotrope

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\(^1\) Cowley, "'Not Men,'" p. 422.

And into this life of flowers, this world of colour, this atmosphere oppressive and clogged and cloyed and thickened with sweet odour, Angèle had been born.\textsuperscript{3} To Vanamee, Angèle is completely identified with the seed ranch, and thus with all nature; she has the smell of roses in her hair, the color of violets in her eyes, the red of carnations in her lips, the whiteness, perfume, and grace of the lilies in her neck. Her hands have the odor of heliotrope, her feet the smell of hyacinths, her dress the scent of poppies. Small wonder that Vanamee, a lover of nature and of beauty, falls in love with her. The seed ranch-flower motif is repeated with each mention of Angèle, and later, of her daughter, until the three are always thought of together. It may also be noted that the descriptions of the seed ranch illustrate Norris's use of visual details, in the description of the flowers, and appeal to the reader's sense of smell, in the cataloguing of odors.

An example of the vitality and rich texture which Norris gives to his settings is the scene in which Presley shows Vanamee the completed poem, "The Toilers." Looking for Vanamee, Presley finds him in a setting which is both romantic and dynamic; a sense of motion is given by scurrying gophers and a rabbit on the ground, hawks in the sky, and quail

\textsuperscript{3} Norris, \textit{The Octopus}, I, 136.
taking to the air. Colors are implied in the description of bare hills, wild oats, olive-green thickets, and the sky:

The hills were huge rolling hummocks of bare ground, covered only by wild oats. At long intervals were isolated live-oaks. In the caños and arroyos, the chaparral and manzanita grew in dark olive-green thickets. The ground was honeycombed with gopher-holes, and the gophers themselves were everywhere. Occasionally a jack rabbit bounded across the open, from one growth of chaparral to another, taking long leaps, his ears erect. High overhead, a hawk or two swung at anchor, and once, with a startling rush of wings, a covey of quail flushed from the brush at the side of the trail.

The romantic quality of "bigness" is achieved by Norris in his description of the San Joaquin Valley, the main setting for The Octopus. Standing on a hill, Presley views a landscape which appears to reach to infinity, stretching beyond the horizon so far that only the imagination can perceive all of it. Presley can see a town and a few ranch buildings:

But all this seemed to be only foreground, a mere array of accessories—a mass of irrelevant details. Beyond . . . on to the south and west, infinite, illimitable, stretching out there under the sheen of the sunset forever and forever, flat, vast, unbroken, a huge scroll, unrolling between the horizons, spread the great stretches of the ranch of Los Muertos, bare of crops, shaved close in the recent harvest. Near at hand were hills, but on that far southern horizon only the curve of the great earth itself checked the view . . . . Then, as the imagination expanded under the stimulus of that measureless range of vision, even those great ranches resolved themselves into mere foreground, mere accessories, irrelevant details. Beyond the fine line of the horizons, over the curve of the globe, the shoulder of the earth, were other ranches, equally vast, and beyond these, others, and beyond these, still others, the immensities multiplying, lengthening out vaster and vaster. The whole

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4 Norris, The Octopus, II, 88.
gigantic sweep of the San Joaquin expanded, Titanic, before the eye of the mind, flagellated with heat, quivering and shimmering under the sun's red eye.\(^5\)

This is the kind of setting which appealed to Norris, vast and sweeping, taking in far more than the eye can see, seemingly as huge as the earth itself.

Frank Norris was once inclined to believe that there were only three "story cities" in the United States: New York, New Orleans, and San Francisco.\(^6\) For this reason, all but one of Norris's novels are set mostly in San Francisco, the city where he spent the greatest part of his life. Having changed his view, however, to the belief that romance lies "in the point of view of people who see things," Norris set his last novel, The Pit, in Chicago. Norris was forced to choose Chicago, of course, because of the location of the wheat pits, but he had also found settings which appealed to him in the city itself.

