THE USE OF THE SIXTH SENSE IN THE
NOVELS OF FRANK NORRIS

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

BY

Nancy L. Neal, B. A.
Denton, Texas
December, 1974
Neal, Nancy L., *The Use of the Sixth Sense in the Novels of Frank Norris*. Master of Arts (English), December, 1974, 76 pp., bibliography, 54 titles.

Frank Norris uses the sixth sense in his writings as a creative device, explaining the illusory characteristics of life mainly in six works: *The Responsibilities of the Novelist*, *Blix*, *Vandover and the Brute*, *McTeague*, *The Octopus*, and *The Pit*. In *The Octopus*, Vanamee, a character fashioned after Norris's friend Bruce Porter, becomes the focal point for the author's elucidation of the sixth sense, and also of related powers such as telepathy, hypnosis, and transmigration, all related to a moral natural order. In the other works the sixth sense is consistently utilized by Norris's special characters in correctly perceiving unknown knowledge. It is conclusive that Norris acknowledges and accepts the mysterious as a reality and attempts to explain it.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. EARLY NOVELS</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandover and the Brute</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McTeague</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blix</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE OCTOPUS</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. LATER WORKS</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Responsibilities of a Novelist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

To explain the illusory characteristics of life, Frank Norris uses the "sixth sense" in his writings as a mystic, creative device. He employs this technique in The Responsibilities of the Novelist, Blix, Vandover and the Brute, McTeague, The Octopus, and The Pit. Although the interpretations are varied, the basis is the same. It is his attempt to tell the "truth" about all of life, for he believes "the people have a right to the Truth."\(^1\) According to Norris, to arrive at this truth a novelist should examine the world:

Go out into the street and stand where the ways cross and hear the machinery of life work clashing in its grooves. Can the utmost resort of your ingenuity evolve a better story than any one of the millions that jog your elbow? Shut yourself in your closet and turn your eyes inward upon yourself--deep into yourself, down, down into the heart of you; and the tread of the feet upon the pavement is the systole and diastole of your own being--different only in degree. It is life; and it is that which you must have to make your book, your novel--life.\(^2\)

---


Norris courageously, and crudely at times, endeavors to deal with some of these mysteries of life. He is influenced by others in his mystic interpretations in *The Octopus* and *The Pit*, but the basic acknowledgement of the experiences is his own. Gelett Burgess (according to Donald Pizer) states that Frank had few mental friends; "he did his thinking alone."3

Any explanation of a mystical experience tends to be vague and tenuous, for there is no logical, concrete example with which to compare it. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* attempts to clarify mysticism by studying its history, nature, and significance. The most prevalent ideas are those concerning man's relationship to God. To many, asceticism and self-purification establish a union with the divine, while to others they instill only a kind of rapport with the world. Thomas à Kempis stresses a practical love and social service. Others have stated they gained an intuitive knowledge of the whole of reality through looking at their own nature. Pantheism, one form of mysticism, promotes an intense awareness of the created world and its beauty. "Mystical experience basically involves a powerful urge toward reconciliation, unification,

---

and harmony of all with all, a feature that can readily be integrated with a moral outlook in which primacy is given to love." 4 What a person does with the experience is the relevant question. "A mystic may interpret elaborately and use his mystical experience as a mere refuge from responsibility, or he may be quite at a loss for interpretations, while recognizing in his experience the center and spring of a morally dedicated life." 5 The mystical strain of Norris's philosophy is seen in his belief of the transforming power of love, and of a natural order requiring a morally dedicated life.

Many critics have found Norris's mystic elucidation far from perfect. According to Warren French, "the most striking thing about Norris is that he coupled remarkably sophisticated theories about the writing of fiction with almost staggeringly naive notions about 'instincts,' 'sixth sense,' 'superior races,' and 'natural goodness.'" 6 Frederic Taber Cooper, one of Norris's contemporaries, states that "he could not or would not understand that while a novelist has a perfect right to look upon life either literally or imaginatively he has not the right

5Ibid.
to do the two things simultaneously." 7 Paul Bixler expresses the belief that Norris introduces mysticism in The Octopus as merely a "contrast and a relief." 8 Even William Dean Howells, in a favorable review of McTeague, labels Norris's use of the mystic sense in the ending of that novel as "melodramatic." 9 Norris, however, believes in his "sixth sense" and defends it to Howells: "I agree in every one of your criticisms, always excepting the anticlimax, the 'death in the desert' business. I am sure that has its place." 10

The Octopus, Norris's next to last novel, contains his clearest and most comprehensive definition of the "sixth sense." The mystic Vanamee, believing in the infallibility of the "sixth sense," explains the power to Presley:

"I believe in a sixth sense, or, rather, a whole system of other unnamed senses beyond the reach of our understanding. People who live much alone and close to nature experience the sensation of it. Perhaps it is something fundamental that we share with plants and animals. The same thing that sends the birds south long before the first colds, the

---

7Frederic Taber Cooper, Some American Story Tellers (New York, 1911), pp. 305-306.

8Paul H. Bixler, "Frank Norris's Literary Reputation," American Literature, 6 (May, 1934), 114.


10Ibid.
same thing that makes the grain of wheat struggle up to meet the sun. And this sense never deceives. You may see wrong, hear wrong, but once touch this sixth sense and it acts with absolute fidelity, you are certain."11

In The Octopus Norris combines a broad dramatic situation with this abstract philosophy while trying to maintain a tone of realism. Concerning this, Warren French states, "we cannot, of course, disprove telepathy, 'sixth senses,' and the transmigration of souls [Norris] seems to be hinting at any more than he can prove their existence with this wild romance that most critics of the book have apparently found too embarrassing to discuss."12 On the other hand, Grant Knight feels the "mysticism gives meaning and weight to the whole book."13 The full scope of the mystical experience in The Octopus will be discussed in a later chapter, for it directly relates to the culmination of Norris's ideology.

Many critics say Norris was a disorganized and poor thinker. This is implied when French says "Norris understood little about underlying human motives and he usually brushes aside hard to analyze behavior as instinctive."14

---


12French, p. 98.

13Grant C. Knight, The Strenuous Age in American Literature (Chapel Hill, 1954), p. 43.

14French, p. 91.
Charles Walcutt expresses failure on Norris's part due to a lack of "sharpness of perception." Donald Pizer decidedly disagrees and reasons that "the rejection of 'thought' for 'feeling' is itself capable of expansion into an elaborate intellectual position. Because Norris advised others to feel does not mean that his advice was not reasoned." According to Pizer, Norris works out a body of thought "related to the foremost intellectual dilemma of his time: the conflict between traditional concepts of God, man, and nature, and a growing body of scientific knowledge impinging on those concepts." Many prominent thinkers of Norris's time advanced solutions to this evolutionary problem. But Pizer contends that Joseph Le Conte, Norris's zoology and geology teacher at Berkeley in 1892-93, was the tremendous influence on Norris; and through the teachings of Le Conte, Norris was able to reconcile scientific concepts and ethics into a workable theory for his fiction:


17 Pizer, *The Novels of Frank Norris*, p. 3.

First, he found a confirmation of the belief that there is a moral order inherent in nature and its laws—a belief present in his earliest writings. Second, he found a way of dealing coherently with two aspects of man's animal nature—his sensual drives and his pleasure in violence and conquest—which he felt strongly within his own nature.19

In accordance with the times and his circumstances, Norris develops certain attitudes about nature, love, life, and art which are reflected in his writings. If these ideas are pursued at length, the investigator will find in each a point of mystery where understanding breaks down and logic fails. At that time it is necessary either to rationalize, ignore, or accept. Within the realism of Norris's philosophy, he accepts the mysterious as a reality and attempts to explain it.

Norris's approach to nature is a response to the scientific dilemma of the times. To some, nature is malevolent; to others it is benevolent; and to still others it is indifferent. Pizer seems to indicate that Norris, despite his naturalistic tag, subscribes to the benevolent view of nature. He says that to Norris, nature "removes those individuals harmful to the race; it aids those who abide by its rules; and it benefits the race as a whole."20

In other words, nature becomes a moral force.

19Pizer, The Novels of Frank Norris, p. 16.
20Ibid., p. 22.
Within McTeague, the lower nature is highly developed and to yield to it is almost necessary. In the scheme of "survival of the fittest," McTeague is not suited; therefore, to him nature is a malevolent force, or at best an indifferent one. Norris points this out in his description of the mountains when the pursued McTeague returns to the mines:

At their bottoms they were solid, massive; on their crests they broke delicately into fine serrated edges where the pines and redwoods outlined their millions of tops against the high white horizon. Here and there the mountains lifted themselves out of the narrow riverbeds 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.21

Vandover's fate is based on free choice, and he chooses to surrender to the worst within himself. Therefore, to Vandover, nature is malevolent and crushing because he has deliberately broken the rules of a moral universe. In the following quotation, Norris explains the cruel fate awaiting those who choose as Vandover does:

It was Life, the murmur of the great, mysterious force that spun the wheels of Nature and that sent it onward like some enormous engine, resistless; relentless; an engine that sped straight forward, driving before it the infinite herd of humanity, driving it on at breathless speed through all eternity, driving it on no one knew whither, crushing out inexorably all those who lagged behind the herd and who fell from exhaustion, grinding them to dust beneath its myriad iron wheels, riding over

them, still driving on the herd that yet remained, driving it recklessly, blindly on and on toward some far-distant goal, some vague unknown end, some mysterious, fearful bourne forever hidden in thick darkness.22

A more optimistic view of nature is seen in Blix, for Condy and Blix are representative of those who abide by the rules causing nature to be friendly to them. After their declaration of love for each other, they stand looking out across the bay:

There was no detail in the scene. There was nothing but the great reach of the ocean floor, the unbroken plane of blue sky, and the bare green slope of land---three immensities gigantic, vast, primordial. It was no place for trivial ideas and thoughts of little things. The mind harked back unconsciously to the broad, simpler, basic emotions, the fundamental instincts of the race. The huge spaces of earth and air and water carried with them a feeling of kindly but enormous force---elemental force, fresh, untutored, new, and young. There was buoyancy in it; a fine, breathless sense of uplifting and exhilaration.23

In a symbolic gesture, presumably to emphasize the benevolence of nature to those who are good and worthy, Norris adds a quaint scene in Blix which appears to stand as a prediction of the couple's future. "In a mud-hole between two rocks they discovered a tiny striped snake, hardly bigger than a lead-pencil, in the act of swallowing a little green frog, and they passed a rapt ten minutes in


witnessing the progress of this miniature drama, which culminated happily in the victim's escape, and triumph of virtue."\textsuperscript{24}

In his article on Norris's use of nature, Don Walker says "that Norris suffered a basic confusion of values."\textsuperscript{25} But apparently, to Norris, nature has to be a vacillating force, for this is how he sees it operate in life around him, and this is how he portrays it in his fiction.

