

To the Editor on Trail

Sadly, I haven't *actually* been on trail, so I can't use that as my excuse for the tardiness of this issue. What should have arrived in your mailbox back in November is arriving in January. This might not be so bad, except that I fear that virtually all of the call-for-papers included in this issue will have expired before you get a chance to see them. For that, I want to extend my sincerest regrets, particularly to the panel organizers involved. But, on the off-chance that you are reading this before January has fully seasoned, please turn directly to The Call of the Papers on page 32 and see what's available. I'll wait here while you do that.

And you're back. On a more positive note, however, I think we have a great issue here, and I would like to personally thank Patrick Dooley, Ben Fisher, Nicole DeFee, Cara Erdheim, and Steven Bembridge for their fine essays. And, of course, a special thanks to Donna Campbell who is the subject of this issue's feature interview, as well as Gina Rossetti who graciously allowed us to share her Top Five list with the world. This issue is rounded out, as usual, with some news, some tragically expired cfps, a bibliographic update, and a few pages ripped from Nordau's *Degeneration* just to whet your archival appetites.

As always, I'd like to extend my ongoing thanks to all of the members of the author societies who send me bibliographic updates, news items, and encouragement. Once again, a tip of the cap to Steve Frye for his editorial assistance and perseverance. And, of course, I'd like to extend my thanks to the Department of English at the University of Memphis for its ongoing support of ALN.

Hope to see many of you in San Francisco for the ALA in May.

Naturally,
Eric Carl Link

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Teaching American Literature in Singapore: Two Fulbright Fellowships

Patrick K. Dooley

“One must travel to learn.”

Mark Twain, *Innocents Abroad*

At the October 2011 Western American Literature Association Conference in Missoula, Montana, I attended a panel discussion, “Western American Literature from the European Perspective.” Four speakers related the difficulties (often humorous ones) and successes they encountered teaching American texts to Danish, Welsh, British, and Spanish students. In the Q and A, I suggested that the next WLA conference ought to have a similar panel on teaching American literature in Asia. This essay, then, is a head start on that discussion.

In the spring of 2008 and the fall of 2010 I had Fulbright fellowships to teach at Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore. First, a bit of history about NTU. In 1955 Nanyang University was founded as the first Chinese-language university in Southeast Asia. In 1990 it merged with Singapore University, becoming NTU in 1991. Since 2000 NTU has set its sights on competing with its older and larger rival, the National University of Singapore. (NUS was founded in 1904 and has 36,000 students; NTU has 25,000 students). In 2006 NTU established a separate College of Humanities, Arts and Social Science, a clear signal that it was aggressively expanding its faculty, departments, and offerings beyond the technical and engineering disciplines. My Fulbrights in the English department were in response to their desire to bolster their offerings in American literature—given Singapore’s early colonial history, the department was already strong in British literature.

Accordingly, beyond being a consultant on curriculum and faculty development, I was asked to offer courses in what they termed “the

American Experience.” These classes meeting once a week for three hours took careful planning and choreography. I decided the best vehicle to introduce American history, geography, culture and philosophy was *via* a literature survey. I used James Nagel’s fine 2008 volume, *Anthology of the American Short Story*, as the basic text, supplemented with several novels. As I will relate below, the experiences and mind-sets of my Asian students presented both interesting opportunities and surprising pedagogical challenges.

A few words about Singapore. The country of Singapore *is* a small, oval shaped island (30 miles by 20 miles), with a population of 6 million. It is nothing if not urbanized—high rise apartments and sky scrapers as far as the eye can see, which is not very far (more about that later). The society is buttoned-down and it is also exuberantly capitalistic. As to the first, since 1959 when it split off from Malaysia, its one-party “democracy” has had three ministers: Lee Kuan Yew (1959-1990), Goh Chok Tong (1990-2004) and since 2004, Lee Hsien Loong—son of Lee Kuan Yew. All three of these leaders now work as an odd triumvirate, respectively, as Minister Mentor, as Senior Minister, and as Minister. Lee Kwan Yew is 88 years old. As Minister Mentor he would seem to be relegated to ceremonial and honorary duties, yet he continues to be a force in Singapore’s domestic and international affairs. He is beloved and respected, even revered—my students would quote him in their papers much as American students might quote Lincoln or Jefferson or Plato or Aristotle. The country’s one newspaper, *The Strait Times*, is an organ of government and its content is censored. When I was there Sir Edmund Hillary died. In *The Strait Times* tribute/obituary, his famous and profane quote about conquering Everest was Bowdlerized to “Well, we knocked the b***** off!”

Regarding its economic prowess, the country is so new and so affluent it seems as if the

cellophane wrappers were just removed from the giant skyscrapers in its central financial district. Also, almost all the automobiles are brand new—to control traffic congestion and pollution, the number of automobiles is capped at 12 per 100 persons. Being Singapore, this social engineering is accomplished *via* a price tag. If you want to buy an automobile, you must first purchase a Certificate of Entitlement (COE) which costs upwards of \$70,000, good for ten years. So when the resale value of your auto falls below what the rest of your COE is worth, the smart things to do are trade up or buy a new car. Most of these almost-new cars are sold elsewhere making Singapore second only to Japan as an exporter of used cars.

Singapore's economy is regarded as the world's freest, most innovative, most competitive, most corporate friendly, and least corrupt; its port is one of the five busiest. (Golf is very expensive in Singapore so a one-hour ferry ride to Indonesia's Bintam Island is a somewhat more affordable alternative. When our ferry boat navigated the Straits of Singapore it seemed as if we were threading our way through the D-Day armada off the coast of France.) Singapore has the highest percentage of millionaire households in the world. So under the mostly benevolent hand of Lee Kwan Yew, Singapore evolved from a small, backward, corrupt, and disease ridden colonial outpost to a first-world economic power whose GNP ranks 24th. The December 2011 *National Geographic* reported that the Global Cities Index, a gauge of urban influence, ranked Singapore eighth, not far behind the larger and/or long established cities of New York, London, Tokyo, Paris, Hong Kong, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

Economically speaking, the hardest-charging and largest ethnic group in Singapore is the Chinese (74%, followed by 13% Malay and 10% Indian). Their nickname for these Chinese Singaporeans is the "Bling Dynasty." When I was there the first-ever-under-the-lights Formula One Grand Prix was staged; the race's

glitz, noise, Rolex sponsorship, and jet-set fans are a perfect fit for Singapore.

The island sits on the equator which means a daily high of F 88 degrees. Every day the sun rises and sets at 7:15AM and 7:15PM (that is, 07:15 and 19:15) so there are no seasons. November to January are called the "winter," rainy months, though we could not notice much change. This is the tropics so where there are not high rises, malls and parking lots the island teems with jungle-like vegetation. NTU has recruited an army of groundskeepers who constantly prune, mow, and rake the trees, grass, shrubs and flowers on campus.

Finally, only one percent of the population are Westerners—American, Canadians, Europeans, Australians and New Zealanders. More often than not my wife and I were asked if we were Australian or Canadian. The Singaporean term for Westerners is "ang moes," literally "red-haired monkeys." The term is used in a kindly, humorous way and did not seem to us demeaning or threatening. Still we had a profound sense of being part of a microscopic minority. It was abundantly obvious that we were an object of curiosity and interest; we could feel the gazes in church, at the symphony, at the malls, on the subways, and on the street.

Teaching Singaporeans. On campus the conversations I overheard were in Malay, Mandarin, or "Singlish"—a barely understandable (to my ear) combination of English, Chinese, Hindi and Malay. For example, in Singlish the letter "L" is all but missing and collective nouns are a problem. When the taxi driver came to our apartment he asked, "Do you have many ruggages?" ("Do you have much luggage?") In the classroom, however, the King's English was the rule. One of my brightest and smallest students, a young Indian man who was not quite five feet tall, remarked to me before we began a discussion of Emerson's *Nature*, "Dr. Dooley, that was a demanding exercise," sounding all the while like a forty year old British diplomat.

My students were positively disposed toward America and eager to learn about our history, geography and culture. Though I am not used to doing so, I gave broad-stroke background mini-lectures on:

- “The Declaration of Independence” for selections of the Federalist papers;
- The colonial experience for Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*;
- American romanticism for Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*;
- The Fugitive Slave Law for Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience”;
- The Civil War for Ambrose Bierce’s “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,” Harriet Beecher Stowe’s “The Two Altars,” Frances Harper’s “The Two Offers,” and Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*;
- The transcontinental railroad, the Homestead Act, and settling the Great Plains for Willa Cather’s *My Ántonia*, Frank Norris’s “A Deal in Wheat” and Hamlin Garland’s “The Return of the Private”;
- Classical American pragmatic philosophy and William James’s *The Principles of Psychology* for Jack London’s “South of the Slot” and Henry James’s “The Real Thing”;
- The California and Alaska gold rushes for Jack London’s “To Build a Fire”;
- The Great Depression for John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*;
- The Jazz Age for Fitzgerald and Hemingway;
- The South and segregation during the pre-civil rights movement for Flannery O’Connor’s “The River,” William Faulkner’s “Barn Burning,” Jean Toomer’s “Blood Burning Moon”;
- Persistent concerns with identity and assimilation for Charles Chesnutt’s “The Wife of His Youth,” Leslie Marmon Silko’s “Storyteller,” Louise Erdrich’s “The Red Convertible,” and Sherman Alexie’s “The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven”;

- The Vietnam War for Tim O’Brien’s “How to Tell a True War Story.”

As I prepared each week’s three hour class I worked to freshly engage the assigned texts. I read unmarked copies and I resisted the temptation to use my old reading and lecture notes. I tried to anticipate not only what my students would find interesting, noteworthy, or thought-provoking, but also what they might find puzzling, confusing, or baffling in our readings. As it turned out my conjectures about my students’ reactions to fictional settings, especially geography and climate were generally on target; however, there were several real surprises regarding cultural differences.

Given Singapore’s size, climate and geographic location I expected them to be intrigued but also to have difficulty relating to the seasonal variations, vast distances, sparsely populated and natural landscapes. They could not vividly imagine the Nebraska frontier of *My Ántonia*. They marveled and were astonished with Jim Burden’s first-night’s experience on the prairie, “there was nothing but land; not a county at all but the material out of which countries are made. No, there was nothing but land . . . I had the feeling that the world was left behind, and that we had got over the edge of it, and were outside man’s jurisdiction” (54). Lacking any correlative experiential bases, Cather’s wonderful descriptions simply did not resonate in them. Using William James’s categories, reading might eventually give them “knowledge about” the frontier, they would never have the richer, more fundamental “knowledge by acquaintance”—in his illustration, James explains that a blind person might master the physics of color vision, but that is not the same as seeing.

Distance, the big sky, emptiness, and untamed wilderness are radically foreign experiences to citizens of such a densely populated, built up, humanized, and citified county. My students simply could not imagine how big the United States actually is; Cather’s and other author’s accounts of the Great Plains were just

not believable for them. Perhaps this anecdote will help. After a semester I accumulated a sizable store of books, notes, files, and class notes. Even though NTU's budgets are beyond ample and the English department was very generous, air freight for a dozen boxes was asking too much. However, the department secretary said cheerfully, "no problem." She secured part of a ship container so that my boxes could be economically shipped to New York City. She was then dismayed to learn that her "solution" left my boxes a six hour drive from my home university of St. Bonaventure in western New York State. NTU is at the western end of Singapore and Changi airport at the city's eastern tip, meaning that our taxi ride from one end of the county to the other took about forty five minutes.

"Cold" turned out to be the most intriguing and baffling experience for my students. "Cold," for them, meant air conditioning. One student had been to Switzerland and she did her best to help them understand ice, snow, and that cold can be painful. They were fascinated with the "Pond in Winter" chapter of *Walden*, marveling at the layers of clothes that Thoreau wore and his accounts of ice skating for miles on the Concord River. We read his accounts of shoveling through a foot of snow and then chopping through another foot of ice to get a pail of water or to ice fish. They especially enjoyed his descriptions of harvesting the ice, packing it in sawdust and shipping some of it to Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta. While I had remembered the nineteenth-century, transoceanic commerce in ice, I had forgotten Thoreau's muse that Massachusetts ice in India meant, "the pure Walden water [was] mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges" (199).

About a month after we had finished our discussion of *Walden*, we encountered more winter settings: the storm that stranded Bret Harte's "Outcasts of Poker Flat" and the Yukon cold that killed the greenhorn in Jack London's "To Build a Fire." London's effectively repetitive descriptions, such as "that cold and gray,

exceedingly cold and gray day" lead to a lively discussion. Later, though I had not paid special attention to it, my Singaporeans were quite attuned to the snowy setting of F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Winter Dreams" and the blizzard in Stephen Crane's "Blue Hotel."

As interesting as were the difficulties that differences in geography and setting posed, persistent cultural differences proved to be both challenging and illuminating for our discussions. For example, after I explained Frederic Jackson Turner's thesis that the continual presence of a frontier became the defining character of the American experience, I asked them for the Singaporean equivalent. Without realizing it I had asked a vexing, and for many Singaporeans, an embarrassing question. They struggle to explain what is distinctive about their culture and country. My students were chagrined that the answers they gave were, by their own admission, "lame." Some responded that Singapore is renowned for "good food." Others mentioned "The 5 C's of Singapore"—cash, credit card, car, condominium, and county club membership.

On occasion their own experiences provided helpful entrees into our readings. For instance, my students found that Singapore's one party "clean democracy" was an interesting analog to the top-down, stable and closed society in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. On this point, my first fellowship there was during the season of primaries and state caucuses in the run up to the Obama-McCain presidential election. They (as well as my NTU faculty colleagues) were much attuned to the 2011 elections, though they also often remarked that our democratic practices were "messy," chaotic, and inefficient—like India's they said.

They thought that Cather's account of first, second, and third generation immigrants on their way toward assimilation and Americanization in *My Ántonia* was revealing, because it so accurately reflected their own experiences. Most of my students were bi/multi lingual; several of them spoke Chinese at home, Singlish

with their friends, and English at the university. They also remarked that Cather's descriptions of the worries of the elder Bohemians and Scandinavians of Black Hawk, reminded them of their parents' and grandparents' apprehensions regarding the mixed blessing of their own enthusiastic embrace of 21st Century Singaporean ways.