Chicago had undoubtedly begun to appeal to Norris because it possessed the quality of "bigness." He saw Chicago as a great force, causing the wheels of industry to turn all over the country, a place of "infinite, inexhaustible vitality," filled with "the true power and spirit of America."\(^7\) Such power and vitality make the city a romantic setting:

\(^5\) Norris. The Octopus. I. 43-44.
\(^6\) Walker, Frank Norris, p. 17.
\(^7\) Norris, The Pit, IX, 58.
The Great Grey City, brooking no rival, imposed its dominion upon a reach of country larger than many a kingdom of the Old World. For thousands of miles beyond its confines was its influence felt. Out, far out, far away in the snow and shadow of northern Wisconsin forests, axes and saws bit the bark of century-old trees, stimulated by this city's energy. Just as far to the southward pick and drill leaped to the assault of veins of anthracite, moved by her central power. Her force turned the wheels of harvester and seeder a thousand miles distant in Iowa and Kansas. Her force spun the screws and propellers of innumerable squadrons of lake steamers crowding the Sault Sainte Marie. For her and because of her all the Central States, all the Great Northwest roared with traffic and industry; sawmills screamed; factories, their smoke blackening the sky, clashed and flamed; wheels turned, pistons leaped in their cylinders; cog gripped cog; beltings clasped the drums of mammoth wheels; and converters of forges belched into the clouded air their tempest breath of molten steel.

Chicago is shown to be so powerful that the central and northern states are kept busy for and because of her; massive machines all over the country are run by Chicago's tremendous energy. Besides the idea of force, the reader is treated to such visual details as the woodcutters with their axes, the steamers, the converters, the harvesters; he feels the cold of snow and the heat of hot steel. Motion is everywhere, in the machines, the factories, the seeders, the picks of the laborers.

The wheat pit is also a setting filled with vitality and energy. Describing it, Norris fills it with motion, sights, sounds, and feelings, all conveying the idea of power and the

Ibid., p. 57.
intensity of emotion developed in the traders:

And all these sounds, the chatter of the telegraph, the intoning of the messenger boys, the shouts and cries of clerks and traders, the shuffle and trampling of hundreds of feet, the whirring of telephone signals, rose into the troubled air, and mingled overhead to form a vast note, prolonged, sustained, that reverberated from vault to vault of the airy roof, and issued from every doorway, every opened window in one long roll of uninterrupted thunder . . . . Then suddenly, cutting squarely athwart the vague crescendo of the Floor came the single incisive stroke of a great gong. Instantly a tumult was unchained. Arms were flung upward in strenuous gestures, and from above the crowding heads in the Wheat Pit a multitude of hands, eager, the fingers extended, leaped into the air. All articulate expression was lost in the single explosion of sound as the traders surged downward to the centre of the Pit, grabbing each other, struggling toward each other, trampling, stamping, charging through with might and main.9

So much action and sound are crammed into this one scene that the reader inevitably feels the intensity of the trading, the energy of the traders, and the power wielded over them by the unseen wheat.

In McTeague Norris's use of setting is romantic in "the treatment of the city [San Francisco] and the wilderness [the California mining country] as great entities," says Richard Chase.10 Norris gives to the city and rugged mountains a life of their own, a romantic vitality which can be felt by the reader and which lends a sense of Norris's characteristic richness and vastness to the settings. Norris expends nearly

9Ibid., p. 91.
10Johnson, "Romance and Realism in the Novels of Frank Norris," p. 184.
four pages describing the view of Polk Street as seen from McTeague's window at different times of the day, the "corner drug stores with huge jars of red, yellow, and green liquids in their windows," the stationer's stores, the barber shops, the cheap restaurants. ¹¹ McTeague can see the laborers trudging by, "plumber's apprentices, their pockets stuffed with sections of lead pipe, tweezers, and pliers," the carpenters, gangs of street workers with "overalls soiled with yellow clay," night clerks, conductors, and marketers. ¹² Later in the day he sees shop girls, school children, and newsboys, as he hears the "mingled shuffling of feet, the rattle of wheels, the heavy trundling of cable cars." ¹³ In the evening he can see the theater-goers, the workers returning home, the Salvationist band, and the tamale men. The street is filled with a pulsing life of motion and color; the reader sees, hears, and feels it all.