The power of love is another facet of Norris's philosophy which is used in his fiction. It has certain healing and substantiating properties which are reminiscent of those found in mystical ideology. The insensitive Annixter is transformed by love when he encounters Hilma Tree. Although he does not want to love her, he finally succumbs to find himself almost magically changed:

\begin{quote}
I just woke up that night. I'd been absolutely and completely selfish up to the moment I realized I really loved you, and now, whether you'll let me marry you or not, I mean to live--I don't know, in a different way. I've got to live different. I--well--oh, I can't make you understand, but just loving you has changed my life all around. It's made it easier to do the straight, clean thing.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., p. 80.

\textsuperscript{25}Don Walker, "The Western Naturalism of Frank Norris," \textit{Western American Literature}, 2 (Spring, 1967), 15.

\textsuperscript{26}Norris, \textit{The Octopus}, II, 118.
Blix, considered autobiographical, abounds in romantic energy and exuberance which would challenge any modern love idyll, but beneath the dreamlike fantasy, Norris projects the power of love as it involves Condy and Blix. Condy recognizes that "he had become a man, and she a woman."27 Love of another reacts as an internal power which inevitably brings change. Condy realizes "the love of her had made a man of him--he could not forget that; had given to him just the strength that made it possible for him to keep that resolute, grim silence now. In those two months he had grown five years; he was more masculine, more virile."28 And Blix also acknowledges, "since I've found out how much I loved you and knew that you loved me--why, everything is changed for me. I'm not the same, I enjoy things that I never thought of enjoying before, and I feel so--oh, larger, don't you know?--and stronger, and so much more serious."29

Love is one of those forces of nature which benefits those who blend with the moral order. Norris sets Vandover as an example of one who misuses love. The tragedy of Vandover and what makes him different from McTeague is

27 Norris, Blix, III, 123.
28 Ibid., p. 161.
29 Ibid., p. 170.
that he is able to recognize his part in the loss and misuse of love:

The other person who had helped to bring out all that was best in Vandover had been 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.\textsuperscript{30}

Norris approaches life and his art in a very moralistic manner. He has decided views on the behavior of a person—especially concerning the responsibilities belonging to a creatively gifted one. In collecting Norris's letters for publication, Franklin Walker finds that when writing to others, Norris never spoke of his inner life or feelings, but concentrated mostly on his enthusiasms about his craft.\textsuperscript{31} Norris also expresses his artistic morals in \textit{Responsibilities of a Novelist}. Although these essays were written after the bulk of his fiction, many of the ideas upheld are expressed within the characters of the fiction.

Norris considers "truth" to be the first essential ingredient of life, for "if truth is not an actual workaday thing, as concrete as the lamp post on the corner, as

\textsuperscript{30} Norris, \textit{Vandover}, V, 189.

practical as a cable car, as real and homely and workaday and commonplace as a bootjack, then indeed are we of all men most miserable and our preaching vain." 32 Leaders in all fields are only leaders because they have accepted a certain standard:

But it will come to you, if it comes at all, because you shall have kept yourself young and humble and pure in heart, and so unspoiled and unwearied and unjaded that you shall find a joy in the mere rising of the sun, a wholesome, sane delight in the sound of the wind at night, a pleasure in the sight of the hills at evening, shall see God in a little child and a whole religion in a brooding bird. 33

In "Salt and Sincerity," an essay reflecting Wordsworthian ideas, Norris compares the creative power of a man to a "silver cord" which has gotten out of tune. In order to be renewed, the man must return to nature. "And the silver cord of our creative faculty--the thing nearest to perfection in all the make-up of our imperfect human nature--responds to the Master Note with the quickness and sensitiveness of music-mathematics . . . and the man comes back once more to the world of men with a true-beating heart, a true-hearing ear." 34


33 Ibid., p. 41.

On the other hand, man can lose that creativity if he does not accept the moral responsibilities. Until Condy is urged on by Blix, he is in danger of becoming just a "hack writer." And Vandover is a splendid example of one who has totally lost his creative gift. Vandover painfully realizes "it was gone--his art was gone, the one thing that could save him. That, too, like all the other good things of his life, he had destroyed. At some time during those years of debauchery it had died, that subtle, elusive something, delicate as a flower; he had ruined it."35

As Pizer points out, Norris believes in a mechanics of fiction which applies certain rules and procedures to the writing of fiction. These can be taught, but they require discipline and practice.36 Pizer also states that Norris "believed that fictional form is an intellectual problem in selection and organization for the achievement of plausibility, effect, and theme, and that there are few substitutes for a considered and painstaking intellectual solution."37 On the surface these deliberate techniques appear to contradict Norris's theory of "life over literature," but instead they are really his methods of

35 Norris, Vandover, V, 201.
36 Pizer, The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris, p. xv.
37 Ibid.
portraying a true picture of life which requires something more than realism. In a statement echoing Emerson, Norris attempts to differentiate between accuracy and life, which to him is necessary for fiction to live:

Accuracy is the attainment of small minds, the achievement of the commonplace, a mere machine-made thing that comes with niggardly research and ciphering and mensuration and the multiplication table, good in its place, so only the place is very small. In fiction it can under certain circumstances be dispensed with altogether. It is not a thing to be striven for. To be true is the all-important business, and, once attaining that, "all other things shall be added unto you." 38

Assuming Norris believes what he writes, certain conclusions can be made concerning what may be called a philosophy. He believes in a moral nature, a transforming love, and an ethical life. Within these facets, if taken to their most distant points, attitudes of mysticism can be found. In the most obvious ways, Norris is a realist, a naturalist, and a romanticist. There are, however, times when Norris reaches an abstract stage which can be labeled mystic. His use of the "sixth sense" implies his acceptance of mysterious forces in the world.

It is known that Norris's mystic friend, Bruce Porter, influenced the creation and dramatic situation of Vanamee,

---

his most mystic character. However, Norris did not meet Porter until May 1, 1896. The use of the term the "sixth sense" in Vandover and the Brute precedes this date. Pizer states that "the novel, as we know it today, was written during 1894-95, revised in 1896, and again revised, probably slightly, by Charles after Frank's death. For all practical purposes, we may consider Vandover as basically of 1894-95 and as totally by Frank Norris." 

The expression the "sixth sense" has scientific and religious origins which predate Norris. Norris leaves no conclusive evidence concerning the original source of the phrase for him. However, the definition of the "sixth sense" from other sources provides some interpretation of it in Norris's fiction. The Oxford English Dictionary says it is first used by anatomists in 1837 to denote animal magnetism. Nandor Fodor, in the Encyclopedia of Psychic Science, states that the sixth sense is a convenient explanation of transcendental phenomena. Near the conclusion of his discussion, Fodor credits Charles Richet

40 Walker, Frank Norris, p. 134.
41 Pizer, The Novels of Frank Norris, p. 134.
(1850-1935) with featuring the sixth sense when he uses it as a "comprehensive term for the phenomena of telepathy, clairvoyance, psychometry, premonitions, predictions, crystal vision and phantasmal appearance. They are in his view manifestations of a new unknown sense which perceives the vibrations of reality."42

The "sixth sense" also has a religious background with Buddhism. With this religion it is defined as the sense beyond the other five and is denoted as the "discriminating faculty" or "discursive intellect."43 Arthur Christy in The Orient in American Transcendentalism describes how the Emersonian transcendentalists integrate many of the mystical elements of the Orient, which includes the Buddhist religion, into their thinking. Much evidence of this is found in Bronson Alcott's Journal.44


44 Arthur Christy, The Orient in American Transcendentalism (New York, 1932), pp. vii-ix. An interesting coincidence relating to Norris is noted here, for Christy insists that the American Transcendentalists were brought in close contact with Buddhist thought through the marriage of transcendentalist Fannie Maria Channing and Sir Edwin Arnold, the most eminent Eastern thinker and author of "The Light of Asia," the popular poem about Buddhism (p. 248). In The Pit, Cortell, Norris's artist who is supposedly fashioned after Norris's mystic friend Bruce Porter, courts Laura Dearborn by reading poems such as "The Light of Asia" to her (The Pit, p. 105).
When or how Norris added the phrase the "sixth sense" to his vocabulary remains a speculative game, for he was exposed to both scientific and religious thought on various levels. However, the important point is his use of the term.

