

THE STYLE AND THE METHOD OF THE WORKS OF FRANK NORRIS

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Abstract: well-known American writer Frank Norris wrote a lot of brilliant novels during his lifetime. His works differ with his method which used in his novels. His notable works include *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, *The Octopus: A story of California* and *The Pit*. This article describes some features of Frank Norris as a writer and his works.

Key words: method, Frank Norris, writers, naturalism, *The Octopus*, *McTeague*.

There are writers in the world literature who can never be forgotten. The reason for this is the priceless literary legacy they left behind. One of favourite writers of the world is the American novelist Frank Norris was a universally well-liked person with an inextinguishable joie de vivre, a fine sense of humor, a gift for maintaining long-term friendships, and a degree of self-confidence that early career-related disappointments could not dampen.

Frank Norris was an American author who wrote primarily in the naturalist genre, focusing on the impact of corruption and turn-of-the-century capitalism on common people. Best known for his novel *McTeague* and for the first two parts of his unfinished *The Epic of the Wheat* trilogy—*The Octopus: A Story of California* and *The Pit*, Norris wrote prolifically during his lifetime. Following his education at the Académie Julian in Paris, University of California, Berkeley, and at Harvard University, Norris worked as a news correspondent for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and covered the Spanish-American War in Cuba for McClure's Magazine. Norris died suddenly in 1902 of peritonitis, leaving *The Wolf: A Story of Empire*, the final part of his *Wheat* trilogy, incomplete.

In all time people wants to read or to analyze the works of Norris. Norris's works can easily overcome the reader with their action. The reader lives in it. For example, Modern critics generally agree that *McTeague* is one of Norris's finest works, and displays his naturalist concerns with the new sciences of psychology and evolution and how they affect human behavior. "Norris believed that human behavior could largely be understood in terms of the impact of heredity, environment, and the pressure of circumstance, and that free will or the ability to make choices was limited," Karen F. Jacobson observed in *Mosaic*. "What also interested him, in turn, was how such beliefs might affect individuals and/or how such theories might be enlisted to account for the abnormal or pathological in human behavior." According to Jacobson, the characters of *McTeague* and *Trina* both display obsessive-compulsive traits: *McTeague* has a

desperate need to control his wife's behavior, while Trina is unable to stop hoarding her gold—and in one notorious scene is even shown lying naked on a bed covered in coins. "In both style and content," Norris's method of revealing such abnormal behavior "shows the influence of contemporary social science," John Dudley similarly remarked in *College Literature*. The critic explained that Norris emphasized physical characteristics and scientifically objective language in his narrative, especially when portraying "'born criminals' whose ancestry and physical traits foretell the proclivity toward violent or anti-social behavior." Dudley and other modern critics have observed that these portrayals often have racist undertones, as reflected the disdainful thinking of the era's white, Anglo-Saxon ruling class towards immigrants of all races and nationalities. Nevertheless, the novel has interest for the modern reader; "the greatness of *McTeague* lies in the description of the Polk Street routine," French noted, for "the setting is not merely a group of back-drops against which the story unfolds; it shapes the story." The critic concluded: "What Norris has done in *McTeague* is to preserve the physical characteristics of an important era in human affairs—the period immediately before the electrification of the city established the distinctive quality of twentieth-century domestic life." [1]

Literary scholars often debate the existence of the "Great American Novel"—one work of literature that authentically encapsulates the American experience. This mythical work does exist, and has been around for more than a century. It is *The Octopus* by Frank Norris, originally published in 1901. Based on the real-life incident of the Mussel Slough Tragedy, *The Octopus* tells the story of a conflict between a group of California wheat ranchers and an all-powerful railroad corporation. Set in the farmlands of Tulare County, California, the novel features an indelible ensemble of characters, among them Magnus Derrick, the elder statesman of impeccable integrity; Buck Annixter, the irascible but good-hearted ranch owner; Hooven, the German immigrant and war veteran; Vanamee, the ascetic drifter and mystical prophet; and Presley, the surrogate for Norris himself, an educated, city-bred poet who immerses himself among these country folk in search of his great, as yet unwritten "Epic of the West." The railroad, not content to gouge the ranchers with their exorbitant shipping rates, sets out to snatch the very land itself. When the ranchers resolve to defend their homes and livelihood, an altercation arises which produces tragic consequences.

The Octopus deserves the designation of Great American Novel not only for its exceptional literary merit, but also because it deals with issues that are quintessentially American—a person's right to own land, the right to derive a living from that land, and conversely, the right to pursue great wealth, even at the expense of others. The scope of the novel encompasses the realms of business, agriculture, the press, the arts, politics, and family. It celebrates the beauty of nature, the triumph of love, and the defiance of the human spirit. Whether depicting the small dramas of everyday life or the cataclysmic

clash of inevitable forces, Norris's writing is perfect throughout. As the foremost representative of the Naturalist school in American literature, Norris showcases his preternatural ability to accurately depict nature and society in almost photographic detail, yet he also displays a Romanticist's penchant for larger-than-life events and heroic conflict. The result is a gripping novel of ordinary people faced with extraordinary circumstances.[2]

Some critics complain that the stoic, fatalistic tone of the book's epilogue betrays the fiery social consciousness that precedes it. Fellow "muckrakers" like Jack London or Upton Sinclair would have ended the book with a socialist polemic, but Norris refuses to take the easy way out and rightly realizes that such an anthemic ending would belie the book's realism. When one character does seek a socialistic solution to the railroad problem, Norris immediately points out the folly of such a simplistic answer. The *Octopus* was influenced heavily by the French author Emile Zola's masterwork *Germinal*, which tells the story of a coal miners' strike. Like Zola, Norris primarily concentrates on the plight of the working class, but also allows the opposing side to be heard, objectively acknowledging that the dispute is not so cut and dried as it appears. The conflict between the railroad and farmers is not merely one of predator and prey, but a manifestation of universal forces which operate above and beyond the lives and deaths of these characters.

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