

Drama of a Broken Teacup

Last issue I let everyone know that I would soon be knocking on doors seeking spare change in order to help keep ALN alive. Thus far, ALN has been provided free-of-charge, but the funds I had relied on to make that happen went away (at least, in part). The answer, it seemed, would be to switch to a subscription-based system. I worked with my institution, North Georgia, to set up the proper accounts to handle the funds. With the logistics in place, I stepped on a plane in April 2008 to spend some time teaching American literature in Ukraine.

While I was in Ukraine, I was contacted by the University of Memphis and, long story short, I changed jobs. The job change prevented me from getting out an issue of ALN last fall (thus, this “double” issue). It has also necessitated starting from scratch in setting up an account to handle the subscription fees. Unfortunately, setting up that account has proven considerably more complicated than anticipated. Thus, I have not come seeking subscription fees yet. At this point, I cannot predict when I will do so.

That’s the status of things. The financial status of ALN is my own personal teacup tragedy. Howells might view it as a wolfish problem by itself, but Norris would work it a bit. He would have me drunk and bloodied, having been pummeled roundly by some mid-level administrator in the Business and Finance Department. After I signed the account creation form, I would spit out a piece of broken tooth as I bent over to pet my Great Dane.

As this issue goes to press, many of you are packing your bags for the annual American Literature Association Conference in Boston (which, as I draft this note, begins in exactly one week). From the look of things, interest in American literary naturalism remains high, and this observation is underscored by the work collected in this issue of ALN. I would like to extend my thanks to all of the fine contributors to this issue, and additional thanks to the leadership teams of the associated author societies who provided bibliographic updates and other news items for this issue.

Naturally,
Eric Carl Link

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Expanding the Naturalist Canon in an “Experimental” Classroom

John Dudley

Those who devote themselves to the study of American Literary Naturalism have long debated one central question: what is it? That is, just how *do* we define naturalism as a genre, and how do the various available definitions affect the books we read, the courses we teach, and the scholarship we pursue? The many debates that surround the central question of definition are certainly worthwhile and, perhaps just as importantly, *fun*—at least for those of us who are drawn to the field as our primary scholarly focus. Is naturalism a sort of second-generation realism? A distinct narrative technique? A strict application of Darwinian principles to literature? A broad set of formal tensions regarding free will and determinism? As students and scholars, we have inherited a rich body of criticism that explores these questions and many more, and we begin with our own individual understanding of the term “naturalism” when we construct our syllabi and compile a list of authors and texts worthy of our students’ time and effort.

If the act of teaching naturalism represents the culmination of years of study, reading, and thinking, the chronology implicit in this process reinforces the notion of a course syllabus as an end-product, the hard-earned result of all this work. Whatever our distinct ideas about the value or validity of a literary canon, the syllabus is inevitably our own “canon” of the moment. In teaching literary naturalism, it is my primary goal to help students understand that generic term, and the texts we read form the basis of this understanding. John Guillory refers to an “inherent logic of closure” that underlies canon formation (6), and while each classroom experience should always inform our future pedagogical decisions, this feedback loop is inescapably limited by the texts we

choose to include in our courses. Partly in response to this problem, and partly because there were some works I’d never had the opportunity to teach, I chose to approach a recent graduate-level seminar on American naturalism as a sort of “experimental classroom” (with a conscious nod to Émile Zola), in which we would read a number of works not generally defined as naturalist, along with many of the “usual suspects,” in order to test the integrity of some of my assumptions about the genre. I hoped to reconsider literary naturalism through empirical, rather than *a priori*, means, and to reflect on the distinctions that might arise. Like other teachers, I take seriously the challenge to “expand the canon” of literary naturalism – to remain open to the inclusion of long forgotten or rarely considered works by authors marginalized for any number of aesthetic, social, or political reasons. These works might, of course, include those written by women and people of color. Also worthy of consideration, however, are works excluded for other reasons – “minor” works by major authors, such as *George’s Mother* by Stephen Crane, or popular novels whose aesthetic value might seem lacking – Richard Harding Davis’s *Soldiers of Fortune* comes to mind. As a literary movement often frankly dismissed or devalued by critical and theoretical fashion, naturalism includes more than its share of obscurities. The recent success of *There Will Be Blood*, Paul Thomas Anderson’s cinematic rendering of Upton Sinclair’s *Oil!* (which almost certainly qualifies as a literary obscurity), demonstrates the textual depth and resonance that exist beyond the standard course syllabus. Of course, among the practical obstacles to an expanded canon is that with every addition to the syllabus comes a corresponding loss: what to cut? Moreover, the length of many books that one might consider indispensable (*Sister Carrie*, for example) means that much less room to maneuver. Maintaining a solid grounding in the “essentials” inevitably limits one’s ability to broaden the scope of the course, evidence of what Karen

Cardozo refers to as competing “fictions of coverage and representation” (406). Striving for both goals risks accomplishing neither. In considering issues of gender and ethnic diversity, one is confronted by two contradictory ideas: first, much recent criticism has established naturalism’s investment in progressive-era ideologies of race and gender; and, second, expanding the canon to include books by women and people of color is a worthwhile goal. How, then, can one incorporate a thorough discussion of contemporary critical trends (essential for any graduate course) along with a more open and inclusive reading list? In her discussion of “expanding the canon” of American realism, Elizabeth Ammons takes up Paula Gunn Allen’s call to “derive critical principles based on what is actually being rendered by the true experts, the writers themselves” (qtd. in Ammons 102). Employing an explicitly multicultural logic of inclusion, Ammons suggests that we consider “American realism as a multiple rather than unitary phenomenon, American realism as American realisms” (103). Applying Ammons’s approach to discover the “naturalisms” that coexisted in the tumultuous period around the turn of the twentieth century would seem a logical extension of her argument. The singular challenge in doing so lies in identifying those authors and texts that participated in this “multiple phenomenon,” which of course circles back around to the problem of definition. If Frank Norris was perhaps the only self-proclaimed heir to Zola, and the other “canonical” naturalists have been admitted into the club through the application of the very philosophical, thematic, or aesthetic criteria we wish to interrogate, what yardstick do we employ to determine the proper fit? In practical terms, what did this mean for my course syllabus? To paraphrase Frost, before I built this wall I wanted to know what I was walling in or walling out. With that notion in mind, I committed myself to a few broad guidelines for selecting texts: they should be published between 1890 and 1915; they should confront, in some explicit

way, questions of individual freedom and determinism, and they should come from a wide range of authors and sources, including elite literary journals, journalism, and the popular press.

Among the texts added to my “tried and true” reading list were the following: Abraham Cahan’s *Yekl*, Sutton Griggs’s *Imperium in Imperio*, Pauline Hopkins’s *Contending Forces*, Zitkala-Sa’s *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings*, and Sui Sin Far’s *Mrs. Spring Fragrance and Other Writings*. In each case, the issues raised by these particular works helped to broaden my own ideas about naturalism, in particular regarding the genre’s investment in Progressive-era ideologies of race and ethnicity. While most readers recognize that Norris’s *McTeague* or London’s *The Sea-Wolf* reflect troubling attitudes about racial difference that were all too typical in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, it is just as true that the merging of literary and scientific discourse within naturalist fiction of the period allowed a wide-ranging interrogation of these same limited – and limiting – attitudes. It is tempting, and to some extent valid, to see works by women, Jews, African Americans, and others as a *response to the canon*, rather than a part of it. But, for me, it was also worth considering what happens when a classroom of new readers approaches these same works as central to the genre, instead of looking for them only on the margins.

Abraham Cahan’s 1896 novella *Yekl*, although perhaps less often read than his later book, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, is a striking example of the naturalist text as a chronicle of the urban immigrant experience. The book offers an alternate view of the same cityscape depicted in Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives* and Stephen Crane’s *Maggie*, and, when read in conjunction with these works, *Yekl* complicates and enhances the portrait of lower Manhattan at the end of the nineteenth century. In the novel, Cahan, the Lithuanian-born founding editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, renders the charac-

ters' Yiddish in clear English prose and their *English* in heavily accented dialect, a simple rhetorical strategy that allows for a productive classroom discussion of Cahan's reorientation of the self/other binary made explicit in Riis's portrayal of Manhattan's "other half." The novella's title refers to the Yiddish name of the protagonist, referred to throughout the text as Jake. Despite his claim to be "an American feller, a Yankee" (70), Jake cannot escape "the grip of the past," most powerfully in the form of his newly arrived wife, who remains Gitl, not "Gerty," as Jake would have it. Even as Jake obtains his divorce from Gitl, left free to pursue the more Americanized Mamie, he feels a sense of doubt and loss that speaks to the violent power of assimilation as a determining force within the immigrant community. Wandering beyond the confines of the ghetto, Jake feels "himself a wretched outcast, the target of ridicule – a martyr paying the penalty of sins, which he failed to recognize as sins, of or which, at any rate, he could not hold himself culpable" (73). In his limited self-awareness, Jake's dilemma suggests a cross-cultural counterpart to the "double-consciousness" that W. E. B. Du Bois, in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) finds in the African American – an irresolvable tension stemming from the "sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (5). Invited to consider Jake's self-awareness alongside Norris's characterization of Zerkow in *McTeague* and Crane's depiction of the Bowery as a culture of spectacle and deception, students emerge with a more complex and nuanced sense of naturalism's exploration of "otherness" as a cultural and epistemological phenomenon.

Of course, several novels by African Americans can be accommodated easily within a course on naturalism. Along with Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods* (1902), books such as Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), and W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Quest of*

the Silver Fleece (1911) reflect well-established conventions of the naturalist novel. Dunbar's novel depicts the northward migration of African Americans to New York at the height of Jim Crow repression, and, like *Yekl*, complements and enriches a consideration of urban space and demographic change. In their respective works, Chesnutt and Du Bois present sweeping historical examinations of the 1898 Wilmington "race riots" and the industrialization of the "cotton belt" at the turn of the century, both within the context of novels that trace the interwoven fates of black and white families. These narrative structures fit comfortably within the acknowledged boundaries of literary naturalism, offering ready comparisons with Zola's *Germinal* or Norris's *The Octopus*. To be sure, few naturalist novels conclude with more conventionally deterministic words than does *The Sport of the Gods*: "It was not a happy life, but it was all that was left to them, and they took it up without complaint, for they knew they were powerless against some Will infinitely stronger than their own" (433). Other works by African Americans, however, defy easy comparisons, and instead suggest how the incorporation of such texts into the reading list might expand and challenge the boundaries of the course. In his self-published 1899 novel *Imperium in Imperio*, Sutton Griggs incorporates the author's outspoken advocacy of black self-determination, romantic melodrama, and the fantastic conceit of the Imperium, a "patriotic secret society" (132) with sovereignty over a nation of over seven million black Americans. In revealing the "unwritten history" of the Imperium, the novel's narrator asserts that "love of liberty is such an inventive genius, that if you destroy one device it at once constructs another more powerful" (177). Wildly inventive and with an ambitious, if ultimately unstable, formal structure, the novel offers a profound example of progressive humanism in direct response to the racial assumptions of Jim Crow America.

Like Griggs, Pauline Hopkins found a substantial African American audience for her variety of naturalist fiction, and the distinctive characteristics of her work help to complicate any reductive definition of naturalism we might employ. As its title suggests, *Contending Forces* (1900) explicitly indicts the limitations placed on African Americans by powers beyond their control, but its investment in strict determinism is perhaps more ambiguous and complex than that found in *The Sport of the Gods*. While the downfall of Berry Hamilton's family in Dunbar's novel is set in motion by the racist vestiges of Southern plantation culture and abetted by the urban underworld of New York's Tenderloin, Hopkins stages her work within the distinctly middle-class milieu of those identified by Du Bois as "the talented tenth." Moreover, as Claudia Tate argues, Hopkins's book "rewrites the antebellum sexual discourse designating black women as powerless sexual prey" (161). *Contending Forces* re-frames the traditional "tragic mulatto" narrative in a form that combines the apparently contradictory conventions of sentimentalism and naturalism. Confronting assumptions about racial authenticity and miscegenation in its depiction of Sappho Clark, the novel makes clear that it is not essential difference, but rather "conservatism, lack of brotherly affiliation, lack of energy for the right and the power of the almighty dollar" which constitute the "contending forces" conspiring against black progress (256). By placing the emphasis on prejudices, temptations, and structures within the African American community, the novel not only offers a rejoinder to the racialism of some canonical naturalist texts, but it also does so within the context of a domestic "romance" steeped in the sentimental tradition. Sappho's transcendent marriage to the burgeoning "race man" Will Smith is a love "sanctified and purified by suffering" (398). After introducing this novel in my seminar on naturalism, classroom discussion on this apparent paradox between naturalism and sentimentalism involved a reconsidera-

tion of the sentimental and sensational elements in Jack London's *The Sea-Wolf*, in which Hump and Maud's union provides a similar transcendence, not *in spite of*, but *because of* the suffering both survive. Furthermore, *Contending Forces* makes clear the liberating possibilities of naturalism as a fictional mode which allows authors to reexamine – not merely perpetuate – entrenched racial ideologies.