Writing about the mining country where McTeague flees after Trina's murder, Norris again conveys an impression of life but of a life, much older than that of the city, dating back to prehistoric times, slow moving, majestic, gigantic, powerful:

A tremendous, immeasurable Life pushed steadily heavenward, without a sound, without a motion. At turns of the road, on the higher points, canons disclosed

¹¹ Norris, McTeague, VIII, 4.
¹² Ibid., p. 5. ¹³ Ibid., p. 6.
themselves far away, gigantic grooves in the landscape, deep blue in the distance, opening one into another, ocean-deep, silent, huge, and suggestive of colossal forces held in reserve. At their bottoms they were solid, massive; on their crests they broke delicately into fine serrated edges where the pines and redwoods outlined their million of tops against the high white horizon. Here and there the mountains lifted themselves out of the narrow river beds in groups like giant lions rearing their heads after drinking. The entire region was untamed. In some places east of the Mississippi nature is cozy, intimate, small, and homelike, like a good-natured housewife. In Placer County, California, she is a vast, unconquered brute of the Pliocene epoch, savage, sullen, and magnificently indifferent to man.¹⁴

One receives the impression that Norris would never write about a "housewifely" nature; instead, he delights in the picturesque description of the primeval forces of the wilderness, silently held in check but indicative of vast power, immense size, and indeterminate age.

A Man's Woman gives Norris another opportunity to use two settings, the Arctic and the city of San Francisco. In the Arctic scenes, Norris turns once more to a concept of nature developed in McTeague, a nature full of primal energy, here even more harsh, more brutal than in the mining country. And, as always, Norris pays close attention to visual details of color and objects as well as to sounds:

Outside the unleashed wind yelled incessantly, like a sabbath of witches . . . . In front of the tent and over a ridge of barren rocks was an arm of the sea dotted with blocks of ice moving silently and swiftly onward; while back from the coast, and back from the tent and to the south and to the west and to the east,
stretched the illimitable waste of land, rugged, gray, harsh; snow and ice and rock, rock and ice and snow, stretching away there under the sombre sky forever and forever; gloomy, untamed, terrible, an empty region—the scarred battlefield of chaotic forces, the savage desolation of a prehistoric world.\textsuperscript{15}

This passage is strikingly similar to the passage in \textit{The Octopus} quoted above, in which the ranch country is described. Norris uses identical words to describe "illimitable" landscapes, stretching "forever and forever" beyond the horizon, beyond the reach of the eye. Prehistoric and untamed, hostile to man, the Arctic is also quite similar to the mountainous country described in \textit{McTeague}.

In several scenes of \textit{A Man's Woman}, the city of San Francisco is described in such a way as to give the reader the impression that the city, composed of many individuals and parts, is nevertheless a single creature with independent life and personality. Such descriptions impart a romantic vitality to San Francisco, and the city seems almost able to communicate with the characters in the novel by conveying impressions and feelings to them. Lloyd Searight, while on a nursing job, begins "to be aware of a vague, unwonted movement in the City itself, outside there behind the drawn curtains and half-opened window—a faint, uncertain agitation, a trouble, a passing ripple on the still black pool of the night."\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Norris, \textit{A Man's Woman}, VI, 32-33.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 61.
There is excitement in the air, "finding expression in a vague murmur, the mingling of many sounds into one huge note—a note that gradually swelled and grew louder and seemed to be rising from all corners of the City at once." The city, in its stirrings and sounds, is able to communicate to Lloyd the intensity of feeling generated by Ward Bennett's return before she knows of that return. Just as Angéle was identified with nature in *The Octopus*, Lloyd has become so closely a part of the city that she can interpret its moods. Excitement stirs the city again in *A Man's Woman* on the day that Bennett begins his return voyage to the Arctic, and the feeling of the people is reflected in the movement and noise of the city itself:

The distant, droning sound drew gradually nearer, swelling in volume, and by degrees splitting into innumerable component parts. One began to distinguish the various notes that contributed to its volume—a sharp, quick volley of inarticulate shouts or a cadenced cheer or a hoarse salvo of steam whistles. Bells began to ring in different quarters of the City.18

*Vandover and the Brute* is filled with the descriptions of San Francisco life at which Norris excelled. Each scene shows the romantic vitality and richness of the city's noisy, hurrying life. One particular description of a street is reminiscent of that of Polk Street in *McTeague*, quoted above. Whereas McTeague sees from his window the workers and hears the "trundling" cable cars, Vandover hears wagons "rattling over the cobbles and car-tracks," the cable cars which

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"trundled up and down the street," and the bells in the cars.  

