

PATTERNS OF REPETITION IN THE NOVELS OF FRANK NORRIS

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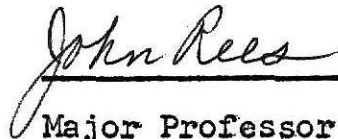
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Patterns of Repetition in the Novels of Frank Norris	Page 1
A Checklist of the Novels of Frank Norris	Page 25

PATTERNS OF REPETITION IN THE NOVELS OF FRANK NORRIS

The literary device of repetition is certainly a legitimate tool in the hands of the competent writer. It can be used by the novelist to emphasize major themes and attitudes, it can present similar descriptions, and it can help to bind apparently disparate sections of the novel together. But even when repetition does not function in these ways, it can give us insight into various aspects of a writer's work.

Throughout the novels of Frank Norris, we can distinguish two broadly different kinds of repetition. First, there are the evidences of repetition that occur in a single work where Norris is repeatedly using a unifying principle. Secondly, there is the larger repetitive pattern that is apparent through several novels.

Two of Norris' best known novels, McTeague and The Octopus, provide instances of repetition which are particularly obvious. The plot of McTeague turns on the premise that man is basically a brute, and if, through no fault of his own, the conventions and restraints of society are stripped away, man will become bestial. Accordingly, Norris had to show this "stripping away" and the ensuing headlong fall of both Trina and McTeague, but in such a way that it did not become ludicrous. As a remarkably simple and lucid means to this end, he used repetition.

Trina is first presented as an appealing young lady who is small, neat, and pretty and whose greatest physical asset is her beautiful hair.

Trina was very small and prettily made. Her face was round and rather pale; her eyes long and narrow and blue, like the half-open eyes of a little baby; her lips and the lobes of her tiny ears were pale, a little suggestive of anaemia; while across the bridge of her nose ran an adorable little line of freckles. But it was to her hair that one's attention was most attracted. Heaps and heaps of blue-black coils and braids, a royal crown of swarthy bands, a veritable sable tiara, heavy, abundant, odorous.¹

While Trina is not lovely in the sense of classic beauty, she is at least appealing in her prettiness, and Norris will use her most striking attributes again and again. Only a short time after her opening appearance, McTeague sees her again.

He saw her as he had seen her the day that Marcus had introduced them; saw her pale, round face, her narrow, half-open eyes, blue like the eyes of a baby; her tiny, pale ears, suggestive of anaemia; the freckles across the bridge of her nose; her pale lips; the tiara of royal black hair (McT, 68)

Here Norris does not describe Trina so completely because he can rely on McTeague's and the reader's memories of her first appearance; but he will repeat the pattern again, just before the wedding of McTeague and Trina.

The dentist saw again, as if for the first time, her small, pale face looking out from beneath her royal

¹ Frank Norris, McTeague (Garden City, 1899), pp. 19-20. Included in Complete Works (Garden City, 1928). All quotations are cited from this edition. For a checklist of the novels of Frank Norris, see page 25.

tiara of black hair; he saw again her long, narrow blue eyes; her lips, nose and tiny ears, pale and bloodless, suggestive of anaemia, as if all the vitality that should have lent them colour had been sucked up into the strands and coils of that wonderful hair. (McT, 139)

To this point, Norris has thrice explained that Trina is pretty and that her hair is worthy of notice. A reader is led to suspect that these repetitive descriptions are not being used indiscriminately but they are leading to something. And that something is readily apparent after the decline of the characters is well advanced, late in the novel. Even this early, Norris has already hinted about McTeague's coming disenchantment with her and her own decline.

Juxtaposed with the three appealing portraits is another later picture:

Worst of all, Trina lost her pretty ways and her good looks. The combined effects of hard work, avarice, poor food, and her husband's brutalities told on her swiftly. Her charming little figure grew coarse, stunted, and dumpy. She who had once been of a cat-like neatness, now slovened all day about the room in a dirty flannel wrapper, her slippers clap-clapping after her as she walked. At last she even neglected her hair, the wonderful swarthy tiara, the coiffure of a queen, that shaded her little pale forehead. In the morning she braided it before it was half combed, and piled and coiled it about her head in haphazard fashion. It came down half a dozen times a day; by evening it was an unkempt, tangled mass, a veritable rat's nest. (McT, 285)

The contrast is shocking, as it is supposed to be. To reinforce dramatically his theories of naturalism, Norris simply gives four descriptions that present the decline more or less

objectively and then allows the reader to make his own judgment about the truth or falsity of the scene. Norris knows what that judgment will be, however, and he counts on the reaction that he has so carefully prepared for through repetition.