Among the "experimental" texts on my syllabus, perhaps the most challenging to incorporate were the works of Zitkala-Ša, a Nakota writer and activist raised on the Yankton Sioux Reservation in South Dakota. As one student anxiously inquired after reading *American Indian Stories, Legends, and Other Writings*, "Why, exactly, is this 'naturalism' again...?" Often read in the context of literary realism or regionalism, this collection includes collected folklore, memoirs, essays, and works of short fiction, all of which deal, either explicitly or implicitly, with the problem of determinism, and it offers a complex picture of the forces shaping American Indian identity at the dawn of the twentieth century. While most critical investigations of American Indian trickster tales read these works outside the context of naturalism, the central motif explored in Zitkala-Ša's rendering of the Iktomi narratives, for instance, is the largely unsuccessful attempt to defy or escape from the vagaries of an unforgiving natural world. Iktomi's sometimes comical, sometimes tragic, struggles against fate provide the backdrop for Zitkala-Ša's account of her own childhood in an Indian boarding school, first published in 1900, and the author's naturalistic depiction of the school's impact is easy to identify: "It was next to impossible to leave the iron routine after the civilizing machine had once begun its day's buzzing; and as it was inbred in me to suffer in silence rather than to appeal to the ears of one whose open eyes could not see my pain, I have many times trudged in the day's harness heavy-footed, like a dumb sick brute" (96). Here, the author applies the familiar naturalist trope of

the brute to herself, but rather than atavistic reversion or inherent “savagery,” this transformation occurs as the direct result of the “civilizing machine” allegedly designed for the opposite effect.

In her work, Zitkala-Ša exemplifies a literary naturalism derived in large part from vernacular sources, rather than from the European philosophical tradition that informs so much of our understanding of the genre. Defining the contemporary condition of the American Indian as “poor in a land of plenty, friendless in a den of thieves” (212), Zitkala-Ša employs recognizable naturalist narrative strategies in helping to construct a viable identity out of the folklore, personal experiences, and more conventional works of fiction that comprise this volume. Formally, her *American Indian Stories* challenge the naturalist convention of third-person narration, suggesting the possibilities for first-person point-of-view later demonstrated in such naturalistic texts as James Weldon Johnson’s *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* (1945), or even Saul Bellow’s *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953). Indeed, this strategy is also evident in many of Sui Sin Far’s literary and journalistic sketches, including her 1909 autobiographical essay “Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of an Eurasian,” in which the author (born Edith Eaton) describes her confusion as a young child of mixed heritage: “I am only ten years old. And all the while the question of nationality perplexes my little brain. Why are we what we are? I and my brothers and sisters. Why did God make us to be hooted and stared at?” (221-222). Just as *Yekl* serves as an interesting companion to *Maggie*, so does Sui Sin Far’s fiction offer a fascinating alternative “story of San Francisco” alongside *McTeague*. In her fiction and non-fiction alike, Sui Sin Far explores the central questions of racial identity, authenticity, and assimilation that continue to haunt American literature and culture, and these questions are articulated within the context of a distinctly

naturalist discourse of heredity, environment, and chance.

At the conclusion of the semester, my students and I alike emerged with a sense of literary naturalism that was perhaps less conclusive, but also more complex and heterogeneous, than any of us might have expected. While some readers and critics have dismissed naturalism as essentially reductive in its application of a mechanical determinism on the infinite possibilities of human experience, perhaps their own idea of naturalism is what remains most essentialist and reductive. Reading new texts, or familiar texts in new ways, is surely one way to avoid this kind of reductionist thinking. In guiding students through today’s multi-page syllabi, loaded down with the language of assessment, “competencies,” and “learning outcomes,” I sometimes joke that a more honest (not to mention ecologically responsible) syllabus would fit on an index card: “We will be reading several books and talking about them.” As unlikely as this format is to become the standard for any course of the future, perhaps that simple idea isn’t a bad objective to keep in mind.

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Why does Daisy Die? Teaching Late 19th-Century American Literature in Switzerland

Thomas Austenfeld

As all readers of naturalist masterworks know, our lives are determined in many different ways. Sometimes a lottery win is the first step in a chain leading inexorably to disaster, while at other times our talents either invite us to overreach or lead us into situations that challenge us to grow. At still other times, we simply have to trust fate to carry us along, with limited comfort to derive from the knowledge that,

do what we may, the outcome is already determined. In the spirit of adventure, yet trusting in fate, I accepted a professorship of American Literature in Switzerland in the Fall of 2006 and prepared to leave the American South. Now, Switzerland has impressive mountains and glaciers as well as other attractions, but it isn't the Klondike, right? True, the risks in going there were limited. Salaries, food supplies, transportation conveniences, and health care far exceed in quality what any of Jack London's adventurers would have encountered on the frozen tundra. Still, moving one's professional base permanently – however long "permanent" may turn out to be – from the United States to Europe does entail certain risks: The administrative languages of the University of Fribourg are French and German (this is the only officially bilingual University in Switzerland), even if all the work in the English department is carried on in English. The "survival of the fittest" all of a sudden becomes a question of linguistic competence. Our family dynamic has had to adjust. Moving across the ocean has meant leaving things behind, buying more stuff elsewhere. The materiality of life is never so obvious than when we find ourselves paying, pound for pound, for what we have gathered, whether to move or to store.

Along with luggage, we move our cultural assumptions and our teaching predilections to a new place. All of a sudden, I am no longer a professor of American literature in a place where American literature obviously needs to be taught, but "the" professor of American literature in a place that occasionally demands justification for my existence. As "the" Americanist, I am also, inevitably, the point person for any questions about present-day American culture and the continuing follies of American politics. English is a utilitarian but officially unloved language in this proudly quadrilingual country (with German, French, and Italian as the most frequently spoken idioms, and Romansh speakers enjoying a guaranteed minority status).

I decided to begin my roster of classes with material I knew. A seminar on Realism and Naturalism seemed to fit the bill. And coming as an American-trained Americanist to Europe, I thought, I cannot possibly do better than to problematize just that topic, *The International Theme?* James, Howells, Norris, Chopin – all left their marks on the discussions and the resulting student papers, but no text made a stronger impression on me – re-teaching it for the first time to an audience of non-native speakers – than "Daisy Miller." Teaching Henry James's early tragi-comical masterpiece in Switzerland in the Fall semester of 2006 sensitized me to perceptual differences between American and European students that made me rethink my critical assumptions about realism and naturalism. My somewhat impressionistic assessment of two groups of students ultimately demonstrates the continuing fluidity of such categories as "realism" and "naturalism." "Daisy Miller" turns out to be a suitable test case for many reasons: traditional-age American college students have always been able to relate to Daisy's social and emotional turbulences because they recognize in her a fellow traveler, a young woman of approximately their own age who is trying to blaze a trail in a socially unfamiliar environment heightened by unfamiliar geography. "Daisy Miller" powerfully suggests the literarily underexplored emotional terrain of early adulthood. Between absent or ineffectual parents, annoying younger siblings, blandishments of parties and eager young men, these young women—and today's students of modern literature are mostly young women—try to remain true to themselves while enjoying the transitory power their attractiveness bestows on them: Daisy is, after all, caught in the competing male gazes of Winterbourne, Giovanelli, a host of anonymous young men, the servant Eugenio, and even the narrator. While, except for the general parameters of their biological and social existence, young American university students of the early 21st century have, of course, almost nothing recognizable in com-

mon with the *nouveau riche* industrial heiress of 1878, the sympathies generally bestowed by women students upon Daisy in class discussion bespeak a common sisterhood beyond the analytical differences we might marshal.

Yet while all readers necessarily bring the contexts and experiences of their own lives to the literary texts they read, geographical settings and cultural dispositions may influence interpretation more than we might assume. To Darwin, biology is destiny. To Daisy, geography is destiny. The Chateau de Chillon, site of Daisy's first arranged date with Frederick Winterbourne, is highlighted in the text as a classically European musty site of decadent aristocracy, deteriorated to the status of a museum. It serves as backdrop to Daisy's pretty dress and dainty walk as well as her conventional feminine horror at the "oubliettes" her cavalier points out to her. This very castle, however strange it is to Daisy, is abundantly familiar to my Swiss students. Forty-five minutes by car take us there from Fribourg. Many a family picnic has featured Chillon as its setting.

Chillon is at the opposite end of Lake Geneva from Geneva itself: the opposite end, not the opposite coast—that would be France! But James slyly sets his tale in Switzerland and Italy, commonly seen as bastions, respectively, of Protestant and Catholic establishment. Now Chillon is, in fact, *on the road* that leads from this portion of Switzerland to Italy: The old pass road over the top of St. Bernard into Italy, used long ago by Hannibal to transport his elephants from Carthage for his planned assault on the Roman Empire, skirts the Chateau which is situated so as to take advantage of commercial travelers and impose duties on their passage. The valley is so narrow that little Chillon can easily exercise control over anybody going by. Today, the busy intercity rail route runs next to the castle (between the castle itself and its parking lot, on the local road), while the interstate motorway roars along high up, on a cantilevered set of pylons, directly overhead. All traf-

fic from Vaud to Valais, and from Switzerland to Italy, passes by Chillon.

[See Picture on Page Following]



Daisy always amuses and delights us, but Daisy's death often seems gratuitous to students. Why does Daisy die? Why is the punishment for social misbehavior so strong? To today's young readership, the only similarly strong connection between "dating the wrong guy" and suffering death as an unintended consequence is a scenario in which a careless sexual relationship results in an HIV infection and eventually death from AIDS. In this contemporary scenario, testing the social boundaries by transgressing the sexual ones can have fatal consequences. But readers of "Daisy Miller" expect a comedy of errors. The heroine's mistakes are social, not sexual, in nature. Ostracism and return to New York might be acceptable consequences of continued foolish-

ness, but death in Rome? There is a disconnect between Daisy's offenses and the capital punishment she suffers. The disproportionality is

as large as

that felt by readers when they encounter Mary Rowlandson meditating on the wonderful providence of the Lord: did the fact that Mary mispent the Sabbath really enrage God so much that He caused her baby to die in nine days of unmitigated pain? Where is the relation between deed and punishment? To return to Daisy: Do curiosity, travel, and ignorance merit such hard punishment?

In previous instances of teaching the text to American students in sophomore survey courses, I have regularly tried to suggest several lines of interpretation that resonate with my assumptions about realism, especially the availability of multiple perspectives and the author's reluctance to offer moralizing judg-

ments. "Daisy Miller" is instructive because the protagonist's actions are not judged in reference to one overweening external norm, but in differing ways, determined by social conventions, in the critical eyes of Winterbourne, Giovanelli, Mrs Walker, and Mrs Costello. The American ladies want Daisy to behave with greater restraint than she would have to show in New York, the Italian *avvocato* is pleased to shine in her borrowed light and does not seem to mind public ogling and ridiculing, and Winterbourne, socialized in both societies but increasingly Europeanized, is content to observe rather than forcefully influence Daisy, thus ending up with a possible participatory guilt in her death by malaria. The simultaneous presence of differing viewpoints, the detailed descriptions of material features, the attention to surface and appearance, the microscopic analysis of social gaffes that Frank Norris would later derisively call "the drama of the broken teacup," the refusal to offer final judgment—all these are characteristic features of realism that are eminently teachable. Daisy's death, to be sure, is considerably more than a broken teacup and thereby paves the way towards the discussion of naturalism with its indifferent universe and harsh punishments for failing to preserve one's life. Under naturalist criteria, Daisy's Rome is a precursor of Jack London's Klondike, and Henry James's narrative choices anticipate the harsher naturalism of the next generation of American writers. My American students were generally satisfied with "explaining away" Daisy's death as the unfortunate consequence of her social misbehavior. Daisy, to them, was not "responsible" for her death because "she didn't mean to die."

When I found myself teaching "Daisy Miller" to a large lecture class at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, the nature of the lecture and the local pedagogical practices did not encourage discussion at the point in the semester when I spoke about the text, so that I learned about the students' understanding and responses to "Daisy Miller" only when reading their final

exam essays. Although realism tries to hold moralizing in abeyance through its multiple perspectives, student readers in particular yearn to evaluate a text by judging the protagonist or the author. In their own way, my Swiss students were just as quick to moralize as my former American students were, but each group employed decidedly different parameters. Unwilling to consider Daisy's death a realistic description which offers a final opportunity to contrast Winterbourne's and Giovanelli's different forms of cynical indifference and lack of concern—Giovanelli's more bold and assertive, Winterbourne's more passive and calculating—my Swiss students moved the death into the realm of symbol: Daisy dies not only as an individual, but what is killed in this story is American innocence and naiveté. James shows that the self-possessed American girl, the "pretty American flirt," will not be able to negotiate the supersophisticated, rule-bound European society.