A final aspect of the "sixth sense" concerns religion. The Encyclopedia of Philosophy says, "mystical experience is religious experience, in a broad but meaningful sense of 'religious.' It is sensed as revealing something about the totality of things." The totality in Norris's existence is life itself, and he approaches life with a religious air of almost mystic quality. In his description of Condy and Blix walking on the Presidio, he is able to delineate for the reader his totality of life:

They still had their illusions, all the keenness of their sensations, all the vividness of their impressions. The simple things of the world, the great, broad, primal emotions of the race stirred in them. As they swung along, going toward the ocean, their brains were almost as empty of thought or of reflection as those of two fine, clean animals. They were all for the immediate sensation; they did not think—they felt. The intellect was dormant; they looked at things, they heard things, they smelt the smell of the sea, and of the seaweed, of the fat, rank growth of cresses in the salt marshes; they turned their cheeks to the passing wind, and filled their mouths and breasts with it. Their life was sweet to them; every hour was one glad effervescence. The fact that the ocean was blue was a matter for rejoicing. It was good to be alive on that royal morning.


46 Norris, Blix, III, 123.
Warren French labels Norris "an extremely unrealistic idealist who could not stomach the constant compromise of ideals demanded by life in an urban society." There is some validity in the statement that he is an idealist, but Norris's overpowering zeal for life eliminates the possibility of his being an escapist. Ernest Marchand describes this penchant for life as "this almost mystical sense of an exhaustless life reaching down into the very roots of being [which] stirs and excites him; it is almost an obsession."

Norris never says he is a mystic, but there are enough circumstantial connections in his writings to conclude that at least a facet of his soul and his ideology lean toward mysticism--especially in his reverence for life. And since sincerity is part of his philosophy as a writer, he attempts to put this mysterious side of life in understandable terms--namely the "sixth sense." Most critics have avoided discussing the whole subject. In a few instances they have mentioned the term and included a few vague sentences concerning the ambiguousness of the topic. However, there seems to be much which can be said. The novels in which Norris uses the device of the "sixth sense" will be discussed in the remaining chapters.

---

47 French, Frank Norris, p. 122.

48 Ernest Marchand, Frank Norris: A Study (Stanford, California, 1942), p. 178.
CHAPTER II

EARLY NOVELS

Vandover and the Brute, McTeague, and Blix are the three earliest novels in which Frank Norris uses the "sixth sense." Vandover and McTeague were mainly written in 1894-95, the year Norris spent at Harvard. However, McTeague was not finished until the summer of 1897, and finally was published in 1899. Vandover was finished at Harvard, but not published until 1914. Pizer believes "the two novels were thus written under the same general impulse and the same broad influences."¹ Blix is considered autobiographical, reflecting Norris's own courtship with Jeannette Black. The events of the book take place in the summer of 1897; the story was written a year later; and finally, Blix was published in 1899.²

According to Vanamee in The Octopus, the "sixth sense" is beyond understanding, but it is never wrong, "it acts with absolute fidelity." He admits that it is possibly something shared with the animals. The three main characters

¹Donald Pizer, "Evolutionary Ethical Dualism in Frank Norris' Vandover and the Brute, and McTeague," Modern Language Quarterly, 86 (December, 61), 554.

of these early novels—Vandover, Condy Rivers, and McTeague—experience this strange phenomenon. McTeague's contact with the "sixth sense" is instinctual like the animals, whereas Vandover and Condy's experience is on a higher level, reflecting free will. In The Octopus, written much later, the reader has what constitutes Norris's final statement on the subject, larger and complete.

**Vandover and the Brute**

*Vandover and the Brute* is the study of the decline of a man through his own weak character. Pizer asserts there is a great possibility that Norris adopted Le Conte's belief that "man alone is possessed of two natures—a lower, in common with animals, and a higher, peculiar to himself. The whole mission and life-work of man is the progressive and finally the complete dominance, both in the individual and in the race, of higher over the lower."3 Vandover is representative of an individual whose natures are struggling; the dramatic situation of the novel involves this conflict of lower and higher.

Walker says Norris "turned to his college life to find his characters and fixed upon himself as the subject for Vandover—not himself as he really was but as he imagined he could develop."4 Norris has endowed Vandover with special

---

3Pizer, "Evolutionary Ethical Dualism," p. 553.

creative talents and a strong sensual appetite. Not to confuse anyone, Walker quickly asserts that Norris "was, in fact, not at all likely to become a slave to gambling, drinking, or lechery, but it was one of his favorite games to imagine himself a victim of excess." Nevertheless, because Vandover is somewhat a reflection of Norris, the novel becomes valuable as a study of a young man's questions and maturing philosophy. In Vandover, Norris comments on religion, art, and the internal struggle.

After Vandover returns from Harvard and begins living and working in San Francisco, he begins to notice certain things about his character. Subconsciously he realizes particular weaknesses. Vandover finds "that he could be contented in almost any environment, the weakness, the certain pliability of his character easily fitting itself into new grooves, reshaping itself to suit new circumstances." As Vandover moves in his particular society, his lower nature surfaces more frequently:

Thus it was that Vandover, by degrees, drifted into the life of a certain class of the young men of the city. Vice had no hold on him. The brute had grown larger in him, but he knew that he had the creature in hand. He was its master, and only on rare occasions did he permit himself to gratify its demands, feeding

---

5 Ibid., p. 97.

its abominable hunger from that part of him which he knew to be the purest, the cleanest, and the best.\footnote{7} Vandover is aware of a moral universe, is aware of his adaptability, but proceeds apparently oblivious to consequences. As the action progresses, it is obvious the brute is winning the struggle, for Vandover's excesses increase without respite. Coupled with his flexible personality, "Vandover was self-indulgent—he loved these sensuous pleasures, he loved to eat good things, he loved to be warm, he loved to sleep. He hated to be bored and worried—he liked to have a good time."\footnote{8}

Norris very carefully and skillfully weaves a picture of a young man constantly yielding to his weaknesses. He loves to take long baths while eating expensive chocolates; he prefers pleasure reading to painting; and he spends days rolling trivial paper lighters to avoid working. The epitome of his indulgence comes when he arrives in San Francisco after the shipwreck; he stops at the Imperial for a breakfast of oysters, an omelette, and wine before informing his worried father he is safe. These scenes, so vividly written, appear more sensual and debauched and indicative of Vandover's decline than the ones depicting lechery, drunkenness, and gambling. "He was content to be idle, listless, apathetic, letting the days bring whatever they chose, making no effort

\footnote{7}{Ibid., p. 25.} \footnote{8}{Ibid., p. 27.}
toward any fixed routine, allowing his habits to be formed by the exigencies of the hour." His lack of purpose and discipline leads him into further concessions to the brute within himself. He ignores any possible help from benevolent influences—Turner Ravis, his father, his art—until it is too late. He now has a disease known as general paralysis, which is caused by syphilitic infection of the nervous system. Pizer states, "in the late nineteenth century, however, though syphilis was often mentioned in connection with general paralysis, it was more commonly believed that intemperate sexual and sensual habits (particularly drunkenness) were primary causes." According to this, it seems Norris intends Vandover's decline to be directly the result of his surrender to the beast rather than the work of some outside force.

Vandover realizes his destination and finally accepts:

There was nothing, nothing. He clearly saw the fate toward which he was hurrying; it was not too late to save himself if he only could find help, but he could find no help. His terror increased almost to hysteria. It was one of those dreadful moments that men sometimes undergo that must be met alone, and that when past, remain in the memory for all time; a glimpse far down into the springs and wheels of life; a glimpse that does not come often lest the reason brought to the

9 Ibid., p. 158.

10 Pizer, "Evolutionary Ethical Dualism," p. 555.
edge of the fearful gulf should grow dizzy at the sight, and reeling, topple headlong.11 Norris has given a clear picture of a struggle lost to man's lower nature--of a man who has seen hell.

Within Norris's philosophy, certain rigid standards belong to the man of art. Vandover is an artist who does not operate within this code. "In the wreckage of all that was good that had been going on in him his love for all art was yet intact. It was the strongest side of his nature and it would be the last to go."12 Spasmodically, Vandover returns to his art without being able to sustain the effort or accomplish anything. At this very low point in his life, he goes to the opera and is overwhelmed by the music. His reaction is typical of a great religious experience:

There came over him a vague sense of those things which are too beautiful to be comprehended, of a nobility, a self-oblivion, an immortal eternal love and kindness, all goodness, all benignity, all pity for sin, all sorrow for grief, all joy for the true, the right, and the pure. To be better, to be true and right and pure, these were the only things that were worth while, these were the things that he seemed to feel in the music.13

This experience at the opera acts as a motivation; he begins to work at his art in earnest only to find it is too late. That mysterious quality of creativity is gone:

11Norris, Vandover, V, p. 192.

12Ibid., p. 182.

13Ibid., p. 187.
The forms he made on the canvas were no adequate reflection of those in his brain; some third delicate and subtle faculty that coordinated the other two and that called forth a sure and instant response to the dictates of his mind was lacking. The lines on his canvas were those of a child just learning to draw; one saw for what they were intended, but they were crude, they had no life, no meaning. The very thing that would have made them intelligible, interpretive, that would have made them art, was absent. Norris never states exactly why it is gone, but he leaves the impression it is lost because of some mysterious punishment for the debauched life. In modern terms the result seems somewhat exaggerated, for today an answer to Vandover's lost talent may be provided by medicine or psychology. But Norris finds the answer in the mysterious abstract world of a moral universe.

Throughout the writings of Norris, very little is said directly about religion, but in Vandover there is evidence of a certain spiritual questioning. Walker says Norris was an inactive Episcopal all of his life, and much later adds that he "inherited a strong puritanical strain from his mother; and that, as he remained under her control, this heritage was accentuated by training." In "Lauth," an early short story written in 1893 for the Overland Monthly,

14 Ibid., pp. 196-197.

15 Walker, Frank Norris, p. 15.

16 Ibid., p. 97.
Norris says through his character Anselm, "the soul of man is the chiefest energy of his existence; take that away and he is no longer a man." Then in a rare allusion to religion, Norris says Vandover is lost because he lacks a faith of some kind:

But, as a rule, Vandover thought very little about religious matters and when he did, told himself that he was too intelligent to believe in a literal heaven, a literal hell, and a personal God personally interfering in human affairs like any Jove or Odin. But the moment he rejected a concrete religion Vandover was almost helpless. He was not mystic enough to find any meaning in signs or symbols, nor philosophic enough to grasp vague and immense abstractions. Infinities, Presences, Forces, could not help him withstand temptation, could not strengthen him against the brute.