On the other hand, there were predictable cultural barriers to be negotiated. When surveyed about for their religious affiliation, Singaporean responded Buddhist most often, next "no religion," followed by Islam, Hindi, Sikh, and Christianity. I knew then that I could not count on their readily recognizing, as most of my American students do, Christian symbols, nor could I assume that they would easily identify biblical allusions in our readings. Hence, I was prepared for instance, to explain that because Mr. Shimerda took his own life he would be denied burial in consecrated Christian cemetery or why the Shimerda family believed that they could "pray his soul out of purgatory." However, I was unprepared for the class's response to a question that has been a staple and sure-fire topic for my class discussions of *My Ántonia*. The day before most class discussions I have my students email me brief reaction journals. In this case my prompt was, "Discuss Cather's treatment of the philosophical (and theological) aspects of the suicides in the novel." While Cather gives Mr. Shimerda's suicide extended treatment, she also describes how a tramp throws himself into the threshing machine, and near the end of the novel, how Wick Cutter carefully arranges onlookers to witness that he is killing himself out of spite. When I outlined the journal question on the suicides, the immediate and nearly unanimous response from my Singaporean students was, "we don't understand the question." "Isn't suicide a positive and self- (if not life) affirming action?" Their assumptions were a revelation to me—my intuitions, religious background and cultural reflexes badly miscarried. I really was at a loss for words.

Regarding "canonical" naturalistic texts, readers of the *ALN Newsletter* might be interested in the reactions of my Singaporean students to literary naturalism. Bear in mind that these were introductory level survey courses so my commentary on literary movements was limited. My thumb-nail definition was the standard one: naturalism is realism with an agenda—determinisms of various sorts that severely hamper and, in some authors and some narratives, obliterate human freedom. Several of my students were free will naysayers holding either that since we are fated the very notion of human freedom is incoherent or, a bit less extreme, others expressed severe doubts about the efficacy of individuals' actions. Conversely, and ironically, the majority of my students argued that even when we are severely constrained by circumstances, ignorance, or compulsions, we retain the freedom to choose, even if that choice implies self-destruction. Our discussions regarding freedom and determinism were among the liveliest, and clearly the most philosophical conversations we had. I was not surprised that my Singaporean students' struggles with these philosophical questions was not very different from those of my American students. With both audiences I took care to explain that the freedom or determinism dichotomy is a false one; in our lives we confront both/and situations. This view is most economically illustrated by Aristotle's treatment of voluntary and involuntary actions, responsibility and blameworthiness in his *Nichomachean Ethics*. Aristotle contends, on one hand, that the precondition of free actions and responsible choices is predictability of both natural events and human behavior. On the other, he concedes that there are situations in which agents are so overwhelmed by ignorance and/or physical and psychological compulsions—Aristotle's terms are external and internal forces—that freedom and impugnability are precluded.

I concur with my students on both sides of the Pacific who are highly skeptical of strict determinism—even the freedom agnostics not-

ed above argued for enough wiggle-room to make human choices consequential. Accordingly, the supposition of a realistic compatibilism, rather than a doctrinaire determinism, set the stage for meaningful discussions by both my American and Singaporean students.

Fictional scenarios in which characters have absolutely no freedom are uninteresting—though, strictly speaking and by definition, no naturalistic characters should have enough control of their actions to influence the outcome of their lives. Therefore we explored whether, in these naturalistic narratives, there is enough loose play to permit even naturalistic protagonists to “enjoy” genuine, albeit severely limited, freedom.

- Frank Norris’s “A Deal in Wheat.” To be sure the Kansas farmer Sam Lewiston is besieged with forces beyond his control—nature, greed, and economic capitalism—yet my students pointed out that Levinson has choices to make and he makes them. Furthermore, even if market capitalism follows the laws of supply and demand, in Norris’s story, these economic forces await the initiating decisions of Truslow, the Bear, and Horning, the Bull.
- Jack London’s “To Build a Fire.” My students were unconvinced of a blanket assertion of a fatalistic and naturalistic (in this case, climate-driven) determinism. They argued that London’s greenhorn’s stupidity and arrogance did him in. Was the moral of the story, they wondered, that animal instincts are the more reliable guidance for survival? In that case, if London’s greenhorn had been even more intellectually challenged, and more like his dog, he might have prevailed in the minus 50 degree cold.
- Stephen Crane’s “Blue Hotel.” Even though the Swede believes he is doomed as he repeatedly announces “I suppose I am going to be killed before I can leave this house” (426), my students pointed out the many places in the story where others in Scully’s hotel could have helped the Swede

overcome his paranoia. Moreover, my students found Crane a conflicted and half-hearted naturalist: even as his story moves to its inexorable conclusion, his infamous ninth section is explicit about what could have been, including the Easterner’s final salvo, “Every sin is the result of collaboration. We, five of us, have collaborated in the murder of this Swede” (444). Incidentally, they were more interested in considering Crane as an existentialist given his comments that human are lice “which were caused to cling to a whirling, fire-smote, ice-locked, disease-stricken, space-lost bulb” (440).

Last week in a briefing here (we have lots of these) the director of the Air Force Academy’s Center for International Students, which administers policies for the contingent of foreign exchange cadets, shared with instructors of the required senior English course the following cultural information. (All cadets take three English courses: Eng 111—composition and critical thinking, Eng 211—a world literature survey course, and English 411—literature devoted to war and leadership). She explained that in Japanese society, discussions of war and combat are assiduously avoided, presenting a serious problem for the Japanese cadets in English 411 who are understandably uncomfortable, if not threatened, by the core readings of that class. For all of us in the room, this was unexpected but important information about another culture.

Singapore is a first-world gem and a soft landing in Asia. From there travelers have ready access to many fascinating countries: Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Indonesia, Viet Nam, and without much more in the way of time and money, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand. We visited several of these and so my Fulbright fellowships and associated travels brought many cultural and personal dividends, including valuable insights into teaching and understanding

American literature, not the least of which were the benefits of appreciating how some non-native readers respond to American literary texts.

Mark Twain had the first words; it is fitting that he also gets the last ones:

Travel is fateful to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable view of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all of one's lifetime. (474)

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Frank Norris's *A Man's Woman* Revisited

Benjamin F. Fisher

To the overall negative critiques of *A Man's Woman*, I respond that this novel displays genuine art in theme, form and characterization. At the close of the nineteenth century, polar exploration presented a timeliness that a young writer like Frank Norris would naturally have been quick to use. Although he was by no means the first to feature polar expeditions as literary material, sufficient interest in this scientific pursuit was such that Norris was not beating a dead horse with a big stick in creating his novel.¹ Ward Bennett's diary entries concerning the expedition, ultimately a failure, to the North Pole, add realism to the novel, as do the medical situations which engage Lloyd Searight and her colleagues in nursing. Combining Bennett's ruthless determination to succeed in the love that bonds him to Lloyd was likewise a deft move by Norris. Bennett is a superman who fears almost nothing, and whose understanding in matters other than those of love buttresses his sense of being always right. Correspondingly, Lloyd is very much a superwoman, although her attitude alters when love for Bennett overwhelms her rationality. Then she swerves from her duty as a nurse, permitting Bennett to take her away from a typhoid patient, who, ironically, happens to be Bennett's greatest friend, Richard Ferris. Just as ironically, when both men figured that they would never return alive from the Arctic, Ferris lied to Bennett. Consequently, Bennett thinks that Lloyd loves only himself.

Mistaken suppositions about who loves whom bring about Bennett's attempt to rescue Lloyd from what he assumes will be certain death if she remains with typhoid-ridden Ferris, though Bennett hadn't known the identity of Lloyd's patient. Whether actually brought about by Lloyd's deserting her post when Ben-

nett's overpowering will throws her emotions into turmoil, Ferris's death makes her realize that she as a woman must yield to male dominance in love, no matter her capabilities and self-reliance related to her profession. To some extent these circumstances might suggest a present-day soap opera. Such psychological upheavals do occur in everyday life, however, as well as in many modernist and post-modernist writings. That Norris should alternate episodes of high-pitched emotion or those that foreground humans' nearness to animal forces with those rife with sentimentality is no mighty wonder. Not for nothing is he often remembered as "the boy Zola," but, as I read *A Man's Woman*, I'd suggest that its author may have been a "boy" to other writers, too.

One potential influence, or at least a fairly contemporary work in which a similar human-beast syndrome operates, and which alternates lurid activity and thought with sentimentality, is Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), a novel that has been obscured for many because of later film makers' liberties with Stoker's text. Lloyd Searight and Stoker's Mina Harker are New Woman figures, Lloyd in her selected profession of nursing, Mina with her abilities as a typist when typewriters were new, state-of-the-art, technology. Both women also transcribe their spouses' records to give them order. Such New Woman characters' departures from long cherished ideals of woman as domestic and wholly subservient to patriarchy caused many contemporaneous readers and reviewers to wince.

Along with other literary female characters in this era, Lloyd and Mina were professional women *and* devoted wives. Both were also characterized by strong sexuality—else Mina couldn't have come under Dracula's spell, no matter its temporary effects. Lloyd's ample physique and, even more so, her wealth of copper-red hair signal a strong sexuality, and that she is an intensely sexual being is affirmed when she yields to Bennett's importuning her to leave the house of typhoid and come away to

safety. Although she is subsequently depicted as a solicitous wife, Lloyd's red hair recalls that of many other female (and male) characters whose freedoms in thinking and action are greater than those of the stereotypical "Angel in the House" female dear to the hearts of many Victorians. Just so, Lloyd is literary kin to an even more free-spirited red-haired siren of the times, Celia Madden in Harold Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware*. Red hair had long folklore associations with forceful sexuality, free-spiritedness and, in some cases, villainy. Witness just two examples: Queen Elizabeth I and Judas Iscariot. Decided sexual propensities in red-haired females continues as a popular characteristic in today's romance novels, where such characters are often highly involved in professional life, as Lloyd Searight was. Many of these red-headed women characters contribute significantly to their lovers' careers, however, and Lloyd is indeed a man's woman in spurring Bennett to break out of his ennui and return to Polar exploration.²

In creating Ward Bennett as a grotesque personage, with obvious Herculean strength and Nietzschean force of will, Norris was also capitalizing on a character type that appealed to him and many other authors in his era. Bennett reminds one of Norris's own McTeague or one of Jack London's superman characters, and his difference from the general run of men would have attracted many readers of that day. To turn again to *Dracula*, the Count is himself a tower of physical strength, in accordance with vampire legendry. Conversely, to be sure, many rather effeminate male literary characters appeared in 1890s writings. If they were heroic types they may have had some ancestry in characters like Tennyson's Galahad or even royal Arthur himself or of the epicene sorts depicted in Aubrey Beardsley's graphics and elsewhere—who were not at all possessed of Ward Bennett's rugged virility. Their opposites were of more muscular, bestial, often rampantly sexual makeup, e. g., some of the wholly animalistic males in Tennyson's *Idylls of the*

King, or those like Hardy's Sergeant Troy or Alec d'Urberville or Aneas Manston. Such characters would have been familiar to Norris, many from his mother's having made her children aware of such readings, and just as many from his other pursuits.

Although the psychology in *A Man's Woman* has drawn mixed responses (most of them positive, however), we must remember that the principal psychological theme in this novel is the subduing of self or, in other words, the channeling of aggression, ego, call it what you want, into healthy courses of human interactions. Bennett and Lloyd cannot exist as a mature couple with a successful marriage until each has redirected some of his or her super-person will, and whether the extended passages in which the mindsets of Lloyd and Bennett are set forth become wearisome, as some others have contended, becomes questionable. As in *Moby-Dick*, for example, the extended sections focusing either in the careful handling of potentially dangerous tools for whaling, or those detailing Ishmael's penchant for taxonomy, may be very realistic presentations of essential, if tedious routines, just as Ishmael's attempts to hold on to everyday reality may be—not padding intended to torment college students. The concepts of self connected with animal qualities or ego may resonate with Zolaesqueness, but they may also suggest characterization found in other writings Norris read, as we know from *The Pit*, for example. Another link in this chain is forged if we recall Norris's essay, "Fiction Writing as a Business," where this passage stands out: "Even so great a name as that of George Meredith is not a 'sesame,' and only within the last few years has the author of *Evan Harrington* made more than five or six hundred dollars out of any one of his world famous books."³

Meredith's novel just named centers on two young lovers who must subdue strong elements of self before they can marry and be happy, and in Evan's case that subduing involves forthrightly admitting that he comes

from humble origins and that he must yield to duty—that of paying his late father's debts—before he may be considered a gentleman. Evan and his beloved, Rose Joscelyn, are great characters who stand out amidst others of lesser characterization, just as Ward and Lloyd do, though Meredith's characters have none of the physical super-person attributes evident in Norris's pair of lovers.

Just as interesting, the paragraph in Norris's essay preceding that about Meredith concerns Harold Frederic's work, which cites *The Damnation of Theron Ware* as Frederic's first financial success. Even though Norris's critical article was written in 1902, several years after *A Man's Woman* appeared, it may shed light on some inspirations not customarily thought of in regard to Norris's novels, and particularly not of *A Man's Woman*. I add that in the Meredith canon a reiterated theme is the ambiguous nature of self. A similar ambiguity is certainly a convincing part of the characterization of Lloyd Searight, for whom "mastery of self" produced "forgetfulness of self" (205), and, to a lesser extent, in Bennett, who, once he thinks that Lloyd loves him, becomes very emotionally confused when he attempts to respond. Norris does not precisely create a Beauty and the Beast situation, for although Lloyd has not the repulsive animal physique of Bennett, her large overall frame, her sturdy arms and hands betoken what are more often in literature thought of as male features. Her first name is also typically a male name. Whatever her physical appearance or name may suggest, she does possess the intuitive qualities that would have been associated with women more so than with men, when Norris wrote his novel. Thus she appeals to Bennett on grounds that she knows are likely to stimulate him to action once again, action essential to his very being.