In one other instance from the same novel, Norris uses repetition in a similar way. In the sitting room of the McTeagues hangs their wedding picture in a place of pride, amidst the comfortable furnishings.

It represented Trina, her veil thrown back, sitting very straight in a rep armchair, her elbows well in at her sides, holding her bouquet of cut flowers directly before her. The dentist stood at her side, one hand on her shoulder, the other thrust into the breast of his "Prince Albert," his chin in the air, his eyes to one side, his left foot forward in the attitude of a statue of a Secretary of State.
(McT, 191)

After the dentist has lost his job and after all of the other furnishings including the wedding picture have been sold at auction, the reader sees the portrait again after it has been returned by a friend:

It represented Trina sitting very erect in a rep armchair, holding her wedding bouquet straight before her, McTeague standing at her side, his left foot forward, one hand upon her shoulder, and the other thrust into the breast of his "Prince Albert" coat, in the attitude of a statue of a Secretary of State.
(McT, 241)

It is the same picture, described in almost exactly the same words, but it is not the same. The pride once there is gone, for McTeague no longer has "his chin in the air, his eyes to

one side, his left foot forward" The happy part of the McTeagues married lives is over, and after the return of the wedding picture, only the mocking portrait of the joy they once looked forward to remains. Through this small bit of selective repetition, the point is powerfully made.

In The Octopus, on the other hand, repetition functions less for contrast than for reinforcement. In this novel, Norris is dealing with large themes: Nature as a force in men's lives, the People as a force in Nature, and the Wheat that functions as yet another complex mysterious force. One easy way to understand this preoccupation with forces, and to discover how the use of repetition furthers the naturalistic dialectic, is to examine several instances. In the beginning, it must be understood that the earth is much more than simply the ground in which the wheat is planted. Instead, it is alive, it is still another force that Norris personifies. The novel opens after the harvest has been completed in the San Joaquin Valley and the ranchers wait for the rain that signals a new growing season.

It was as though the earth, after its period of reproduction, its pains of labour, had been delivered of the fruit of its loins, and now slept the sleep of exhaustion. (Oct, v.1, 11-12)

This image reappears in almost the same words a few chapters later:

It was the season after the harvest, and the great earth, the mother, after its period of reproduction, its pains

of labour, delivered of the fruit of its loins, slept the sleep of exhaustion (Oct, v.1, 44)

By this time, the reader will think of the earth/mother analogy each time the planting/reproduction parallel is considered by Norris in his large schematic outline of man and nature. As a result, after the rains, the plowing, the planting, the growing, and finally the second harvest, nearly at the conclusion of the novel, we are not surprised to find a third reference in the exact words of the first two:

It was the season after the harvest and the great earth, the mother, after its period of reproduction, its pains of labour, delivered of the fruit of its loins, slept the sleep of exhaustion
(Oct, v. 1, 342-3)

The novel has repeated a great cycle of life as the wheat has gone from birth to death. Norris has come full circle, relentlessly pursuing his theme.

In a somewhat different way, Norris again uses the wheat, this time as it sprouts overnight, to underline the new awareness two men have about themselves after observing this "sign" in nature. Annixter has believed himself to be a man who can live without love and has prided himself on the fact that he has never been captured by a woman. But Hilma has suddenly come to mean a great deal to him. After he has sat all night trying to come to terms with himself, he looks up and makes a startling discovery:

There it was, the Wheat, the Wheat! The little seed long planted, germinating in the deep, dark furrows of the soil, straining and swelling, suddenly in one night had burst upward to the light. The wheat had come up. It was there before him, around him, everywhere, illimitable, immeasurable. The winter brownness of the ground was overlaid with a little shimmer of green. (Oct, v. 2, 82)

For him, the sprouting of the wheat seems to have paralleled his own growing consciousness of his love for Hilma.