My American students tend to be concerned about Daisy's death at the hands of Roman history and culture impersonated in Giovanelli and represented by Roman ruins. They frequently notice that the representative of a modern empire, America, dies in a place that is emblematic of a bygone empire's power. In 1878, America was not sufficiently far removed from the Civil War to have asserted itself as an empire on the international stage; that assertiveness would not happen until the Spanish-American war which made America a global power. But the students' sense is not so far off the mark: Daisy Miller is an emissary of her father's money, and much of the text revolves around the questions of money versus class, with Italian poverty and sophistication trying to win over American wealth and simplicity. Giovanelli simply pushes too hard, too soon, too recklessly. He indirectly kills Daisy, offering the Roman stroke of death to the young American beauty. Giovanelli's suave and insouciant final comment to the inquiring Winterbourne, "For myself I had no fear," only con-

firms the suspicion in most American readers that he is self-centered and unconcerned.

My Swiss students—judging by the sample constituted by the group I taught—had a different reaction. In essay after final essay, I read statements to the effect that Daisy dies because the America she represents is wrong to impose its presence. Her death is seen as a critique of her person and of her country, not the society that killed her. James, these students aver, had by 1878 lived in London long enough to become Europeanized and to recognize that the European approach to life was simply better and more authentic. He writes "Daisy Miller," they argue, as a warning to his former compatriots: unless you become as competent of cultural manipulation as Winterbourne, you will not survive. Americans need to change if they want to engage with Europe.

So far, it's mostly a question of cultural chauvinism on both sides of the Atlantic. Americans favor a reading that allows them to salvage their positive feelings for Daisy. She is an unwitting victim of circumstance. Romantically, Daisy's death can be invoked as a literary celebration of one of Edgar Allan Poe's more controversial assertions, that the "most poetic of all topics is the death of a beautiful woman." Europeans favor a pragmatic reading that defends the *raison d'être* of European institutions. In the encounter between Europe and America seen through European eyes, Europe has won. Daisy had fair warning which she disregarded at her own peril. But Swiss students add a pique to this interpretation: Daisy should have stayed in Switzerland! Here, she was safe, protected by gentlemanly Winterbourne, in a society which prizes safety above all other concerns. The Castle of Chillon, though darkly reminiscent of imprisonment, is to students in Fribourg a familiar weekend tourist destination a mere 40 miles away. They cannot imagine a safer place than this picturesque Swiss spot. In Italy, by contrast, Daisy finds herself a public spectacle, beset by predatory men, first on the Picino and, more forcefully even, when she en-

ters the Coliseum. She is metaphorically fed to the wolves. But are the wolves to be blamed? Surely not. Daisy should have known better than to place herself in their vicinity.

If the metaphorical beasts of the coliseum (Wolves? Malaria-bearing insects?) are not to be blamed, James has become an early naturalist in the eyes of these Swiss interpreters. A stroke of fate fells Daisy in her prime. The larger question about the relationship of geography and interpretation strikes me as interesting: determinism, then, can have a hand in the fate suffered by a text as well, from the moment it is let loose into the interpretive hands of its various readers the world over. Geography determines the destiny of interpretation as much as the material circumstances of daily life. Readers invariably adopt a point of view vis-à-vis a literary text that originates in their respective corners of the world. And so we see, at the story's end, Giovanelli abiding in Rome, Winterbourne returning to Geneva, and Daisy failing to find her way back home to Schenectady only because she is now interred in Rome's Protestant cemetery. Readers, in turn, return to their respective geographical subject positions which provide them with their fixed points from which to launch interpretive readings. To enrich their views, they might do well to live, at least for a while, "in foreign parts."

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Back to School: Pedagogical Pitfalls and Innovations in Teaching Chopin's *The Awakening*

Gina M. Rossetti

As a post-bellum Americanist who specializes in naturalism, it is rather fitting that one of the texts that I teach often is Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. Vilified in its era for its representation of women's sexual freedom and its seeming rejection of traditional, maternal roles, *The Awakening*'s original reception is not unusual as it emerged in an era that was struggling with conflicting ideological representations of womanhood. Teaching this novel to students reared in a different century, ones who have "choices" whereas Edna had only "obligations," would seem to be a matter of an easier order because students of this current generation would reject the strictures that suffocated Edna's character. Or would they? Perhaps it was wishful thinking on my part, or maybe I am more of an optimist than I care to admit, but I have been genuinely taken aback when I have taught Chopin's novel to this new generation. As I contemplated this dilemma, I tried to determine the trigger point. In recent years, I have taught at two distinct institutions in two different parts of the country: a flagship state university in East Tennessee and a Catholic university in the Midwest. On the surface, it would appear that students in the former would have fewer qualms about the novel: these students would appear to be more geographically diverse, secular in perspective, and seemingly cosmopolitan than those who attend a religiously-affiliated institution—many of whom had attended religious high schools. Imagine my surprise, then, when students from both institutions registered similar responses, which included a rejection of Edna's strictures

as less than oppressive, an outrage toward her description of maternal responsibilities, and a condemnation of what they identify as her solipsism. If I could only focus students on the era, it seemed to me, they would come to recognize that the standards against which they judged Edna were anachronistic, and less than what is expected from *serious* English majors.

Armed with my "plan" to rescue my students from their seemingly uncritical thought processes, and in many ways appearing on the surface as a literary missionary ready to save the students from their earlier ways, I had lunch with one of my colleagues from the Communication Department. A specialist in organizational communication and trained in social science research methods, my colleague and friend asked me about how individuals in my discipline teach novels. I decided to articulate to her the challenges involved in teaching a novel such as *The Awakening*. After listening patiently to my dilemma, she asked, "do you focus on how your students learn?" Sounding precisely like the kind of professor I choose not to be, I surprised myself when I said, "what difference does that make? Students must learn the discipline and part of this act manifests itself in abandoning the ways of naïve readers who place themselves at the center of fictitious representations." Chuckling at the pedagogical dissonance she knew to be true, my colleague countered, "why don't you show students that their reading habits are naïve by first having them focus on how they perceive themselves as readers: have them do a values inventory. Then, ask your students to fully research the era in terms of its culture, ideology, and politics to name a few areas. Finally, have them read the novel in terms of their inventory and in terms of the issues they have identified at play, which will prompt them to recognize that their initial responses were quite inadequate." My colleague's remedy put this cultural materialist to shame: while I have had students put the text in terms of its era, I have never once asked them to first address themselves as readers. Such an

approach runs the risk, I had believed, of coddling the students in a false sense of reader response theory that validates the reader's impressions but fails to move to higher-order critical thought. By rejecting this method, I had believed I was teaching my students the discipline: to place the emphasis on the text, its era, and its original readers—not on the current reader at hand. Her recommended approach has not only encouraged me to re-think my original solution, but also re-imagine and re-cast this article.

Identifying the Problem

When I begin to consider the challenges that *The Awakening* poses to contemporary college readers, I am struck by similarities in the student populations at the University of Tennessee and Saint Xavier University. Initially, I assumed that the two populations would have rather startling differences. As I probed further, however, I recognized that both populations were motivated by religiously-based arguments: evangelical Christians who reject Edna's adultery and Catholic students who consider Edna's abandonment of her family as tantamount to a rejection of life itself. Moreover, both student populations envisioned no problematic implications for their personal and felt conclusions, which they applied to the nineteenth-century "realities" for women like Edna. In other words, the students envisioned their value system as a reliable litmus test that could be applied to any woman, whether she were a fictitious character or the student sitting at the next desk.

Equally strong for both student populations is the insistence on the relationship between the personal and the political. Once a liberal mantra, this approach seems to have been adopted by both student populations as their way to make sense of novels written in an all too distant past. Rather than immerse themselves in the values and problems of the era, students seemingly reject this practice and imagine their

personal lives as the only standard against which to judge the characters. When examining Edna's attempt to paint, for instance, one of the students took the character to task for her pursuit of an impractical and immature career path when she had one already outlined for her as a wife and mother. This student had once wanted to pursue the arts but "came to her senses" when she recognized its limited income potential. Why couldn't Edna realize the errors of her ways, the student seemingly reasoned? Or, one might focus on the student who challenged Edna's maternal responsibilities, as epitomized in the line, "I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself" (48). The student was at a loss as to how any author could represent a mother as selfish. Pointing to another fictional text, the student wondered why Chopin had not depicted Edna in the way Silverstein depicts the selfless tree in his novel *The Giving Tree*. For this student, motherhood is a quality that only knows sacrifice and to depict it as desiring something different is to render its agent as frivolous.

As I considered these and other student responses to the novel, I had originally concluded that they were the hallmarks of non-critical thinking. If students were only immersed in the era, they would de-emphasize their felt textual responses and recognize the appropriate context of the novel to its era. As I would soon learn, this approach ran the risk of further alienating the students and dismissing the text's importance. For this new generation of college students, such an approach to cultural history gains further ascendancy only when the professor also situates the students in the era. In other words, the students must first recognize and "take charge" of their own agency. While such an approach seemingly runs counter to the principles of literary studies, it recognizes the importance of a fully-engaged classroom—for both the students and the professor. Armed with both a knowledge of the era, as well as the principles outlined in Belenky's

seminal text *Women's Ways of Knowing*, I set out to find ways to engage my students in the era, rather than dismiss the difficulties involved in teaching *The Awakening* as lying solely with student academic apathy.

Seeking a Solution

In *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Belenky outlines the pitfalls of the style of instruction that educational theorist Paulo Freire criticizes as “banking.” He explains, “the banking concept distinguishes two stages in the action of the educator. During the first, he cognizes a cognizable object while he prepares his lessons in his study or laboratory; during the second, he expounds to his students about that object. The students are not called upon to know, but to memorize the contents narrated by the teacher. Nor do the students practice any act of cognition, since the object towards which that act should be directed is the property of the teacher” (214). Even if we do not structure our classes as lectures, we still run the risk of relying on the banking metaphor as a chief instructional delivery system because we hope to leave our students with the sufficient amount of capital so that they might better understand the era under examination, and in later occasions, draw upon these “funds” and return them in the form of papers or exams. In doing so, I had practiced the type of pedagogical style that runs counter to engaged, critical student thought: I had imagined that the students would simply use what had been given to them so that they could apply the information to the text. Consequently, I assumed that the students would be passive receivers of information, which undermines attempts at galvanizing their agency even before such efforts begin. Contrary to this banking model, Belenky argues that professors need to demystify the educational process. She writes, “so long as teachers hide the imperfect processes of their thinking, allowing their students to glimpse only the polished products, students will remain convinced that only Einstein—or a

professor—could think up a theory” (215). To show students the messiness of the learning process, Belenky offers the midwife-teacher as a model. In this model, the professor aides the student in coming into his/her “agency” (216). Rather than remind the student about what s/he lacks, the midwife-teacher “coaches” the student into realizing that s/he already possesses the rudimentary elements of the more critical analysis s/he will eventually learn. As a result, the point of emphasis for the midwife-teacher is on the student’s acquisition of knowledge, rather than on the validation or even reification of the professor’s knowledge base.

One might well ask, how does the professor avoid the very act of “professing?” In other words, why should the professor obfuscate the fact that s/he *does* possess knowledge of the period, which the student is attempting to gain? I believe the question at hand has less to do with “hiding” the professor’s knowledge in an attempt to offer a simplistic gesture that validates the student. Rather, the issue at play is the extent to which the professor “bares the devices” of the discipline, which entails showing the student not only how to “think as an English major,” but more importantly, how to engage in the act of critical reflection that is in constant conversation with other learners. One method for this approach is to fuse together the student’s perception of himself/herself with the material that is to be studied. As Belenky explains, the midwife-teacher “assists in the emergence of consciousness. [S/he] encourage[s] the students to speak in their own active voices” (218). This model not only encourages students to come into their own as mature, critical thinkers, but it also advances the importance of encouraging the experiences that each learner brings to the class: “the more involvement they have in something that affects them personally, the more they are going to explore it and the more they are going to be able to give and to get out of it” (202).

Determined to explore Belenky’s approach, I decided to apply this model to my

Realism/Naturalism class in which I had assigned Chopin's novel. The class was comprised of English majors. The class's composition was a challenging one: half of the class consisted of students with strong close-reading skills. The other half of the class brought weaker study habits to the fore. At times, this latter population ran the risk of lagging behind, not only because of their weaker habits, but also they seemed uninterested in improving their overall performance. In other words, this student group internalized a kind of inferiority complex, suggesting that they not only lacked the skills the rest of the students possessed, but they had also concluded that these skills were beyond their comprehension. Up to this point, the class had been a struggle, as the really strong students brought their enthusiasm to the class, while the rest of the students seemed to wallow in their own perceptions that they could never achieve. It seemed to me, then, that Chopin's novel would serve as a critical test: one that would engage the students, while at the same time, validate to one half of the class that they need not imagine themselves as unworthy.

