

The octopus (frank norris) essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Frank Norris (1870-1902) by Janice Albert Norris' novels include Blix (1899), The Pit (1903), The Octopus (1901), and the memorable McTeague (1899).

Of the writers who assembled in San Francisco's Bohemian Club along with Joaquin Miller and Jack London, young Norris was one of the most energetic, filled with ideas. Like many of his contemporaries, he was profoundly influenced by the advent of Darwinism, and Thomas Henry Huxley's philosophical defense of it. Norris was particularly influenced by an optimistic strand of Darwinist philosophy taught by Joseph LeConte, whom Norris studied under while at UC-Berkeley. Through many of his novels, notably McTeague, runs a preoccupation with the notion of the civilized man overcoming the inner "brute", his animalistic tendencies. His peculiar, and often confused, brand of Social Darwinism also bears the influence of the early criminologist Cesare Lombroso and the French naturalist Emile Zola. Frank Norris rests eternally in the deep shade of four Irish yew trees.

His elegant monument, dedicated by his fraternity brothers ???????? ?????????? at the University of California, is an eight-foot tablet in the Arts and Crafts style. It bears his writer's name, Frank, rather than his given name of Benjamin Franklin Norris, and is embellished ?????????? with three blades of wheat, in tribute to his epic novel, "The Octopus," about wheat farming in the San Joaquin Valley. Roman numerals (MDCCCLXX-MCMII) blunt the awful fact that this prolific, nationally recognized writer died at the age of 32. Frank Norris, novelist and critic, was one of the progressive writers of his time whose works dealt with social problems and won the attention of the reading public.

His critical articles on literature and style did much to turn young writers towards realism. Born in Chicago in 1870 in the family of a rich jeweller, Norris was able to get a good education. When Frank was still a boy, his father moved to California where he became a successful businessman. At the age of seventeen Norris went to Paris where he studied art.

Reading the novels of Emile Zola fueled his imagination and sharpened his sense of creative purpose. He studied literature and the arts for about two years. In 1890 he entered the University of California, and later went to study at Harvard University. Later, as an undergraduate at the University of California at Berkeley, he studied the philosophy of evolution in the natural history classes of Joseph LeConte. In 1895, he transferred to Harvard College to develop his writing under Lewis E.

Gates. A study of his student work shows that *McTeague* was already in the making as a series of weekly themes. At the university he began to write his first novel, “*McTeague*”, which was considered to be one of the few naturalistic novels in America. Norris was writing a trilogy of San Francisco, of which *McTeague* was the middle piece, *Blix* the starting point, and *Vandover the Brute*, published posthumously in 1914, the conclusion. The novel was written under the influence of Zola in the style of the French naturalistic writers.

It was a portrayal of slum life in San Francisco. Unable to find a publisher at the time, Norris applied for newspaper work. At the outbreak of the Boer War he was sent to South Africa as a war-correspondent for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. On his return to San Francisco he became assistant editor for the

paper *The Wave*, but all his spare time he devoted to his career as a novelist. At heart a literary critic as much as a writer, Norris kept a keen eye on everything fresh and original in the creative work of other young writers.

When Crane's first novel "Maggie" appeared, he wrote a review in favour of the book and its gifted author. He was also the first critic to note young Dreiser's talent. Having read the manuscript of Dreiser's novel "Sister Carrie", he recommended it for publication. During his time at the University of California, Berkeley Norris was a brother in the Fraternity of Phi Gamma Delta.

Because of his involvement with a prank during the Class Day Exercises in 1893 the annual alumni dinner held by each Phi Gamma Delta chapter still bears his name. Phi Gamma Delta (also known as FJI) is a collegiate social fraternity with 107 chapters and 9 colonies across the United States and Canada. It was founded at Jefferson College, Pennsylvania in 1848 and its headquarters are located in Lexington, Kentucky, USA. Phi Gamma Delta is a member of the North-American Interfraternity Conference and, along with the Fraternity of Phi Kappa Psi, forms the Jefferson Duo.

1] The society they formed is called the Fraternity of Phi Gamma Delta. The founders, reverently referred to by Brothers today as the "Immortal Six", are John Templeton McCarty, Samuel Beatty Wilson, James Elliott, Jr. , Ellis Bailey Gregg, Daniel Webster Crofts, and Naaman Fletcher. [13] The first regular meeting of Phi Gamma Delta and the adoption of the Fraternity's Constitution took place on May 1, 1848.