As McTeague had watched the workers file past his window, so Vendover sees the delivery men on grocery, express, and delivery wagons. Motion and sound fill the page, and the reader senses the city's energy.

Interior settings in *Vandover and the Brute* are just as impressively vital as the exterior settings, filled with sounds, colors, motion, and feeling. A good example is Norris's description of the Mechanic's Fair:

There was a vast shuffling of thousands of feet and a subdued roar of conversation like the noise of a great mill; mingled with these were the purring of distant machinery, the splashing of a temporary fountain, and the rhythmic clamour of a brass band, while in the piano exhibit the hired performer was playing a concert-grand with a great flourish. Nearer at hand one could catch ends of conversation and notes of laughter, the creaking of boots, and the rustle of moving dresses and stiff skirts. Here and there groups of school children elbowed their way through the crowd, crying shrilly, their hands full of advertisement pamphlets, fans, picture cards, and toy whips with pewter whistles on the butts, while the air itself was full of the smell of fresh popcorn.

An examination of the settings used by Frank Norris shows that Norris did not use setting as a strictly naturalistic writer might have done, as a deterministic force, an environment to mold a character. Norris's backgrounds show his love of vitality, of vivid sights, sounds, colors, and smells. They demonstrate the "bigness" of his writing, an effort to present

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20 Ibid., pp. 75-76.
settings which are vast in size, energy, and intensity of feeling conveyed to the reader.

Just as Norris was attracted to settings which throbbed with life and energetic force, he enjoyed writing about action, revolting against "the prudish restraints of the age" and exploiting "the adventures and elemental emotions of 'red-blooded' characters." He again achieves the quality of "bigness," in its reference to intensity, as Walcutt says, by the use of "naturalistic subject matter presented (because it is sensational) in a style that is restrained and objective; here the effect would be called romantic, whereas the style would be called realistic."  

Several scenes of The Octopus contain violent action and bloodshed. One such scene is a jack rabbit hunt; thousands of rabbits are rounded up, forced into a corral, and slaughtered:

Armed with a club in each hand, the young fellows from Guadalajara and Bonneville, and the farm boys from the ranches, leaped over the rails of the corral. They walked unsteadily upon the myriad of crowding bodies underfoot, or as space cleared, sank almost waist deep into the mass that leaped and squirmed about them. Blindly, furiously, they struck and struck. This is naturalistic subject matter, dealing with the sordid side of human nature, and it is sensational; it is, however, 

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22 Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism, p. 22.
23 Norris, The Octopus, II, 214.
what Norris would have called "romantic," a "variation from the type of normal life."

Another scene of bloodshed in The Octopus is the massacre of Presley's friends by the railroad agents. Again the style is objective, but the gunfight is similar to those found in any western adventure story, with the exception that in The Octopus sympathetic characters are destroyed:

Hooven, in attempting to rise from his kneeling position, received a rifle ball squarely in the throat, and rolled forward upon his face. Old Broderson, crying out, "Oh, they've shot me, boys," staggered sideways, his head bent, his hands rigid at his sides, and fell into the ditch. Osterman, blood running from his mouth and nose, turned about and walked back. Presley helped him across the irrigating ditch and Osterman laid himself down, his head on his folded arms. Harran Derrick dropped where he stood, turning over on his face, and lay motionless, groaning terribly, a pool of blood forming under his stomach. The old man, Dabney, silent as ever, received his death, speechless. He fell to his knees, got up again, fell once more, and died without a word. Annixter, instantly killed, fell his length to the ground, and lay without movement, just as he had fallen, one arm across his face.24

Writing in an almost reportorial style, Norris brings to the reader's mind visions of the Old West and its famous gun battles, showing how such battles must have been.