Of course those circumstances may serve in part to date *A Man's Woman*. The idea that Bennett's immense physical hardihood and powerful will make him a genuine man, in contrast to his turning to writing as a career re-

placement after all the physical and emotional sufferings that the Arctic expedition occasioned, followed by additional emotional strains after his return to domestic life and to writing a book about his explorations, may raise many an eyebrow at present. Bennett is not glibly articulate, and his outburst when he tries to convince Lloyd that he loves her: “Oh! Words—the mere things that one can say—seem so pitiful, so miserably inadequate” (128), might well be considered a forerunner of Faulkner’s Addie Bundren’s remarking that “Words are just a shape to fill a lack.” To be a professor—to cite terminology from Norris’s novel, where that designation is used deprecatingly—does not perforce mean that one is physically weak or spiritless. I think of my own early mentor in graduate school, the late Arlin Turner, whose keen critical mind was matched by great physical strength, as just one example. Bennett and Lloyd may be unusual characters, but their characteristics do not perforce make them dull or psychologically implausible—far from it. Bennett’s admission during his delirium adds another realistic touch to the novel. For Bennett and Lloyd, their work is paramount, yet another trait that may have come from Meredith’s fiction and, behind that, the work of Thomas Carlyle, one of Meredith’s strong inspirations.

From Meredith, too, or from William Morris in his prose romances, or from his American contemporary, Stephen Crane, Norris may have gained expertise in the writing of poetic prose, another feature in *A Man’s Woman* that seems to have gone largely unnoticed. The paragraphs of natural description in chapter one, for example, contain onomatopoeic effects, as well as plausibly shifting imagery, which create felicitous expression for the sensations and sounds created by the unstable ice that hampers Bennett’s and his party’s attempts to move southward. The notion of “Enemy”—for Bennett the bleak, death-dealing northern polar region, for Lloyd, whatever disease she as a nurse must combat—constitutes another poetic motif,

which amounts almost to Gothic effects in passages where it is thought of as an evil force pursuing hapless victims, though without the monk’s cowl or flaming eyes of villains popular in antecedent Gothics. There are many passages of alliterative prose in *A Man’s Woman*, and the more overwrought a character’s emotions become, the more lyrical the sound effects grow. This was, of course, an era when reading aloud was much in vogue, and Norris was doubtless aware of how sounds as well as visual effects might appeal to his readers.

Norris was also canny in employing transparent names. Ward means “a watcher” or “preserver,” and Bennett certainly is both, albeit in his own way. Lloyd’s surname, “Searight,” is likewise functional in that she perceives what must take place to restore Bennett’s self-esteem and physical vitality. That she herself repairs to rural Bannister is likewise subtle art. “Banister” means a support, and that the country house where she finds such restorative support is “Applewood” may be suggestive of Eden, though the apple in that biblical paradise was ambiguous as to human love-sex circumstances. Thus, fittingly, Bennett’s declaration of love in that place plausibly causes emotional turmoil for Lloyd and him.

To draw to a close, though, I mention that British reviewers in particular found the theme in *A Man’s Woman* exciting, and the characters well drawn, though several thought that the episode of the surgical operation on little Hattie Campbell was appalling. Given that the early twentieth century was a time when many books by Americans found anything but favor among British reviewers, such testimony is a tribute to Norris’s artistry. I might add that the open-ended conclusion to the novel—will Bennett return from his next polar expedition or won’t he?—is not to be ignored. The enshrouding fog that hovers over the parting of Bennett from Lloyd portends a gloomy future, and Bennett is not a woman’s man, as the text itself states. The inconclusive ending, on the one hand, harks back to Henry James’s technique in novels like

The Portrait of a Lady or *The Turn of the Screw*, just as it makes *A Man's Woman* a fore-runner of many later novels.⁴ So, as I probably have only stumblingly suggested, this Norris novel may yield more treasure than have heretofore been unearthed.

Notes

1. William E. Lenz. *The Poetics of the Antarctic: A Study in Nineteenth-Century American Cultural Perceptions*. New York, London: Garland, 1995. Throughout this essay, all citations to *A Man's Woman* are to *The Argonaut Limited Edition of Frank Norris's Works. Vol. 6: A Man's Woman and Yvernelle: A Legend of Feudal France*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1928.

2. Such contradictions as are evident in the characterizations of Mina and Lloyd are by no means unusual. Another such character in fiction of the era is Justine Brent, in Edith Wharton's *The Fruit of the Tree*—see Teresa Tavares, "New Women, New Men, or What You Will in Edith Wharton's *The Fruit of the Tree*," *Edith Wharton Review* 21.1 (Spring 2005): 1-2, 4-13. Justine's face-off character, Jeffrey Amherst, is, like Ward Bennett, multi-sided.

3. See *The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris*, ed. Donald Pizer. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1964; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1976: 149. See also Joseph R. McElrath, Jr. and Jesse S. Crisler. *Frank Norris: A Life*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006: 411. A generous selection of reviews appears in *Frank Norris: The Critical Reception*, ed. Joseph R. McElrath, Jr. and Katherine Knight. New York: Burt Franklin, 1981. I have unearthed from American and British periodicals many additional reviews of Norris's publications, and I have noted the Meredith-Norris connection in "The Pit as a Play," *Frank Norris Studies*, 4 (1987), 4-7.

4. A sidelight on the James-Norris differences, which seems relevant in context, is worth citing here: Unsigned. "The Pit," *Book News Monthly* 21 (February 1903): 437-438: "The effect for which Mr. Henry James is ever striving, and barely succeeds in bringing to pass after a number of hours passed in wearisome reading is obtained by Mr. Norris in a page, and an interesting page at that, while the intense grip of the situation, the thrilling power of exciting scene make the work of the latter not only satisfying but absorbing from beginning to end." (438).

Ben Fisher's early interest in Frank Norris was spurred by the late Clarence Gohdes and Louis J. Budd, with whom he took classes at Duke, and subsequently by Donald Pizer. He has unearthed many reviews and gossip column pieces concerning Norris, and he also has strong interests in Poe's life and writings, and in Victorian writers. He is a Professor of American Literature at the University of Mississippi.

The Brute Nature of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*

Nicole DeFee

At first blush, it appears that Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short novel *Herland* has no business being included in a discussion of American literary naturalism. Instead, one would naturally compare it to, on the one hand, the other utopian novels of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and, on the other hand, science fiction novels such as Joanna Russ's twentieth century novel *The Female Man* (1975). To push this point a little further, *Herland*, in many ways, reads like a precursor to the *Wonder Woman* comic books. Both have an arguably superior race of women who live without men in a paradisiacal land. The women of *Her-*

land, like the Amazonian “wonder women,” are skilled athletes. While they do not have the bullet-reflecting, lasso-looping skills, or the immortality of the Amazonian “wonder women,” the women of Herland are a physically strong, nimble, fit race of highly intelligent women. Like the “wonder women,” they prefer a form of conflict resolution that seeks to avoid killing one another at virtually all costs. Though the women of Herland, unlike their “wonder women” kin, do not descend from gods and goddesses in the Greek sense, they do descend from one “all-powerful” woman, a supreme mother who conceived and gave birth to five female children without the aid of men. From these five female children came the entire race of Herlandians.

Though the parallels between the *Wonder Woman* comics and *Herland* are fascinating, I certainly can't say whether the original author of the *Wonder Woman* comics had any familiarity with Gilman or *Herland*. Nor is this somewhat obvious comparison between the two the real point of my argument. Rather, what I would like to explore here is the less-obvious connections between *Herland* and literary naturalism. Perhaps the very nature of an all female land where women are solely responsible for the reproductive survival of the race is a science fiction or a fantasy for some, a utopia for others. Nevertheless, the novel certainly seems to qualify as what Eric Carl Link identifies as “positive literary naturalism . . . a substantially idealistic, progressive, and often utopian” naturalism (69). *Herland* is in many ways an ideal place—there is no crime, war, conflict, or competition for resources. There is no real hierarchy. Motherhood is often synonymous with sisterhood as there is a deep and literal familial connection amongst all the women in the country. *Herland* is progressive—a society of self-sufficient women who do all the heavy lifting themselves, grow their own food, tend to their own civilization. The women are the gatekeepers of the land and all its knowledge. The quasi-deity of the supreme mother is female.

Women need men for nothing here, arguably not only a progressive position, but a profoundly threatening one as well.

This question as to whether or not *Herland* is a naturalist text is a bit of a cheat. Link has long since started the conversation, and he argues successfully, though briefly, that *Herland* fits squarely in the naturalist utopian tradition alongside Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and Howells' *A Traveler From Altruria*. And others have argued as well for Gilman's inclusion in the naturalist canon. As Link points out, utopian naturalists, like Bellamy, were Nationalists, a party and ideology to which Gilman also subscribed. In his discussion of *Looking Backward*, Link notes that the Nationalists

took from evolutionary thinking the hope and belief that evolution was ameliorative and discarded from evolutionary thinking the darker elements that indicate the close connection between man and brute, the violence in nature, and the chance elements in random selection. (85)

Indeed, Gilman does something similar to Bellamy in *Looking Backward*. In “*Looking Backward* crime has largely disappeared because the motive for crime has been eradicated. All remaining evil is largely the result of hereditary atavism and is restricted to a small handful of individuals, and those cases are treated in hospitals. Prisons are empty” (Link 83). Likewise a similar phenomenon has taken place in *Herland*. Unlike the dual sex society in *Looking Backward*, in *Herland* the women have been able to successfully eradicate undesirable traits. Somel tells Vandyck that they have not had a “criminal” in over six hundred years. She informs them that they “made it our first business to train out, to breed out, when possible, the lowest types” (83). Somel explains: “If the girl showing the bad qualities had still the power to appreciate social duty, we appealed to her, by that, to renounce motherhood. Some of the few worst types were, fortunately, unable to reproduce” (83).

Central to Gilman's utopian and Nationalist ideology is evolutionary theory. Many critics have commented on the Darwinian and Spencerian evolutionary models framing utopian naturalism specifically, and literary naturalism broadly conceived. I suggest that Gilman's evolutionary philosophy is closer to a Bergsonian model. Bergson argued in *Creative Evolution* (1911) that one of the building blocks of evolutionary theory is that intent can result in action (47). To be sure, Bergson's theories are much more complex than that simple statement alone; however, the notion of *intent resulting in action* is at the heart of his creative evolutionary philosophy. Intent and action are the basis for reproduction and evolution in Herland. The intent to become pregnant results in pregnancy. Likewise, the intent not to become pregnant prohibits the body's becoming pregnant. Should a woman in Herland find herself the unwilling victim of a random selection that results in a genetically undesirable trait, that woman is not allowed to become pregnant. Because pregnancy is subject to a woman's will, the energy that normally be directed toward conception and motherhood are focused elsewhere. Those women who possess undesirable traits are simply not allowed to breed.

While it is clear that there is a progressivist evolutionary philosophy underscoring the text, there is yet another aspect of the text that undeniably places the novel in the naturalist tradition and illustrates that Gilman did not always toe the Nationalist party line. Gilman does not discard the darker elements of evolutionary thinking; she does not discard the brute. In fact, the interplay that is established in *Herland* between the "brute" Terry, who is "rich enough to do as he pleased" (3) and the progressive evolutionary philosophy that thematically frames the narrative is what marks the text most clearly and directly as a work of American literary naturalism.

Terry's sense of entitlement goes beyond his riches and is intimately linked with his manhood and his sexual desire. Terry's attitude

toward Herland and its women is evident from the start of the novel. Upon first hearing about a land full of women, Terry proclaims that the women "would fight amongst themselves" as "[w]omen always do" (10). He argues that there would be neither order nor organization and that they "mustn't look for inventions and progress; it'll be awfully primitive" (10). In fact, he is so sure of his own superiority that he believes that he will "get solid with them all—and play one bunch against another. I'll get myself elected King in no time" (10). When the three explorers finally reach Herland and discover that it is a civilized and cultivated country, they hold steadfast in their belief that there must be men somewhere. Only men could have possibly created and sustained a country as civilized as the one upon which they have ventured.

Like Norris' McTeague and Wharton's *Ethan Frome* and *Lawyer Royall*, Terry's devolution into a brute is intimately linked to sexual desire. Unlike McTeague, Frome, and Royall, Terry's fall is a short one. And while there are plenty of things about Herland that bother Terry, the single most troubling aspect of the country for him is the lack of sexual desire among the women. Jeff is completely happy living celibate as long as he is able to idealize and "worship" the women in his way. Vandyck walks the middle ground between Jeff and Terry. He wants a sexual relationship with his Herland wife Ellador; however, though married, he is willing to wait until sexual desires awaken in her naturally. However, the longer Terry is in "captivity," and the longer his wife Alima refuses to have sex with him, the more Terry feels entitled to it. In true brute fashion, Terry's regression is complete when he commits an act of violence in Herland: "Terry put in practice his pet conviction that a woman loves to be mastered, and by sheer *brute force*, in all the pride and passion of his intense masculinity, he tried to master this woman" (131, emphasis added). Because the women have been without men for so long, the act of rape is com-

pletely incomprehensible to them. There is no word on Herland for Terry's attempted violation. As Vandyck notes throughout the novel, the longer Terry goes without sex, the angrier and more aggressive he becomes. Like McTeague, Frome, and Royall, when Terry is confronted with the thing he cannot have, he tries to take it in an act of violence.

June Howard's treatment of the brute in *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism* helps complicate and contextualize any understanding of Terry as "brute." In her extensive treatment of the brute's relationship with the turmoil facing Americans at the turn of the twentieth century, Howard states that "Americans in a basic sense no longer knew who or where they were" (73). Terry embodies that anxiety. As his identity is based largely on his ability not only to seduce but to conquer women, his inability to do either leaves him at a loss regarding his sense of self. Though Terry is quite familiar with women—"familiar" in every sense of its meaning—the women on Herland are very much the *Other* for Terry. As Howard explains, "In naturalism the creature who defines humanity by negation and represents a problematical area of existence is imagined as living not outside the bounds of human society, not in the wilderness . . . but within the very walls of the civilized city" (80). While the women here are read as "Other" for Terry, it is not the women who occupy the brute space. The brute is Terry, who cannot, and will not accept, the existence of a woman so far outside of what he considers normal.

Howard notes that typically the brute comes from the lower classes; he is usually in some way marginalized, although almost always a white male, a "dumb beast, the animal who does not use language and is named but never names" (81). Terry, however, does not fit this description—at least, not in the traditional sense. We know that Terry is the wealthiest of the three "adventurers." Because of his wealth and status, he is certainly in a position to name rather than be named. He is the one

who offers the various names for the land of women. However, in Herland, Terry is the one who is marginalized. His wealth means nothing to the women of Herland. His attempt to lure the young women in during their first encounter with jewelry, an attempt which assumes that *all* women are subject to the lure of the "shiny object," fails miserably. Rather, the women take the jewelry not because they desire pretty and shiny things (they have no need for jewels), but because they plan on exhibiting the pieces in a museum. Terry's wealth and power in America does not endear him to the women of Herland. It alienates him from the women and sets him further apart from Jeff and Vandyck.