On the same night that Annixter learns something through a correlation between himself and nature, Vanamee is engaged in a similar struggle in a different part of the valley. He had lost his love, Angele, sixteen years before; victim of a criminal assault, she died after giving birth to the child. His struggle is more serious and more difficult than Annixter's. He cannot reconcile Angele's death to the teachings of Christianity which speak of a kind and beneficent God. Therefore, he has sought her return from the grave through a mysterious power of his, rather than praying to God for relief.

Angele is described repeatedly in the novel, and it is perhaps useful to consider the reason for this repetition before continuing. Presley had seen Angele before her death, and when he meets Vanamee, he remembers her for the reader's benefit:

At this moment he was trying to recall how she looked, with her hair of gold hanging in two straight plaits on either side of her face, making three-cornered her round white forehead; her wonderful eyes, violet-blue, heavy lidded, with their astonishing upward slant toward

the temples, the slant that gave a strange oriental cast to her face, perplexing, enchanting. He remembered the Egyptian fulness of the lips, the strange balancing movement of her head upon her slender neck, the same movement that one sees in a snake at poise.

(Oct, v. 1, 33-4)

Only a few pages later, as Presley begins to feel the inspiration that he needs to complete his epic of the West, he thinks of the tragic story of Angele again:

It was in Vanamee's strange history, the tragedy of his love; Angele Varian, with her marvellous loveliness; the Egyptian fulness of her lips, the perplexing upward slant of her violet eyes, bizarre, oriental; her white forehead made three-cornered by her plaits of gold hair (Oct, v. 1, 45)

By this time, the reader again senses a purpose behind these descriptions, or at least he suspects that should he meet Angele in the novel, he would surely recognize her. And this is exactly what happens. While Vanamee sits thinking his tortured thoughts, and asking for an answer to his questions and doubts, he looks up and sees Angele's daughter:

On either side of her face, making three-cornered her round white forehead, hung the soft masses of her hair of gold. Her hands hung limply at her sides. But from between her parted lips--lips of almost an Egyptian fulness--her breath came slow and regular, and her eyes, heavy lidded, slanting upwards toward the temples, perplexing, oriental, were closed. (Oct, v. 2, 104-5)

Because of the repetition, the reader knows as Vanamee knows what Angele will look like, and although one cannot expect her return from death, Vanamee can and does expect this. That the girl who is described for the third time is Angele's daughter

and not Angele herself, is enough reaffirmation for Vanamee. He can realize that death cannot stop nature, for a birth occurred in death, and his victorious shout proclaims his joy to the world.

But if the appearance of the daughter is not sufficient proof of the immortality of life, Norris still has one bit of repetition left to use. The wheat that provided the new birth of realization in Annixter does the same thing as the sun rises on the triumphant Vanamee:

There it was. The Wheat! The Wheat! In the night it had come up. It was there, everywhere, from margin to margin of the horizon. The earth, long empty, teemed with green life. (Oct, v. 2, 106)

For Vanamee, the sprouting of the wheat reinforces what he has already learned. For Frank Norris, the sprouting of the wheat is a simple collation of a similar experience of two men. Through the use of repetition, he has bound the two incidents together, while at the same time, he has reinforced a theme of the force he calls Nature.

In one final example, we can see how Norris derives both contrast and unity from repetition. His last novel, The Pit, explores through the eyes of Laura and Jadwin the business of selling the wheat from the San Joaquin and the rest of the country in the Chicago grain market. As the novel opens, Laura, who is a newcomer to Chicago, is attending the opera, where the businessmen of the city insist on discussing the

failure of a man named Helmick, who tried to "corner" the entire wheat supply of the grain market. In this scene, she also meets for the first time her future husband, Curtis Jadwin, a wealthy and handsome realtor. On the trip home from the theatre, she looks out of her carriage window:

And this was her last impression of the evening. The lighted office buildings, the murk of rain, the haze of light in the heavens, and raised against it the pile of the Board of Trade Building, black, grave, monolithic, crouching on its foundations, like a monstrous sphinx with blind eyes, silent, grave--crouching there without a sound, without sign of life under the night and the drifting veil of rain.
(Pit, 27)

The scene is a foreboding one, particularly because the lighted office buildings late in the evening signal the defeat of Helmick. But this passage becomes completely meaningful only when one reads the last paragraph of the novel, and then many things become clear.