The Pit deals with subjects less sensational than the slaughter of rabbits or the killing of men, but the activity in the wheat pits generates its own kind of excitement by portraying what Taylor calls "elemental emotions." In The Pit, Curtis Jadwin is driven by two basic desires; he wants

24 Ibid., p. 233.
to make money, and he likes to gamble. Stronger of these two desires is the one which appeals to the speculative side of Jadwin's nature, the side finding its greatest joy in the action of the wheat pits; there Jadwin discovers "that there were in him powers, capabilities, and a breadth of grasp hitherto unsuspected."\(^{25}\) It is in the pits, too, that "elemental emotions" are exposed. There are men who are content to make ten dollars:

Others who might at that very moment be nursing plans which in a week's time would make them millionaires; still others who, under a mask of nonchalance, strove to hide the chagrin of yesterday's defeat. And they were there, ready, inordinately alert, ears turned to the faintest sound, eyes searching for the vaguest trace of meaning in those of their rivals, nervous, keyed to the highest tension, ready to thrust deep into the slightest opening, to spring, mercilessly, upon the smallest undefended spot.\(^{26}\)

Here, although not stated, are avarice, fear, hope, and hate, the emotions which move the men in the pit.

There is also action in the pit, swift moving and exciting. As one of Jadwin's assistants goes onto the floor, he sees that

Men on either side of him were shouting mere incoherences, to which nobody, not even themselves, was listening. Others, silent, gnawed their nails to the quick, breathing rapidly, audibly even, their nostrils expanding and contracting. All around roared the vague thunder that since early morning had shaken the building. In the Pit the bids leaped to and fro, though the time of opening had not yet come; the very planks under foot seemed spinning

\(^{25}\) Norris, The Pit, IX, 268.

\(^{26}\) Ibid., p. 90.
about in the first huge warning swirl of the Pit's centripetal convulsion. There was dizziness in the air.27

Here is action confined to a small space, the wheat pit, and the reader senses the undercurrent of excitement, the tension of the traders, and the motion of the pit.

*McTeague* contains violent action as well as characters driven by basic emotions. A single scene, the murder of Trina by McTeague, best illustrates these aspects of the novel. McTeague is driven to kill by his desire for Trina's money and by his anger at her for having sold his concertina. Trina is killed because of her greed; avarice leads her to hoard her money, keeping it from McTeague, and to sell the concertina to get more money. Almost drunk and out of money, McTeague goes to Trina's room; she refuses to give him any of her money, and he attacks her:

Beside herself with terror, Trina turned and fought him back; fought for her miserable life with the exasperation and strength of a harrassed cat; and with such energy and such wild, unnatural force, that even McTeague for the moment drew back from her. But her resistance was the one thing to drive him to the top of his fury. He came back at her again, his eyes drawn to two fine twinkling points, and his enormous fists, clenched till the knuckles whitened, raised in the air.

Then it became abominable.28

Norris has shown how his characters' basic drives and emotions bring them to this point in the story. Then he

28*Norris, McTeague*, VIII, 318.
describes what happens, the fury of McTeague, the fear of Trina, the horror of the murder. McTeague is not judged for his deed; Trina is not judged for her miserliness. Such action could be found in pulp magazine detective-adventure stories but not described with Norris's objectivity.

"Red-blooded" characters in conflict with one another and brutal adventure in the Arctic make up the most interesting portions of *A Man's Woman*. The suffering undergone by Ward Bennett and his crew in the Arctic has been called "heart-rending" and brutal, but Norris's descriptions are restrained and objective, being partially in the form of a journal kept by Bennett. Virtually copied from the "ice-journal" of Lieutenant-Commander George DeLong (although using only the more disagreeable episodes), Norris's descriptions cannot be called mere sensationalism or brutality. Norris is dispassionately recording sensational material for its romantic effect:

November 30th—Tuesday--The doctor amputated Mr. Ferriss's other hand to-day. Living gale of wind from northeast. Impossible to march against it in our weakened condition; must camp here till it abates. Made soup of the last of the dog meat this afternoon. Our last pemmican gone.

December 1st—Wednesday--Everybody getting weaker. Metz breaking down. Sent Adler down to the shore to gather

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29 "*A Man's Woman,*" *Outlook, LXIV* (March, 1900), 486.

shrimps. We had about a mouthful apiece for lunch. Supper, a spoonful of glycerine and hot water.  