Terry believes his wealth and power in America entitles him to the same privileges in Herland. That he cannot use his entitlement in Herland to his advantage creates the conditions which awake his brute nature: "Dullness and incomprehension, as well as bestiality and depravity, are essential to the image of the brute" (Howard 83). This is key. Terry is dull in the sense that his is unable to comprehend on their own terms the lack of men in Herland and the abilities the women have. He can neither accept nor comprehend the religion of motherhood nor the type of literal and figurative sisterhood that exists among them. He can neither accept nor comprehend the lack of violence nor the way the women are continually able to overpower him, Jeff, and Vandyck without violence and with little force. He can neither accept nor comprehend an alternative to the frilly femininity he associates with middle- and upper-class womanhood in America. Arguably, like McTeague, Terry "comes of a defective line and lacks the distinctly human capacity that could enable effective resistance: reason" (Howard 91). Throughout the narrative we bear witness to Jeff and Vandyck's abilities to reason. They make definitive choices in how they interact with the women, what they choose to tell them. Unlike Terry, they are immediately willing to learn the language of Herland and

are eager to communicate with them. Terry is not. Confronted with a reality that is alternative to what he considers “normal,” Terry is unable to reason.

Terry’s inability to reason in Herland is even more dangerous when it is paired with an atavistic trait: “The idea of the atavism in particular seems to fascinate the naturalists, offering a way of representing disruptive forces as the primitive within civilization and indeed within the individual” (Howard 93). I would like to argue that the atavistic trait from which Terry suffers is misogyny. It is at the core of his regression to the brute. As Elizabeth Grosz notes, “Female sexuality and women’s powers of reproduction are the defining (cultural) characteristics of women, and, at the same time, these very functions render women vulnerable, in need of protection or special treatment, as variously prescribed by patriarchy” (13-14). Grosz continues:

Relying on essentialism, naturalism and biologism, misogynist thought confines women to the biological requirements of reproduction on the assumption that because of particular biological, physiological, and endocrinological transformations, women are somehow *more* biological, *more* corporeal, and *more* natural than men. (original emphasis 14)

In fact, all three of the men are misogynists to a certain degree. What separates Vandyck from Terry, for example, is that Vandyck is a man of reason. Though he initially defends Terry’s attempted rape with a “boys will be boys” type of defense, he eventually realizes how grossly horrible Terry’s act is. Terry does not. Vandyck’s musing on the attempted rape and the men’s attitude toward women reflects Grosz’s definitions of misogyny and is worth quoting at length:

We honor them [women] for their functional powers, even while we dishonor them by our use of it; we honor them for their carefully enforced vir-

tue, even while we show by our own conduct how little we think of that virtue; we value them, sincerely, for the perverted maternal activities which make our wives the most comfortable of servants, bound to us for life with the wages wholly at our own decision, their whole business, outside of the temporary duties of such motherhood as they may achieve, to meet our needs in every way. (139)

As Vandyck points out, the value of women is tied not only to their ability to reproduce, but to the man’s access to the female body as well. Grosz explains this key component to misogyny: “The coding of femininity with corporeality in effect leaves men free to inhabit what they (falsely) believe is a purely conceptual order while at the same time enabling them to satisfy their (sometimes disavowed) need for corporeal contact through their access to women’s bodies and services” (14). Terry, because of his lack of access, sees the women as unnatural, as non-women. He refers to them as “neuters” (99). The great irony of Terry’s misogyny is that the women of Herland are the very embodiment of the classic cultural markers of womanhood. They all reproduce; they are all mothers. They are just able to do it without him. Perhaps the problem is not that they are not female/woman enough for Terry but that they are *too much* woman for him to handle.

Notes

¹Elizabeth Grosz discusses Henri Bergson’s relationship with Darwinian and Spencerian evolutionary philosophies, as well as Bergson’s relationship with feminism in *Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution, and the Untimely*.

²While Frome does not have the physical stature that generally marks the brute in the naturalist tradition, his attitude, thwarted education, treatment of women, social standing, and his act of violence, mark him, I would argue, at the very least as being “brute-like.”

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Food, Fitness, & Fasting: Rethinking American Naturalism in the College Classroom

Cara Erdheim

Shortly after completing my dissertation, “The Greening of American Naturalism,” I mentioned to a colleague that while I looked forward to teaching my topic to undergraduates, I wondered whether students would share my insatiable hunger for the naturalist novel. My colleague swiftly replied, “These books are all about food, money, and sex; what else could motivate eighteen and nineteen year olds at 8:30 AM?!” Once the laughter had settled down, I began to work on putting my scholarly

ideas into pedagogical practice. I had spent the past six years of my graduate school career searching for innovative ways to understand the works of Theodore Dreiser, Jack London, Frank Norris, Ann Petry, Upton Sinclair, and Richard Wright. Moreover, during my first year as a full-time professor, I discovered that the classic conversations about Social Darwinism and urban determinism failed to get college freshmen energized about Norris’ *McTeague* (1899) and Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* (1900), among other common texts. Specifically, when teaching Petry’s *The Street* (1954), a later work of naturalism written by an African American woman, I discovered that students had more interest in the characters’ vigorous gardening practices than they did in the polluted environments where Petry’s protagonist, Lutie Johnson, lives. These in-class discoveries shed light on my students’ curiosities, and I realized that freshmen might enjoy connecting naturalist narratives to topics like eating and exercise.

While at work on my current project, “Food, Fitness, and the Greening of American Naturalism,” I started to design an undergraduate course that shares the same three objectives of my book-in-progress: 1. to reconcile a counter-narrative of culturally disordered eating and self-restraint on the one hand with the ecological ethics so central to naturalism’s politically radical sentiments on the other; 2. to rethink the traditional construction of American naturalism as a predominantly urban genre of fiction by using ecology to enrich our readings of this period’s nonfiction and poetry; 3. to illustrate how the often overlooked tradition of African American naturalism challenges the masculine white rhetoric of supreme physical conditioning and bodily fitness inherent in the culture and politics of Progressive era America. While researching the works of Dreiser, London, Norris, Petry, Sinclair, and Wright, I began formulating a particular approach to this undergraduate course. After rereading London’s *The Abysmal Brute* (a 1913 novel about prizefighting) and Sinclair’s contributions to *Physical Culture*

Magazine (an early twentieth-century periodical devoted to health, diet, and exercise), I thought to myself: what better way to interest college freshmen in literary naturalism than to engage them in conversations about nutrition, the body, and physical fitness? Therein lies the genesis of “American Sports Stories: from the Weight Room to the Classroom,” a interactive interdisciplinary course designed to enhance the academic experience of Sacred Heart University freshmen, many of whom participate in athletics and/or feel passionate about sports. As a competitive figure skater and tennis player, I have dedicated much of my life to athletic training, performance, and competition, and as a scholar of U.S. literature, I have spent many years writing about and teaching stories about American identity, community, and culture. Therefore, I have created a course that would look to the nation’s literature as a way to understand sports—and vice versa. Naturalism, as it turns out, has proven pivotal to this exercise (no pun intended!)

A large portion of my seminar focuses on naturalist narratives about dieting and physical activity; in particular, I highlight the more obscure writings of Sinclair and London. I begin the class by introducing Sinclair’s fasting narratives, which the author pioneered after publishing *The Jungle* in 1905. Undergraduates entering fields like medicine, nutrition, or public health are often curious about how this widely successful muckraking novel resulted in the passage of Theodore Roosevelt’s Food and Drug Administration Act one year later in 1906. We spend a great deal of class time discussing how Sinclair, after reporting on the unhealthy working conditions of Packingtown’s polluted meatpacking district in turn-of-the-century Chicago, went on to write about his fascination with fasting fads, vegetarianism, and raw food diets; these writings expose eating patterns radically different from the more familiar images of excess and gluttony that we read about in naturalist novels like Norris’ *The Octopus* (1901).

Against the backdrop of American literary naturalism, then, I have identified through my research a largely unexamined preoccupation with starvation, raw foods, temperance, and physical fitness. In the classroom, I focus on Sinclair’s less canonical writings, often published in Bernarr Macfadden’s *Physical Culture Magazine*, a Progressive era periodical promoting an idealized standard of white male beauty, as well as a disordered form of eating (or not eating). Images of overly robust males lifting weights, as well as pictures of exceedingly thin females dancing, make their way into class through my Powerpoint presentations. Almost always eager to discuss body image and gender, my students are intrigued by Sinclair’s participation in conversations with Horace Fletcher and Macfadden, both of whom viewed extreme exercise and vigorous fasting as emboldened forms of masculinity.

How, I often ask students, does Macfadden’s masculine white rhetoric of supreme physical conditioning, which so strongly influenced Sinclair, inform our reading of London’s *The People of the Abyss* (1903) and *The Abysmal Brute* (1913)? Although the author is best known for animal stories like *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1906), the less common works upon which I focus show that London shares with Sinclair and Macfadden a Progressive era preoccupation with disciplined dieting, heavily regimented exercise, and extreme physical conditioning. We often associate American naturalism with excessive appetite and gluttony; however, a counter dietary discourse, as well as an obsession with the elimination of bodily waste, emerges in *The Abysmal Brute*, a novel about how bribery and prizefighting pollute the sport of boxing. On the one hand, London voices his humanitarian concerns for the poor in *The People of the Abyss*, a book that grew out of a social experiment of sorts: the author went underground to live amongst and report on England’s underclass; on the other hand, in *The Abysmal Brute*, London illustrates an early twentieth-century

racial rhetoric that idealizes the white male athlete as one who is most “fit” for survival.

Even within a seminar, I see that students benefit from my brief lectures on social Darwinism and Progressive era America; this cultural context and historical background inform and are informed by the literary texts that we read. Class discussions often highlight how London’s writings about urban hunger in *The People of the Abyss*, along with the boxing narrative that he writes eight years later, capture the divided nature of Progressive era politics, which inform the early twentieth-century phase of literary naturalism. Progressive politics may have promoted socialistic economic policies, but a fierce moral conservatism led to a local and national governing of behaviors like drinking, eating, smoking, and sexual activity. Moreover, while Teddy Roosevelt’s federal initiatives to regulate eating protected the health of workers and consumers alike, Woodrow Wilson (who succeeded Harry Taft as a Progressive era President) was notorious for his racist initiatives and policies. This historical context reflects the sometimes conflicting, but often complementary strands of London’s writings about social reform and physical fitness: his urban journalism promotes environmental and economic progress on the one hand, while his sports novel perpetuates a survivalist racist rhetoric on the other.

Within my own writing and research, I have noticed that *The People of the Abyss* shows a sustained effort to rid urban environments of toxicity and waste, while *The Abysmal Brute* focuses on a fascination with athletic bodies that are clean and free of impurities. This aversion to waste in all forms pinpoints a type of thinking common during the Progressive era, according to William Little. Little’s literary scholarship has proven useful for students in class who need to practice situating themselves within a larger critical discourse. In recent months, students have helped me realize that, similar to Sinclair’s fasting narratives, London’s literature is influenced greatly by the

rhetoric surrounding *Physical Culture Magazine*; this periodical encouraged early twentieth-century readers to “bar out tobacco, liquors, patent medicines, corsets, high-heeled shoes, and various other articles that were harmful in their effects upon human life” (223).

Macfadden prefaced each issue of *Physical Culture Magazine* with a viewpoint “devoted to health, strength, vitality, muscular development, and the care of the body”; this discourse about dieting and discipline helps college undergraduates to rethink naturalist notions of hunger and survival surrounding London’s literature. The survivalist rhetoric associated with social Darwinism gets complicated by Macfadden’s definition of fitness as *Muscular Power and Beauty*, the title of his 1909 book. Rather than see consumption, gambling, and prostitution as societal ills that lie beyond the control of underprivileged city-dwellers, Macfadden viewed such vices as self-imposed traits that one could will him or herself into correcting. Indeed, Macfadden’s emphasis on *Physical Culture* exposes another almost puritanical side to the familiar struggle that we have long understood socially determined characters, governed by animalistic appetites, to experience in naturalist narratives.

My most engaged undergraduate students have helped me to realize that environmental concerns about water use, hunger, waste, pollution, and air quality are central to London’s *The People of the Abyss*. For example, London depicts a world “unnatural” because of its toxic atmosphere, which harms the city’s diverse “vegetation” (*The People of the Abyss* 39) and its human population. Moreover, he attributes Britain’s class tensions, as well as those of the Western world, to the polluted industrial “air” that workers and the underclass “breath” (39). Contaminated food, water, and waste adversely affect London’s laborers, and vegetation suffers as well when remaining “gardens” get “built upon” (30). London affirms how interrelated social, cultural, economic, and environmental injustices are.

While attention to the green concerns of these reformist writers may help free American naturalism from its deterministic clutches, the ecological ethics informing this literature can also attune my students to naturalism's melodramatic plot sequences and unique narrative forms. The vacillation between exterior reportage and interior monologue is a central stylistic of the movement, and recognizing this pattern of narration helps readers to locate London's environmental consciousness within his social experiment of living among the People of the Abyss. For example, London sometimes separates himself as a journalist from those affected by England's unclean eating and drinking conditions, and thus establishes his distance from those whom he interviews. At other moments, however, he describes how the capital city's "bad sanitation" (*The People of the Abyss* 177) affects him as a reporter upon his descent into the abyss. When trying to sleep surrounded by the "smell of soiled cloths and unwashed bodies," London explains how this polluted air, along with the lack of clean food and water, has made him feel "faint and weak" (81). In his final two chapters ("The Hunger Wail" and "Drink, Temperance, and Thrift"), London's focus on appetite leads not to a deterministic preoccupation with insatiability, but rather to a concern for nonhuman and human health.