And this was the last impression of the part of her life that that day brought to a close; the tall grey office buildings, the murk of rain, the haze of light in the heavens, and raised against it, the pile of the Board of Trade Building, black, monolithic, crouching on its foundations like a monstrous sphinx with blind eyes, silent, grave--crouching there without a sound, without sign of life, under the night and the drifting veil of rain. (pit, 403)

This time, Jadwin has tried to corner the market and he has failed, in much the same way Helmick did. The Jadwins are leaving town, all but penniless after failing to subdue the force Norris calls Wheat. The novel has come full circle,

as is emphasized by the use of a single paragraph of repetition. Laura's life has also come full circle, from a beginning in Chicago to a presumed beginning in a new town in the West.

While these are certainly not the only examples of repetition to be found within single novels of Frank Norris, they are among the most noticeable and the most functional. In these cases, moreover, we can fairly assume that Norris knew exactly what he was doing and what the effect would be. We cannot be so confident about his purposes, however, when the examples of repetition occur throughout several novels. But if we examine these, perhaps we can understand more fully how Norris operated as a writer.

It has not been difficult to see the mind of Frank Norris working behind the repetitions that he incorporated into single novels. Most often, he seems to have intended these passages to unify the novel, to provide contrasting descriptions, or to reinforce a theme. But coming to an understanding of the principles (if indeed he had conscious ones) behind his use of repetition throughout several novels is far more difficult. The first problem is that there is seldom a sustained mood or feeling, as there was in the passages concerning the wedding portrait, that can provide at least a basis of judgment. The second problem is that one of Norris' early novels which is unusually rich in repetitive passages, Vandover and the Brute, was not published until long after his death; consequently, one cannot

be sure that Norris would have had it printed as it is, without revision, or perhaps even printed at all. Therefore, any conclusions drawn in this section must be more speculative than those of the preceding section.

In any event, there exist striking parallels between sections of the early Vandover and Norris' last novel, The Pit. One set of these passages has to do with the opera, and presumably those of The Pit were copied directly from the earlier Vandover. Perhaps Norris felt that since he had so completely described the sights and sounds of the opera once, and that since his book was not yet in print, the repetition would save time and be completely his own concern. On the other hand, since several of the passages are altered slightly, Norris may have felt that the parallels wouldn't be especially conspicuous. Or, of course, he may not have copied consciously at all. In any case, the repetition is there and it may well be examined, for, deliberate or not, it occasionally demonstrates the development of Norris' narrative skill.

The visit to the opera in Vandover occurs midway through the novel, after Vandover has begun to decline and after the reader has perceived certain evidences that the decline will continue. But the opera provides an interlude or plateau in Vandover's otherwise direct downward course, for he feels that music ennobles him and that because of it, he can become a

better person. Almost the same elevating qualities are given to music in The Pit, where the opera scene we have already noted begins the novel, and where Laura feels her own powers of goodness brought out by the opera.

The theatre Vandover attended in San Francisco strongly suggests the one Laura patronized in Chicago. In Vandover,

The atmosphere was heavy with the smell of gas, of plush upholstery, of wilting bouquets and of sachet. (Van, 183)

In The Pit, the odors are the same and only the order is reversed:

Inside it was dark, and a prolonged puff of hot air, thick with the mingled odours of flowers, perfume, upholstery, and gas, enveloped her upon the instant. (Pit, 16)

Not only is the smell of the two theatres the same but the initial sight is directly parallel except for a slight change of simile. Vandover sees that

The only movement perceptible throughout the audience was the little swaying of gay-coloured fans like the balancing of butterflies about the light.
(Van, 183)

In Chicago, Laura sees much the same thing:

All the lights were lowered; only through the gloom the swaying of a multitude of fans, pale coloured, like night-moths balancing in the twilight, defined itself. (Pit, 17)

When the orchestra comes out to tune up the instruments, the sounds are very much alike in both theatres. In Vandover the musicians

sent up a prolonged medley of sounds, little minor chirps and cries from the violins, liquid runs and mellow gurgles from the oboes, flutes, and woodwind instruments, and an occasional deep-toned purring from the bass viols. (Van, 185-6)

The description in The Pit is developed somewhat further, but it is essentially very similar.