Norris projects the idea that people have to believe in something beyond themselves in order to stay up with that "infinite herd of humanity" being driven by life. For himself he chooses a morality which contains responsibility to others and a belief in forces he cannot explain, but feels. Norris vividly displays the recognition of the human reach for the unknown through Vandover, when "without knowing why, moved by an impulse, a blind, resistless instinct, Vandover started up in bed, raising his clasped hands above him, crying out, 'Oh, help me! Why don't you help me? You can if you only will!' Who was it to whom he had cried with

---


18 Norris, Vandover, V, 191.
such unerring intuition? He gave no name to this mysterious 'You,' this strange supernatural being, this mighty superhuman power." 19 Naturally this type of petition is spoken loudest by those in torment or those without direction, like Vandover. When a need exists which cannot be answered by human response, people usually turn to something outside their understanding. Vandover has made his last desperate plea for help; he waits for an answer:

In the tortured exalted state of his nerves he seemed suddenly possessed of a sixth sense; he fancied that he would know, there in that room, in a few seconds, while yet his hands remained clasped above his head. It was his last hope: if this failed him there was nothing left. Still he waited; he felt that he should know when the miracle came, that he would suddenly be filled with a sense of peace, of quiet joy. Still he waited--there was nothing, nothing but the vast silence, the unbroken blackness of the night, a night that was to last forever. There was no answer, nothing but the deaf silence, the blind darkness. But in a moment he felt that the very silence, the very lack of answer, was answer in itself; There was nothing for him. Even that mysterious power to which he had cried could not help him now. 20

After Vandover has his answer, he realizes the best action is to kill himself, for soon the brute will have all of him. Even in this he fails; the gun is not loaded, and he faints.

The phrase "sixth sense" is used only this one time in the book. In this instance it accompanies a religious agony experienced by Vandover. The answer he gains through the power of the "sixth sense" is honest, for he fully understands

19 Ibid., pp. 213-214.  
20 Ibid., p. 214.
his prospects. There is no hope. Norris is certainly implying more meaning to this phenomenon than simply "intuition," which is usually interpreted as a strong guess. And the extraordinary powers Norris uses later with Vanamee are not implied. At most, there seems to be some mystical connotation of intuitive knowledge of the whole of reality about self. At any rate, it is impossible to understand Norris's use of the power without understanding his philosophy, for in this instance the "sixth sense" is connected to an extent with Norris's moral universe. Almost in a Biblical fashion, Norris has pictured Vandover as an example of a fallen child of God, whose path is to be avoided by the more righteous.

McTeague

"I've got it!" [Norris] cried in delight. "You know I've been looking for a man that I could build a big story around. Well, I've discovered him. He's out on Polk Street, and he's a dentist. I can see a great story in him." So Frank Norris excitedly projects McTeague to his old friend Bailey Millard of the San Francisco Examiner. "And it's going to be strong low-life stuff—just the kind of thing Zola likes to do. I want to write life. I can see this dentist come into the story, big, brawny, crude—a regular animal. He's commonplace enough, but that's all the better

---

I'm going to study him and I'm going to put him bodily into my book."  

Partial inspiration for McTeague lies in the San Francisco murder of a charwoman by her husband. To this Norris adds details and spirit borrowed from Zola's *L'Assommoir* and a concept of inherited criminality. In an evolutionary scheme echoing the theories of Le Conte, McTeague is one of those characters whose lower nature is the strongest element in him, resulting in very little internal struggle. Norris emphasizes this in the scene where Trina is unconscious in the dental chair. "Suddenly the animal in the man stirred and woke; the evil instincts that in him were so close to the surface leaped to life shouting and clamoring." The internal struggle between his two natures ends as quickly as it begins. The sexual implications of the scene are numerous, but in accordance with the late nineteenth century morality, Norris only allows McTeague to kiss Trina "grossly, full on the mouth." From this point McTeague gradually loses complete control until finally he is more animal than man. Norris never holds McTeague responsible for losing the struggle as he

---


23 *Pizer, "Evolutionary Ethical Dualism,"* p. 557.


does Vandover. As Pizer says, "McTeague, because of hereditary degeneracy, has never sufficiently ascended the evolutionary scale to struggle adequately against his brute nature." 26

Norris does not endow McTeague with a "sixth sense" until he has completely lost the struggle and has become an animal. Feeling no remorse for his murder of Trina, he runs to the mountains like a wolf to his den. "Straight as a homing pigeon and following a blind and unreasoned instinct, McTeague had returned to the Big Dipper mine." 27 Warren French believes the conclusion of McTeague illustrates what a moralistic writer Norris is, for "a thoroughly naturalistic writer--having already made his point about McTeague's deterioration--would not have cared whether he was punished or not and so would probably simply have ended the story with his flight from Polk Street after murdering Trina." 28 To meet the demands of his moral universe, Norris chooses a concluding retribution, for within Norris's philosophy it is impossible for McTeague to escape and get richer from a gold claim.


27 Norris, McTeague, pp. 296-297.

Just as instinct leads McTeague to his place of birth, some strange feeling within him senses danger after a period of time. "He sat up in bed with eyes and ears strained. 'What is it? I don' know what it is. I don' hear anything, an' I don' see anything. I feel something--right now; feel it now. I wonder--I don' know--I don' know.'"29 McTeague becomes restless and suspicious of something he cannot understand. He prowls the area at night peering into the darkness.

Then Norris interjects to explain the strange sensations. "What strange sixth sense stirred in McTeague at this time? What animal cunning, what brute instinct clamored for recognition and obedience? What lower faculty was it that roused his suspicion, that drove him out into the night a score of times between dark and dawn, his head in the air, his eyes and ears keenly alert?"30 McTeague is too animalistic to even apply a name to his strange sensations. But he obeys them; he takes his canary and leaves. Seemingly safe, McTeague and Cribbens become partners in a search for gold, which they find. Now the situation appears unusually optimistic. Then the nervousness returns, along with the listening and peering into the dark:

29 Norris, McTeague, p. 309.

30 Ibid.
It was warning him again, that strange sixth sense, that obscure brute instinct. It was aroused again and clamoring to be obeyed. Here, in these desolate barren hills, twenty miles from the nearest human being, it stirred and woke and roweled him to be moving on. It had goaded him to flight from the Big Dipper mine, and he had obeyed. But now it was different; now he had suddenly become rich; he had lighted on a treasure—a treasure far more valuable than the Big Dipper mine itself. How was he to leave that? He could not move on now.  

Fighting with some mysterious force within himself, McTeague gives in, deserts the promise of riches and hurries away as if driven. Rushing eastward into the burning desert, he seems possessed. "McTeague looked furtively and quickly from side to side, his teeth set, his eyes rolling. Once more the rowel was in his flanks; once more an unseen hand reined him toward the east. After all the miles of that dreadful day's flight he was no better off than when he started."  

This panicked departure continues until he hears Marcus say "Hands up. By damn, I got the drop on you." Justice has been served; the beast is cornered. Norris has employed the "sixth sense" as a "fundamental that we share with plants and animals." McTeague is an animal that obeys the inner urges, but he does not understand. Norris enters the story to delineate for the reader the strange sensations. Where Vandover's encounter with the "sixth sense" is philosophical, McTeague's is instinctual.

---

31 Ibid., pp. 316-317.  
32 Ibid., pp. 324-325.  
33 Ibid., p. 330.
Marchand believes Norris does not know how to end the novel or to dispose of McTeague, so he devises this pursuit. Of McTeague's flight, Marchand states, "It is also credible that he should be abnormally alert to danger. What is improbable is that every time his sixth sense warned him to move on, his pursuers were actually closing in on him. A sixth sense will do as a figure of speech but not as an infallible instrument of perception."34 Despite criticisms of the ending, Norris was satisfied and believed it represented "life."

**Blix**

*Blix* is the third of Frank Norris's early novels in which he employs the "sixth sense." The novel is unique though, for as Kathleen Norris, Frank's sister-in-law, says in the introduction, "*Blix* more than any other of his books, is the story of Frank Norris himself--or rather the story of his early youth."35 Franklin Walker, Norris's biographer, goes beyond this, for he says it "may be read in light of a confession. . . . There are considerable grounds to assume that in so far as lack of determination and set purpose is


at the root of the troubles of both Vandover and Condy Rivers, it was a weakness which Norris recognized as a dangerous element in his own character."\textsuperscript{36}

Love is the element that saves Condy from his weakness, just as it does Frank Norris. While Norris writes for the \textit{Wave}, he participates in as much aimless fun as he did at Berkeley. He drifts from one writing assignment to the other without gaining any satisfaction. By the spring of 1897, he is extremely depressed, for as Walker says, "he had no desire to become a reporter or editor; he felt that he was dangerously near to becoming a hack writer and remaining one. He was a story-teller, not a newspaper man."\textsuperscript{37} At this point Norris basically has no purpose and does not seem to be motivated in any direction. Then he falls in love with Jeannette Black, which renews his interest in writing and prompts him to avoid his aimless fellowship.\textsuperscript{38}

As lightweight and amusing as the novel is, Blix makes some serious comments about life as Norris sees it. Marchand believes "romance and realism were coexistent in him from the beginning. There was no development of one to the exclusion of the other. His development lay rather in the

\textsuperscript{36}Walker, \textit{Frank Norris}, p. 147.

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., p. 145.