All entries in the journal are similar to these two, merely stating in plain language the conditions of the weather and the men. The situation could have been described in much more sensational terms, and much could have been made of the suffering of the men, but Norris is content to let the facts of the journal reflect their hardships.

A contest of strong wills occurs in A Man's Woman when Bennett demands that Lloyd leave the house where she is nursing Richard Ferriss. In keeping with his idea that romance should explore "the unplumbed depths of the human heart," Norris presents the thoughts of Lloyd as she tries to understand that Bennett wants her to leave a patient:

If he was determined, she was obstinate; if he was resolved, she was stubborn; if he was powerful, she was unyielding. Never had she conceded her point before; never had she allowed herself to be thwarted in the pursuance of a course she believed to be right. Was she, of all women, to yield now? . . . . There was to be no compromise, no half measures. Either she or Bennett must in the end be beaten. One of them was to be broken and humbled beyond all retrieving.

The clash between these two wills is so great that the result will be the destruction of the loser's character. In the end,

31 Norris, A Man's Woman, VI, 30-31.


33 Norris, A Man's Woman, VI, 116-117.
Lloyd is the weaker, and, as she has foreseen, it is her character that is destroyed:

Her strength seemed all at once to leave her. All the fabric of her character, so mercilessly assaulted, appeared in that moment to reel, topple, and go crashing to its wreck. She was shattered, broken, humbled, and beaten down to the dust. Her pride was gone, her faith in herself was gone, her fine strong energy was gone. The pity of it, the grief of it; all that she held dearest; her fine and confident steadfastness; the great love that had brought such happiness into her life—that had been her inspiration, all torn from her and tossed aside like chaff.34

In this scene there is no "prudish restraint" of emotion. Both characters' thoughts are fully examined; the episode requires twenty pages, although less than an hour passes. Norris refers to this as "niggling analysis"; however, he is actually exploiting his characters' emotions to produce a romantic effect.

In Vandover and the Brute Norris has little opportunity to describe the type of violent, sensational action which can be found in his other novels. Possibly for this reason, Norris has Vandover take a short ocean voyage, almost entirely irrelevant to the rest of the story, so that Norris can describe a stormy sea and a shipwreck. Such a scene gives Norris a chance to depict a variety of violent actions in a few pages—people leap into the stormy water; a woman is crushed by a falling beam; a Jew tries to get into a full lifeboat and is beaten until his hands are little more than stumps on his

34 Ibid., p. 131.
wrists; the boilers of the ship explode, and it sinks. All these things are told in Norris's objective style, an enumeration of realistic detail to achieve a romantic effect:

There had been a great rush to the other side of the ship, a wild scrambling up the steep deck, over skylights and between masts and ventilators. People clung to anything, to cleats, to steamer chairs, to the brass railings, to the person who stood next to them. They no longer listened to the protestations of the brave boatswain's mate; that last long roll had terrified them. The sense of a great catastrophe began to spread and widen all about like the rising of some fearful invisible mist.35

Although most of the material in this passage is factual, the reader can sense the fear of the passengers, the panic that runs through them, and their desire to save themselves at all costs.

It is interesting to note that although Norris claims to be a romantic writer, there is one aspect of romance—sentimentalism—which he believes should be "handed down the scullery stairs."36 However, as Robert Spiller points out, Norris's critical distinctions are not clear enough to keep him away from the sentimentality of popular romance.37 While not playing a major part in any of Norris's works, sentimentality is present in all his novels.

35 Norris, Vandover, V, 114-115.
36 Norris, The Responsibilities, VII, 163.
Sentiment appeals to the reader's emotions, and Warren French points to one section of *The Octopus* in which, he believes, Norris causes the reader "to indulge in the worst kind of sentimentality—to revel in feeling for its own sake."\(^{38}\) In this section of *The Octopus*, glimpses of Mrs. Hooven starving to death are alternated with descriptions of an important railroad man and his guests gorging themselves at a banquet. Not only this, but Mrs. Hooven's little girl is with her, hungry and watching her mother die. The main purpose of such a scene seems to be to let the reader engage in an orgy of emotion. Norris, the romanticist, is using the sentimentality that he purports to abhor.