Soon they began to tune up, and a vague bourdon of many sounds--the subdued snarl of the cornets, the dull mutter of the bass viols, the liquid gurgling of the flageolets and woodwind instruments, now and then pierced by the strident chirps and cries of the violins, rose into the air dominating the incessant clamour of conversation that came from all parts of the theatre. (Pit, 24)

After the opera is over, and while each of the central characters involves himself in his own thoughts of personal improvement, the accompanying sights and sounds are very much the same in both theatres. In San Francisco,

there was a roar of applause. The gallery whistled and stamped. Everyone relaxed his or her position, drawing a long breath, looking about. There was a general stir; the lights in the great glass chandelier clicked and blazed up, and the murmur of conversation arose All over the house one heard the shrill voices of the boys crying out: "Op'ra books--books for the op'ra--words and music for the op'ra." (Van, 185)

In Chicago, the ending is much the same except that a view of the stage is substituted for a view of the audience:

The house roared with applause. The scene was recalled again and again. The tenor, scrambling to his feet joined hands with the baritone, soprano, and other artists and all bowed repeatedly. Then the curtain fell for the last time, the lights of the great chandelier clicked and blazed up, and from every quarter of the house came the cries of the programme sellers:

"Opera books. Books of the opera. Words and music of the opera." (Pit, 29)

But now Norris made an interesting addition. If he was using the incident in Vandover to construct the scene in The Pit, then he apparently decided to borrow still another bit of business from several pages earlier in Vandover. Vandover had attended a party, a very dismal amusement for him as it turned out, and Norris describes the scene as the guests are leaving the house:

As the first groups reached the open air there was a great cry: "Why it's pouring rain!" This was taken up and repeated and carried all the way back into the house. There were exclamations of dismay and annoyance: "Why it's raining right down!" "What shall we do!" Tempers were lost, brothers and sisters quarrelling with each other over the question of umbrellas On the horse-block stood the caller, chanting up the carriages at the top of his voice. The street was full of coupes, carriages, and hacks, the rain drops showing in a golden blur as they fell across the steaming light of their lamps. The horses were smoking and restless, and the drivers in oilskins and rubber blankets were wrangling and shouting. At every instant there was a long roll of wheels interrupted by the banging of the doors. Near the caller stood a useless policeman, his shield pinned on the outside of his wet rubber coat, on which the carriage lamps were momentarily reflected in long vertical streaks. (Van, 173)

This incident is repeated in The Pit, this time as the patrons are leaving the theatre. Here again, an abrupt change in the weather causes some inconvenience:

But as they came out from the foyer, where the first draughts of outside air began to make themselves felt, there were exclamations:

"It's raining."

"Why, it's raining right down."

It was true. Abruptly the weather had moderated and the fine, dry snow that had been falling since early evening had changed to a lugubrious drizzle.

A wave of consternation invaded the vestibule for those who had not come in carriages, or whose carriages had not arrived. Tempers were lost; women cloaked to the ears, their heads protected only by fichus or mantillas, quarrelled with husbands or cousins or brothers over the question of umbrellas. The vestibules were crowded to suffocation, and the aigrettes nodded and swayed again in alternate gusts, now of moist, chill atmosphere from without, and now of stale, hot air that exhaled in long puffs from the inside doors of the theatre itself. Here and there in the press, footmen, their top hats in rubber cases, their hands full of umbrellas, searched anxiously for their masters.

Outside upon the sidewalks and by the curbs, an apparently inextricable confusion prevailed; policemen with drawn clubs laboured and objurated; anxious, preoccupied young men, their opera hats and gloves beaded with rain, hurried to and fro, searching for their carriages. At the edge of the awning, the caller, a gigantic fellow in gold-faced uniform, shouted the numbers in a roaring sing-song that dominated every other sound. Coachmen, their wet rubber coats reflecting the lamplight, called back and forth, furious quarrels broke out between hansom drivers and the police officers, steaming horses with jingling bits, their backs covered with dark green cloths, plunged and pranced, carriage doors banged, and the roll of wheels upon the pavement was as the reverberation of artillery caissons.