\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., p. 150.
enlargement of his experience, some deepening of thought, a better grasp of the social significance of the novel." Norris's own experience with love solidifies the philosophy he depicts in the other novels. To Norris love is an active, transforming force in the world.

Few writers are able to describe love and its mysteries with any great clarity. Although Frank Norris is no exception to this general rule, he is able to extend the almost mystical sense of the subject to an emotional level:

Condy and Blix sat still, listening, looking, and watching—the intellect drowsy and numb; the emotions, the senses, all alive and brimming to the surface. Vaguely they felt the influence of the moment. Something was preparing for them. From the lowest, untouched depths in the hearts of each of them something was rising steadily to consciousness and the light of the day. There is no name for such things, no name for the mystery that spans the interval between man and woman—the mystery that bears no relation to their love for each other, but that is something better than love, and whose coming savours of the miraculous.

This mystical sense appears to be a part of the past and the future, something without end, for when the tension mounts between Condy and Blix, Norris explains "there in that room, high above the city, a little climax had come swiftly to a head, a crisis in two lives had suddenly developed. The

---

39 Marchand, Frank Norris: A Study, p. 35.

40 Norris, Blix, III, 169.
moment that had been in preparation for the last few months, the last few years, the last few centuries, behold! it had arrived."41

Much of the story is devoted to the idyllic months of pleasures, picnics, fishing, walks, reading, and sharing thoughts. Along with this enviable enchantment, Norris portrays the transformation which comes with love. Condy feels "her sweetness, her goodness, appealed to what he guessed must be the noblest in him."42 Norris depicts his attitude about the responsibility of life in a conversation between Condy and Blix:

"It does seem a pity," he went on, "that when you want to do the right, straight thing, and be clean and fine, that you can't just be it, and have it over with. It's the keeping it up that's the grind."

"But it's the keeping it up, Condy, that makes you worth being good when you finally get to be good; don't you think? It's the keeping it up that makes you strong; and then when you get to be good you can make your goodness count."43

Later when Norris writes the critical essays, he reflects this same attitude about novelists in particular.

Within Blix, Norris uses the term the "sixth sense" only once, and this time it concerns Condy's love for Blix. Since the novel is autobiographical, the assumption is that Norris himself has felt the mysterious sense which is more than premonition:

41 Ibid., p. 163. 42 Ibid., p. 56.

43 Ibid.
And he loved her because she was herself, because she was Blix, because of that strange, sweet influence that was disengaged from her in those quiet moments when she seemed so close to him, when some unnamed, mysterious, sixth sense in him stirred and woke and told him of her goodness, of her clean purity and womanliness; and that certain, vague tenderness in him went out toward her, a tenderness not for her only, but for all the good things of the world; and he felt his nobler side rousing up and the awakening of the desire to be his better self.  

In this passage when Norris uses the "sixth sense," it is possible he is only searching for a viable way of explaining the mystical experience of falling in love. Although the novel abounds in romantic idealism of a seemingly immature author, the ending stresses an attitude that life is far more important than the brief interlude of Condy and Blix. "Their little gayeties were done; the life of little things was all behind. Now for the future. The sterner note had struck--work was to be done, that, too, the New Year had brought to them--work for each of them, work and the world of men."  

Vandover and the Brute, McTeague, and Blix, all early novels of Norris, utilize this seemingly psychic phrase, "sixth sense." The use in McTeague is the most elementary application, for it denotes a lower animal magnetism known vaguely as instincts. However, in McTeague Norris devotes more time to describing the dramatic action in conjunction

---

44 Ibid., p. 129.  
with the "sixth sense" than he does in the other two novels. In Vandover and Blix, the function of the "sixth sense" is one similar to clairvoyance, for both Condy and Vandover have clear perceptions of something not ordinarily discernible. A high emotional state at the appearance of the "sixth sense" is a common factor among the three. There are no special personality traits displayed by the three men which account for the unique sense within them. Possibly Norris believes it is a phenomenon common with all men. Many modern investigators of psychic power share this attitude and feel the power is merely undeveloped in most people. Anyway, it is conclusive that Norris intends to demonstrate something more definite than just premonition, and something which reflects aspects of his philosophy. Pizer states that "Norris' faith in the intuitive or instinctive is thus the common foundation both for his mystique of sincerity and his call for 'life, not literature.'"\(^4^6\)

CHAPTER III

THE OCTOPUS

In his Washington Square apartment, Frank Norris finished The Octopus and it was published in April, 1901. Although it is an intricately plotted novel with several sub-plots, the concern here is for the Vanamee and Angéle sub-plot, which provides commentary on Norris's use of the "sixth sense." In September, 1900, Norris wrote to Marcosson about the novel, stating "it is the most romantic thing I've ever done. One of the secondary sub-plots is pure romance--oh, even mysticism, if you like, a sort of allegory--I call it the allegorical side of the wheat subject--and the fire in it is the Allegory of the Wheat." This statement foreshadows one of Norris's more controversial sections of writing. Critics are constantly making comments, mostly unfavorable, about Vanamee and his strange powers. However, Franklin Walker says Norris uses a subject which had long fascinated him, for "he had listened to Bruce Porter discuss mysticism, hypnotism, thought transference. He had


been impressed by DuMaurier's use of Svengali's powers in *Trilby*. He had endowed McTeague with a sixth sense, an intuitive awareness of danger. Now, again, he planned to exploit an unnatural sense in a dramatic manner, giving Vanamee the power of attracting others by thought transference."³ But at the same time Walker considers the creation of the idyllic Vanamee-Angéle incidents "to be one of the major mistakes of the book, an extraneous and formless blur on the canvas, the most indigestible portion of the ragout."⁴ A great admirer of Norris's talent, William Dean Howells, reservedly suggests that the episode of Vanamee and Angéle,"with its hideous tragedy, and the long mystical epilogue ending almost in anti-climax, is the only passage which can be accused of irrelevance, and it is easier to bring than to prove this accusation."⁵ A little more kindly, Marchand says "whether or not one feels that the presence of Vanamee in *The Octopus* is justified, he does not forget the lean, black-bearded shepherd."⁶


⁴Ibid., p. 263.


Vanamee, fashioned after Norris's friend Bruce Porter, becomes the focal point for Norris's elucidation on many strange powers. Norris describes Vanamee as a thirty-six-year-old, lean, tanned man with long black hair and a pointed beard. Presley, Norris's raisonneur, sees him as an "ascetic," a "recluse," and a "seer." He compares him to the "younger prophets of Israel." Frohock believes "Vanamee, rather than the Mexican parish priest . . . appears to represent the spiritual in a situation where the other characters are overwhelmingly preoccupied with the material." Lutwack, a writer of the heroic epic tradition, says "Vanamee is Norris's third version of the hero." Vanamee's purpose in the novel is larger than just relating mystical experiences. Reninger aptly states this fact:

It is very significant that Vanamee, the mystic, teaches Presley the socialist-poet of the great struggle, the lesson to be found in the resistless flow of the wheat. Whether Norris believed in the mystical method of gathering truth is irrelevant to his conclusion, for Vanamee's mysticism is merely a

---


8Frank Norris, The Octopus (Garden City, New York, 1967), I, 30.


technique used by Norris to get at "the larger view" of things: Vanamee is the only character in the novel whose temperamental equipment (his "sixth sense") permits him to look far enough into the future in order to perceive that the struggle and temporary defeat of the men directly involved are only segments of the whole.11

Warren French believes that Vanamee is important in Norris's scheme because "of the amount of space he lavished upon the story and the fact that it is Vanamee's philosophy that is repeated at the end of the book."12 And finally, Marchand believes that Vanamee and his story exist "as counterpoint to the economic struggle of ranchers and railroad, with its accompaniments of intrigue and corruption."13

There are diversified opinions concerning Vanamee, his story, and his powers, but regardless of the opinion, Norris has drawn a memorable character who reflects aspects of Norris's own philosophy. It has already been shown in the early novels that Norris regarded mystical powers as realities. But in The Octopus, Norris includes with the "sixth sense" an expanded form of telepathy, as well as vague allusions to transmigration and hypnotism. Along with this psychic discussion, Norris includes comments on immanent forces of nature.

---


13Marchand, p. 37.
The friendship of Bruce Porter and Frank Norris dates back to May 1, 1896, when they meet at Martinelli's Cafe for a Les Jeunes gathering hosted by a mutual friend, Frank Gelett Burgess.14 A few days preceding this meeting, Bruce Porter, while riding a cable car, sighted "an unknown young man, a slouched figure in an Inverness cape, passing beneath a blown gaslight in a downpour of rain. Some poignancy of drama in the scene fixed it in his mind, and the next day he painted the impression into a somber little canvas which he called "Spring Floods."15 Ironically enough, the subject of the picture is Frank Norris, with this event marking the prelude to an intimate friendship. Walker says Porter found Norris "a very dear, a very charming, and a very solitary human being."16

Although Norris became close friends with the whole staff of the Lark, a rebellious artistic magazine of the times, Walker states that "Bruce Porter's studios in San Francisco and New York were to become his favorite spots of retreat and confession."17 In March, 1899, while Norris was living on Washington Square in New York, he wrote to his friend Mrs. Davenport saying, "Mr. Bruce Porter has

15Ibid.
16Ibid., p. 138.
17Ibid., pp. 134-135.
come to New York--and to the Square--and I see a great deal of him."18 Porter's arrival in New York relieved some of Norris's loneliness, for they spent many hours discussing Norris's novels and his plans for future stories.19 Walker describes one of these times:

One morning at five o'clock Norris burst into Porter's room and flung himself on the foot of the bed, exhausted but satisfied. He had made his leap in the dark an hour before, had cleared his entanglements and had his story and his form, and couldn't contain himself till daylight. From that moment he used Porter as a springboard; he'd sit for hours listening to the compelled memories of the California he had missed.20

In editing the Frank Norris letters, Walker concludes that "Porter was interested in mysticism and symbolism; he had much to do with the creation of the Vanamee-Angele idyl in The Octopus and was the prototype of the character of Vanamee."21 An added piece of evidence to indicate that Norris shares some of Porter's mystic thought is provided in a discussion of Norris's letter-writing style. Walker says "he occasionally illustrates his letters with sketches in the margin, and he almost always accompanies his signature with a pretzel-like rubric, a mystic sign similar to those

18 Walker, The Letters of Frank Norris, p. 32.
19 Walker, Frank Norris, p. 240.
20 Ibid., p. 241.
used by his close friends of the days of *les jeunes*, such as Gelett Burgess, Bruce Porter, and Porter Garnett."