My initial plan was simple: ascertain from the students how they perceived themselves as individuals in our contemporary culture. By inventorying their values, they would not only get a sense of themselves, their perceptions, and their biases, but they would also move toward understanding that such values are shaped by the era and culture in which they live. As we started the novel, I first asked the students to write about the problems they experienced while examining Edna's experiences. In doing so, I wanted them to catalogue how they envisioned Edna and to also imagine how Edna might have imagined herself via a nineteenth-century lens. Rather than remain in this stage in which the students only relied on their critiques of Edna and what they perceived to be her privilege-induced ennui, I asked students to form small groups. In the groups, students would first engage in a self-report in which they would answer a series of questions designed to

ascertain how they perceive themselves. The next stage of the exercise was to move from self-perception to external perception: how did members of the group and/or the class perceive them. Finally, the student would share with the group his/her self- and external perceptions. It was at this point that the class became quite interesting, as students were amazed that their peers perceived them to act in ways that they did not imagine. Indeed, many students claimed that their classmates failed to know them at all. When I asked these astonished students why they bristled at their peers' comments, and at times laughed, they argued that their peers did not have an understanding of the contributing factors that caused them to act in the manner that they do. It is only by understanding this back-story, the students reasoned, that others could appreciate their actions and gain insights into their behaviors. It was at this point that I asked: could we say the same point about Edna? To what extent are we prevented from knowing Edna because of our value system and a lack of access to what has contributed to her set of circumstances? The students became intrigued by this point and they began to realize that the same measuring stick that had been unfairly applied to them might well be in play as they examined this fictional character.

To remedy the situation, I asked students to keep a log of their self- and external perceptions and place alongside them their research about late nineteenth-century American Southern and Creole culture. Again, I divided the class into small groups. One group examined the contemporary reviews of *The Awakening*. Another group examined the collision between Southern and Creole societies as they manifest themselves in the novel. A final group examined how the era's ideology about women contributed to the challenges of both the novel's original reception and the collision between two distinct cultures in the text. In order for these groups to be successful, one group member from each served as an emissary to the other groups. This individual would serve as an

important conduit so that the students could begin to see the connections among the three issues at play.

The research process took several class periods. At the conclusion, the three groups offered presentations about the information they had gathered, while also indicating the points in common that linked the three groups. It was at this point that I asked the students to return to their original self-and external perceptions, along with their initial conclusions about Edna. I asked them to re-examine the conclusions they had drawn in light of what they had learned via their cultural studies approach to the novel. At this juncture, students discovered that their original approach to Edna had been a hasty one, as they were not examining the character in terms of her era, while also noting that they had approached her as if she were something other than a fictional character. At the same time, the students recognized that only when they took ownership of learning about the era did they recognize that they could actively (re)construct the era in which the novel occurs. In other words, the students did not fully appreciate the novel or its particular context if this information been supplied to them via the banking metaphor that Freire describes. Instead, the students felt far more empowered as readers once they recognized that they could not only learn about the novel in greater depth, but that they also ran the risk of perpetuating quick and superficial conclusions about Edna if they reject the novel's cultural context.

While I do not suggest that this approach to *The Awakening* is a panacea, which will remedy each and every challenge that the novel poses to students, I will contend that it was only at the point that I recognized that how students perceive themselves as readers has every bit to do with how effective they are as practitioners of the discipline. In the end, I needed to relinquish my control in the classroom as a dispenser of information and make room available for students to attempt their own way toward critical literary and self-discovery. By heeding

my colleague's advice, I not only created opportunities for what Belenky terms "connected teaching," but I also went "back to school" by re-educating myself in how students come into their own agency. As a result, I discovered that it is only by recognizing the shared educational responsibility that our students will be as invested in the materials and era to which we have devoted our professional lives.

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I wish to acknowledge my colleague Dr. Renee Robinson, Associate Professor of Communication, Saint Xavier University, for her insight that guided my approach to the novel and to this article.

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Ontological Rejects in Phylogenetically Arrested Octavius: Teaching Harold Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware*

Vince Fitzgerald

Harold Frederic's novel *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (1896) has always had its enthusiasts, including William Dean Howells, Booth Tarkington, Gertrude Atherton, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sinclair Lewis, John Berryman, Edmund Wilson, and James T. Farrell. Yet when I tell my colleagues I often include the novel on my syllabi, I feel called upon to play the role of

apologist, responding to an explicit or perceived slight: “Who teaches *Theron Ware* these days?” There is something in the novel that attracts the Galahad in many of us, and I suspect *Damnation* will always have its champions until it receives the acceptance and understanding it deserves but is perpetually denied.

Nonetheless, the pedagogical values of the novel are substantial. Today, I use the novel in survey courses as an opportunity to discuss the variety of concerns growing out of post-Reconstruction America, and I ask the students to locate the novel within a genre. I also use it in graduate and undergraduate sections on American Literary Realism and Naturalism. I have never had a bad experience with the novel; students think it a good read (once one gets past the “boring first chapters”), a novel with plenty of mental food and socio-historical significance. In it my students discover possibilities that intrigue, a fear that we, too, are to some degree Theron Wares ourselves, and a seemingly two-sided lust story masquerading as spiritual connectedness that ends so embarrassingly we cringe not only for Ware but for ourselves and all of humanity.

Beyond the students’ enjoyment and its inherent aesthetic worth, the novel has further pedagogical values to me, not least of which is the genre debates it engenders (Is it realism? Is it naturalism? What do these terms mean anyway?). However, its greatest value to me is that *Damnation* foregrounds and embeds better than any novel I know degeneration and recapitulation theories so important to an understanding of American Literary Naturalism. The novel itself becomes for Frederic a testing ground wherein he can experiment with the actual implications of degeneration and recapitulation as facts of nature, so that concepts that upset Theron’s private moral universe (Darwinism, Higher Criticism, history as palimpsest, etc.) are also for Frederic facts of the entire universe that, in some major ways, dictate Theron’s behavior.

One final and successful hook I use to engage students are copies of some of Frederic’s voluminous working notes to the novel, which are extant at the Manuscript Division of The Library of Congress.¹ From the notes, students get a fuller sense of the author at work; his small, neat handwriting and multiple cross-outs allow students to witness that a great novel does not fall from heaven but is the work of a talented breathing individual. Indeed, students are especially intrigued by the implication of one page of notes: Frederic had written over a fourth of his novel without a clear sense of where he was going with it, or even if his protagonist would live to see the final chapter.

At this point I must post a caveat: the danger of using working notes to explore a finished novel is that one may find oneself analyzing the novel not written more than the one that was. Also, at times it is difficult to know which ideas revealed in the notes were seriously considered over a long period and which were instant throwaways. Nonetheless, from a pedagogical perspective, the fascination and lure of actual working notes outweighs the dangers. From the small packet of the notes I distribute, students can partially reconstruct Frederic’s central and occasionally shifting intentions for the novel, and they can also examine what ideas, dialogue, and characters were left out of the finished novel, and debate why. Also, students get a thrill from feeling as if they are somehow cheating, getting insider information, or peeping into someone’s medicine cabinet.

I begin in class as I will begin here: with a brief recap of degeneration and recapitulation theories. I will then explore some insights the notes help reveal about the novel.

By the time *The Damnation of Theron Ware* was published in America, degeneration theorists had already warned the thinking lay public of the flip side of Darwin, that appearances can be deceiving; what we take for progress may indeed be its opposite. The seeds of degeneration are scattered broadcast, and may germinate in our society, in our neighbors, and

even in our own bodies. Part of the diagnosis and prognosis of almost any personal or social ill imaginable, the degeneration myth provided “scientific” validation for old prejudices and foretold the potential destruction of highest civilization if physical, mental, or moral degenerates were left to their own devices. And whether one believed that we all degenerated from more perfect ancestors, or that we have evolved from lower primates, almost all could agree that some people are naturally lower than others. Here at least the religious and the scientifically minded could find common ground.

A concomitant idea floating around in the cultural ether of the time was Ernst Haeckel’s Biogenetic Law, “Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny”--better known as recapitulation theory. Haeckel asserted that the growth of the human individual from a single-celled creature to an infant (ontogeny) followed the evolutionary steps by which single-celled creatures evolved into humans (phylogeny). Thus every human has passed through a condensed version of a staggeringly long process of evolution. Not only do we all have animals within, we are all animals for a time in the womb.

Enthusiastic adherents of recapitulation theory saw no reason to stop there; if the development of an infant child from a single-celled creature recapitulated all of the stages of our animal evolution, then the development of an adult from an infant child must recapitulate the evolution of mankind from our earliest human origins to our current level of civilization. An infant child is thus a primitive human who must evolve (literally) from savage infancy, through barbarous adolescence into civilized adulthood.

Most degeneration theorists found in recapitulation theory a mechanism by which they could explain why some people degenerate: most of us pass through animal and savage stages on our way to civilized adulthood, but a degenerate is one who does not develop past all of normal stages of ontogeny.

Early in the 1890s, when Frederic began collecting notes for what was to become his

most widely read novel, the term “degeneration” began to mean more than simply a deviation or fall from a more perfect original type; it also meant an inability, whether by unfortunate ancestry or acquired depravity, to rise to the exigencies of one’s surroundings. Frederic employs both definitions to diagnose Theron; not only does he fall from an aboriginal innocence to guilty degeneration, becoming by turns effeminate, childish, infantile, animal, and finally savage, there is also a strong suggestion that he is a being who is unable to evolve, ontogenetically speaking, far enough to meet the requirements of the new intellectual environment he encounters in Octavius because of his phylogenetic limitations.

While the degeneration of Theron Ware is central to the novel, recapitulation theory, complete with its interrelated notions of animal and embryonic stages of personal development, personal and historical epochs, cyclical patterns of history, and racial memory, plays an important role in the novel not only because theories of just this type shake the foundations of Theron’s faith, but also because they provide a substratum behind the actions of all of the major characters.

Father Forbes’s echo of the first chapter of Ecclesiastes addresses issues far more central to the concerns of *Damnation* than a cursory reading may reveal; “You see, there is nothing new. Everything is built on the ruins of something else...the mental world is all alive with the ghosts of dead men’s thoughts and beliefs, the wraiths of dead faith’s imaginings” (71). Indeed, the burdens of the past, the tangle of “faiths and imaginings” of ancient people, built one upon another, was more a major concern to Frederic’s intentions for the novel than is present in the finished product. Frederic’s working notes to the novel reveal his many and varied designs for the novel, which was to represent in words a sprawling and complex tangle of the tenets of civilizations past and present whose implications were being played out in modern-day Octavius. From the working notes

can be gleaned a plot far more intricate, with far more delicate threads of associations and affinities amongst his characters, than can be found in the finished work; not inappropriately, his working title for the novel was “Snarl.”

Frederic toyed with recapitulation notions that the developing individual, like the developing society, is a palimpsest in that all stages of human development, from pre-natal beasthood, to savage infancy, to civilized adulthood, are over-written on the human soul. In his grammatically lax notes, under a column titled “Religion vs. Science,” Frederic reminds us that of each individual begins humbly:

He first infinitesimal germ, like that of any other animal to all appearances. He progresses, through form after form, each entirely dependent on surrounding conditions. Even after birth, look at his enormous changes, each linked to and part of million other things about him....Infancy, childhood, youth, manhood, maturity, decay--each has its different views.

From the moment of conception, Frederic believed, the developing human is enmeshed in an environment beyond his control, bound to innumerable ancestors he never knew, and answering to inner demands he cannot understand.

Early in the novel, before Theron is firmly fixed on the path of his own moral degeneration, we see character blemishes that should make us a bit uncomfortable; we suspect that what passes for naiveté may be childishness, what seems to be innocent candor may be adolescent egotism. And one of the most easily recognizable symptoms of Theron’s degeneration is his growing effeminacy. At one point, Theron surprises his wife by becoming over-particular about his clothes and later buys a book on the care of his fingernails. He sullenly tells Alice that he supposes people think of a minister “as a kind of hybrid female” (112), but later, dallying among heterodox books, he him-

self feels “as a woman of coquetry might play with as many would-be lovers” (232). Sneaking into the Irish picnic, he wishes someone would bring him a glass of beer “as if he were a pretty girl” (236). Elsewhere, he chides himself on having so little faith in Celia’s playing the knight to his distressed damsel; “Would she not with lightning swiftness draw forth that check-book, like the flashing sword of a champion from its scabbard, and run to his relief?” (266). Theron’s imagining himself female numerous times suggests, of course, “sexual inversion,” a sure sign of degeneration. But it also indicates that Theron may not have evolved ontogenetically past sexual differentiation. His maleness may only be apparent.