[14] Consequently, May 1 was chosen to be “ Founder’s Day” at the 43rd Convention held in 1891 and has traditionally been celebrated as the founding date of the Fraternity ever since. 15][16] Frank Norris rests eternally in the deep shade of four Irish yew trees. His elegant monument, dedicated by his fraternity brothers ?????????? ?????????? at the University of California, is an eight-foot tablet in the Arts and Crafts style. It bears his writer’s name, Frank, rather than his given name of Benjamin Franklin Norris, and is embellished ?????????? with three blades of wheat, in tribute to his epic novel, “ The Octopus,” about wheat farming in the San Joaquin Valley.

Roman numerals (MDCCCLXX-MCMII) blunt the awful fact that this prolific, nationally recognized writer died at the age of 32. Norris’s knowledge of San Francisco was developed in the years between 1891 and 1899 when he completed over 120 pieces for The Wave, a periodical founded by Southern Pacific originally to promote Monterey’s new Hotel Del Monte. As a feature writer, Norris interviewed residents of all classes, from tamale vendors ?????????? ?????????? to society matrons and the crews of visiting battle ships. As the Tom Wolfe of his time, he took meticulous ?????????????? notes of life along Polk Street, reporting details so accurately that scholars have been able to trace the prototypes of all the shops and even the festivities recorded in the novel McTeague. His work as a journalist at The Wave took him to various corners of California. He witnessed an actual fight between the farmers and agents of the South-Pacific Railroad Company in the struggle of the farmers to defend their rights to the land they had cultivated.

The fight made a deep impression on the young writer. He knew that his thoughts on the farmers' movement would not be printed by the newspapers, so he saved this material for a book which he later wrote, "The Epic on the Wheat". The "Epic of the Wheat" was a second trilogy to record the drama of this industry from seed to sale. Norris had planned to write a vast trilogy, three separate novels on one and the same theme: the first book, "The Octopus", tells of the growing of the wheat; the second book, "The Pit", describes the marketing of the wheat; and the third novel, "The Wolf", was to be about the consumption of the wheat. But Norris completed only the first two parts of the trilogy, the stories of which take place in America.

These were received with great enthusiasm by the readers. The third book, which was to be set in Europe, was never written because of the author's untimely death. In 1900 Frank Norris married Jeanette Black. They had a child in 1901. The Spanish-American War found Norris in Cuba as a correspondent for an American magazine.

He wrote many articles against the war, which were not accepted by the editor because he characterized the war as a bloody stain on the L'SA and stressed the fact that the American soldiers were not at all enthusiastic about fighting for the imperialists. In Cuba he fell ill with yellow fever and had to return home. He went to live in New York where he began writing his novel "The Epic on the Wheat". But an operation for appendicitis stopped his creative work. He died in New York in 1902. Norris and his wife Jeannette had hoped to live and write on a ranch he had purchased from the widow of

Robert Louis Stevenson, ten miles west of Gilroy off Route, but his sudden death from appendicitis in 1902 ended everything.

His cabin, though private, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Mountain View Cemetery, his burial place, is located at the foot of Piedmont Avenue in Oakland, California. Norris' gravesite is Plot 12, Lot 105; Site 11 on the cemetery's map of " Graves of Noted Persons. Norris' *McTeague* has been filmed repeatedly, most famously as a 1924 film called *Greed* by director Erich von Stroheim, which is today considered a classic of silent cinema. [2] An opera by William Bolcolm, based loosely on this 1899 novel, was premiered by Chicago's Lyric Opera in 1992. The work is in two acts, with libretto by Arnold Weinstein and Robert Altman.

The Lyric Opera's presentation featured Ben Heppner in the title role and Catherine Malfitano as Trina, the dentist's wife. His short story " A Deal in Wheat" (1903) and the novel *The Pit* were the basis for the 1909 D. W. Griffith film *A Corner in Wheat*. **NORRIS'S WORKS AND HIS VIEWS ON LITERATURE** In his first novel, " *McTeague*" (1899), Norris wanted to show the corrupting influence of gold upon human nature, and how it breeds greed and avarice in human beings.

The story is set in a poor district in San Francisco. Norris tried to depict the exact surroundings in great detail with an observant rather than with a philosophical eye, that is to say, he described life more from the outside. Towards the end of the century Norris made a clean break with the naturalistic method of writing. He wrote much about his views on realism in his critical articles. A collection of these articles was published posthumously

in 1903 under the title “ The Responsibilities of the Nove–list”. In these articles Norris writes about Leo Tolstoy.

In his estimation Tolstoy was one of the greatest of humanists because his works were not merely pictures copied from life but were works written about the people and addressed to the people. In his works the writer dealt with his sub–ject-matter from a sociological and economic point of view. The epic form which Norris chose for the work demanded large canvasses. Norris showed man as part of society: the individual is swallowed in the enormous mass of people and is swept along with them. Norris’s work often includes depictions of suffering caused by corrupt and greedy turn-of-the-century corporate monopolies, but Norris has been criticized for the apologetic stance his work seems to take, in the end, toward unbounded capitalism and corporate trusts.