(Pit, 32-3)

It will be immediately noted that this second passage, from The Pit, is much more fully developed than the one from the earlier Vandover. The interior view of the building is more complete. The brothers and sisters who are quarreling are replaced by the more mature ladies, more concerned with their clothing, and by husbands, cousins and brothers. The vestibule is described more fully, with attention paid to the atmosphere as well as to the people. There is certainly more

activity with the footmen added to the "press" to further complicate the already crowded scene.

Outside the building, the same confused situation exists, but again it is more complete and detailed. The single "useless" policeman of Vandover is replaced by several who are very active. The wet young men and the caller, this time with a personality of his own, add to the bustle of activity. Finally, the long last sentence which includes the coachmen, hansom drivers, police officers, horses, carriage doors, and artillery caissons, tends to create a breathless effect of action and confusion. In short, if Norris used the earlier novel to provide the incident for the later, as he seems to have done, he shows a certain development as an artist. He pays more attention to detail, and he is able to reinforce the feeling of chaotic activity that generally seems to pervade The Pit, with this small but complete description of the exterior of an opera house.

In at least one other instance, Vandover and the Brute parallels yet another Norris novel. Blix, a story of young love in San Francisco, was published in 1899; and again, dating repetition between a novel published during an author's life and one that he had not the opportunity to revise can be only conjectural. But here the repetition is again so close and so exact that there can be little doubt of conscious intention,

this time with Vandover showing the greater development.

The incident in question concerns the simple description of a meal, and then closely related to it, the serving of that meal. In Blix, the passage is short and succinct:

Tea was had at half-past five. Never in the history of the family had its menu varied: cold ham, potato salad, pork and beans, canned fruit, chocolate, and the inevitable pitcher of ice-water. (Bl, 7)

In Vandover, on the other hand, the situation is for the most part the same, but the description is again more complete:

About half-past five, as they were talking about amateur photography, Mrs. Ravis came in and called them to tea.

Tea with the Ravises was the old-fashioned tea of twenty years ago. One never saw any of the modern "delicacies" on their Sunday evening table, no enticing cold lunch, no spices, not even catsup or pepper sauces. The turkey or chicken they had had for dinner was served cold in slices; there was canned fruit, preserves, tea, crackers, bread and butter, a large dish of cold pork and beans, and a huge pitcher of ice-water. (Van, 70)

In each case, the picture of what was on the table is followed by a paragraph showing the self-conscious awkwardness of a waitress serving the tea. In Blix, it is Maggie who suffers:

In the absence of Victorine, Maggie waited on the table, very uncomfortable in her good dress and stiff white apron. She stood off from the table, making awkward dabs at it from time to time. In her excess of deference she developed a clumsiness that was beyond all expression. She passed the plates upon the wrong side, and remembered herself with broken apology at inopportune moments. She dropped a spoon, she spilt the ice water. She handled the delft cups and platters with an exaggerated solicitude, as though they were glass bombs. She brushed the crumbs into their

laps instead of into the crumb-tray, and at last, when she had set even Travis's placid nerves in a jangle, was dismissed to the kitchen, and retired with a gasp of unspeakable relief. (Bl, 8)

In the parallel passage in Vandover, a certain expansion is again evident, with Victorine's conduct more fully rendered than Maggie's:

In the absence of June, Victorine the cook went through the agony of waiting on the table, very nervous and embarrassed in her clean calico gown and starched apron. Her hands were red and knotty, smelling of soap, and they touched the chinaware with overzealous and constraining tenderness as if the plates and dishes had been delicate glass butterflies. She stood off at a distance from the table making sudden and awkward dabs at it. When it came to passing the plates, she passed them on the wrong side and remembered herself at the wrong moment with a stammering apology. In her excess of politeness she kept up a constant murmur as she attended to their wants. Another fork? Yessir. She'd get it right away sir. Did Mrs. Ravis want another cuppa tea? No? No more tea? Well, she'd pass the bread. Some bread, Master Howard? Nice French bread, he always liked that. Some more preserved pears, Miss Ravis? Yes, miss she'd get them right away; they were just over here on the sideboard. Yes, here they were. No more? Now she'd go and put them back and at last when she had set the nerves of all of them in a jangle, was dismissed to the kitchen and retired with a gasp of unspeakable relief. (Van, 70-1)

This incident seems to work well in each novel but for different reasons. In Vandover, the scene serves to introduce the Ravis family, "one of the best families of the city." They are old-fashioned, solid, conservative citizens. Their menu never varies because they believe in the old order of things as opposed to the "modern 'delicacies.'" The emphasis on the awkwardness of the servant, which is made even more

evident to the reader by the bits of conversation, seems to underline the idea that only a slight derangement can upset the old order in which Vandover will soon rightly feel that his own place is precarious.