It would be a bit like shooting fish in a barrel to argue that Celia would be considered a moral degenerate by Frederic’s original readers; her indication to Theron that she will experience physical love without the benefit of marriage would certainly have damned her in the eyes of many of the 1890s reading public. But Frederic allows both Forbes and Ledsmar (the novel’s two true intellectuals) to paint her as a physical and mental degenerate as well, an especially attractive case of arrested development. To the trained eye, Celia bears some recognizable stigmata with her red hair, rose-tinted skin, firm handshake, and capricious nature (she tells Theron, “Now it is the one fixed rule of my life to obey my whims” [253]), but Frederic also puts the specific language of recapitulation and degeneration theories in the mouths of his characters in *Damnation*. Dr. Ledsmar, for instance, confidently explains post-natal ontogeny, complete with cultural epochs and racial memory, to Theron:

Our boys, for instance, traverse in their younger years all the stages of the childhood of the race....They pass through the lust for digging caves, building fires, sleeping out in the woods, hunting with bows and ar-

rows....[T]he boy goes through all this and leaves it behind him. (218-19)

Ledsmar's appraisal of the developing female is straight from the recapitulationist and degenerationist arsenal:

She is infinitely more precocious as a girl. At an age when her slow brother is still stubbing along somewhere in the neolithic period, she has flown way ahead to a kind of mediaeval stage, or dawn of mediaeval stage, which is peculiarly her own. Having got there, she stays there; she dies there. The boy passes her, as the tortoise did the hare. (219)

Precocity was thought by recapitulationists and degenerationists to be a marked characteristic of savages, degenerates, and women, leading to their early arrested development and premature senility. Women, therefore, can only evolve so far up the phylogenetic ladder before they become arrested, and thus they are more primitive and, according to Ledsmar, more in tune with the older racial memories that men have evolved past. In fact, for Ledsmar, Celia is such an extreme case of arrested development he dismisses her as an abnormality, "a mere bundle of egotism, ignorance and red-headed immodesty." He adds, "If she were even a type, she might be worth considering, but she is simply an abnormal sport" (224).

Recapitulationists coupled the workings of an individual's mind and body with those of his larger society. In turn, both the individual and society were thought to be tied inextricably to all of human history. In a sense, recapitulationists could have it both ways: progress (or degeneration) in the individual and in society are mutually revelatory, and subject to the same primordial laws of development, and thus the developing individual is forever burdened by ancestral impulses. Theron's choice of Abraham as a subject for his profit-seeking book,

which to him seemed to come "ready-made" and directly from "the hand of Providence" (38), is carefully chosen by Frederic; Abraham represents an important historical juncture by which we may measure the atavism, arrested development, racial traits, and degeneration of the denizens of Octavius. As the traditional representative of a historical tribe, Abraham exemplifies an epoch of civilization, and, according to recapitulation theory, a stage of advancement wherein individuals or entire groups of people may become arrested.

The working notes to *Damnation* indicate that Frederic carefully re-read *Genesis* himself, and that he initially intended his novel to suggest that the "snarl" in which Theron finds himself has everything to do with the "snarl" of associations and affinities that existed at the dawn of civilization; in block letters he writes in his notes, "EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD IS OVERLAID." Thus, modern civilization is a veneer written upon older barbaric societies which never wholly disappear. Elsewhere, Frederic scribbles the words, "Everything degenerates--reaches top, goes down. Immutable law"; and under a column of notes titled "Intellectual Barbarism," Frederic asks

Why should we say...people are "progressing?" They don't progress. They just as stupid, fickle, selfish, blind as were at dawn history. No earthly reason why shouldn't all wallow back into blackest barbarism again.

Octavius itself is an exemplar of Frederic's premise that modern civilization is a cribbed version of older ones. In a note titled "Central Action," Frederic indicates his desire to centralize the "Contrast between Methodists and Catholics," one which has ancient roots between the Greeks and the Jews. Celia tells Theron, "I divide people up into two classes, you know--Greeks and Jews....It is the only true division there is" (194). However superficial Celia's reading of Matthew Arnold may be, it is

clear from Frederic's notes that he meant for this distinction to be an important one; he notes: "The Great See-Saw--Epicurean vs. Stoic--Greek vs. Jew." The Jews, according to Frederic, have remained unchanged for thousands of years. Elsewhere, he writes, "The Jews are the sole survivors of antiquity;" they "belong to the very childhood of the race" (*The New Exodus* 54-55).

Octavius's resident scientist, Dr. Ledsmar, according to Frederic's notes, was to have been a Jew, perhaps a Shylock type with money relations with the note-shaving attorney Levi Goringe. Ledsmar serves as a foil to Celia's worldview, and as a rival for the mind and soul of Father Forbes. Ledsmar's and Celia's mutual dislike for each other, then, is a modern manifestation of ancient differences. According to Ledsmar, a Nordauian exemplar of Hebraic values, all art is a sign of degeneration; he asks Theron, "Has it ever occurred to you...that the only animals who make the noises we call music are of the bird family,—a debased offshoot of the reptilian creation,—the very lowest types of vertebrata now in existence?" He concludes, "I am convinced that musicians stand on the very bottom rung of the ladder in the sub-cellar of human intelligence" (79). Thus Ledsmar holds Celia, Octavius's greatest musician, in low esteem, believing she is a case of arrested development. Frederic's notes indicate that he considered making Celia more bird-like in that she was to have been a singer, and one who keeps birds at that. Not to be outdone, Celia denies the humanity of Ledsmar by calling him "a beast" and complains to Theron of Forbes's evenings with Ledsmar: "They sit and stuff themselves, or loll about afterwards like gorged snakes," and "talk about mankind being merely a fortuitous product of fermentation" (98-99).

Notably, both Celia and Ledsmar accuse each other of reptilian qualities. Later, after Theron is well on his way to degeneration, Ledsmar will rename a particularly evil looking lizard "the Rev. Theron Ware." Recapitulationists claimed we all pass through a reptile

stage in our ontogeny, and any remnants are cases of arrested development. Referring to one's reptilian qualities amounts to claiming that person has not evolved; Ledsmar may be a living representative of ancient Hebraism, Celia may be an underdeveloped pagan, and Theron may be a moral degenerate.

So, who teaches *The Damnation of Theron Ware* anyway? Well perhaps more of us should, for the novel unambiguously addresses and embeds naturalistic themes that other novels gesture towards obliquely. It also comes with its own set of working notes that can be applied in a variety of creative and engaging ways. Finally, it is not bitter medicine; most students enjoy reading it instead of swallowing hard on our insistence that it is good for them.

Note

¹ The working notes to *Damnation* are part of The Harold Frederic Papers in the Manuscript Division of The Library of Congress, Washington D.C. They have never been published as a collection, but they have been catalogued in Noel Polk, *The Literary Manuscripts of Harold Frederic: A Catalogue* (New York: Garland, 1979). According to WorldCat.Org, a microform copy of The Harold Frederic Papers is available for interlibrary loan from Indiana University. Also, I will respond to email requests (vfitzgerald@ndnu.edu) for copies of the packet of notes I give my students.

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lation theories in fiction and non-fiction of the late 19th Century.

The Nature and Culture of Horses in “The Most Noble Conquest of Man” and *The Octopus*

Karin Molander Danielsson

The inner, metaphorical animal in Frank Norris’s characters, such as the “animal in the man” in *McTeague* (283) or the brute of *Vandover and the Brute*, has been the object of many studies. However, unlike the metaphorical animals, Norris’s actual animal characters have been largely overlooked. According to Norris’s biographers, McElrath and Crisler, Norris had a particular interest in horses (142-145 and *passim*), something that becomes apparent in his carefully and naturalistically drawn equine characters. In what follows, I will show how Norris was able to utilize his knowledge of horses and horsemanship for narrative effects ranging from providing social commentary to serving as a highly visible signal of critical scenes.

Norris’s early short story “Outward and Visible Signs: II. The Most Noble Conquest of Man,” (1894) depicts how a spirited and hard-mouthed mare plays mercilessly with a young man, Taggart, who tries to impress a young woman and expert rider. In a desperate attempt to outdo a rival, Taggart rents a horse in order to join the girl in one of her rides. Like his rival, Taggart is ignorant of horses and riding, but unlike the rival, he has realized that to win a riding woman, he has to appear interested and, most importantly, unafraid. As Norris’s narrator puts it in the story: a horse is one of the “three things that every man by virtue of his sex must know all about and must never under any circumstances be afraid of” (502). Thus, a working knowledge of riding, of horses, and their behavior, is the very touchstone of this short story, and Norris, if not Taggart, shows it.

After having revealed his lack of experience by attempting to place his right foot in the stirrup first (which would have resulted in his sitting facing the horse’s tail) Taggart rides off without understanding or heeding the advice of the stable boys. As anybody familiar with horses could guess, this does not go well. Taggart fails to notice that there is something wrong with the bridle, and the mare immediately identifies him as a beginner.

The mare was having a very good time; she knew that Taggart did not know how to ride, from the way he felt her mouth, and from his neglect of gripping her with his knees. She began to feign to be high-spirited, and started away from things at which ordinarily she would not have lifted an ear; then she would pivot about on her hind legs, and go up the street sideways, and make Taggart feel unhappy; or else stop in her tracks till he touched her up, when she would suddenly start off with a fearful clatter of hoofs. (504)

The mare’s antics are described with humor but also with understanding, in that we are invited to regard the situation from the mare’s point of view, and to see the mare as a narrative agent, in charge of some part of the plot. An important narrative effect of this is to create a contrast between what the mare thinks, and what Taggart experiences that she is doing. Whether the horse feigns nervousness, or whether she actually becomes nervous because she is ineffectively tacked out and has an incompetent rider on her back is unresolved, but the double vision creates both drama and comedy. This effect can only be achieved, however, because the narrator has the knowledge that Taggart only pretends to possess. In other words, Norris knows how horses behave, and he invites his reader to join him, momentarily, on the side of the horse.

In the end, Taggart falls off his horse and has to get help from the young lady. She catch-

es the bolting mare and provides the missing piece of tack, a new lip-strap to keep the mare from opening her mouth. With this, Taggart is able to control his mount, and the situation: “She started to run again instantly, but the army bridle checked her like a second fence, and after walking about a few minutes on two legs, she suddenly gave up and came to hand meekly as a kitten” (506). One of Norris’s points here is that courage, or even mastering the physical skill of riding, is not enough; cultural knowledge like the that of equestrian equipment, and most importantly, to read and judge equine behavior, is as important as courage.

Equestrian knowledge was highly valued in (predominantly) male cultural spheres such as warfare, hunting and territorial conquest, and with the aristocracy and upper layers of society, in pre-modern times. In “Equestrian Knowledge and the Middle-Class Man” Susanna Ryan discusses how, in Victorian England, riding and horse knowledge became a way for the middle class to achieve social mobility, and how this is reflected and problematized in a large and popular genre of sporting stories. “The Most Noble Conquest of Man” is a story in that tradition, and, as McElrath and Crisler show (142), is also inspired by a somewhat similar story by Richard Harding Davis, “Mr. Travers’s First Hunt.”¹ In the motorized and mechanized society of the 20th and 21st centuries, however, the value of horsemanship has declined, rendering the point of these stories obscure.

Steve Baker, in *Picturing the Beast*, argues: “Culture shapes our reading of animals, just as much as animals shape our reading of culture” (4). In other words, a certain amount of equestrian culture and animal awareness is necessary to appreciate both Taggart’s difficulties and his success, something which might explain why this little gem of a story has gone largely unnoticed. Similarly, the character of the buckskin mare in *The Octopus* has been ignored by scholars, and one reason for this is very probably that knowledge of horses is no

longer required in society. Lacking in horsemanship, scholars have failed to notice that one of the main characters of *The Octopus* is a horse.

The Octopus, although published in 1901, is set around 1880, when the mechanization of farming was well underway in California. Although the railroad had been built, and the railroad company was making its economic and political presence known in the area, teams of horses were still used to draw the reapers, and riding was still a common way to get around the countryside. The horse is, therefore, an integral part of the landscape, and many horses are mentioned in the novel. Only one becomes a character in her own right, however: the buckskin mare. She is shown to have agency in that she influences the story through her actions, but she also has gender, personality and characterization, and although she doesn’t have a name, she is known by her highly unusual and very visible color. Towards the end of this essay I will return to why the color is symbolically significant.

The buckskin mare belongs to one of the main characters, Buck Annixter, owner of the Quien Sabe ranch. Annixter’s story is that of a young self-centered man who is seen to slowly evolve in the course of the novel. He learns how to be an adult, how to behave around women, how to take his place in society, and how to think of somebody else besides himself. His buckskin mare is present at intervals, and by her high visibility in these instances connects the most dramatic and significant scenes. Although Annixter is her owner, the horse passes from one rider to another, and offers her various riders the symbolic equine gifts of wildness, speed, and social and sexual domination.

Before we meet the mare in the flesh, she is metaphorically present when the conflict between the ranchers and the railroad is explained in the third chapter: “Good Lord! What can you do? We’re *cinched* already” (my emphasis). “It amounts to just this: *You can’t buck*

against the railroad” (659) (emphasis in the original). Buck is Annixter’s nickname, and bucking is what the mare will be seen to do before long. However, her bucking, just like Annixter’s own against the railroad, will prove futile.