London's interests in waste reduction become less about public health and more about physical fitness in *The Abysmal Brute*. This novel tells the tale of Pat Glendon, a prodigious boxer who, despite a lack of formal training in the ring, possesses a natural ability to overpower opponents. Boasting of his son's physical prowess, the elder Glendon (Pat's father) persuades Sam Stubener, a widely successful sports manager, to represent the athletically gifted young boy. From the moment that Stubener takes the youthful, exuberant, and innocent athlete under his wing, Pat proves victorious in every competition that he enters. Soon after the novel begins, the reader learns that Stubener has been fixing the fights; then, after

we discover the manager's dishonest practices, Pat learns through a female reporter, Maud Sangster (who also becomes his love interest) that his manager has paid off Pat's opponents to lose at precise moments throughout the matches. Innocent and clean, the young Glendon initially refuses to believe that corruption exists in the sport of boxing. The boy, who leaves his rural home to train and compete in the city, ends up feeling polluted by prize-fighting, which he condemns to a packed audience that has viewed his final fight.

Students often notice that from the beginning of this novel, London paints a portrait of a protagonist that is youthful and exuberant, as well as physically strong and racially fit for survival. In fact, while trying to persuade Stubener to take on his son as a new prodigy, the elder Glendon describes Young Pat as a racial superior human being: "'Talk about the hope of the white race. This is him. Come and take a peep. When you was managing Jeffries you was crazy about hunting. Come along and I'll give you some real hunting and fishing that will make your moving picture winnings look like thirty cents. I'll send young Pat out with you'" (*The Abysmal Brute*, 5-6). The predictions of Pat's father ultimately prove to be partially correct: by the end of the novel, the boxer has earned his manager money, but the fortune results from Sam's fight fixing, rather than from the natural abilities of the young boy.

The Abysmal Brute works well as a text to teach about how sports, specifically boxing, relate to race, gender, and class. Throughout the novel, both London's narrator and other characters comment on how whiteness makes Pat simultaneously strong and clean: "'Look at the slope of the shoulders, an' the lungs of him. Clean, all clean, to the last drop an' ounce of him'" (25). By contrast, London's narrator describes the African American boxer, Kelly, whom Pat fights in chapter three, as ape-like and animalistic" (*The Abysmal Brute* 42). In addition to our discussions about race, sports, and naturalism, we focus in class on how Lon-

don barely develops the female characters in this novel. Although Pat embodies brute force and exhibits masculinity within the ring, he displays characteristics beyond the gym's walls that London's narrator describes as prototypically feminine. According to the elder Glendon, his son is the consummate "nature lover" (17) who has a passion for poetry, a love of literature, and an appreciation for aesthetics. The father proceeds to explain that his son has neither "tasted tobacco" nor indulged in alcohol (16). Indeed, while pushing himself to the point of exhaustion, Pat heavily monitors everything that enters his body; determined to purify himself of all toxins, the young boy seems, for most of the novel, to personify progressive purity and piety.

Even with the purest of intentions, though, Pat Glendon cannot escape the sport of boxing unscathed: after discovering that Sam has fixed his fights, and that his victories have therefore signified nothing, Pat ends up underestimating his brute force while competing in his last match; repeated blows leave his final opponent, Jim Hanford, unconscious (*The Abysmal Brute* 160). Realizing that the fight has gone too far, since Stubener has not fixed this one, Pat confesses to the crowd that his boxing victories have all been staged by the manager, who has bribed the other opponents to lose. Following this confession, the young man "retire[s] from the ring forever" (169) to begin a new life with Maud Sangster. As in-class and take-home assignments, I pose the following questions to my students: what are we to make of this slightly sentimental ending to a novel so heavily steeped in racial rhetoric and the struggle for survival? Might Pat's exit from boxing reveal the novel's efforts to condemn the racial and gendered determinisms characteristic of athletic culture at this time?

These questions don't produce easy answers, but students have opened my eyes to the somewhat negative representation of women and blacks in *The Abysmal Brute*, which seems so inconsistent with Jack London's humanitari-

an efforts at alleviating poverty in *The People of the Abyss*. Perhaps one commonality between the two works is that both reflect a Progressive preoccupation with cleanliness and the elimination of filth (in cities as well as in the boxing ring). Through my teaching of "American Sports Stories," I continue to work toward bringing together two of London's more obscure literary works; when read jointly, *The People of the Abyss* and *The Abysmal Brute* enable readers to reconcile naturalism's counter-narrative of culturally disordered eating and self-restraint on the one hand with the ecological ethics and economic reforms so central to the period's socially radical sentiments on the other.

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The Oxford Handbook of American Literary Naturalism

Steven Bembridge

The Oxford Handbook of American Literary Naturalism. Edited by Keith Newlin. 2011, New York: Oxford University Press. Page 521. ISBN: 978-0-19-536893-2

I often sit on London's Hampstead Heath and overlook a city whose skyline is showing signs of its approaching Olympic dream. The study and scholarship of American literary naturalism can often feel very far away from such a place, and it can seem just as difficult to know where to start in developing an understanding and appreciation of the genre as it is to imagine what it must be like to stand amongst a sea of Californian wheat. *The Oxford Handbook of American Literary Naturalism*, whilst not quite whisking the reader away to California, is most certainly a welcome collection of essays for advanced undergraduates and post-graduates, as it provides a solid foundation on which to develop one's own research and to appreciate both the body of work that can be described as American literary naturalism and the research currently being undertaken into the genre.

Part I of the *Handbook* makes it very clear to me that I am not that far from the philosophical and scientific heart of American literary naturalism after all. About two miles from where I write this review, the grave of Herbert Spencer can be found and a few more miles down the road Charles Darwin would have had a prime seat for the melodrama of a recent royal wedding. It is this sense of European influence and its scientific learning that form the heart of Part I and which make American literary naturalism very relevant to someone so far away from its geographical home.

London, New York and Chicago all experienced incredible industrialization and urbanization from the mid-nineteenth century. These

transatlantic similarities of the "machines" that man makes are introduced in Meadowsong's essay. Zola's influence upon the naturalists is clearly set out, both as overt "monster machine[s]" (29), and those "devoid of mystical qualities" (33), "mirroring" his outlook (33). What really stands out is the way in which humanity, in learning to "control" its environment to some extent, really has no control of its creations at all.

For example, one only has to read the local news to understand just how tenuous life in our major cities can be and to see the same forces that the naturalists described as being at work. It is these "forces," both "vitalistic" and "physical" (44) that Lehan examines in historical context. His essay demonstrates how a transforming agrarian society was subject to economic, individualistic and scientific forces that Dreiser's *The Financier* and Norris's *McTeague* so ably represent.

Bender continues the theme of transition, tracing the impact of Darwinian theory from transcendentalism to realism/naturalism so much so that mankind actually becomes "part" of nature (54). A major theme of the chapter is sexual selection and how the "courtship" plot became central to naturalistic fiction (58). I was impressed with the way Bender incorporated citations from *The Origin of Species* throughout the essay, especially in his discussion of *The Awakening*, as this is a good example of the way in which the *Handbook* continually relates theory to examples.

Part I, therefore, provided me with a sense of the context of naturalism, but it is all well and good knowing the context, it is quite another thing to know how to define the genre, and this is what Part II does so well in both expanding the scope of naturalism and questioning the very need for its definitional status.

As a graduate student, I often find myself reading an author such as Sinclair Lewis thinking "hold on a minute, this seems to have a naturalistic element" even when I might also be thinking "but that can't be right, he's technical-

ly not part of the naturalist canon.” Link, however, explores “familial resemblances” and allows for an expansion of the traditional “bookends” of naturalism, suggesting that attempts to define an author as naturalist are necessarily approached with “critical hindsight” (75), and that we must not expect works of literary naturalism to be a direct manifestation of the “ideology or methodology of philosophical and scientific naturalism” (87). This approach provides a liberating alternative in which the spirit of an age becomes more important than a shared worldview (87).

Howard continues a similar theme and begins her essay claiming that by the very nature of our reading the *Handbook* we have “provisionally consented” that the term American literary naturalism is something real (93). This questioning of convention is what the *Handbook* does so well, and in which lies its strength. Howard concludes that the term *naturalism* is useful, but it is far from coherent and open to much interpretation, which for a graduate reader, is incredibly challenging (101).

Newlin, too, explores the representation of reality, but this time in a discussion of how it was used in both realist and naturalist novels for very different reasons. The highlight of the essay was the discussion of how the journalistic beginnings of Crane and Norris not only shaped their narrative, but also made them more likely to form composite plots from newspaper headlines (105, 109), which is probably one of the reasons naturalism is still so relevant for me today: people remain people.

Part II of the *Handbook* raised more questions than it answered, but this is a sign of how well the essays invite the reader to develop his or her own thinking. One of the reasons that members of the naturalist family are so fascinating is because of the philosophical and religious currents that run through many texts. It is refreshing, if this is not too much of a contradiction, to read works that are over one hundred years old that are still, I believe, so vital and living in our own society. Part III explores the-

se themes in detail and demonstrates why the *Handbook* moves well beyond being an introductory text and into a rich vein of research potential.

When asked to “define” naturalism, at some point I will invariably use the words *determinism* and *free will*. But what am I actually saying, or assuming, when I use such terms? Roberts’ chapter makes it very clear how important it is to use terminology correctly in order to provide accurate textual analysis. The “inseparability” of determinism’s relationship to free will is well argued (124), and Roberts goes to great length to evaluate viewpoints of this interaction with excellent examples that link theory to the works of Norris, Dreiser and London.

Building upon these philosophical questions, Armstrong provides a detailed example of how the naturalists, whilst committed to Darwinian and Spencerian thought, began to see the flaws in these very theories’ handling of the evolution of ethics and morality (140). Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*, Wharton’s *The Decent of Man* and Norris’s *The Octopus* are all discussed in this context, but the discussion of London’s *The Sea Wolf* and *Martin Eden* provide the most interesting examples for me, as Armstrong explores London’s “conflicted acceptance of Spencerian thought” (150).

Truth also forms the heart of Frye’s essay, in which religious truth is examined. In a society that was so steeped in scientific discoveries, it is very easy to assume that the naturalists presented an either/or viewpoint of religion. Frye argues, however, that this interpretation is incorrect and that the naturalists were “artists” trying to make sense out of a developing scientific and philosophical culture, not forcing a worldview on the reader (155). Philosophy and theological context are introduced in accessible detail, and the inclusion of bibliographic details provides surprising demonstrations of how well “qualified” the naturalists were to speak of religion in informed ways.

Yet the naturalists lived in a society in which ignorance existed, and Rossetti investigates how the “majority culture” (180) was perceived as under threat from increased immigration and those living at the edge of society, demonstrating how American sociologists proposed theories of the biological inferiority, inherent atavism, and uncivilized characteristics of these groups to account for this (173). It is a little shocking to realise that the atavistic themes of Norris’s *McTeague* and *Vandover and the Brute* are derived from this mentality (175), but, as Rossetti argues, some, like London, provide an alternative, in which atavism reasserts what industrialisation took (177).

Brennan makes it clear that the society of the naturalists, “committed to science” as it was (182), was also aware of the importance of understanding what happens in the minds of individuals when they “make” choices. It is in this context that pre-Freudian and early-Freudian distinctions are made between naturalist works, and I found this distinction incredibly useful for a graduate student beginning to look seriously at the motivation behind characterisation.

Motivation also dictates our own lives, and this is at the heart of Turpin’s essay in its discussion of modern evolutionary psychology. A real highlight for this Steinbeck enthusiast is the introduction of “non-zero-sum altruism” and “reciprocal altruism” (213), as they appear in *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Of Mice and Men* (217). It was refreshing to read an account of Steinbeck that views his work as “prescient” (212), and that, rather than commenting on his oft-derided sentimentality, “addresses” Darwinian concepts and “counters” Spencerian ideas of altruism.

Part III was really my ‘treat’ of the *Handbook*, as it explored many of my own research interests in a great deal of depth; Part IV, however, is all about challenging preconceptions, and it demonstrates the relevance of new seams of research available to post-graduate students. My first contact with naturalism some years ago was with the traditional male canon. Any-

one coming to the *Handbook*, however, will not be able to overlook the importance of women writers in the genre. In a series of sketches, Campbell demonstrates how female naturalists “make exemplary test cases for American naturalism” (224) in both the portrayal of women and the environments in which they find themselves (230). Campbell stresses how this actually broadens the scope of naturalism, which complements Link’s earlier essay, thus highlighting the strength of continuity that the *Handbook* brings.

Many of us reading this are lucky enough to live in a society where the expression of our sexuality can be pursued without interference. However, Kornasky demonstrates that the naturalists lived at a time when the expression of one’s sexuality was a very real public debate, arguing that whilst the naturalists were “progressive proponents” of looking at sexuality empirically, it would be wrong to claim that they did so in a united front (242). Kornasky provides a fascinating discussion of how male and female naturalists differed significantly in their representation of heterosexuality and its expression in relationships.

The lives of Norris’s *McTeague* and *Vandover* may exhibit deterministic elements, but the fact remains that these characters “had” choice in a white society, even if their choices were determined. Dudley argues that if a characteristic of naturalism is the investigation of an individual’s freedom, then the denial of free will and freedom “imposed by the system of chattel slavery” (258) provides a challenging new level of how to view concepts such as determinism and fate.

While Dudley sets out what it was to be black and naturalist, Reesman investigates what it was to be white and a naturalist in a societal context where “racialism” and “eugenics” were widespread (277). The essay concentrates upon the “racial other” in representative short stories, each of which provides very mixed messages as to how the naturalists viewed those of another race. I was left with a real sense of how much I

would like some naturalists to put the record straight on beliefs that time has since eradicated, as I did feel anger towards authors that I admire.

Just as ideology influences behaviour, so too can commodities. Papke opens her essay with Emerson's "Things are in the saddle, / And ride mankind" (292). What follows is a refreshing essay that explores how naturalist texts explore the way in which people are ridden to their "overdetermined fates" (292). Papke really helps contextualise the late nineteenth century, which does not look too different from today, and provides a thoughtful account of who profited and who did not from the economic and commodity-driven growth of the time.

Equally similar to the nineteenth century is the stratification that our own society continues to exhibit. Davies argues that the naturalists acted as "meditating the experience of an industrial, often immigrant working class for the middle-class reading public" (307). I found this analysis particularly interesting, as our social standing, education and material wealth often give an impression of invulnerability, or, as Davies puts it, the attributing of agency to those who climb "the social ladder out of poverty" (318). Though as *Vandover* teaches us, this can also work in reverse.