In Blix, on the other hand, there is less pretension and less adherence to old ideals for their own sake. Travis is an unconventional young lady who breaks with the very social groups that ostracize Vandover. As a result, there is less attention given to why the meal never varied; it probably never would have occurred to one of the family to even ask that question. They did not try to live up to the standards set by high society. For very much the same reason, Maggie, the awkward serving girl, is treated somewhat more gently in Blix than is her counterpart in Vandover. She is awkward and inept, it is true, but because she isn't given the same bits of trying conversation that Victorine is, she retreats to the kitchen with less of her rude conduct revealed. In short, while both of the passages are worded in very much the same way, they serve different functions in each novel.

There are yet other repetitions from one novel to another, but several are so small as to be hardly noticeable. In The Pit, the orchestra which provided the music for the opera appeared in a characteristic fashion:

But the orchestra was returning, the musicians crawling out one by one from a little door be-

neath the stage hardly bigger than the entrance of a rabbit hutch. (Pit, 24)

In McTeague, the musicians of the variety production, although very different from the operatic artists, and in a very much different theatre building, had made a very similar entrance:

The orchestra entered, each man crawling out from an opening under the stage, hardly larger than the gate of a rabbit hutch. (McT, 85)

In a similar way, a favorite theme of Norris is emphasized in a short paragraph in both Vandover and McTeague. Both novels consider the stripping away of the conventions of society and the resulting brutalization of the human animal. In Vandover's case, the process is complete, or so nearly complete, that he is finally like a wolf in appearance, behavior, and voice. An early hint of his animal sensuality leads a reader who has already completed McTeague to anticipate Vandover's fate:

He delayed over it long, taking a great pleasure in satisfying the demands of the animal in him. The wine made him heady, warm, stupid; he felt calm, soothed, and perfectly contented, and had to struggle against a desire to go to sleep where he was. (Van, 131)

The parallel of McTeague's early behavior, before he has been reformed by Trina, is close indeed:

Once in his office, or as he called it on his sign-board, Dental Parlors, he took off his coat and shoes, unbuttoned his vest, and having crammed his little stove full of coke, lay back in his operating chair at the bay window, reading the paper, drinking his

beer, and smoking his huge porcelain pipe while his food digested; crop full, stupid, and warm. By and by, gorged with steam beer and overcome by the heat of the room, the cheap tobacco, and the effects of his heavy meal, he dropped off to sleep. (McT, 1)

In both cases, the satisfaction of animal desires precedes the total collapse of the man, and in both novels, these desires become finally the only important considerations. Through the repetition of a short paragraph, Norris signals a pervasive naturalistic theme.

As a final example, a repetition of dialogue occurs several times in four of Norris' novels. Always spoken in the same tone, by a woman addressing her husband or lover, it provides an insight into Norris' conception of the relations of men and women in love. While Norris' heroines are very different otherwise, in this instance they all sound the same. First Moran, of Moran of the Lady Letty, speaks to her lover:

"But you must be good to me now." The deep voice trembled a little. "Good to me, mate, and true to me mate, because I've only you and all of me is yours. Mate, be good to me, and always be kind to me." (Moran, 298)

Leaving out the "mate" method of direct address, Laura Jadwin in The Pit could have spoken for her:

"Oh, I don't want you to leave me at all, ever, ever! Curtis, love me, love me always, dear. And be thoughtful of me and kind to me. And remember that you are all I have in the world; you are father and mother to me, and my dear husband as well." (Pit, 294)

Even Trina, in McTeague, twice appealed to her husband in the same fashion before she had alienated him through her avarice:

"Oh, you must be good to me--very, very good to me, dear--for you're all that I have in the world now."
(McT, 155)