Although there is evidence of mutually sharing ideas, there is no positive proof that Porter exerted a strong influence on Norris's thought. In fact, Norris is shown to be critical of the efforts of the *Lark*, feeling his friends can write for a better purpose than just the joy of life. He never contributed to the magazine, but remained close friends with the originators. However, Bruce Porter's contributions to the *Lark* show some similarities of thought between the two. In May, 1895, Porter ends a selection entitled "Hail to Thee, Blithe Spirit" with this Norris-like passage: "Let us get out into the air--run wild over the Presidio, and then a dash in the bay! Life is a bigger thing than art!" Another passage from the same issue provides a resemblance of style in the use of frequent indiscriminate capitilization: "And--living seriously, generously, and following an art with sincerity--must bring us, at last, to Realism--to seeing quite clearly the whole round of the circle; Passion and Sin, Pain and

---

22 Ibid., p. vi.


Death, Love and Self-forgetfulness, Independence and Joy--the eternal realities."\textsuperscript{25} Whatever Porter's influence might be, it seems clear at least that he and Norris were good friends, that they shared thoughts, and that Porter was somehow an example for Vanamee.

The \textit{Octopus} is structurally built around the growth of the wheat, and there are two conflicts which take place during the time of growth. Pizer says the first "deals with three young men--the poet Presley, the ascetic shepherd Vanamee and the rancher Annixter--each of whom undergoes a transformation in values and belief following a perception of the meaning of the process of growth. The second substructure is that of the struggle for the wheat by the ranchers and the railroad, each seeking the largest possible profit from its growth."\textsuperscript{26} Therefore, Vanamee and his mystical experience can only be fully understood as a part of the theme.

The story of Vanamee and his lost love, Angéle, is unfolded through the reflections of Presley. While Vanamee is a young man of eighteen or nineteen, spending his college vacation on the Los Muertos Ranch, he falls passionately in love, "one of those legendary passions," with sixteen-year-


\textsuperscript{26}Donald Pizer, "The Concept of Nature in Frank Norris' \textit{The Octopus}," \textit{American Quarterly}, 14 (Spring, 1962), 76.
old Angéle. The secluded Mission garden next to the Seed Ranch becomes the meeting place of the lovers. One tragic night Angéle arrives sooner than Vanamee, and in the dark she goes into the arms of another. She is raped, gives birth to a daughter, and dies leaving Vanamee grief stricken. The unknown assailant is never found. As Angéle is lowered into her grave in the mission yard, Vanamee looks one last time and leaves, heading for the desert.27

Norris describes Vanamee's temperament:

There were capabilities in Vanamee that were not ordinarily to be found in the rank and file of men. Living close to nature, a poet by instinct, where Presley was but a poet by training, there developed in him a great sensitiveness to beauty and an almost abnormal capacity for great happiness and great sorrow; he felt things intensely, deeply. He never forgot. (I, 33)

Vanamee's first entrance in the dramatic action is with the use of his strange powers. Presley, having left Annixter, feels rather than hears a call. There is no one in sight except a far-distant shepherd who turns out to be Vanamee:

The shepherd smiled and came forward, holding out his hands, saying, "I thought it was you. When I saw you come over the hill, I called you."

"But not with your voice," returned Presley, "I knew that someone wanted me, I felt it. I should have remembered that you could do that kind of thing."

"I have never known it to fail. It helps with the sheep."

"With the sheep?"

27Frank Norris, The Octopus (Garden City, New York, 1967), I, 33-36. (Further page references are placed in the text and are to this edition.)
"In a way. I can't tell exactly how. We don't understand these things yet. There are times when, if I close my eyes and dig my fists into my temples, I can hold the entire herd for perhaps a minute." (I, 30-31)

Ironically, shortly after this many of Vanamee's sheep are killed by a train, indicating maybe this is not the proper use for the special power.

Vanamee then visits his friend, Father Sarria, again using his strange power on him:

Vanamee did not call to the priest. Putting a finger to either temple, he fixed his eyes steadily upon him for a moment as he moved about at his work. In a few seconds he closed his eyes, but only part way. The pupils contracted; his forehead lowered to an expression of poignant intensity. Soon afterward he saw the priest pause... Vanamee, hidden in the deep shadow of the archway, did not move, but his eyes closed, and the intense expression deepened on his face. The priest hesitated, moved forward a step, turned back, paused again, then came straight across the garden patch, brusquely colliding with Vanamee. (I, 132-133)

The priest is disturbed by this force which he cannot resist. He questions Vanamee concerning the effectiveness of the power during sleep. Vanamee answers, "I understand as little of these things as you. But I think if you had been asleep, your power of resistance would have been so much the more weakened." (I, 133)

After demanding that Sarria's God return his Angéle, the distraught Vanamee says, "but there are moments when my whole mind and soul seem to rise up in rebellion against what has happened; when it seems to me that I am stronger
than death, and that if I only knew how to use the strength of my will, concentrate my power of thought—volition—that I could—I don't know—not call her back—but—something—."

(I, 142-143) Vanamee begins to pit his power against the forces of nature. In nightly vigils he returns to Angele's grave crying "Come to me—Angéle—don't you hear? Come to me." (I, 148) Norris interrupts: "But the Answer was not in the Grave." (I, 148) Vanamee's strange power has never failed except maybe with the sheep when they were killed by the train, and he is sure with effort something will happen. The concentration of his power forces him to abandon the grave and face the Seed Ranch, Angele's home. Certain that something has happened, Vanamee reflects: "It was vague, intangible, appealing only to some strange, nameless sixth sense, but none the less perceptible." (I, 152) After many similar nights, Vanamee tells Presley, "how can I explain it to you, this that happens when I call to her across the night—that faint, far-off, unseen tremble in the darkness, that intangible, scarcely perceptible stir. Something neither heard nor seen, appealing to a sixth sense only." (I, 209)

The same night Presley brings his poem "The Toilers" to Vanamee for an opinion, Vanamee goes once more to the Mission. He suddenly pauses on the way:
His head in the air, eye and ear alert, to that strange sixth sense of his, responsive as the leaves of the sensitive plant, had suddenly come the impression of a human being near at hand. He had neither seen nor heard, but for all that he stopped an instant in his tracks; then, the sensation confirmed, went on again. (II, 93-94)

The object Vanamee's "sixth sense" is alerted to is Annixter sitting in the dark agonizing over his lost Hilma. This is the night of Annixter's transformation as well as Vanamee's answer. Both coincide with the stand of wheat coming to the surface.

Norris describes Vanamee's concentration in terms of self-hypnosis or a mystic trance:

Vanamee, dizzied with mysticism, reaching up and out toward the supernatural, felt, as it were, his mind begin to rise upward from out his body. He passed into a state of being the like of which he had not known before. He felt that his imagination was reshaping itself, preparing to receive an impression never experienced until now. His body felt light to him, then it dwindled, vanished. He saw with new eyes, heard with new ears, felt with a new heart. (II, 104)

Vanamee's quest is answered, for "she stood before him, a Vision realized--a dream come true. She emerged from out the invisible. He beheld her, a figure of gold and pale vermillion, redolent of perfume, poised motionless in the faint saffron sheen of the new-risen moon. She, a creation of sleep, was herself asleep." (II, 105) Norris describes the sleeping Angele in terms which cause the reader to believe it is his dead love returned to him. He carries the suspense as long as possible before he has the peeping
priest say, "it was Angéle, the little girl, your Angéle's daughter. She is like her mother." (II, 106)

But to Vanamee it does not matter, for "it was She. Death was overcome. The grave vanquished. Life, ever-renewed, alone existed. Time was naught; change was naught; all things were immortal but evil; all things eternal but grief." (II, 106) To Norris, this answer of a substitute Angéle is the only realistic answer. With the acceptance of the death and rebirth, Vanamee has aligned himself with the natural order of the universe denoting his transformation.

William Vance decidedly rejects this solution, saying Norris "has resorted to improbable plot developments which would be acceptable only in unrealistic modes of fiction. Moreover, he alienates the reader because without even pretending to limit his point of view, he has willfully withheld information in order to titillate him with a bogus miracle."28

The philosophical kernel of the whole novel is stated by Vanamee who says to Presley, "if these are the last words I ever speak to you, listen to them, and remember them, because I know I speak the truth. Evil is short-lived. Never judge of the whole round of life by the mere segment you can see. The whole is, in the end, perfect."29


29Norris, The Octopus, II, 345.
Charles Walcutt, Norris fails to find solutions for the injustices described in the novel, so a "vaguely religious affirmation of ultimate good is offered to appease the emotions aroused by the action." Warren French insists Norris believes "we must either put up with injustice and abuse, temporary 'evils' of civilization, or else reject civilization altogether and take to the woods where we can develop 'unnamed senses.'" Both statements appear to be an oversimplification of Norris's theme, which is based on the philosophy of a moral universe. Concerning nature, Pizer expresses the idea that Norris believes man "has free will in his individual relationship to force. He can ally himself with it, attempting to perceive its workings and to determine its pace and direction, or he can stand opposed to it and be destroyed." Only when Vanamee accepts the cycle of life and death is he mature enough to perceive the ultimate truth.