This sense of social standing is very clear in a large city like London, and one often forgets that each area of the city has its own reality. It is with this in mind that I read with great interest how Giles argues that naturalism emerged as a response to the city (323) in two ways: works like *Maggie* guide the reader through the slums at a "narrative distance" and works like Wright's *Native Son* drag the reader by the scruff of the neck and force them to experience the "internal perspective" of the characters (329).

This internal dialogue is no more so important than in relation to criminal culpability, especially if one considers London's recent riots. It is this sense of blame that Scharnhorst investigates in naturalist fiction, arguing that

the naturalists would most likely believe that guilt would better be apportioned to the deterministic forces of the city, not to individuals (344). As religion is my research interest, I appreciated Scharnhorst's telling reference to Stephen Crane's "one makes room in Heaven for all sorts of souls ... who are not confidently expected to be there" (342).

Once again, it is examples like this taking up of themes from Frye's essay that make the *Handbook* flow as a whole even when essays appear in differing thematic parts. However, it is easy to assume the texts of the naturalists have always existed, so entrenched in our culture as they are. Until the day when I hold an original naturalist text in my hands, Part V provided me with a jolt of reality and very human insight into women and men struggling to earn a living through their art.

With this in mind, Johanningsmeier discusses how the traditional view of the publication market of the late nineteenth century was one in which the naturalists were simply "cogs" in the publication machine. Johanningsmeier, however, argues that the naturalists themselves were either responsible for their own lack of success (363), or they were actually very shrewd business people, whose work was far from ignored by the book-reading American public (369).

Loranger also takes up this sense of popular reception, demonstrating that the naturalists often trod a fine line between literary progress and convention: works like London's *The Sea Wolf* were successfully received because they both "pushed the boundaries" whilst respecting "popular story elements," but Crane's *Maggie* "had nowhere to go" (387) because Crane "resisted the consolatory mode of popular texts" (374). While one cannot mind-read, it is interesting for the graduate student to see the balance between art and economics that must have existed in the naturalists' minds.

Hayes continues this sense of balance and demonstrates that the textual history of novels like Crane's *Maggie* and Dreiser's *Sister Car-*

rie are twofold: the first concerns the editing of their works for public release; the second, a rescuing of “those prunings from the flames” (390). As an afterthought from the essay, I was interested in how the naturalists are represented on a well-known e-book reader. It is worth noting that *Maggie* and *Sister Carrie* are, in fact, not the original texts, which is something to consider if one wants to conduct research on such a device.

Interpretation also plays an important part in Den Tandt’s essay, in which “postmodernist” theory provides new interpretations (404). For example, were the naturalists examining social Darwinism not to understand aspects of determinism, but as a means of promoting “gender and racial supremacy”? (405) The highlight of the essay, and indeed of Part V, was that it really forced me to think about the way in which context and interpretation can change the meaning of a text either through literary theory or the availability of original manuscripts. Part VI adds to this and investigates how artistic forms influence naturalist writing and how naturalist sensibilities found expression in other forms.

When I was a child, I went to see my dad perform in an adaptation of Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*. Reading Dowling’s essay has helped me to fully appreciate the motivation and difficulty to either translate or develop naturalistic themes on the stage. Dowling demonstrates the way in which theatre productions changed from Wharton’s 1906 doubt that the American public could ever positively receive a play with a “sad ending and a negative hero” (428), through to and beyond O’Neill’s 1921 *Anna Christie*, which Dowling cites as marking “a clear shift in the kind of subject matter American audiences were willing to accept” (432).

Crane’s famous call to the Universe has a touch of the dramatic, too, but it also demonstrates that naturalists sought expression through poetry. Beyers provides compelling evidence to suggest that naturalist poets took

very different paths in their art: some verged towards pessimism, some optimism (450). What really stands out, though, is the sense of change that Beyers presents: naturalism’s influence on and transformation of modernist poetry (458).

Before reading the *Handbook*, I knew that later authors like Stein looked to Cezanne as a model for narrative change, so it was satisfying to learn that the naturalists were just as open to art and photography as modes of inspiration (463). Pizer’s discussion of Impressionism in the context of Crane formed the essay’s highlight, in which Pizer provides a considered interpretation of Impressionism (474), and an illuminating account of the way in which Crane might have Impressionism in his *The Red Badge of Courage*.

It is undeniable, therefore, that the naturalists drew upon art and photography, but what about the reverse, how do other art forms express naturalist concerns? Jaeckle looks at just this idea in *Film Noir* and its “cinematic incarnation of naturalism” (485). The discussion of Fate was the essay’s starring role: Jaeckle argues that characters in *Film Noir* are subject to Fate, but unlike naturalist texts, are conscious of their position (493), so much so that “there is no escape even for those aware of their entrapment” (493), which I suppose becomes somewhat ironic if one views a spool of celluloid as a larger sense of entrapment.

Part VI, therefore, provided a real sense of naturalism’s legacy, but what the *Oxford Handbook of Literary Naturalism* has achieved in doing is to introduce a genre that contains so many more levels than I previously imagined, almost to the point of being slightly intimidating in its complexity. To say that it left me wanting more is probably the best critique I can give, and the book sits perfectly between introductory texts such as Gray’s *A History of American Literature* and more focused works, such as Link’s *Vast and Terrible Drama*, a place until now occupied by works such as Cambridge University Press’s *Companion to*

Realism and Naturalism. The Oxford Handbook of Literary Naturalism is, therefore, a must read for all students who are serious about the genre and about contributing to its rich body of research.

Five on Twenty-Seven

For each issue of ALN the editors ask someone in the field to share his or her favorite books. We aren't sure why we do this. Call it either a strange obsession or the idle wandering of curious minds. For this issue of ALN, we asked **Gina Rossetti**, Associate Professor and Chair of English and Foreign Languages at Saint Xavier University in Chicago, Jack London Society Advisory Board member, Area Chair for Jack London Studies for the Popular Culture Conference Association, and author of *Imagining the Primitive in Naturalist and Modernist Literature*.

The Rossetti Top Five

1. Edith Wharton *The House of Mirth*
2. Frank Norris *McTeague*
3. Shakespeare *The Tempest*
4. Jack London *The Sea-Wolf*
5. Henry James *The Wings of the Dove*

The editors wish to thank Professor Rossetti for her list. It is not a list to be trifled with. The list itself is an art object, in which *McTeague*, *Caliban*, and *Wolf Larsen* are framed—nay, caged—by the polite and refined manners of the denizens of Wharton's and James' narratives. What?—you don't agree that Professor Rossetti's list is a thing of beauty? a veritable meditation on the nature of art and love? Beware: we shall turn our faces to the wall in response. And, no, we will cut you out of our wills completely, Milly Teale's example notwithstanding. Now, picture this for the next ALA Conference: Lily Bart, Trina McTeague, Miranda, Maud Brewster, and Kate Croy host a roundtable discussion on "Personal Finance for Couples." Perhaps Prospero could moderate the panel...

Ten Questions with Donna Campbell



Donna Campbell is an associate professor of English at Washington State University. She is the author of *Resisting Regionalism: Gender and Naturalism in American Fiction, 1885-1915* (1997), and her recent work includes essays on

naturalism, Edith Wharton, W. D. Howells, and Kate Chopin appearing in *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*, *The Cambridge Companion to Kate Chopin*, *Studies in American Naturalism*, *Resources for American Literary Study*, and *Twisted from the Ordinary: Essays on American Literary Naturalism*. Her current book project is called *Bitter Tastes: Naturalism, Early Film, and American Women's Writing*.

ALN: Much of your work in the field of American literary naturalism has tended to focus on the interplay of gender and aesthetics in the late nineteenth century, and, more specifically, on the cultural dialogue between regionalism and literary naturalism. Indeed, your 1997 book on this subject, *Resisting Regionalism: Gender and Naturalism in American Fiction, 1885-1915*, stands as one of the major statements on late nineteenth century fiction of the past twenty years. What was the genesis of this work? What drew you to this set of issues and questions?

I had been reading work by Norris, Crane, Dreiser, and London, and at about the same time I had begun reading the regionalist literature of Sarah Orne Jewett, Rose Terry Cooke, Constance Fenimore Woolson, and Mary Wilkins Freeman. Going from one set of readings to the other was something of a culture shock. Here were two sets of authors who were nearly

contemporaries, yet Norris and company rarely mentioned Jewett and vice versa. Neither the authors themselves nor the critics who were writing about them seemed to have much to say about the other camp: feminist critics discussing alternative female-centered communities in regionalism weren't talking about naturalism, nor were the critics working on naturalism (Pizer, Michaels, and so on) discussing gender as extensively back then. In reading both, it became clear that this division was laid out along gender lines. The question to ask then was "Why?" and that's when I started to work on what became *Resisting Regionalism*.

ALN: You have done considerable work on the question of the relationship between American women writers and literary naturalism, and this work is helping to expand our understanding of the impact of literary naturalism on late nineteenth century American culture. How might you describe the role women authors played in the growth and development of literary naturalism?

We think of Norris, Dreiser, Crane, and London as the "Big Four" of classic naturalism, the figures whom everyone mentions when talking about the movement, but there's less consensus about women writers of naturalism and their role in its growth and development. Since naturalism did not have a formally affiliated cohort of self-identified practitioners (except for Frank Norris) in the sense that, say, Alcott, Emerson, and Thoreau thought of themselves as Transcendentalists, a lot of our understanding of what constituted naturalism has evolved over time. Our understanding of naturalism and women's roles within it is still changing and expanding, with recent work by Donald Pizer, Eric Carl Link, John Dudley, Mary Papke, June Howard, Gina Rossetti, and Jeanne Campbell Reesman, to name but a few.

For women authors such as Wharton, Glasgow, and Chopin especially, writing in what we think of as a naturalistic mode was

less about naturalism *per se* than about Darwinism and about being modern: naturalism was a gateway to modernity and a break with the past. Writing naturalism meant taking risks and placing yourself in an intellectual context that had an inherent set of rules that didn't include you if you were a woman writer. We need to keep this in mind as we keep studying the question.

ALN: If you were to assemble a syllabus for a class on the women writers of literary naturalism, around what texts would you build your class?

First, we'd read a selection of works by what might be called the "grim realists" of the late nineteenth century: Rebecca Harding Davis's "Life in the Iron Mills" and *Margret Howth*; Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *Hedged In* and *The Silent Partner* or *The Singular Life*; Lillie Buffum Chace Wyman's *Poverty Grass*; and possibly Elizabeth Stoddard's *Two Men*.

The class would then turn to discussing Darwinism in its various forms as a preparation for discussing turn-of-the-century writers: Mary Wilkins Freeman ("Old Woman Magoon," *The Portion of Labor*, or *Pembroke*); Sarah Orne Jewett (industrial stories); Kate Chopin's *At Fault* and *The Awakening*; Charlotte Perkins Gilman; and Ellen Glasgow (*The Descendant*). Other possibilities would include Mary Hallock Foote (*Coeur d'Alene*, "Maverick," "The Trumpeter") and Elia Peattie.

In the Progressive era and modernism, Edith Wharton's *Bunner Sisters*, *The House of Mirth*, *Ethan Frome*, or *The Fruit of the Tree*, along with some early stories; Willa Cather's early stories or a selection from these rural naturalistic novels: *O Pioneers*, Edith Summers Kelley's *Weeds*, Mary Austin's *The Ford*, and Glasgow's *Barren Ground*. Also essential would be Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*, Evelyn Scott's *The Narrow House*, Angelina Weld Grimké's *Rachel* or "The Closing Door," and Ann Petry's *The Street*. Also, Linda Kornasky's 2007 *ALN* article about this issue has

some great suggestions, especially in the later period.

ALN: What is your favorite work of literary naturalism to teach?

This is a tough question. In an undergraduate course, *McTeague* and *The House of Mirth* are great to teach together in a novel class, although for short stories nothing can beat Crane's "The Open Boat" or "The Blue Hotel," and Wharton's "Roman Fever."

One of the great things about *McTeague* and *The House of Mirth* is that each presents such a well-documented, even obsessively documented, social world built of things, and people treated as things (see Barbara Hochman, Bill Brown, and Jennifer Fleissner on this point). In a practical sense, the visual qualities of each create interesting class discussions, especially if the students discuss the visual iconography of Reynolds's *Mrs. Lloyd* or watch Erich von Stroheim's silent classic *Greed*.

ALN: What is the one work or author we probably should be teaching in classes on American literary naturalism, but which we probably aren't?

Paul Laurence Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods* is a naturalistic novel that not everyone teaches, but it works beautifully either by itself or paired with *McTeague*, *George's Mother*, or *Sister Carrie*. The social forces that Dunbar depicts work as inexorably on his protagonist, Berry Hamilton, as the forces in the other novels, but with racism as the precipitating factor. It has the going-to-the-city plot that Richard Lehan identifies as typical of naturalism; the story of a young woman becoming an actress like Carrie Meeber; the degeneration of a young man under the influence of street life as in *George's Mother*; and the disintegration of a family.

Ann Petry's *The Street* is another naturalistic novel that should more often be taught.

James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, which is not usually treated as a naturalistic text (although John Dudley has rightly said that it is), works very well in conjunction with both *McTeague* and Harold Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware*.

ALN: You have a unique perspective on recent literary criticism devoted to American fiction in the first third of the twentieth century because of the years (from 2000-2008) you spent writing the chapter on that topic for American Literary Scholarship. From your perspective, what is the state of scholarship on early twentieth century American fiction, and how are the local color and naturalist writers of the early twentieth century faring in terms of recent critical trends?

I didn't get to cover Norris and Crane (or Wharton and Cather) for *American Literary Scholarship*, but in the 1900-1930 section, the number of essays on Dreiser, London, and James Weldon Johnson was heartening, and the quality of the work was usually high. With London especially, not only his views of race but also his engagement with socialism and his place as a writer of the Pacific Rim are being recognized, something that Jeanne Campbell Reesman predicted several years ago in an essay for *Prospects*.

John Dos Passos and Sinclair Lewis are increasingly characterized as writers whose concerns range beyond the United States, and works that had not received much attention earlier (Dos Passos on Mexico, or Lewis's *Kingsblood Royal* and *Arrowsmith*) are now being seen in a global context. There are also new approaches to Sherwood Anderson, Dorothy Scarborough, Nella Larsen, and a number of other figures. Of course, the majority of the essays for any given year are always on W. E. B. DuBois and Gertrude Stein (whose novels *The Dark Princess* and *Three Lives* are arguably naturalistic), but good work is being done

on more traditionally naturalistic authors as well.