In *The Octopus*, for example, the Pacific and Southwest Railroad is implicated in the suffering and deaths of a number of ranchers in Southern California. At the end of the novel, after a bloody shootout between farmers and railroad agents at one of the ranches (named *Los Muertos*), readers are encouraged to take a “ larger view” that sees that “ through the welter of blood at the irrigating ditch, [...] the great harvest of *Los Muertos* rolled like a flood from the Sierras to the Himalayas to feed thousands of starving scarecrows on the barren plains of India. ” Though free-wheeling market capitalism causes the deaths of many of the characters in the novel, this “ larger view always [. . .] discovers the Truth that will, in the end, prevail, and all things, surely, inevitably, resistlessly work together for good. ” One of his greatest books

may have been *Vandover and the Brute*, published after his death. The story is about four college friends, on their way to success, and the ruin of one through a degenerate lifestyle. *The Octopus* (Frank Norris) “*The Octopus*” is a 1901 story of farm life in California; by Frank Norris and the first part of a planned but uncompleted trilogy, *The Epic of Wheat*.

The Pit” —a story of the stock-market in Chicago. In both books Norris meant to expose the crimes of the businessmen and show how difficult it was for the farmers to struggle against the monopolies. Norris was inspired by role of the Southern Pacific Railroad in events surrounding the Mussel Slough Tragedy. It depicts the tension between the corrupt railroad and the ranchers and the ranchers’ League.

The Mussel Slough Tragedy was a dispute over land titles between settlers and the Southern Pacific Railroad that took place on May 11, 1880 on a farm located 9 km northwest of Hanford, California in the central San Joaquin Valley, leaving seven people dead. Frank Norris’ 1901 novel, *The Octopus: A California Story*, was inspired by this incident, as was W. C. Morrow’s 1882 novel *Blood-Money*. The exact history of the tragedy has been the source of some disagreement, due to a popular anti-railroad sentiment in the 1880s which saw the tragedy as a clear example of corrupt and cold-blooded corporate greed.

Muckraking journalists and anti-railroad activists glorified the settlers and used the tragedy as evidence and justification for their anti-corporate crusades ?????????? ?????? ??????? ??????????. AftermathAfterwards, seventeen people were indicted by a federal grand jury and five were found guilty of

willfully interfering with a marshal in performance of his duties (Braden, Patterson, Pryor, Purcell, and John J. Doyle, a leader in the Settler's League). They were convicted in federal court (with Judge Sawyer presiding) and sentenced to eight months in prison and fined \$300 each.

Their time spent in imprisonment was hardly difficult. Three of the men's wives were allowed to live with them, and Susan Curtis, daughter of one of the jailers, fell in love with and later married Braden. Upon their release in September 1881, they were greeted by a joyous crowd of 3, 000 in Hanford. Such was the anti-railroad sentiment that the five were looked upon as heroes across California, and those killed were considered martyrs ???????? who had given their lives for a cause. Nevertheless, the affair brought such a shock that people were sobered. The legal battle had been lost and the railroad had won.

The only concession SP made was to reduce the land price slightly. In the end, most people simply stayed where they were and purchased the land. Origins Following the release and subsequent success of Norris' 1899 *McTeague*, Norris began searching for an idea for his next project. Within a few weeks he had formulated his idea for a trilogy of novels on the topic of wheat, his 'Epic of the Wheat', from its growth in California (which would be the basis of *The Octopus*), to its distribution in Chicago (*The Pit*, published posthumously in 1903), to its consumption in a famished region of Europe or Asia (intended to be titled *The Wolf*, although never begun before his death). *The Octopus* itself was based on the Mussel Slough Tragedy of 1880, which involved a bloody conflict between ranchers and law agents defending the Southern Pacific Railroad.

The central issue was over the ownership of the ranches, which the farmers had leased from the railroad nearly ten years earlier with intentions of eventually purchasing the land. Although originally priced at \$2.50 to \$5 per acre, the railroad eventually opened the land for sale at prices adjusted for land improvements, leading to the conflict depicted in the book. Norris decided upon the project in March 1899, and by early April had left for California to research the project.

Over the following months he visited the locations of the incident and worked on nearby farms, gaining firsthand knowledge of the wheat farmer's life. He returned to New York that fall, and between January and December of 1900 wrote the manuscript for *The Octopus*, which was published the following April with substantial success. Plot Summary *The Octopus* depicts the conflict between wheat farmers in the San Joaquin Valley and the Pacific and Southwestern railroad (P&SR). The railroad attempts to take possession of the land the farmers have been improving for many years, forcing them to defend themselves.