We first hear of the buckskin mare herself as an object of rivalry between Annixter and his employee, Delaney. This rivalry is later to be extended to a human female and ultimately to the land itself. In the first scene, the fierceness, and the courage it takes to ride the buckskin, is emphasized: “The buckskin mare was a half-broken broncho that fought like a fiend under the saddle until the quirt and spur brought her to her senses. But Annixter remembered that the Tree’s cottage, next to the dairy-house, looked out upon the stables, and perhaps Hilma would see him while he was mounting the horse and be impressed with his courage” (645). It is interesting to note that this fighting fiend is a female animal of a domestic species. In *The Wild and The Domestic*, Barney Nelson argues that in American literature of this period or later, domesticity and tameness are associated with female animal characters, cows and sheep, but never bulls and rams, whereas wild animal characters (in London, Muir, Faulkner, etc) are typically lone males (53—54). It could be argued that Norris makes a less than subtle point of presenting this animal as a wild female that is waiting to be tamed, but he allows her considerable space and admiration in the process, emphasizing the fact that this is a horse, and not just any wild female animal.

Annixter’s idea to show himself off as an expert horse breaker backfires in this early scene, however. When he asks for the buckskin this specific horse is gone, taken out by his employee and rival, Delaney. The stableman tells Annixter: “Yes sir. He had a circus with her, but he busted her right enough. When it comes to horse, Delaney can wipe the eye of any cow-puncher in the country” (646). In other words, Delaney has succeeded on both counts: he has

the mare, and he has very likely cut an impressive figure right in front of the dairy maid, Hilma Tree. The connection between the successful handling of, on the one hand, horses, and, on the other hand, women, becomes clear at this point, and although Delaney is fired and turned away from the ranch, the rivalry between him and Annixter over the mare and the woman continues.

Annixter’s barn dance in chapter six offers one of the novel’s most dramatic scenes and one of the buckskin’s memorable appearances. The barn dance is an opportunity for Annixter to show off his new barn and his own success as a farmer, and to have another chance to impress Hilma. However, as he tells Presley, “just when I want a good lively saddle horse to get around on, somebody hikes the buckskin out the corral” (756). Even though the description of the horse has changed from half-broken bronco to a lively saddle horse, its purpose is to enhance its rider’s male persona and his social standing.

Later that evening, the buckskin and her thief Delaney, who is looking for revenge, turn up at the dance. Delaney is dressed as a cow-puncher; that is, he is in full Western garb, “hair trousers, sombrero, spurs and all the rest of it” (772) and the buckskin, his highly visible and dramatic mount, forms the finishing touch of his frontier make-up. Delaney clearly is out to achieve an effect, because the saddle horse is once again described as a bronco:

Delaney had ridden the buckskin at a gallop straight through the doorway and out into the middle of the floor of the barn.

Once well inside, Delaney hauled up the cruel spade-bit, at the same time driving home the spurs, and the buckskin, without halting in her gait, rose into the air upon her hind feet, and coming down again with a thunder of iron hoofs upon the hollow floor, lashed out with both heels simultaneously, her back arched,

her head between her knees. It was the running buck, and had not Delaney been the hardest buster in the county, would have flung him headlong like a sack of sand. But he eased off the bit, gripping the mare's flanks with his knees, and the buckskin, having long since known her master, came to hand quivering, the bloody spume dripping from the bit upon the slippery floor. (781)

Unlike Taggart who was the involuntary victim of his mare's antics, Delaney deliberately causes the mare to buck, only to bring her to hand again, thus demonstrating his horsemanship. In other words, the mare's seemingly wild nature emphasizes Delaney's Western, male culture. Up to this point, Delaney is in undisputed charge and the center of everyone's attention. But Norris has set this story in the twilight of the Western frontier, and cowpunchers are a dying breed. Delaney draws his gun and the scene quickly evolves into a regular shootout in which Annixter wounds Delaney in the hand, causing him to fall off the dancing mare. Without the horse, Delaney is helpless, and has to run away defeated. However, Annixter doesn't win because he is a superior shot, but because he acts maturely. Unlike the show-off Delaney, Annixter keeps his head and tries to protect Hilma and his other guests before throwing himself into the fight.

Interestingly, at this point, the mare returns as the center of attention. Delaney may be disarmed, but the mare is still at large. "Twenty men promptly sprang to the buckskin's head, but she broke away, and wild with terror, bewildered, blind, insensate, charged into the corner of the barn by the musicians' stand" (785). The mare, very much the wild animal now, is in charge of the action as she tramples an old man and frightens the crowd into the corners of the barn before all the men together manage to subdue her, by sitting on her head: "For five minutes she struggled and fought; then, by degrees, she recovered herself, drawing great

sobbing breaths, at long intervals that all but burst the girths, rolling her eyes in bewildered, supplicating fashion, trembling in every muscle, and starting and shrinking now and then like a young girl in hysterics" (786). The wild animal that could defy twenty men turns into a frantic girl. Here, Norris's interest in the agency of a non-human animal has to stand back for his symbolic use of the mare as a female, strongly associated with another female in Annixter's household, Hilma Tree. The mare's fight and subsequent submission in fact foreshadows similar processes in Hilma Tree, Annixter's servant and love interest.

In the next chapter, it is early spring, and Annixter and the horse have followed similar tracks of development, in that both have become more socially adept. The mare has become tame, and Annixter has lost some of his selfishness and fear of women. Even so, he considers marriage a trap best avoided, and decides to propose another arrangement to Hilma. The young woman is sitting by the creek, reflecting upon Annixter, the hero of the barn dance, when said hero suddenly appears, naturally on horseback. He is riding the buckskin, who has now turned into that lively saddle horse, a decorative and useful female servant, just like Hilma, in fact. As Jennifer Mason shows, "Humans do not gain self-mastery by being figured like a horse, but by becoming actual riders. At the same time that it transports humans from one location to another, the equine body becomes a vehicle through which one may gain control over the animal drives of one's own body" (516). In this scene, Annixter is, initially at least, in control of his feeling and of his horse.

As the now tame buckskin is allowed to wander around looking for grass, Annixter phrases his less than honorable plans in a way that Hilma repeatedly misunderstands as a marriage proposal. When the buckskin momentarily reverts from her self-regulated domestication and wanders off, "bridle dragging," suggesting that the opportune moment may similarly slip

away, Annixter is forced to clarify his intentions. Hilma's reaction and subsequent flight is described in terms reminiscent of the hysterical buckskin at the barn dance:

She stood for an instant, spellbound, her eyes wide, her bosom swelling; then all at once, turned and fled, darting across the plank that served for a foot bridge over the creek, gaining the opposite bank and disappearing with a brisk rustle of underbrush, such as might have been made by the flight of frightened fawn. (844)

Here the woman, and by implication the mare, are associated with another female animal, a young deer, which also links them to Annixter, whose first name is Buck. This conflict over cultural and social expectations is soon resolved, and the two make up and marry. The buckskin mare has not played out her role in the novel, however.

So far we have seen the horse representing the wild and violent, as well as the domestic and decorative. As the novel draws towards its end and the conflict between the ranchers and the railroad is approaching its climax, the buckskin repeatedly appears in scenes where her speed and inherent dramatic quality are needed. In one scene, this, the "fastest horse in the county," is lent to Dyke, an ex-engineer and rancher, who is trying to escape a posse. The buckskin is described in action: "gathering her legs under her, her head low, her neck stretched out . . . disappearing in a blur of dust" (953). In a later scene Annixter is riding her at similarly high speed in difficult terrain to gather the ranchers' league in opposition to the railroad company, and again the buckskin is described as exceptional: "game as a fighting cock, catching her second wind [and] distancing even the English thoroughbred" (982). Her speed will only make a difference in the short run, however, and although her riders stay in the focus of the narrative, they all finally have to stop and dismount, because a horse, however

fast, is clearly not a sustainable solution to their problems. This horse thus plays her final role in this narrative as a sign of the end of the horse-powered society.

In fact, Norris's text signals this end in no uncertain terms, in that the buckskin mare in *The Octopus* also can be seen as a veritable harbinger of destruction, indeed, as the fourth horse of the apocalypse. The well-known image comes from Revelations 6:8 "And I looked and behold a Pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and hell followed with him." The reason this interpretation presents itself is of course the horse's unusual color, which we have been repeatedly reminded of. The mare in *The Octopus* has no name; she is invariably called "the buckskin." This practice, which connects her with Buck Annixter, also makes her color impossible to overlook. The body of a buckskin horse is a pale gold, or sandy yellow, like the skin of a buck or a deer, while legs and ears, mane and tail, are black. The laws of genetics also prove buckskin an unusual color, and together this means that a buckskin horse is both highly visible and worthy of notice. As the pale horse of the apocalypse, she doesn't bring destruction herself, but her presence points to that of another "beast of the earth," another kind of horse, the railroad or iron-horse, "that galloping monster, that terror of steel and steam" that has burst into the valley "leaving blood and destruction in its path" (1096).

Annixter's premonition is proven right; the farmers are indeed "cinched" and defeated in the shoot-out at the irrigation ditch. This final stand of Annixter and the farmers is also our last glimpse of the buckskin, who is led away to safety by Presley and tied to the big oak. Here she associatively joins the ranks of other famous battle horses, like Comanche at Little Big Horn, (Lawrence 1989) whose riders have succumbed to an overpowering force and who therefore are left alone to contemplate a new world.

As I hope to have shown, Taggart's hard-mouthed mare and Annixter's buckskin are

significant characters in their own right: naturalistic portraits of horses, drawn by an admiring and accomplished artist. But they are also empowered narrative agents, determining the outcome of important scenes, imbibing others with symbolic value, and constituting the natural loci of social aptitude and cultural consequence.

Note

¹ Davis, however, tells his story and regards the aptly named horse, Satan, entirely from the point of view of the miserable rider Travers and is thus unable to give his readers the pleasure and comedy of seeing two sides of the story.

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Studies Journal 9 (2003): 145-71.

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Five on Twenty-Seven

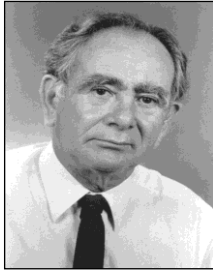
For each issue of ALN the editors ask someone in the field to share his or her favorite books. We aren't sure why we do this. For this issue of ALN, we asked Eric Carl Link, chair of the Department of English and professor of American literature at the University of Memphis. Professor Link is also the erstwhile editor of the fine journal, ALN. Thus, he asked himself to submit a Top Five list, and he kindly agreed. He also finds it hysterical that he is writing this introduction in the third person, and hopes that it doesn't mean that he lacks depth of character or dignity (although it probably does).

The Link Top Five

1. *Moby-Dick*, Herman Melville
2. *The End of the Affair*, Graham Greene
3. *Miss Lonelyhearts*, Nathanael West
4. *Lolita*, Vladimir Nabokov
5. *Love in the Ruins*, Walker Percy
6. *The Book of the New Sun*, Gene Wolfe

ALN doesn't wish to cause trouble, but it must point out that there is a sixth item on Professor Link's list. We confronted him with this fact, and his explanation was that "well, *Miss Lonelyhearts* is really short." Short or not, ALN made it clear to Professor Link that the integrity of the exercise demanded a five-item list: no more, no less. Upon hearing this, Professor Link graciously agreed to drop the sixth item from his list.

Ten Questions with Donald Pizer



Donald Pizer, Pierce Butler Professor of English emeritus at Tulane University, has published widely on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American literature. In recent years he has devoted a great deal of his

time to editing volumes of Theodore Dreiser's interviews and letters.

ALN: How did you approach teaching American literary naturalism? What were some of your strategies? How did they differ in graduate and undergraduate courses?

I tended to avoid making much of naturalism as a historical moment and concept when teaching works of the period to undergraduates. Inexperienced students are overeager for the crutch of simplified controlling ideas, and when you give them one they stop thinking about what they are reading. Graduate students, however, need to know the history of critical discussion of the period. When I taught graduate seminars on specific naturalistic writers or on the movement as a whole, we spent considerable time on this subject.

ALN: Given naturalism's relationship to Darwin and Spencer (as well as other late nineteenth-century intellectuals), in the context of your teaching did you ever contend with the religion/science tension with students? How did you work with it?

I spent my entire teaching career—aside from Fulbrights and other brief stints—at Tulane, where our students are drawn largely from the white upper middle class. Students of this background usually lack fundamentalist religious ideas. And they usually have the conventional ability of their class and education to separate whatever religious ideas they have

from the study of the absence of religion in others. Going a bit further, though this is an idea I never tested in a classroom discussion, I think that they find congenial and even attractive some of the ways in which writers of the 1890s who had rejected conventional faith adopted alternative systems of belief appropriate to their temperaments and moment—Norris and a specific kind of evolutionary theism, for example, or Dreiser and the idea of beauty. Not that they would themselves adopt these systems, but they find useful the notion of meaningful sources of the spiritual outside of conventional belief.

ALN: Teachers and scholars of late nineteenth-century American literature are familiar with the usual authors (London, Crane, Norris, and Dreiser). In your experience, what are some under-read, under-taught, and under-considered texts in the field?