ALN: The editors (and, we would guess, many of the readers) of ALN have long owed you a great deal of gratitude for all of the work you have done over the past decade in helping to give American literature—and the realists and naturalists in particular—a useful, serious, and accessible web presence. What work needs to be done?

There are a lot of exciting projects that could be done now, especially with the increased visibility that digital humanities has had in universities and with funding agencies such as the NEH. The Emily Dickinson Online Collection (www.emilydickinson.org) and the Walt Whitman Archive (www.whitmanarchive.org) are two such major NEH-funded sites, and those show the potential for making authoritative texts accessible on the web. Let's not forget two major sites in naturalism that also provide models of what can be done: The Dreiser Web and the new Dreiser Bibliography (<http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/Dreiserbib/>) is one excellent resource, and the Jack London Online Collection (<http://london.sonoma.edu/>) is another.

What I've been working on in a very preliminary way is the idea of a collaborative "hub" site for American realism and naturalism, one that integrates these resources with others on Crane, Wharton, Howells, Garland, Frederic, Freeman, and other writers of the period. Ideally this would include reliable texts, critical materials, bibliographies, and features that would enable research for scholars as well as resources for teachers to work with these texts in the classroom. It would follow established practices for peer-reviewed digital humanities sites laid out by Nines (<http://www.nines.org/>), so that scholars contributing material could be credited with their work. As the hub develops, other features could be added. For example, wouldn't it be great to

have calendars of letters for realist and naturalist authors along the lines of the Henry James Calendar of Letters and Biographical Register of Correspondents (<http://jamescalendar.unl.edu/>) or the text manipulation capabilities offered for Stephen Crane on the Wordseer site (http://wordseer.berkeley.edu/stephen_crane/)? The connections that we could see if these kinds of resources were available and cross-linked could be valuable. For instance, imagine if you could digitally track the conversation in letters and in texts as several of these authors responded to a particular issue or a book, or if there were a way to visualize, with texts, letters, and commentary, events within Crane's circle of literary acquaintances when he was in England. A site like this would require a number of collaborators, including editors for the texts, as well as funding, and it would need to be built in stages on a platform that multiple contributors could access, but it could open up new areas for scholarship in our field.

ALN: What's your latest project?

My latest project is a book manuscript called "Bitter Tastes: Naturalism, Early Film, and American Women Writers." It includes several of the authors I mentioned above: the "grim realists" Davis, Wyman, and Phelps; Freeman and Peattie; the "big four" of Wharton, Chopin, Glasgow, and Cather; and a host of others, ranging from Kelley and Petry to Alice Dunbar-Nelson and Sui Sin Far. Other texts are less familiar: there's a section on naturalism's connections to prostitution narratives and Progressive Era "white slave" films, for example. Part of my argument is that the intensively affective dimensions of naturalism, especially its visual elements, make the contemporaneous rise of early silent film an important component to explore. Pieces of some chapters have already appeared in recent articles: those on women writers of naturalism for *Studies in American Naturalism* and *The Oxford Handbook of*

American Literary Naturalism; and those on naturalism for *The Cambridge History of the American Novel, A Companion to The American Novel, 1900-1950, and Literature Compass*.

ALN: What work remains to be done in the field of American literary naturalism? What questions or critical trends do you see shaping the field for the next generation of scholars?

As naturalism seems to be opening up to new perspectives and to revisiting its principal tenets—including, as Donald Pizer noted in an essay a few years ago, its radical roots—we should see some new work emerging, especially in the emerging areas of animal studies and human interactions with (or absorption into) new technologies. The latter is a hot topic right now in other fields, including digital media studies, but, of course, the naturalists were questioning the human-machine divide over a hundred years ago, as Zena Meadowsong and others have said. The “Naturalism’s Histories” issue of *Studies in American Naturalism* is tremendously helpful in thinking about this issue, too.

ALN: If you could revise or rewrite one commonly held misconception about late nineteenth century American literature, what would it be?

The misperception I’d like to revise isn’t so much a scholarly one, for there is a lot of exciting research being done on the literature of this era, as a pedagogical one. There seems to be a common wisdom among some educators and administrators that undergraduates won’t respond to literature unless it directly addresses their own lives and concerns and that only contemporary literature can serve that need. This attitude has grown in tandem with the “students as customers” idea now prevalent in many universities, and it suggests that late nineteenth-century American literature isn’t “relevant” to

students’ lives. But my experience has been the just the opposite: students really respond to the work of Twain, Norris, Wharton, Chesnut, Crane, and London. I’m guessing that many ALN readers will have had the same experience of exposing students to realism and naturalism and seeing them respond positively—once, that is, they get over the idea that all stories have a happy ending.

Naturalism News

ALN seeks to note all items of interest to scholars of American literary naturalism and related to the memberships of the Frank Norris Society, the Jack London Society, the Hamlin Garland Society, the Stephen Crane Society, the Theodore Dreiser Society, and beyond. If you have a newsworthy item, please send it to Eric Carl Link at eclink@memphis.edu and we’ll be sure to take note of it in a forthcoming issue of ALN. Did someone in your society win an honor or reach an important career milestone? We want to know. Do you know of a forthcoming volume that might be of interest to the ALN readership? Tell us about it. Is there an event related to American literary naturalism that you attended (or would like us to attend in the future)? Are there competitions, prizes, or grant opportunities that you have learned about?

•ALN•

The Jack London State Historical Park in Glen Ellen, California, was closed by the State this fall along with nearly 200 other state parks. There are efforts underway by the Valley of the Moon Historical Association, the Shaffer family, and numerous scholars to try to keep the park open under new supervision. For details contact Greg Hayes (ghayes21@comcast.net); another knowledgeable source is Clarice Stasz (stasz@sonoma.edu).

The Call of the Papers

**Jack London Society
American Literature Association Conference
May 24-27, 2012, San Francisco**

The Jack London Society has issued a call for papers for the May 24-27, 2012, 23rd Annual American Literature Association meeting, to be held in San Francisco. Papers or paper proposals are welcomed on any aspect of Jack London studies. Send submissions to Jeanne Reesman (Jeanne.reesman@utsa.edu) by the Society's deadline of December 15, 2011.

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**Stephen Crane Society
American Literature Association Conference
May 24-27, 2012, San Francisco**

The Stephen Crane Society invites papers and proposals for two panels at the American Literature Association Conference in San Francisco, May 24-27, 2012.

The two panels are...

1. Crane and Gender
2. Open Topics. All topics are welcome, though one might consider the following:

- Crane and the Gothic
- Crane and war
- Crane and the arts (painting, photography, music, etc.)
- Crane's depiction of the city
- Crane's poetry
- the Sullivan County tales and sketches
- the Whilomville stories
- one of Crane's lesser-known novels (*The Third Violet*, *Active Service*, or *The O'Ruddy*)

Presentations will be limited to 20 minutes. Please email proposals (approx 300 words) or papers by December 31, 2011 to Ben Fisher, program chair: bfisher@ms.metrocast.net

•ALN•

**Theodore Dreiser Society
American Literature Association Conference
May 24-27, 2012, San Francisco**

The International Theodore Dreiser Society will sponsor two panels at the American Literature Association Conference in San Francisco on May 24-27, 2012.

Panel One: Dreiser and Other Writers

Papers are invited that consider Dreiser's work in relation to that of other writers, including but not limited to examinations of Dreiser's work as an influence on or influenced by other writers, Dreiser and his contemporaries, later twentieth- and early twenty-first-century writers' literary debts to Dreiser, Dreiser's impact on literary movements and traditions, or the relationship of Dreiser's work to writing in fields other than literature.

Panel Two: Open Topic

Papers are invited on any topic concerning Dreiser or his work. Given the centennial anniversary in 2012 of the publication of Dreiser's *The Financier*, proposals might include (but are not limited to) considerations of money, greed, capitalism, business ethics, market forces, or related issues in this and other Dreiser works.

Presentations will be limited to 20 minutes. Please send abstracts (250-350 words) for either panel to the program chair by 16 January 2011. Email submissions are preferred.

Gary Totten, Program Chair
Department of English, #2320
P.O. Box 6050
North Dakota State University
Fargo, ND 58108-6050
gary.totten@ndsu.edu

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**Hamlin Garland Society
American Literature Association Conference
May 24-27, 2012, San Francisco**

The Hamlin Garland Society will sponsor one panel at the American Literature Association Conference in San Francisco on May 24-27, 2012. Papers are invited on any topic concerning Garland or his work. Presentations will be limited to 20 minutes. Please send abstracts (250-350 words) to the program chair, Keith Newlin, by 16 January 2012. Email submissions are preferred.

Keith Newlin
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<http://www.uncw.edu/garland/>

•ALN•

**Frank Norris Society
American Literature Association Conference
May 24-27, 2012, San Francisco**

The Frank Norris Society will sponsor two sessions at the American Literature Association Conference at the Hyatt Regency San Francisco in Embarcadero Center on May 24-27, 2012.

Session One: Issues in American Literary Naturalism. This session will focus on broader treatments of American literary naturalism (whether directly related to Frank Norris or not). Possible topics might include definitional studies, treatments of American literary naturalism in the context of late nineteenth-century culture and history, examinations of literary naturalism in the twentieth century, and related topics.

Session Two: Open Topic. Any aspect of Frank Norris's work or life will be considered.

Presentations will be limited to 20 minutes. Please email abstracts or papers of no more than ten double-spaced pages by January 15, 2012, to the program chair:

Eric Carl Link
eclink@memphis.edu

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**Society for the Study of Midwestern Lit
2012 SSML Symposium
East Lansing, Michigan, May 10-12, 2012**

CFP on Midwestern Naturalism: Scott Emmert and Andy Oler are assembling a panel on Midwestern naturalism for the 2012 SSML Symposium. They are interested in addressing a wide swath of Midwestern literary naturalism and therefore welcome proposals that consider turn-of-the-century novels and stories, mid-twentieth century proletarian naturalism, or later naturalist-inflected texts; they are especially interested in papers establishing, investigating, or denying a regionalized version of literary naturalism. Scholars interested in joining this panel should send proposals of 250-300 words to Scott Emmert and Andy Oler by January 1, 2012.

scott.emmert@uwc.edu
soler@uemail.iu.edu

Bibliographic Update

Listed below are studies on American literary naturalism published since the last bibliographic update (in the fall 2010 issue). The lists below are comprehensive, but not exhaustive, and we undoubtedly missed a work here and there. If you published an article or book related to American literary naturalism in the past year and it is not listed below, please let us know, and we'll make sure to note it in the next issue of ALN.

General Studies

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Naturalism's Histories. A Special Issue of *Studies in American Naturalism* 5.1. Ed. Gary Totten. (Summer 2010).

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Stephen Crane

Casey, John Anthony, Jr. "Searching for a War of One's Own: Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*, and the Glorious Burden of the Civil War Veteran." *American Literary Realism* 44.1 (Fall 2011): 1-22.

Dooley, Patrick. "Stephen Crane: An Annotated Bibliography of Secondary Scholarship: Book Chapters and Articles through 2007." *Stephen Crane Studies* 18.2 (Fall 2009): 10-29.

Dowling, Robert M. "Riders of the Imagination: George Monteiro on Stephen Crane." *Studies in American Naturalism* 5.1 (Summer 2010): 37-50.

Gaskill, Nicholas. "Red Cars with Red Lights and Red Drivers: Color, Crane, and Qualia." *American Literature* 81.4. (Dec 2009): 719-745.

Huntsperger, David. "Populist Crane: A Reconsideration of Melodrama in Maggie." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 53.3 (Fall 2011): 294-319.

Link, Eric Carl, Ed. *Critical Insights: The Red Badge of Courage*. Pasadena: Salem Press, 2010.

Monteiro, George. "Is 'A Newsboy Capitalist' Crane's Work?" *Stephen Crane Studies* 18.2 (Fall 2009): 30-32.

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Vanouse, Donald. "Stephen Crane's Depictions of Irish Americans." *Stephen Crane Studies* 18.2 (Fall 2009): 2-9.

Theodore Dreiser

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Hu, Hanying. "A Brief Analysis of *Sister Carrie*'s Character." *English Language Teaching* 3.2 (June 2010): 210-212.

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So, Richard Jean. "American Literary Realism and Chinese Exclusion: HT Tsiang and Theodore Dreiser, 1930." *Realism's Others*. Baker and Aldea, eds. Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars, 2010: 107-127.

Hamlin Garland

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- Pizer, Donald, Ed. *Hamlin Garland, Prairie Radical: Writings from the 1890s*. Urbana, IL: U of Illinois P, 2010.

Jack London

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- Haley, James L. *Wolf: The Lives of Jack London*. New York, NY: Basic, 2010.
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- Jacobi, Martin J. "Rhetoric and Fascism in Jack London's *The Iron Heel*, Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*, and Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*." *Philip Roth Studies* 6.1 (Winter 2010): 85-102.
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- Reesman, Jeanne Campbell. "Frank Norris and Jack London." *Companion to the American Short Story*. Ed. James Nagel. London and New York: Blackwell, 2011. 171-86.
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From the Archives

Max Nordau from *Degeneration* (1892)

Although perhaps not the work that Nordau would consider the crowning achievement of his career, Degeneration is certainly the work he is best known for today, and one can't delve too deeply into intellectual culture in the 1890s without bumping into something that was influenced, directly or indirectly, by this lengthy study of fin-de-siècle artistic culture. Nordau's thesis was fairly straightforward: many of the literary artists of the late nineteenth century suffer from the same degenerate compulsions and characteristics as the "criminal men" described by Cæsar Lombroso (to whom Degeneration is dedicated). One would imagine that the decadent French writers and British aesthetes at the turn of the century would come under the knife in Nordau's work, and they do. But so does Zola. In the excerpt from Degeneration below, Nordau finds Zola to be a degenerate artist, and he skewers Zola's alleged "realism" and his notion of the "experimental novel." A reader of the excerpt below will note the remarkable similarity between Nordau's description of Zola's craft—including his comparison with Hugo—and Frank Norris's comments on Zola and naturalism in "Zola as a Romantic Writer" (1896). Norris's brief essay appeared one year after the English translation of Degeneration was published in 1895 by D. Appleton and Company of New York (from which the excerpt below is taken, appearing on pages 490-499 of that volume.)