"Oh, Mac, dear, love me, love me big. I'm so unhappy."
"What---what---what-" the dentist exclaimed, starting up bewildered, a little frightened.
"Nothing, nothing, only love me, love me always and always." (McT, 160)

Finally Hilma Tree, who had Annixter willing to provide her with the world, could appeal in the same spirit:

"Oh, you will be good to me, now, won't you? I'm only a little, little, child in so many ways, and I've given myself to you, all in a minute, and I can't go back on it now, and it's for always But now if you weren't good to me--oh, think of how it would be with me. You are strong, and big, and rich, and I am only a servant of yours, a little nobody, but I've given all I had to you--myself--and you must be so good to me now. Always remember that. Be good to me and be gentle and kind to me in little things--in everything, or you will break my heart. (Oct, v. 2, 49)

None of these women is of the "shrinking violet" variety; each of them has her own well-developed and distinct personality throughout the rest of the novel, yet they each adopt a pose that must have been very important to Norris. He seems to have wanted to make certain that the reader recognized his own personal belief in feminine dependence upon male strength, but the repetition also suggests that he may have been uncomfortable writing dialogue in his novels' undeniably pale love scenes.

A study of an author's use of repetition should provide better understanding of that writer through the simple method of perceiving what he thinks important enough to repeat. For Frank Norris, in particular, this perception is not difficult. Within single novels, he uses carefully repeated descriptions to provide contrast or to reinforce a theme. In McTeague, in The Octopus, and in The Pit, repetition often seems to function within the thematic construction of the novel, whether Norris describes a wedding portrait, a sprouting of wheat, or a group of buildings. When the repetition appears within several novels, however, the motivation is more difficult to describe. Certain scenes are repeated, an opera or a tea, and those included in the published novels, which are usually the latest novels, seem superior. It is not hard to see that these repetitions give the reader glimpses of a maturing novelist. Seldom would Norris simply repeat; he would also expand and develop. It can be safely said that his use of repetition most often demonstrates a useful and conscious intention.

A CHECKLIST OF THE NOVELS OF FRANK NORRIS

Moran--Moran of the Lady Letty--1898

McT--McTeague--1899

BL--Blix--1899

Oct--The Octopus--1901

Pit--The Pit--1903

Van--Vandover and the Brute--1914

PATTERNS OF REPETITION IN THE NOVELS OF FRANK NORRIS

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Frank Norris' use of repetition throughout his novels can be divided into two broadly different areas. First, there are the evidences of repetition that occur in a single work where Norris is repeatedly using a unifying principle. Secondly, there is the larger repetitive pattern that is apparent through several novels.

McTeague, The Octopus, and The Pit are three of Norris' novels that illustrate internal repetition. In McTeague, Norris repeats his detailed description of Trina twice before following with an explicitly contrasting picture. He also shows the decline of his characters by the repetition of the description of their wedding portrait after its meaning had been degraded by being sold at auction. In The Octopus, Norris reinforces his theme of Forces in Nature through the repetition of several passages: the description of the earth as mother, the portraiture of Angele Varian and her daughter, and the death-defying sprouting of the wheat. In The Pit, Norris achieves both contrast and unity through the repetition of a simple description of the Board of Trade Building.

Vandover and the Brute and The Pit contain several parallel passages that center around an operatic performance. The apparent development of Norris' descriptive skill can be noted in several places where he is more attentive to detail and where he is more easily able to develop the feeling of chaotic activity. The parallel dinner scenes in Vandover and the Brute and

Blix again serve to point out Norris' ability to use description to foreshadow naturalistic decline in his characters. The remaining examples of repetition between several novels show Norris again pointing toward the decline of his characters toward bestiality in McTeague and Vandover and the Brute, and exemplifying his (somewhat awkward) stance toward men and women in love in Moran of the Lady Letty, The Pit, McTeague, and The Octopus.

Within single novels, Norris uses carefully repeated descriptions to provide contrast or to reinforce a theme; when the repetition appears within several novels, however, the motivation is more difficult to describe. Certain scenes are repeated and those that occur in the latest novels are usually superior. It is not hard to see that these repetitions give the reader glimpses of a maturing novelist. Seldom would Norris simply repeat; he would also expand and develop. It can be safely said that his use of repetition most often demonstrates a useful and conscious intention.