

Example of the octopus essay

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



The book “ The Octopus” written by Frank Norris in the year 1901 falls in the genre of fictional epic and is one of the unique literary treatises. In the book, Norris discusses about the conflicts between the ranchers of California and wheat growers on one side and the politics and rail road on the other side. The company that operates the railroad controls the land, state legislature and local newspapers, and makes it tough for the wheat growers to survive in the nineteenth century California . In the Octopus, Norris envisions the study of production, processing and distribution of wheat from western California to the market place of Chicago and then to Europe. The book combines Norris’ naturalistic philosophies as it is a study of the boundaries between nature and artificial. Norris depicts the realities of alienation in the contemporary society of America, which majorly possessed political and economic shifts .

The Octopus gives an accurate account of the railroads, the tariffs and the hatred people developed towards the companies. Norris emphasizes on the nature of the modern American society of the nineteenth century rather counting pages on the way the railroad corporations worked. He discusses about the ruthless power of the railroad corporations, which leaped from mechanical to locomotive power. Except for the Canadian Pacific, the petulant and quarrelsome nature of the inept men working in the western railroads was common throughout the transcontinental . Though Norris had no physical involvement in the Populist movement of the twentieth century, the book stood as one of the major protest novels. The book describes the railroads as corporations with clumsy machinery containing melodramatic villains always in the search of an opportunity to trouble the wheat growers.

The Octopus makes it clear to the audience that Norris was a man who rejected the over-civilized ideas of the nineteenth century America. The characters of the novel define the issues of conflict and present a conception about the criticism of the American society and mostly think in terms of large fortunes. Through the fictional character of the novel, Presley, Norris gives an account of the sensitive and delicate nature of the poet. He portrays a sense of temperament in Presley and makes the readers realize that it is the forces that are responsible to control the events rather than people .

Through another character Vanamee, the author narrates the significance of life led by the ranchers when the land is ready for cultivating wheat. Norris emphasizes on how women engage with nature to lead an unsophisticated male-dominant society of the eighteenth century.

In regards to the American society, Norris' purpose of the novel was to demonstrate the immutability of the natural order, the socioeconomic changes happening in the nineteenth century America and the need for reforming the social system of America on the naturalistic lines in order to overcome the obstacles that retard the progress of the people . Norris explains how American men become selfish individualists and socio-economic anarchists instead of becoming an elemental aspect in nature. The overwhelming desire for profits makes the railroad corporations dwarf the values of the society. It makes the people ready to face all the odds with nature with their evil and socially injurious actions. Norris devotes a major part of the novel to the tragic consequences faced by the American society. He remarkably criticizes the class struggle of the wheat ranchers, which is the major cause for their retardation .

Norris regards the farmers of the American society as symbols of abused proletarian and unfortunate speculators who are less ingenious and powerful when compared to the competitors in the struggle for economic power. On the other hand, he considers the ranchers as ruthless exploiters indulging in the manipulation of freight rates with the sole purpose of acquiring fortunes on their single crop wheat. To exemplify the same, Norris makes use of the fictional character Magnus Derrick who is one of the humble and noble ranchers according to the traditional ethical standards. Norris asserts the deeds of Magnus, his willingness to exploit the land his gambling instinct as typical in comparison to the other ranchers of the group. The sad part of the book is that Norris never emphasizes on the appraisal of the men who work for the railroad.

It is evident from Shelgrim's explanation to Presley that the men working for the railroads fulfill the manifest purpose of the railroad as long as they make the railroad an efficient carrier of food for the people in a well-adjusted environment to cause indisputable benefits to the society in spite of the differences. However, the railroad workers are not as good as described by Shelgrim for they intervene with the production and distribution of wheat, break contracts, bribe with the ranchers, conspire among themselves, and fiddle with the law of supply and demand for wheat for their personal gain. Norris points out about the conditions of the natural society of the late-nineteenth century America as those created by men motivated by a lust for profit. Such conditions include the unjust blacklisting of faithful employees, frequent violation of verbal contracts, bribing the public officials and the custodians.

Though the book “ The Octopus” belongs to the twentieth century, it is a panoramic novel that gives an account of economic determinism and the Darwinian struggle for existence in the post-American Civil War era, which witnessed various battles among the capitalists and the monopolists . The episode of conflicts between the wheat ranchers and the railroad corporations was common during the twentieth century America as the country was free from various legislative restraints when Norris wrote the novel. The newspapers of the past showcase several bizarre incidents, which make the readers believe that the novel is not a mere fiction, but contains several elements of reality that happened during the twentieth century America. In spite of the sympathy Norris shows for the wheat ranchers, it is evident from the novel that it was the equal contribution of the ranchers for their suffrage due to their interest in exploiting the land to pillaging the resources for their selfish personal gains .

In comparison to other literary works written during the period in which Norris published the novel, the contemporary readers feel that “ The Octopus” feels unconvincing for its dramatic tragedy and distasteful conclusion on false notes. The book fails to maintain a balance between romance and realism. Norris could not confine to mere surface matters and included the two contradictory concepts of realism and romance, which apparently witness criticism . Though the novel is relevant and popular in the twenty-first century, it lacks robustness, which is necessary in the contemporary world. The book “ The Octopus,” urges the young writers of the contemporary period to succeed as good novelists by following personal morality. In spite of the drawbacks of the book, Norris tried his best to

maintain the philosophy of social regeneration thorough the concept of wheat production .

In the book “ The Octopus,” Norris views death as an illusion and a natural process. He states to the readers that there is no force that is capable to fight death and that one must accept and live in the best possible way by accepting the various roles handed to play in life . Norris emphasizes that even in the face of death, it is important that people do not treat others the way they treat each other in the novel. The conclusion of the novel is neither spurious nor ridiculous, but philosophically, it is both consistent and valid.

The novel possesses the power to correct the errors of the society and accept the future as an optimistic place free from bloodshed disasters. It is important to learn from the novel that the world is a society based on potent nature and indestructible laws. The novel educates the people of the contemporary world to determine social evil and reject all sorts of despotism, tyranny and injustice . The human suffering from unjust economics must make the people take intelligent reformatory moves rather than adjusting in the unhealthy environment of dominance from social, political and economic powers.

The best part of the novel is that Norris does not confuse determinism with fatalism. Norris’ optimistic belief that what happens once does not necessarily happen again impresses the readers. It is crucial that the readers understand from the novel that men must be responsible for their actions and feel guilty for faulty deeds . It is good that Norris does not believe that the socio-economic drawbacks of the twentieth century America would continue throughout eternity. To conclude, “ The Octopus” asserts that it is

force that is responsible to optimize the lives of the people rather than the people themselves. The book is informative to the readers, especially the students as it allows them to analyze the differences between the twentieth century America and the contemporary America. The book also provides immense knowledge on how one must lead their life and act responsibly for their actions.

References

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