The wheat farmers are represented by Magnus Derrick, the reluctant leader of the ad hoc ??????????? farmer's League designed to fight for retention of their land and low cost freight rates. S. Behrman serves as the local representative of P. & S. W. In his attempt at writing his great epic poem, Presley witnesses the disintegration of Annixter, Derrick, Hooven, and their families.

Characters Presley – A poet searching for a plot, as well as a surveyor of the dilemma between the ranchers and the railroad. The novel begins with him,

riding his bicycle across the countryside, and ends with him as well. He lives on Los Muertos with the Derricks as a friend of the family. The character appears to parallel the author, with Presley's search for a 'Song of the West' being comparable to Norris' 'Epic of the Wheat'. Presley later discards his grand ideas and publishes 'The Toilers', a poem about the farmer's plight which stirs up public interest in the issue.

Magnus Derrick – Owner of El Rancho de los Muertos and the father of Harran and Lyman Derrick, Magnus represents the upstanding integrity of the previous generations, as opposed to the modern, increasingly dishonest dealings of the youth, as represented by the railroad and the rancher's League, which Magnus leads. Harran Derrick – Son of Magnus, Harran aids his father on the ranch. It is Harran who persuades Magnus to head the League. Along with his father he is part of the inner circle of the ranchers' League. Lyman Derrick – Son of Magnus, Lyman is a lawyer in San Francisco up north.

Lyman is contracted by the League to represent the farmers on the state Railroad Commission, which decides on transport rates. Annixter – Owner and operator of the Quien Sabe Rancho, Annixter is a young, headstrong confirmed bachelor who, over the course of the novel, matures into a soft-hearted, selfless man, largely due to his developing interest in Hilma Tree. Part of the inner circle of the League. Vanamee – Long-time friend of Presley, Vanamee is a wanderer haunted by the tragic, violent death of a love interest, Angele Varian, years before. In the novel he works on different ranches and spends a great deal of time at the Mission San Juan de

Guadalajara, where Angele had been murdered. The novel compares Vanamee to biblical prophets, as he has a strong spiritual aspect.

S. Behrman – In addition to being a banker, real estate agent, and a political boss, S. Behrman is vilified by his representation of the railroad. As such, he is despised by the ranchers. Other important characters include: Hilma Tree, Hooven, Broderson, Osterman, Dyke, Cedarquist, Delaney, Annie Derrick, and Father Sarria. By the octopus Norris meant the new railroad that had been built across the great Californian valley.

The agents of the railroad are the villains ??????? in the story. There is the local banker, Behrman, a land speculator, and an agent of the railroad; there is a lawyer who is also a politician, and other businessmen. They are a gang of robbers who decide to make millions of dollars for themselves first by literally stealing land from the farmers, and then by raising railroad tariffs on the shipment of wheat. The farmers who till the soil in the valley along the San Joaquin River are unable to pay for the shipment of their goods. The railroad ruins the Californian farmers and finally they are to lose their land.

The farmers stick to their rights in armed defence, but it is the railroad firm that is victorious. The railroad grips ??????? the wheat growers in its cruel tentacles ???????. It spares neither man nor beast. The impact of the “octopus” is shown in one of the first scenes of the novel when a locomotive roars?????, by filling the air with the reek of hot oil, vomiting ????????????? smoke and sparks; it destroys on its way a flock of sheep that wandered upon the track.

It was a slaughter, a massacre of innocents. " Norris symbolizes by it the crushing of the men and women of the valley under the wheels of modern industrialism. The novel gives a picture of actual life in California. There is plowing ??????, plant-ing, harvesting, sheep-herding, merry-making, rabbit-hunting, love, labour, birth and death.

Norris sympathizes with the farmers. Everything he hated in capital-ist America is concentrated in the land speculator Behrman. He is the great boss, the unscrupulous dealer and money-lender. He is victorious, while the farmers whose sweat and blood went into the land lose the fight. They all meet with a tragic end.

Norris, the realist, does not make Behrman die in the fight with the farmers, because he knows that there surely will be another Behrman of the same kind, should this one be done away with. Norris sees the wheat as the symbol of a mightier power than that of the masters of the monopolies — the power of the toiling masses; therefore, at the end of the novel, Norris has Behrman suffocated to death under the grain while it is being loaded into the hold of the ship. Larger view" that sees that " through the welter of blood at the irrigating ditch, [..

.] the great harvest of Los Muertos rolled like a flood from the Sierras to the Himalayas to feed thousands of starving scarecrows on the barren plains of India. " Though free-wheeling market capitalism causes the deaths of many of the characters in the novel, this " larger view always [...] discovers the Truth that will, in the end, prevail, and all things, surely, inevitably, resistlessly work together for good.

“