Although containing no scene of sentimentality so striking as the banquet-starvation episode of *The Octopus*, *The Pit* nevertheless has its share of sentiment. Norris again appeals to the emotion of pity. After Laura marries Curtis Jadwin, she suddenly becomes very frightened of the new life before her. She becomes nostalgic about her old life: "Forever the old days, the old life were gone. Girlhood was gone . . . ."\(^{39}\) Tears come to Laura's eyes, and she leans against the door frame, whispering, "Good-bye. Good-bye. Good-bye."\(^{40}\) Having bid farewell to her old life and girlhood,

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\(^{38}\) French, *Frank Norris*, p. 102.

\(^{39}\) Norris, *The Pit*, IX, 177.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.
Laura kneels by the side of her bed and prays "in the little unstudied words of her childhood" that God will take care of her "and make her a good girl," that she will be happy, and that she will be a "good and loyal wife." Norris is writing romantically here, but the scene is more than a little maudlin; the reader is more likely to laugh at Laura than to sympathize with her.

An even more sentimental scene occurs in The Pit when Jadwin returns home after his failure in the wheat pit. Laura is just about to leave Jadwin for Corthell, when Jadwin stumbles into the room, his hands shaking. For a moment he cannot speak; then he manages only, "Old girl . . . Honey." Laura, tears "streaming down her face," gropes her way to him, saying, "My husband, my husband!" After this dramatic confrontation, they make their way to the couch, sinking down upon it "side by side, holding to each other, trembling and fearful, like children in the night." Here again Norris is appealing to the reader's emotions, to feelings of relief that Laura will not leave, of happiness that the marriage will now be saved.

Norris also plays on the reader's emotions in McTeague. As William Dean Howells pointed out, Norris "wreaks" a great

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., p. 394.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
deal of sentimentality on Old Grannis and Miss Baker, the elderly lovers. The reader can feel the happiness and joy of the old couple, two people living in a dream world of their own making. Since Norris never has them marry, their dream is never shattered; the reader sees them together and assumes that they will always remain so, holding hands and "keeping company":

The day lapsed slowly into twilight, and the two old people sat there in the gray evening, quietly, quietly, their hands in each other's hands, "keeping company," but now with nothing to separate them. It had come at last. After all these years they were together. They stood at length in a little Elysium of their own creating. They walked hand in hand in a delicious world where it was always autumn.45

Norris deals with the emotion of happiness in *A Man's Woman*, and he again lapses into sentimentality. The result is a somewhat mawkish scene that one would expect to find in a woman's magazine of rather poor quality. Lloyd Searight, who has not seen Ward Bennett since his return from the Arctic, turns unexpectedly to his picture in a magazine:

The suddenness with which she had come upon his likeness almost took Lloyd's breath from her. It was the last thing she had expected. If he himself had abruptly entered the room in person she could hardly have been more surprised. Her heart gave a great leap, the dull crimson of her cheeks shot to her forehead. Then, with a charming movement, at once impulsive and shamefaced, smiling the while, her eyes half closing, she laid her cheek upon the picture, murmuring to herself words that only herself could hear.46

Morris has greatly over-sentimentalized Lloyd's love for a man that she has not seen for years and whom she did not even realize she loved until a short time before seeing the picture. Instead of successfully portraying the love and happiness felt by Lloyd, Norris only makes the reader glad that Lloyd was at least "shamefaced" because of her ridiculous actions.

Vandover and the Brute is relatively free of sentimentalism, but it occasionally creeps in, Norris now and again working on the reader's pity in an attempt to make Vandover a sympathetic character. After his father dies, Vandover goes into the house where they had lived and sees his father's hat on the rack:

He took the hat in his hands, turning it about tenderly, catching the faint odour of the Old Gentleman's hair oil that hung about it. It all brought back his father to him as no picture ever could; he could almost see the kind old face underneath the broad curl of the brim. His grief came over him again keener than ever and he put his arms clumsily about the old hat, weeping and whispering to himself.\(^47\)

This scene appeals to the reader's emotions, but Norris carries Vandover's grief almost beyond believability when he has him hug the hat and cry. Honest sentiment is present, but there is a falsity about the scene.