I have tried in my own work of the last several decades to stress the importance of Chopin's *The Awakening* and Wharton's *The House of Mirth* in any consideration of the major naturalistic writing of the period. There is still, however, an element in academic criticism which does not want to consider these writers in the context of naturalism's presumed coarser strain. I believe, too, that teachers of late nineteenth-century American writing are missing a real bet when they neglect Garland's *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly*. The novel has some flaws but it also has a vitality and honesty that are surprising if one comes to it with all the usual preconceptions about Garland as a passé reactionary

ALN: What was your favorite work of literature to teach, or even your favorite two or three? What's appealing and intellectually satisfying about them?

When I first began teaching about half a century ago, I regularly taught a survey of British literature and found *Paradise Lost* (all of it; a tougher breed of students then) a delight to teach. I have never looked too closely into the whys of that response. More recently, my favorites are *Sister Carrie*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *The Big Money*. These works share a thematic breadth—they all ask basic questions about the nature of our society—with various kinds of fictional brilliance. And all are eminently teachable once the present-day reluctance of students to read worthy lengthy works is overcome.

ALN: In *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Twentieth-Century American Literary Naturalism: An Interpretation* you comment on the durability of the naturalist aesthetic in literature, as well as its popularity. Given the pessimistic strand often present in naturalist works, how do you account for this appeal? And how have your students responded to it over the years?

You're asking the wrong person to respond to this question because I seldom use the term pessimistic when discussing works of this period. The notion that naturalism is pessimistic derives from the fact that its representation of the human condition differed so strikingly from most previous expression. In fact, the naturalists for the most part presented life as a mixed bag: some characters die miserable deaths in Bowery flophouses, some are Broadway stars beginning to live mature lives. Unless you tell them that there is something pessimistic in this vision, students—who have been bred on far darker pictures of experience by TV and films—don't themselves have this response. What they do find pessimistic is the concept of determinism if one explains it as a concept. But when they find concrete and persuasive instances of the idea in the fiction—of someone

worn down by the uncontrollable circumstances of his or her life—they don't have that reaction.

ALN: Tell us the story of *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism*. How did the project come about? What conceptual strategy motivated your selection of contributors?

Cambridge asked me to edit the book and to prepare for their consideration a working list of the contents and contributors to the volume. I came up with a basic structure which consisted of background chapters and chapters on individual works, which Cambridge then accepted. Several outside readers of this outline, however, suggested the need for more material reflecting recent trends in the field (I had initially proposed a fairly traditional approach) and chapters on "Expanding the Canon of American Realism" and "Troubled Black Humanity..." were added. "Conceptual strategy" is perhaps too grandiose a term for the way I chose contributors. Where possible, I asked scholars who had done major work in the field and whom I knew personally. (If I were asked to cite the most important bit of advice to pass on, stemming from my having edited several collaborative works, it would be to know your contributors personally if at all possible.) I gave no specific directions to the contributors; they could handle their subjects as they wished. When all the essays were in and I realized that they diverged considerably in theme and strategy, I developed the "dialectic" idea which I discuss in the opening paragraphs of my introduction to the volume. This was no mere adaptation to conditions—the "when life deals you lemons, make lemonade" kind of notion. Rather, I realized that an overt recognition of the complex and unresolved nature of the field was an apt way of responding to what my contributors had independently produced.

ALN: It's safe to say that the way in which your work has revealed the polyvalence of

literary naturalism has both enriched our understanding of the movement and enlarged our sense of the value of works within it. Older and more monolithic conceptions perhaps accomplished the opposite. Can you give us a sense of when and how you began to develop this new understanding?

It began in graduate school at UCLA when I read both late 19th century American naturalistic texts and the criticism about them and found a disconnect between the two. My first published paper, one written for a graduate seminar, was an exploration of Frank Norris's *The Octopus* along these lines. If one reads *The Octopus* in relation to later conventional notions of naturalistic thought and expression, it is an utterly confused novel. But if one reads it in relation to the ideas of its own time and its own fictional strategy it is fully coherent. Since then my work on American writing of 1880-1945 has been along two lines: book length studies of major writers in which I seldom mention naturalism, and essays about the the movement in which I often use the strategy of comparing several works in order to derive deductively ideas about its general character.

ALN: You've done a considerable amount of editorial work, both in terms of edited collections and critical editions. What do you find particularly rewarding about this type of scholarship?

I got into editing as a corollary to the critical work I was engaged in on a specific writer. For example, my first edition, a collection of Norris's literary criticism, was done in conjunction with a study of his novels. And my critical efforts in relation to Dreiser produced a volume of his previously uncollected writings. I found that my method of work—a total immersion in the career and writing of a specific author in preparation for a critical study—produced the *lagniappe* (a New Orleans term for an unexpected benefit) of both a realization of the need

for certain kinds of editions of his work and the ability to meet that need. On the other hand, many of my other editions—my Norton Critical Editions or my Library of America volumes—fall into the category of work that comes one's way in the course of a career as a consequence of concentrating on a particular author or group of authors. I find my editorial work very different from the usual idea of this kind of effort as dryas dust plodding. I like the detective element in it and I also take satisfaction from the sense that I'm producing something that will be used long after my criticism is considered irrelevant. The one kind of editorial labor that I have some regrets about is that involving the preparation of so-called definitive texts. I got into this kind of scholarship because I disagreed with what was happening in the editing of texts I knew intimately such as *Sister Carrie* and *The Red Badge of Courage*. But this is such a disputatious scholarly area that it cost me several good friends over the years.

ALN: You gave a fascinating talk at the ALA Naturalism Symposium drawn in part from your new book *American Naturalism and the Jews: Garland, Norris, Dreiser, Wharton, and Cather*. Treatment of this topic seems long overdue. What drew you to this project? What lines of inquiry do you think remain unexplored in this area?

While editing for the Illinois Dreiser Edition a volume of Dreiser's interviews and then another of his uncollected correspondence, I found various explicit expressions of his anti-Semitism that sharpened my awareness of this aspect of his thought. I made some remarks about this phase of his thinking in my introduction to the Interviews book, remarks which Tom Riggio, the general editor of the Dreiser Edition, questioned me about. Riggio of course accepts Dreiser's anti-Semitism but, if I am summarizing his ideas correctly, believes that too much should not be made of it. Tom is a good arguer, as am I when I get started, so we

discussed this issue by e-mail at some length. In the end, I decided that I would look further into Dreiser's anti-Semitism in order to satisfy for myself that my understanding of its nature was correct. The result was a long article in *Dreiser Studies* called "Dreiser and the Jews." This exploration, however, also had the effect of stimulating my interest in the entire subject of anti-Semitism in major turn-of-the-century American writing, and the book followed. As for additional work in this area, I think that the time is ripe to re-examine the entire subject for the 1865-1945 period: the various shapes anti-Semitism takes in the various generations from Howells's (not that Howells was anti-Semitic) through the naturalists to the major figures of the 1920s. And of course I omit in my study such major writers of the late nineteenth century as Henry Adams and Jack London.

ALN: You published your first major essay on naturalism, "Late Nineteenth-Century American Naturalism: A Definition," in 1965, and you published in 2006 the essay "Late Nineteenth-Century American Naturalism: A Re-Introduction." How have your ideas about naturalism changed during this span of years?

Roughly put, I believe that my thinking has evolved in two ways. First, I no longer seek to find some neat formulation of the central characteristics of American naturalism. Although the first essay you mention has several passages of definition that are still frequently cited, I now tend toward a looser conception of the movement—one that stresses "strains" and "tendencies" rather than precise characteristics. I suspect that this change follows naturally from my efforts to include more figures within the general rubric of American naturalism than I did earlier, both other turn-of-the-century writers, especially women, and later writers of the 1930s and beyond. Second, I have shifted from my early desire to use the formal characteristics of presumed naturalistic fiction to

identify the movement to a more recent emphasis on its social themes. Consistent in both of these approaches—the formalistic and the social—is a belief that efforts to find a shared ideological center among writers in the movement are usually both futile and misleading.

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? Let us know.

•ALN•

Leonard Cassuto's latest book, *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality: The Secret History of American Crime Stories* (Columbia University Press, 2008), includes a chapter focusing on Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*. The book has been nominated for a Macavity Award from Mystery Readers International. For more information about the book, check out www.lcassuto.com.

•ALN•

Since the last issue of ALN, Robert Elias, author of *Theodore Dreiser, Apostle of Nature*

(1948) and a pioneering scholar in Dreiser studies, passed away. ALN mourns the loss of this scholar and offers its deepest sympathies to the friends and family of Professor Elias. In honor of Professor Elias, a new prize has been created (see below for more information).

•ALN•

The Robert H. Elias Essay Prize

The Robert H. Elias Essay Prize, named after the pioneering Dreiser scholar, is sponsored by the International Theodore Dreiser Society and is awarded annually to the graduate student or untenured faculty member who submits the best previously unpublished essay on the topic of naturalism or on the work of a naturalist author. Elias, professor emeritus at Cornell University, knew Dreiser and wrote the first official biography, *Theodore Dreiser, Apostle of Nature* (1949), and his groundbreaking three-volume edition of Dreiser's letters (1959) was the standard collection of the novelist's general correspondence for fifty years.

Applicants may submit essays that consider any aspect of naturalism, broadly conceived. We are especially interested in essays that push the boundaries of conventional conceptions of naturalism and those that make a case for extending traditional interpretations to later writers or that establish connections to other literary movements. In addition to a cash award of \$250, the winning essay will appear in *Studies in American Naturalism*, a peer-reviewed journal sponsored by the Society. Other worthy essays besides the winner will be considered for publication as well.

Electronic submissions are encouraged, either as Word or PDF files. Please identify yourself on a cover page and not on the manuscript itself, and include a postal mailing address and telephone number.

Manuscripts should be sent to:

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Roger W. Smith has developed a new web site dedicated to Theodore Dreiser. The site contains a bibliography of works about Dreiser from 1990 to the present, genealogies of Dreiser and related families, and a Dreiser chronology. Over time, the bibliography will be expanded to include complete coverage for all years and to include works by Dreiser. Additional material and resources about Dreiser are forthcoming, and new material will be added to the site on an ongoing basis. The site can be found at <http://dreiseronline.com>.

Bibliographic Update

Listed below are studies on American literary naturalism published since the last bibliographic update (in the October 2007 issue of ALN). 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 six months and it is not listed below, please let us know and we will make sure to note it in the next issue of ALN.

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From the Archives

One of the more interesting commentaries on Le roman expérimental in the late 19th century was presented by W. R. Thayer in 1890. Thayer provides an overview of Zola's concept of the "experimental novel"—quoting liberally from Zola's essay of that title. Along the way, particularly towards the end of the essay, Thayer points out a few of the problems inherent in Zola's theory. Other commentators would take Zola to task with more exuberance, but Thayer's reserved style and poignant questions make his essay an interesting document in the theory wars of the late nineteenth century.

[*The Open Court, a Quarterly Magazine*
June 26, 1890]

THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD IN FICTION.

By W. R. Thayer

Each age has the defects of its qualities. That the present age stands pre-eminent in scientific attainments, no one will deny; but not every one perceives that the very qualities which conduce to precious results in Science appear as defects when they are applied to other departments of human energy. Thus there is now a school of writers and artists who maintain that the "scientific method" should be adopted in Fiction and Art. Is this assumption valid? Should a novel or a painting be subjected to the same processes as a medical treatise, or a surgical

plate? Let us hear what the advocates of this theory, which goes under the name of Realism or Naturalism, have to say in their defence; and let us listen to their spokesman, Zola, because he has formulated this theory, and because he is a strong thinker, whereas Mr. Howells and the other Realists in England and America merely echo and imitate him.

Zola was originally a Romanticist, but on reading the works of the able physiologist, Claude Bernard, who found medicine an art and left it a science, he was persuaded that a similar improvement was possible in the art of fiction. "Thanks to the experimental method,"* he says, "Bernard first established the difference which exists between the sciences of observation and the sciences of experiment. He comes to the conclusion that experiment is at bottom only intentional observation. All experimental reasoning is based on doubt, for the experimenter should have no preconceived idea in the presence of nature, and should always retain his liberty of mind. He simply accepts the phenomena which are produced, when they are proved." This is the attitude of the true scientist towards inanimate nature, which he regards as an organism in which chemical and dynamical processes are in constant operation: but, since inanimate objects can be thus observed, thus experimented upon, what shall prevent the scientist from treating all animate nature, including man, in the same fashion.

"The difference depends solely on the fact that a material object is surrounded by an external and common environment whilst the elements of superior organisms move in an internal and perfected environment, which is nevertheless endowed with constant physico-chemical properties, like the external environment. Whence it follows that there is an absolute determinism in the conditions of existence of natural phenomena, as well for living bodies as for inanimate objects. Determinism is the cause which determines the apparition of phenomena. This immediate cause is nothing more than the physical and material condition of the existence or of the manifestation of phenomena. The aim of the experimental method, the goal of all scientific research, is therefore identical for living bodies and for inanimate objects: it consists in finding the relations which unite any phenomenon whatsoever to its immediate cause, or,—to express this in another way—to determine the conditions necessary to the manifestation of this phenomenon. Experimental science ought not to trouble herself about the *why* of things: she explains the *how*, no more."