In April, 1897, in an article titled "Studies for Tracts III," Bruce Porter, using nameless, symbolic people, tells a story of an old man who murders his friend over a matter of "Truth." He buries his dead friend by a spring, and

---

30 Walcutt, p. 150.

31 French, p. 98.

when he returns to the spot, he finds the water has turned red. Frantically, he builds a dam to protect the innocent from the tainted water. The small spring becomes a lake. Many years later he returns and shamefully tells his story to a seemingly interested man, who then takes the old man back to the location of the crime:

And smilingly, his auditor lifted the worn body of the old man and carried him to the hill-top; he showed him, far below, the green and prosperous plain, its villages and farms gleaming in the sun; and the stranger said: "Behold! the valley is peopled and made fair by the waters of the spring! The Truth has survived!" The old man's tears were bitter, and he cried: "But I have killed my friend!"33

The Octopus, though on a much broader and grander scale, echoes the philosophy of this short essay. Whether the influence of Porter extends this far is unknown, but since the point is made by Vanamee, it seems somewhat significant.

The mystical philosophy of Norris reaches a high point in The Octopus, for he exhibits a use of telepathy, sixth sense, hypnosis, transmigration, and a moral natural order. Through Vanamee, Norris gives a detailed description of the physical process of telepathy, the communication from one mind to another. Vanamee uses this thought transference with Presley, the priest, and the sleeping Angele. In several instances, Vanamee's use of the "sixth sense" is very similar to that of Vandover's and Condy's perception

of unusual truth. Vanamee also displays a use of hypnosis on himself when he goes into a trance-like state at the grave of his lost love. When the sleeping Angéle suddenly appears, called by the strong powers of Vanamee, she seems to be in a hypnotic trance also. It is Lutwack's opinion that Vanamee believes in the transmigration of souls because he accepts Angéle's daughter as Angéle herself. However, within the novel, no statement of Norris confirms Lutwack's speculative opinion. And finally Norris's belief in a moral natural order culminates in Vanamee's perception of the truth that all things work for the good of humanity as a whole. This concept, as well as Norris's use of the "sixth sense," continues, though diminished, in The Pit, to be discussed in the next chapter.

34 Lutwack, p. 33.
CHAPTER IV
LATER WORKS

The Pit and The Responsibilities of the Novelist are the last two works in which Norris uses the "sixth sense," his mystical device. However, in both of these works his treatment is minor, compared to the elaborate use in The Octopus. The Pit was completed on June 4, 1902, and the first installment appeared September 27, 1902, a month before Norris's death.\(^1\) During the writing of The Pit, Norris was also writing a series of essays about his craft for World's Work, which were finally published posthumously under the title The Responsibilities of the Novelist.\(^2\) The use of the "sixth sense" in The Pit closely resembles that in Vandover and Blix—a highly intuitive perception. But in The Pit Norris includes some remarks concerning spiritualism which can possibly be traced to the influence of Hamlin Garland, an acquaintance and occasional companion of Norris. Also in The Pit Norris again comments on the mystical belief in a moral natural order which finally protects the people from the damages of a corner on the

---

\(^1\) Franklin Walker, editor, The Letters of Frank Norris (San Francisco, 1956), p. 89.

\(^2\) Ibid., p. 95.
wheat. And finally, the "sixth sense" in The Responsibilities is projected as a universal quality belonging to sensitive individuals and nations.

The Pit

The Pit is the second volume in Norris's wheat trilogy. The setting is in Chicago and the basic dramatic situation involves the speculation on the wheat in the market pit. Pizer insists "The Pit is marred by the intrusion of a conventional love story."³ But Hamlin Garland, Norris's friend, says, "I saw a great deal of Norris during the time when this story was forming in his brain, and I confess I was more uneasy than he . . . however, The Pit turned out to be a worthy successor to The Octopus. It was sunnier and more hopeful than McTeague, and less cumbrous and set of form and phrase than The Octopus."⁴ And French feels "Norris accomplishes his purpose without recourse to the mystical trappings and remarkable coincidences of The Octopus."⁵ Walker says, "The Pit was to be the best seller among his books."⁶

⁶Walker, The Letters of Frank Norris, p. 89.
Hamlin Garland met Frank Norris on January 20, 1900, in New York, at the home of Juliet Wilbor Tomkins. Garland described Norris as "a stunning fellow—an author who does not personally disappoint his admirers. He is perilously handsome, tall and straight, with keen brown eyes and beautifully modeled features. His face is as smooth as that of a boy of twenty, but his hair is almost white. I have never known a more engaging writer." In a letter dated December, 1901, to his mother-in-law, Norris expresses his delight: "We have made some very dear friends of late—Hamlin Garland, and his wife." In the collected letters of Norris, Franklin Walker indicates the quality of friendship between Norris and Garland by printing eight letters written by Norris to Garland. The letters include comments about their literary work, friendly visits, and concern over the health of Norris's wife, who was about to have a baby.

The period of time in which The Pit was written coincides with this new friendship between Norris and Garland. Although they were acquainted, Garland and Norris were not as friendly during the writing of any of Norris's other books. Within The Pit elements of spiritualism are introduced—not found

---

7Garland, Companions on the Trail, p. 11.

8Ibid., pp. 103-104.


10Ibid., pp. 28, 75, 76, 81, 87, 88, 90, 93.
in the other novels. That Garland was knowledgeable about spiritualism poses the possibility that he was an influence upon Norris's use of these facts in the novel. In *Hamlin Garland's Diaries* Pizer, the editor, states that "Garland acquired his deep interest in psychic matters during the 1890's when he was introduced to psychic experimentation by B. O. Flower, the radical Boston editor." In the introduction to *The Shadow World*, Garland's novel concerning psychic research, the author says, "This book is a faithful record, so far as I can make it, of the most marvellous phenomena which have come under my observation during the last sixteen or seventeen years. I have used my notes (made immediately after the sittings) and also my reports to the American Psychical Society as the basis of my story." In this book Garland spends considerable time discussing seances, mind-reading, and ghostly visitations.

Other than Garland as a possible source of Norris's spiritualistic passages, several others seem available. Howard Kerr places the movement as a part of the times: "From James Russell Lowell's 'Unhappy Lot of Mr. Knott' (1851) to Henry James's *Bostonians* (1886), the spiritualistic movement exercised a distinct and fairly unified influence


on the American literary imagination." Although some of the writing about spiritualism was an attempt to prove the movement was false, many novelists honestly believed and wrote accordingly. Kerr also says Charles Warren Stoddard, who was one of Norris's friends, was interested in the movement of spiritualism. And Gelett Burgess, another close friend, wrote a melodramatic romance about a young spirit-medium entitled *The Heart-Line: A Drama of San Francisco*. He was attempting to show the damage which could be done by the exploitations of false mediums. However, even though there are many possible avenues of knowledge concerning spiritualism it still appears that Hamlin Garland could be the most influential source.

Garland's influence is further felt in Norris's handling of the spiritualism in the novel, for in *The Pit* it is presented as party talk of a superficial manner. The first time spiritualism is mentioned in *The Pit* is when the group has gathered for play practice at Cressler's home, and the conversation occurs over coffee. "Mrs. Cressler was in the dining room with the Gretry girl, while Jadwin, Aunt Wess', and Cressler himself were deep in discussion

---


14Ibid., p. 159.

15Ibid., p. 64.
of mind-reading and spiritualism." At another gathering of the same group a few days later, "Aunt Wess' and Mr. Cressler were discussing psychic research and seances, on the sofa on the other side of the room." At the same party the group expands, and a conversation is presented as if it is a very ordinary vein of talk among the group:

Cressler and Aunt Wess' who had been telling each other of their "experiences," of their "premonitions," of the unaccountable things that had happened to them, at length included the others in their conversation. "J.," remarked Cressler, "did anything funny ever happen to you--warnings, presentiments, that sort of thing? Mrs. Wessels and I have been talking spiritualism. Laura, have you ever had any 'experiences'?

"No, no. I am too material, I am afraid."

"How about you, 'J.'?"

"Nothing much, except that I believe in 'luck'--a little. The other day I flipped a coin in Gretry's office. If it fell heads I was to sell wheat short, and somehow I knew all the time that the coin would fall heads--and so it did." Jadwin's remarks about luck at the end of the conversation tie in with his use of the "sixth sense."

Garland's novel The Shadow World is an authentic narrative about a group experimenting in psychic testing. The group includes believers and skeptics, but each meeting is a social affair with coffee and much conversation about spiritualism. Garland's group is at the serious stage of


17Ibid., p. 119.

18Ibid., pp. 120-121.
participating, whereas Norris's group seems to contain merely interested and curious people. Possibly this is an indication that Norris is only a curious observer about these particular phenomena. However, he does include the "sixth sense" in this group of mysterious realities.

Jadwin is Norris's character in *The Pit* who experiences the "sixth sense." The exact term is mentioned only once, when Jadwin is considering a move in the pit:

Jadwin hesitated. In spite of himself he felt a chance had come. Again that strange sixth sense of his, the inexplicable instinct, that only the born speculator knows, warned him. Every now and then during the course of his business career, this intuition came to him, this flair, this intangible, vague premonition, this presentiment that he must seize Opportunity or else Fortune, that so long had stayed at his elbow, would desert him. In the air about him he seemed to feel an influence, a sudden new element, the presence of a new force. It was Luck, the great power, the great goddess, and all at once it had stooped from out the invisible, and just over his head passed swiftly in a rush of glittering wings.19

In evaluating this episode, French says, "there is an occasional mention of a 'sixth sense,' but generally Norris uses the term in this novel only as a metaphor to describe Jadwin's knack for correctly evaluating situations until his lust for power blinds him."20 Actually there is not "an occasional mention" of the sixth sense in this book, but only one.