It appears that Norris, in most cases where he becomes overly sentimental, is trying to convey genuine emotion to

\(^47\) Norris, Vandover, V, 137.
the reader. But, as Ernest Marchand points out, Norris's writing is "apt to be invaded by rhetoric and sentimentality, by triteness of both thought and expression." Norris's intentions are honorable, but he fails to carry them out. He himself deplored this type of romanticism and would have avoided it if it had been possible for him to do so, but he obviously could not. If there are any romantic "flaws" in Norris's work, they are in these sentimental scenes, not in those parts of his novels which are in the true romantic tradition.

48 Marchand, Frank Norris, p. 179.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Until very recently Frank Norris has been discussed primarily as a naturalistic writer, and the elements of romance in his novels have been either overlooked or disparaged as flaws which have no place in realistic writing. By pointing out the important romantic aspects of Norris's major novels, this thesis shows that whereas till now the overall effect of Norris's works may have been thought to be naturalistic, the time has come to re-evaluate them and place them in their proper perspective as being a combination of realism and romance, since Norris himself defines his novels as romances and since many passages and ideas in his books do not fit the definitions of realism or naturalism.

An examination of Norris's characters, for instance, shows that many of them undergo a change in philosophical perspective. These changes are meaningful in their lives; and in several cases, Presley and Vanamee, for example, the changes represent ideas directly opposed to naturalism. Both these characters develop a "larger view" which allows them to see that man is not at the mercy of heredity or environment and that good eventually triumphs over evil. Another aspect of this romantic individualism is the transforming power of
love experienced by many of Norris's characters. Of all the characters who develop new outlooks or change their lives by the exercise of free will, only Vandover is not greatly affected by love; and even Vandover could have been influenced by love if he had not given in to the worse side of his nature. Even McTeague, who murders his wife, is, for a short time, changed for the better by love.

Norris does not use symbolism and imagery as a naturalistic writer would, to reveal scientific laws through the action of individual instances. Norris's imagery, in McTeague and Vandover and the Brute, points out the nature of two specific individuals, not of man in general; and his symbols show the transcendent nature of the outer forces with which his characters deal. The wheat in The Octopus and The Pit is a transcendent force, as Norris indicates by portraying it as a "world-force," flowing like a great flood over all obstacles until its purpose is accomplished. It is important to remember that a naturalistic writer would have the wheat obey scientific law, while Norris shows it obeying no law but its own, supremely indifferent to anything else.

Norris's romantic tendencies are also evident in the settings of his novels. Choosing backgrounds which are vast and which contain implicit power and force, he achieves the quality of "bigness," and by describing scenes which are filled with life and color, he imparts to his work a sense of vitality and richness which would in no way be found in the
sordid environments described by the naturalist. Rather than using details of a scene for their own sake, or to point out the influence of environment on his characters, Norris uses details which take on special meaning; in McTeague, for example, the snapping shut of a simple mousetrap comes to represent the life of poverty, greed, and death into which Trina is trapped by her marriage to McTeague.

Revolting against the "genteel tradition," Norris often describes violent, sensational action involving the elemental emotions of his "red-blooded" characters. If such action is not inherent to the story he is telling, Norris will go out of his way to provide it. In Vandover and the Brute, Vandover's ship ride has little or nothing to do with advancement of the plot. It merely gives Norris the opportunity to write about a storm and a shipwreck, and so it is included in the book. Norris's description of violent action is almost always realistic, being restrained and objective, but the effect is nevertheless romantic.

A form of romantic writing which Norris abhored, sentimentiality, is also present in his work. His critical distinctions were not fine enough apparently to allow him to distinguish sentimentality in his own writing as easily as he finds it in others', and if there are romantic "flaws" in Norris's work, they occur in his sentimental passages.
This general statement thus sums up in brief what has been pointed out in specific detail in the preceding chapters, that Frank Norris does, indeed, use many elements of romance in his novels. It is therefore necessary for the student of Norris to examine his work as that of one who writes in the romantic tradition, not strictly as a realist or a naturalist who wished to overthrow the older forms of American literature.
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