This is the gist of Bernard's theory of the purpose and scope of science, and he proceeds to demonstrate that it should be applied to the study and practice of medicine. The physician is not

merely a scientific *observer*, but he is also an *experimenter*: a distinction well put, as we shall perceive when we reflect that astronomy, for instance, can never be more than a science of observation, because the astronomer cannot act upon the stars, but can only observe their motions and conditions; whereas chemistry or physiology is a science of experiment, because the chemist or physiologist can here act upon nature and modify it. Bernard further defines the duties of these two classes of scientific men.

"The observer," he says, "verifies purely and simply the phenomena which he has under his eyes. He should be the photographer of phenomena; his observations should exactly represent nature. He listens to her and he writes her dictation. But as soon as this fact has been verified and the phenomenon well observed, the idea comes, reasoning intervenes, and the experimenter is he who, in virtue of an interpretation more or less probable, but anticipated, of the phenomena observed, institutes the experiment in such a way that, in the logical order of his previsions, it may furnish a result to serve to correct the hypothesis or the preconceived idea. From the moment when the result of the experiment is manifest, the experimenter confronts a veritable observation which he has superinduced, and which must be verified, like every observation, without preconceived idea. The experimenter should then disappear, or, rather, transform himself instantly into the observer."

Such is the double role of the man of science: such, Zola affirms, should be the method of the novelist whose "problem is to know what a certain passion, operating in a given *milieu* and in certain conditions, will produce from the point of view of the individual and of society. An experimental novel is simply that report of the experiment, which the novelist repeats under the eyes of the public. In a word, the whole process consists in taking the facts from nature, then of studying the mechanism of facts, in working upon them by the modifications of circumstances and of *milieux*, without ever departing from the laws of nature." Of course, Zola acknowledges, we are far from having attained in our observation of human nature, to the certitudes of chemistry, or even of the recently-developed science of physiology: but then, the scientific novel is only in its infancy. "We must modify nature, without going outside of nature, when we employ in our novels the experimental method." A significant admission, to which may be joined the following sentence: "The novelist must see, comprehend, invent. An observed fact should inspire the idea of the experiment to be made, of the novel to be writ-

ten, to arrive at the complete understanding of a truth. He starts from doubt in order to arrive at absolute knowledge: and he does not cease to doubt until the mechanism of a passion, taken apart and put together again by him, works according to the laws fixed by nature.”

The determinism of inanimate bodies was long ago established; that of living bodies is becoming day by day recognized, and Zola does not hesitate to announce the approach of the time “when the laws of thought and of passions will be formulated in their turn. A single determinism must rule the stone by the wayside and the brain of man. . . . In a word, we novelists should operate on the character, on the passions, on facts human and social, as the chemist and physicist operate on inanimate bodies, and the physiologist operates on living bodies. Determinism dominates all.” But not until we shall have mastered the physico-chemical conditions of the inner nature of man, shall we find what determines the external phenomena of his life. “The experimental novel is a consequence of the scientific evolution of the century; it continues and completes physiology, which in turn rests on chemistry and physics; it substitutes for the study of man abstract, of man metaphysical, the study of man natural, submitted to physico-chemical laws and determined by the influences of his surroundings; it is, in a word, the literature of our scientific age, as classic and romantic literature corresponded to a scholastic and to a theological age.”

Coming now to the question of the application and moral purpose of this method, Zola declares that the great role of the realistic novelist is “to penetrate the *how* of things, in order to become superior to things, and to reduce them to the state of obedient wheels. We are experimental novelists.” But it is unjust, he says, to charge realists with being materialists; the determinism which they seek to trace in the acts and thoughts of human beings must not be confounded with fatalism. “Fatalism supposes the inevitable manifestation of a phenomenon independent of its conditions, whereas determinism is the necessary condition of a phenomenon of which the manifestation is not forced.” Apply the experimental method, and “there is no longer either materialism, or spiritualism, either dead matter, or living matter; there are only phenomena whose conditions are to be determined, that is to say, circumstances which play the role of immediate cause in relation to these phenomena.” We are to draw no moral

from our works, which should carry their own moral with them. The public has no right to incense itself at any experiment the novelist may choose to make in its presence. The chemist does not hate prussic acid or azote; he suppresses the chemicals when they are harmful to him. Society should behave with such neutral equanimity, when the Realist submits to it his reports of degradation and crime.

By simply reasoning from analogy, we may predict that the experimental novel will inevitably be the backbone of all future literature—nay, that the experimental method will eventually dominate poetry, painting and sculpture—if, indeed, these arts do not have the good sense to betake themselves as fast as they can to oblivion.

“The human mind,” says Bernard, “at the various periods of its evolution, has passed successively through sentiment, reason, and experiment. At first, when sentiment alone imposed itself on reason, it created the truth of faith, that is theology. Reason or philosophy becoming next mistress, it begot scholasticism. Finally experiment,—that is the study of natural phenomena,—taught man that the truths of the exterior world are formulated, at the outset, neither in the sentiment nor in the reason. These are only our indispensable guides; but, to reach these truths, it is necessary to descend into the objective reality of things where they lie hidden with their phenomenal forms. . . . In the search for truth by means of this (experimental) method, the sentiment has always the initiative, and begets the *a priori* idea or intuition; reason, or reasoning, then develops the idea and deduces its logical consequences.”

To all of which Zola says amen. “We can admit nothing occult; there are but phenomena and the conditions of phenomena,” declares M. Bernard; and again Zola replies amen.

Bernard seems to be a little more lenient than his disciple towards romancers and poets, and even compares philosophers to “musicians who play the *Marseillaise* of Theories, whilst men of science hurl themselves in an assault upon the unknown.”

Savants need recreation from their exact investigations, says Zola, and so they tolerate the most extravagant theories, and wish to restrict literature to the ideal. “But it is only a flute *aria* which they permit one to play to them.” “Literary and artistic productions never grow old,” says Bernhard, “in the sense that they are the expressions of sentiments as immutable as human nature.” “True,” replies Zola

“but a great *savant* will also be read from this same point of view, because the spectacle of a great *savant* who has been able to write is quite as interesting as that of a great poet.” But Bernard seems (to me, at least) to have stated the insurmountable objection to Zola’s pretensions, when he says: “*In the arts and in letters, personality dominates all.* The question there is of a spontaneous creation of the mind, and this has no more in common with the verification of natural phenomena, in which our mind must create nothing.” Zola glides over this fatal truth, by merely expressing surprise; “I am at a loss to understand to what branch of letters this most illustrious *savant* refers,” says he; “without doubt, he is thinking of lyric poetry, because he would not have written this sentence had the experimental novel—the works of Balzac and of Stendhal—been in his mind.” Metaphysical man being dead, this is the age of physiological man. “Doubtless,” says Zola, in concluding his gospel, “the wrath of Achilles, the love of Dido, will remain pictures eternally beautiful; but behold, the need overtakes us of analyzing wrath and love, and of seeing precisely how these passions operate in the human being. The point of view is new, it becomes experimental instead of being philosophical. In short, all is summed up in this grand fact: the experimental method, as well in literature as in the sciences, is on the road to determine these phenomena natural, individual, and social, of which till now metaphysics had given only irrational and supernatural explanations.”

Let us complete this epitome of Zola’s doctrines by quoting the description he gives of the actual method of an experimental novelist who wishes, for example, to write a novel on the theatrical world:—

“He starts from this general idea, without having as yet either a fact or a person. His first care will be to collect in notes all that he knows about this world which he wishes to paint. He has been acquainted with some actor, he has attended some performance. Here are already documents—the best—which have ripened in him. Then, he will set out on the war-path, he will make the men best informed on the subject talk with him, he will gather the sayings, the stories, the portraits. Nor is this all; he will next look up written documents, reading all that may be useful to him. Finally, he will visit the places; he will live a few days in a theatre in order to learn its smallest nooks; he will pass his evenings in an actress’s box; he will impregnate himself as much as possible with the surrounding atmosphere. And, the documents being complete, his novel will take shape of itself. The novelist will have only to distrib-

ute the facts logically. From all he has heard the end of the drama—the story which he needs to set up the carcass of his chapters—will disengage itself. The interest is no longer in the strangeness of the story; on the contrary, the more that it is *banale* and general, the more will it become typical. To make real persons move among real surroundings, to give to the reader a shred of human life,—there is all the realistic novel.”

Here, then, is the authentic statement of this new method, which we are assured, is the only true one. This is the Magna Charta on which all future literature will base its claims to liberty. I confess, that, for a person who despises metaphysics, Zola has indulged pretty freely in metaphysical terms, and has not always used them strictly: but this should not prejudice us in our estimate of the theory itself. Have not theologians for centuries succeeded in wrapping up the simple and beautiful teachings of Christ in mummy-cloths of dogma?

The chief excellence in this theory I conceive to be its honesty, and its recognition of the possible importance of any human being as a subject of investigation. Now, these merits can hardly be too highly admired. Honesty, the purpose on the part of the narrator to tell only what he can verify, has not always guided the makers of books. Most men are doctrinaires,—Zola himself is a conspicuous doctrinaire,—persons that is, who, having absorbed some particular theory of life, or art, fashion all their work, all their speech, to match that view. They are candid as far as they go. Take, for a single example, Sunday School literature; the good little boy attends church on Sunday, while the bad little boy goes skating and falls into an air-hole; one grows up to be a deacon, the other—if he escapes drowning—is sure to spend the larger part of his manhood in prison, and his old age in the poor-house. This literature is not honest, because it substitutes for the intricate but inevitable working of the moral law, an arbitrary scheme of rewards; it is based not upon the methods of Providence, but upon the methods which the pious writer would adopt were he Providence. Ascending higher in the scale of literature, we encounter troops of novels inspired with a purpose, whether didactic, or political, or economical. To writers who contemplate the world in this fashion, “it has lost its innocence,” and we need but confront them with Zola’s declaration, that the work should convey its own moral. Nature does not write a tag on each of us, but she leaves us to decide for ourselves whether a man, a deed, a policy, be good or bad. The lesson of *Lear*, the significance of

Macbeth, seem restricted and paltry when interpreted by commentators. So far then as Realists live up to their rule of honesty we shall not quarrel with them. Let us tolerate nothing but the truth, whether in science or in art. But—what is Truth?

The second admirable tenet of the Realist—that any human being may be worthy of reverent study—harmonizes at once with the catholic attitude which science has taught us to hold toward the material world, and with the democratic spirit which is slowly revolutionizing our social views. During this century science has turned from the splendid but vain search for the absolute and infinite, to the patient examination of the relative and finite. It has given up trying to solve the *why* of things, and has devoted itself with unexampled precision and enthusiasm to describe the *how* of things. 'Tis an age of taking account of stock and of making inventories: we will know and name every molecule; we will analyze every force, and represent it by a formula. It is as if the world were a vast library whose myriads of volumes and pamphlets had hitherto lain in confusion on the floors and in the corners; an army of enlightened and zealous scholars enter it; they sweep away the cobwebs and dust; they examine and catalogue each book, and put it on the proper shelf, according to order and system, so that any work in the collection can henceforth be readily consulted. In this undertaking there is plainly no great and no small. Not an atom can be neglected; things are not intrinsically precious, but they may be of inestimable importance in their relations to other things. A fossil fern-leaf may be the clue to a whole series of botanical problems; the twitching of the muscles of a vivisected frog, may reveal to the surgeon the operations of disease in human bodies, and suggest to him a remedy therefor. Every object in nature, thus refers to every other object. The fact that a ray of light is split up into the primary colors in passing through a lens, seemed merely a curious bit of information, until it enabled us by means of the spectroscope, to know the constitution of the stars. No wonder that no particle, no creature is insignificant to the man of science! He stands midway between the world of the infinitely small and the world of the infinitely great. Looking down through his microscope he passes in review all organized life down to the primordial cell or germ, he scrutinizes all inorganic matter down to the atom; looking up through his telescope, he beholds the planets and the sun, Sirius and Canopus

and Vega, and the incalculably distant nebulae, and the motions of the constellations and the ebb and flow of the sidereal tides. Everywhere he beholds unity; everything teaching him catholicity and reverence. But, admitting this, shall we not ask whether the methods, which give the best results in Science, are the best methods for Fiction and Art? Does our insight into human nature depend upon the power of our telescopes or the sharpness of our lancets?

*I quote throughout from Zola's *Le Roman Experimental*.

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Coming up in our Fall 2009 Issue: Naturalism news. Another bibliographic update. More stuff from the archives. An interview with a scholar working in the field. Plus at least one Haiku on the essence of the *determinism v. freedom of the will* debate, if someone writes one and sends it in.

If you would like to contribute to ALN, please contact the editors. We are particularly interested in articles of 2000-3000 words that look at literary naturalism in the classroom, both in the United States and abroad. If you would like to contribute such a piece, we'd like to hear from you. In addition, if you have items suitable for presentation in *From the Archives*, please let us know.

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