---

19Ibid., p. 81.

20French, p. 116.
Curtis Jadwin extends his "sixth sense" beyond its intended use. For in attempting a corner on the wheat, he misuses his winning streak and goes beyond the rules of a moral society. According to Norris's view of nature, there is one choice, and that is for nature to restore the balance concerning the supply and demand of wheat:

What had they to do with it? Why, the Wheat had grown itself; demand and supply, these were the two great laws the Wheat obeyed. Almost blasphemous in his effrontery, [Jadwin] had tampered with these laws, and had roused a Titan. He had laid his puny human grasp upon Creation and the very earth herself, the great mother, feeling the touch of the cobweb that the human insect had spun, had stirred at last in her sleep and sent her omnipotence moving through the grooves of the world, to find and crush the disturber of her appointed courses.21

Knight agrees, saying "again the wheat proved unconquerable, thus supporting the thesis and the mysticism with which Norris began the unfinished trilogy."22 However, French says "Jadwin's unsound intuitions about the wheat suggest that Norris may even have begun to distrust 'feelings.'"23 But through Jadwin, Norris states that "the wheat cornered itself. I simply stood between two of circumstances. The wheat cornered me, not I the wheat."24 Jadwin's feelings are not in error; he merely ignores the moral laws of the

21 Norris, The Pit, IX, 358.

22 Grant C. Knight, The Strenuous Age in American Literature (Chapel Hill, 1954), p. 93.

23 French, p. 117.

24 Norris, The Pit, IX, 402.
universe. Jadwin's "sixth sense" is accurate at the time he receives and first uses it, but later he continues operating in the pit as if he is misled by this strange power--resulting in his downfall. It seems deliberate that Norris avoids a second mention of the "sixth sense" in regard to Jadwin, for his defeat is necessary to balance the natural laws.

The Responsibilities of a Novelist

Norris uses the phrase "sixth sense" only twice in his group of essays about the craft of fiction. The first time occurs in the "True Reward of the Novelist." In this essay Norris discusses the qualities a novelist must have to achieve any degree of success:

But to know the life around you you must live—if not among people, then in people. You must be something more than a novelist if you can, something more than just a writer. There must be that nameless sixth sense or sensibility in you that great musicians have in common with great inventors and great scientists; the thing that does not enter into the work, but that is back of it; the thing that would make of you a good man as well as a good novelist; the thing that differentiates the mere businessman from the financier.25

Norris is implying that the mysterious power is necessary for greatness—it is the generating force in any achievement. Also in some way the mysterious quality is in alliance with morality in the universe.

In "The Frontier Gone at Last" Norris applies the strange sensation to a nation of people who will go on conquering and progressing: "But always, if you will recall it, we had a curious feeling that we had not reached the ultimate West even yet, and there was still a Frontier. Always that strange sixth sense turned our heads toward the sunset; and all through the Middle Ages we were peeking and prying into the Western horizon, trying to reach it, to run it down, and the queer tales about Vineland and that storm-driven Viking's ship would not down." According to Norris, the unrelenting force behind the westward-marching Anglo-Saxon race is the "sixth sense." If compared to the use in "True Reward of a Novelist," the indication in this selection is that those who possess this "sixth sense" are somehow special in the scheme of the universe. Of course, this also seemingly implies a belief in racial superiority, which Norris has often been accused of. Like Whitman, Norris insists on the special greatness of the American people.

In The Pit and The Responsibilities of the Novelist, Norris employs the "sixth sense" to indicate a special quality of infallible perception on the part of the individual, the group, and the race. Jadwin, through the use of the "sixth sense," is able to interpret correctly facts

---

about the wheat market. However, his downfall comes when he begins to act defiantly against the laws of nature. Also in *The Responsibilities*, Norris extends his "sixth sense" to include groups and nations. But still the term means intuitive knowledge of a special kind. Finally, the use of spiritualism in *The Pit* distinguishes this novel from the others.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Frank Norris's uniqueness as a person and a writer is epitomized in a familiar quotation from his essay "True Reward of the Novelist": "I never truckled; I never took off the hat to fashion and held it out for pennies. By God, I told them the truth. They liked it or they didn't like it. What had that to do with me? I told them the truth; I knew it for the truth then, and I know it for the truth now."¹ Norris had an exuberant attitude about life which impressed all those who knew him. Although he was a product of his environment, somehow he had a philosophy which transcended his era. French insists that Norris "did not think that the advantages of civilization were enough to compensate for its disadvantages, but talk about 'instincts' and the submerged brute enabled him to avoid facing squarely the unpleasant questions posed by the changing demands of civilized society upon the individual."² Certainly, there are solutions Norris cannot find, and questions he avoids,


²Warren French, Frank Norris, p. 61.
but there seems to be more than escape in his philosophy. Walker, Norris's biographer, finds that "those close to him found him enthusiastic, responsive to the beautiful in art and life, and fond of any lark which appealed to a story-teller's sense of fun."^3

The continual search for a story which would depict life as he saw it seems to be a special characteristic of Norris. And according to Norris, the presentation of this story must follow certain mechanics of fiction which reveal moralistic theories about life. Describing Norris's rather careless method of research for that special story, Walker uses a statement by Cosgrove, the editor of the Wave:

"Frank never saw things with his eyes. He had no faculty of physical attention, but after having been to a place, exposed to its stimuli, he could describe it--on paper--with complete versimilitude. I used to say that his pores served him as visual organs."^4

Believing Norris's literature was leading to "social involvement," Pizer states that Norris's primitivistic anti-intellectualism had implied from the first both a faith in mass man and a belief that truth must be functional in the world of affairs."^5 Norris's novels reflect a philosophy

---


^4Ibid., p. 139.

which deals with a moral universe, a people morally in
tune with his natural order, and a powerful love. This
paper demonstrates how Norris's writing presents this
body of thought. Although many say such beliefs are
immature, Norris sincerely expounds these ideas through
his characters and themes of his novels.

Possibly the aspect of Norris's ideology most confus-
ing to many is his indulgence in the preternatural.
Howells expresses this attitude in his statement that
Norris "quite transcended Zola in the rich strain of poetry
coloring his thought, and the mysticism in which he now
and then steeped his story."\(^6\) Throughout Norris's work
there is a presentation of various supernatural qualities
which have provoked much criticism. Norris's use of the
"sixth sense" was the device consistently utilized in six
works, Vandover and the Brute, McTeague, Blix, The Octopus
The Pit, and The Responsibilities of the Novelist. In all
instances the implied meaning of the strange sense is one
of unknown knowledge correctly perceived by one of Norris's
special characters. Also common in all six works is the
close relationship between this mystical sense and Norris's
moral natural order. Norris likewise acknowledges within

\(^6\)William D. Howells, "Frank Norris," The North American
Review, 175 (December, 1902), 772.
a dramatic context the mysterious realities of spiritualism, telepathy, hypnotism, and mysticism. However, for Norris it seems the "sixth sense" exists as a personal verisimilitude. The frequency and the ease with which Norris uses the mysterious sense convinces the reader that possibly Norris has experienced this unusual intuition.

At the ending of a letter to Ernest C. Peixotto dated May 7, 1899, Norris said the following: "I'm not good at saying the things that would be appropriate here, but please consider them said and believe me when I tell you that I love you both more than I can ever express. Goodbye—or au revoir—whichever it is to be." In an article about Norris, Ernest Peixotto says "This letter was never signed and its last sentence has always seemed to me strangely prophetic, for, though we both were under thirty, I never saw him again." Peixotto had known Norris since the very early art lesson days in San Francisco; they were very close while Peixotto worked on the Lark and Norris on the Wave. And then they were friends while both were in New York. It seems significant that Peixotto, knowing Norris as he did, would comment on the strange closing of the letter.

7 Ernest Peixotto, "Romanticist Under the Skin," Saturday Review of Literature, 9 (May 27, 1933), 614.
8 Ibid.
Then in September of 1902, Jeannette Norris was in the hospital recovering from an operation. In Norris's biography, Walker gives an account of a particular incident concerning Norris's reactions:

While Mrs. Norris was in the hospital, her husband called at Bruce Porter's studio, haggard and despairing. He told his old friend that his wife had been operated on and was now out of danger, but as they lunched together he seemed unable to shake off the depression which held him. They walked to the hospital together, and outside the door they stood for a moment:

"Bruce, I'm afraid!"
His friend gave him the formal assurance that all was well.
"Yes--but I'm afraid!"
"Afraid of what, Frank?"
"I'm afraid of death!"

He did not tell his fears to his wife, however, but pretended to take the matter lightly, insisting that she had always hoped for the luxury of an operation and had taken this means of satisfying herself.9

She soon came home, and the incident was apparently forgotten because Norris continued his work.

Norris had been to talk with his friend Bailey Millard about the third book of the trilogy. Millard, feeling Norris looked extremely tired, advised him to take a rest before working again. Millard also set up a luncheon appointment for Wednesday. Millard stated that Norris "accepted the invitation, but on the night before the day of the proposed meeting he was taken violently ill with appendicitis, and was removed to a hospital where he

underwent an operation from the effects of which he died within two days after the attack of illness." Norris died on October 25, 1902, about a month after his expression of fear was made to Porter. To say Norris experienced the "sixth sense" in this vague premonition is merely speculation, but certainly it would be a suitable climax for one who spent so much time describing this strange phenomenon.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Knight, Grant C., The Strenuous Age in American Literature, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1954.


Marchand, Ernest, Frank Norris, Stanford University, California, Stanford University Press, 1942.


### Articles


Encyclopedia Articles


Unpublished Material

Davidson, James, "Frank Norris's Angele, Vanamee, and Father Sarria," an unpublished paper.