*

M. Zola boasts of his method of work; all his books emanate from 'observation.' The truth is that he has never 'observed;' that he has never, following Goethe, 'plunged into the full tide of human life,' but has always remained shut up in a world of

paper, and has drawn all his subjects out of his own brain, all his 'realistic' details from newspapers and books read uncritically. I need only recall a few cases in which his sources have been placed within his reach. All the information on the life, manners, habits, and language of the Parisian workmen in *L'Assommoir* are borrowed from a study by M. Denis Poulot, *Le Sublime*. The adventure of *Une Page d'Amour* is taken from the *Mémoires de Casanova*. Certain features in which the masochism or passivism of Count Muffat is declared in *Nana*, M. Zola found in a quotation from Taine relative to the *Venice Saved* of Thomas Otway. The scene of the confinement, in *La Joie de Vivre*, the description of the Mass, in *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret*, etc., are copied word for word from an obstetric manual and a Mass-book. One reads sometimes in the newspapers very pretentious statements of the 'studies' to which M. Zola gives himself up when he undertakes a new novel. These 'studies' consist, on his part, in making a visit to the Bourse when he wishes to write on speculation, in undertaking a trip on a locomotive when he desires to describe the working of a railway, in once casting a glance round some available bedroom when he means to depict the mode of life of the Parisian *cocottes*. Such a manner of 'observation' resembles that of a traveller who passes through a country in an express train. He may perceive some external details, he may notice some scenes and arrange them later in descriptions rich in colour, if wholly inaccurate; but he learns nothing of the real and essential peculiarities of the country, and the life and ways of its inhabitants. Like all degenerates, M. Zola, too, is a complete stranger to the world in which he lives. His eyes are never directed towards nature or humanity, but only to his own 'Ego.' He has no first-hand knowledge of anything, but acquires, by second or third hand, all that he knows of the world or life. Flaubert has created, in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, the characters of two blockheads, who, with unsuspecting ingenuousness, attack all the arts and sciences, and imagine they have acquired them when they have dipped into, or, more correctly, have skimmed through, the first book on the subject which falls into their hands. Zola is an 'observer' of the Bouvard et Pécuchet species, and on reading Flaubert's posthumous novel one is tempted to believe in places that when describing the 'studies' of his heroes he was thinking, at least amongst others, of Zola.

I think I have shown that M. Zola has not the priority in any one of the peculiarities which constitute his method. For all of them he has had models, and some few are as old as the world. The supposed realism, mania for description, impressionism, the emphasis on the 'milieu,' the human document, the slices of life—all these are so many aesthetic and psychological errors, but Zola has not even the doubtful merit of having conceived them. The only thing he has invented is the word 'naturalism,' substituted by him for 'realism' (the sole term in vogue till then), and the expression 'experimental novel,' which means absolutely nothing, but possesses a piquant little smattering of science which Zola's public, at the period when this novelist made his appearance, felt as an agreeable seasoning.

The only real and true things contained in M. Zola's novels are the little traits borrowed by him from the items of news in the daily papers and from technical works. But these also become false from the lack of criticism and taste with which he employs them. In fact, in order that the borrowed detail should remain faithful to reality, it must preserve its right relation to the whole phenomenon, and this is what never happens with M. Zola. To quote only two examples. In *Pot-Bouille*, among the inhabitants of a single house in the Rue de Choiseul, he brings to pass in the space of a few months all the infamous things he has learnt in the course of thirty years, by reports from his acquaintances, by cases in courts of law, and various facts from newspapers about apparently honourable bourgeois families; in *La Terre*, all the vices imputed to the French peasantry or rustic people in general, he crams into the character and conduct of a few inhabitants of a small village in Beauce; he may in these cases have supported every detail by cuttings from newspapers or jottings, but the whole is not the less monstrously and ridiculously untrue.

The self-styled innovator who, it is asserted, has invented hitherto unknown methods of construction and exposition in the province of the novel, is in reality a pupil of the French romanticists, from whom he has appropriated and employed all the tricks of the trade, and whose tradition he carries on, walking in the straight road of historical continuity, without interruption and without deviation. This is what is most clearly proved by the descriptions, which reflect not the world, but the view that the poet is capable of taking of the world. I will

quote, for the sake of comparison, some characteristic passages from *Notre Dame de Paris*, by Victor Hugo, and from different novels by Zola, which will show the reader that both could be very easily confounded, the self-styled inventor of ‘naturalism’ and the extreme romanticist.

[What follows are a couple pages of quotes from Hugo and Zola in order to demonstrate the above point, followed by...]

[Zola] is an out-and-out romanticist in his way of envisaging the world and in his artistic method. He constantly practices [sic] in the most extensive and intensive fashion that atavistic anthropomorphism and symbolism, consequent on undeveloped or mystically confused thought, which is found among savages in a natural form, and among the whole category of degenerates in an atavistic form of mental activity. Like Victor Hugo, and like second-class romanticists, M. Zola sees every phenomenon monstrously magnified and weirdly distorted. It becomes for him, as for the savage, a fetish to which he attributes evil and hostile designs. Machines are horrible monsters dreaming of destruction; the streets of Paris open the jaws of Moloch to devour the human masses; a *magasin de modes* is an alarming, supernaturally powerful being, panting, fascinating, stifling, etc. Criticism has long since declared, though without comprehending the psychiatric significance of this trait, that in every one of M. Zola's novels some phenomenon dominates, like an obsession, forms the main feature of the work, and penetrates, like an appalling symbol, into the life and actions of all the characters. Thus, in *L'Assommoir*, the still; in *Pot-Bouille*, the ‘solemn stair case’; in *Au Bonheur des Dames*, the draper's shop; in *Nana*, the heroine herself, who is no ordinary harlot, but ‘*je ne sais quel monstre géant à la croupe gonflée de vices, une enorme Vénus populaire, aussi lourdement bête que grossièrement impudique, une espèce d'idole hindoue qui n'a seulement qu' a laisser tomber ses voiles pour faire tomber en arrêt les vieillards et les collégiens, et qui par instants, se sent elle-même planer sur Paris et sur le monde.*’ This symbolism we have encountered among all degenerates, among symbolists properly so called, and other mystics, as well as among diabolists, and principally in Ibsen. It never fails in the madness of doubt or negation. The would-be ‘realist’ sees the sober reality as little

as a superstitiously timid savage, or a lunatic afflicted by hallucinations. He puts into it his own mental dispositions. He disposes of phenomena arbitrarily, so that they appear to express an idea which is dominating him. He gives to inanimate objects a fantastic life, and metamorphoses them into so many goblins endowed with feeling, will, cunning and ideas; but of human beings he makes automata through whom a mysterious power declares itself, a fatality in the ancient sense, a force of Nature, a principle of destruction. His endless descriptions delineate nothing but his own mental condition. No image of reality is ever obtained by them, for the picture of the world is to him like a freshly varnished oil-painting to which one stands too close in a disadvantageous light, and in which the reflection of one's own face may be discerned.

M. Zola calls his series of novels ‘The Natural and Social History of a Family under the Second Empire,’ and he seeks in this way to awaken the double idea that the Rougon-Macquarts are a typical average family of the French middle class, and that their history represents the general social life of France in the time of Napoleon III. He expressly asserts, as the fundamental principle of art, that the novelist should only relate the everyday life observed by himself. I allowed myself for thirteen years to be led astray by his swagger, and credulously accepted his novels as sociological contributions to the knowledge of French life. Now I know better. The family whose history Zola presents to us in twenty mighty volumes is entirely outside normal daily life, and has no necessary connection whatever with France and the Second Empire. It might just as well have lived in Patagonia, and at the time of the Thirty Years' War. He who ridicules the ‘idealists’ as being narrators of ‘exceptional cases,’ of that which ‘never happened,’ has chosen for the subject of his *magnum opus* the most exceptional case he could possibly have found—a group of degenerates, lunatics, criminals, prostitutes, and ‘matroids,’ whose morbid nature places them apart from the species; who do not belong to a regular society, but are expelled from it, and at strife with it; who conduct themselves as complete strangers to their epoch and country, and are, by their manner of existence, not members of any modern civilized people whatever, but belong to a horde of primitive wild men of bygone ages. M. Zola affirms that he describes life as he has observed it, and persons he has seen. He has in reality seen nothing and ob-

served nothing, but has drawn the idea of his *magnum opus*, all the details of his plan, all the characters of his twenty novels, solely from one printed source, remaining hitherto unknown to all his critics, a characteristic circumstance due to the fact that not one of them possesses the least knowledge of the literature of mental therapeutics. There is in France a family of the name of Kérangal, who came originally from Saint-Brieuc, in Brittany, and whose history has for the last sixty years filled the annals of criminal justice and mental therapeutics. In two generations it has hitherto produced, to the knowledge of the authorities, seven murderers and murderesses, nine persons who have led an immoral life (one the keeper of a disorderly house, one a prostitute who was at the same time an incendiary, committed incest, and was condemned for a public outrage on modesty, etc.), and besides all these, a painter, a poet, an architect, an actress, several who were blind, and one musician. The history of this Kérangal family has supplied M. Zola with material for all his novels. What would never have been afforded him in the life he really knows he found ready to his hand in the police and medical reports on the Kérangals, viz., an abundant assortment of the most execrable crimes, the most unheard-of adventures, and the maddest and most disordered careers, permeated by artistic inclinations which make the whole particularly piquant. If any common fabricator of newspaper novels had had the luck to discover the treasure he would probably have made a hash of the subject. M. Zola, with his great power and his sombre emotionalism, has known how to profit very effectively by it. Nevertheless, the subject he broaches is the *roman du colportage*, i.e. of a perishing romanticism which transports his dreams into no palaces like the flourishing romanticism, but into dens, prisons, and lunatic asylums, which are quite as far from the middle stratum of sane life as the latter, only in an opposite direction, tending not upwards, but downwards. But if M. Zola has infinitely more talent than the German romanticists, to whom we owe such works as *Rinaldo Rinaldini*, *Die blutige Nonne um Mitternacht*, *Der Scharfrichter vom Schreckenstein*, etc., he has, on the other hand, infinitely less honesty than they. For they, at least, admit that they relate the most marvellous and unique horrors of their kind, while Zola issues his chronicles of criminals and madmen, the fruits of his reading, as a normal account of

French society, drawn from the observation of daily life.

By choosing his subject in the domain of the most extraordinary and most exceptional, by the childish or crazy symbolism and anthropomorphism displayed in his extremely unreal survey of the world, the 'realist' Zola proves himself to be the immediate descendant in a direct line of the romanticists. His works are distinguished from those of his literary ancestors by only two peculiarities, which M. Brunetière has well discerned, viz., by 'pessimism and premeditated coarseness.' These peculiarities of M. Zola furnish us finally with a characteristic sign also of so-called realism or naturalism, which we should have in vain attempted to discover by psychological, aesthetic, historical, and literary inquiries. Naturalism, which has nothing to do with Nature or reality, is, taken all in all, the premeditated worship of pessimism and obscenity.

Pessimism, as a philosophy, is the last remains of the superstition of primitive times, which looked upon man as the centre and end of the universe. It is one of the philosophic forms of ego-mania. All the objections of pessimist philosophers to Nature and life have but one meaning, if their premise be correct as to the sovereignty of man in the Cosmos. When the philosopher says, Nature is irrational, Nature is immoral, Nature is cruel, what is this, in other words, but: I do not understand Nature, and yet she is only there that I may understand her; Nature does not consider what is for my utility alone, and yet she has no other task than to be useful to me; Nature grants me but a short period of existence, often crossed by troubles, and yet it is her duty to make provision for the eternity of my life and my continual joys? When Oscar Wilde is indignant that Nature makes no difference between himself and the grazing ox, we smile at his childishness. But have Schopenhauer, Hartmann, Mainländer, Bahnsen, done anything more than inflate into thick books Oscar Wilde's ingenuous self-conceit? and that with terrible seriousness. Philosophic pessimism has the geocentric conception of the world as its postulate. It stands and falls with the Ptolemaic doctrine. As soon as we recognise [sic] the Copernican point of view we lose the right, and also the desire to apply to Nature the measure of our logic, our morals, and our own advantage, and there ceases to be any meaning in calling it irrational, immoral, or cruel.

But what is also true is that pessimism is not a philosophy, but a temperament. 'The systemic or organic sensations which arise from the simultaneous states of the several organs, digestive, respiratory, etc.,' says Professor James Sully, 'appear, as Professor Ferrier has lately pointed out, to be the basis of our emotional life. When the condition of these organs is a healthy one, and their functions vigorous, the psychical result is an undiscriminated mass of agreeable feeling. When the state of the organs is unhealthy, and their functions feeble or impeded, the psychical result is a similar mass of disagreeable feeling.' Pessimism is always the form under which the patient becomes conscious of certain morbid conditions, and first and foremost of his nervous exhaustion. *Tædium vitæ*, or disgust of life, is an early premonition of insanity, and constantly accompanies neurasthenia and hysteria. It is evident that a period which suffers from general organic fatigue must necessarily be a pessimistic period. We recognise [sic] also the constant habit which consciousness has of inventing, *post facto*, apparently plausible motives, borrowed from its store of representations, and in conformity with the rules of its formal logic, to justify the emotional states of which it has acquired the knowledge.

Thus, for the datum of the pessimistic disposition of mind, which is the consequence of organic fatigue, there arises the pessimist philosophy as an ulterior creation of interpretative consciousness. In Germany, in conformity with the speculative tendency and high intellectual culture of the German people, this state of mind has sought expression in philosophical systems. In France it has adopted an artistic form in accordance with the predominating aesthetic character of the national mind. M. Emile Zola and his naturalism are the French equivalent of the German Schopenhauer and his philosophical pessimism. That naturalism should see nothing in the world but brutality, infamy, ugliness, and corruption, corresponds with all that we know of the laws of thought. We know that the association of ideas is strongly influenced by emotion. A Zola, filled from the outset with organically unpleasant sensations, perceives in the world those phenomena alone which accord with his organically fundamental disposition, and does not notice or take into consideration those which differ from or contradict it. And from the associated ideas which every perception awakens in him, consciousness likewise only retains the disagreeable, which are in sympathy with

the fundamentally sour disposition, and suppresses the others. Zola's novels do not prove that things are badly managed in this world, but merely that Zola's nervous system is out of order.

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