The Evolution of Frank Norris in the American Medievalist Tradition: Norris's Progression From Gothic Juvenilia to Modern Courtly Love in "The Pit".

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THE EVOLUTION OF FRANK NORRIS
IN THE AMERICAN MEDIEVALIST TRADITION:
NORRIS'S PROGRESSION FROM GOTHIC JUVENTILIA TO MODERN
COURTLY LOVE IN THE PIT

A Dissertation

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in

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by

Holly Hale
B.A., University of Alabama, 1985
M.A., Florida State University, 1990
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation and the achievement of the Doctor of Philosophy degree to my parents, Charles Edward Hale and Barbara Brown Hale, and my sister, Karen Hale, for their love and encouragement in this and all of my endeavors.
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ABSTRACT

Though most Frank Norris scholars dismiss the author's early gothic works as insignificant elements of the Norris canon, I argue that this frequently ignored juvenilia is essential to understanding Norris's unique development as an American Naturalist. Norris, like other authors of his generation, was caught up in a boyhood enthusiasm for the Middle Ages which was initiated and nurtured by a similar nostalgia for the period among the American elite in the late nineteenth-century. This post-medieval nostalgia for medieval convention came to be known as medievalism and its enthusiasts were called medievalists.

Norris's early naturalistic writings, including a number of poems and the short stories "Le Jongleur de Taillebois" and "Lauth," are rooted in his interest in medieval culture and custom and are combined with his enthusiasm for popular Darwinism that was fashionable in late nineteenth-century America. This unlikely combination of interests formed an odd hybrid genre of medievally-inspired naturalism that was especially dark and brutal, and foreshadowed the bleak naturalism in his early novels Vandover and the Brute and McTeague. This medievalist/naturalist motif is uniquely Norrisian and I show, through a collection of Norris's essays, the direct relationship in Norris's mind between the medieval and natural worlds as he understood them.

Norris's mature application of medievalism is most obvious in his last two novels, The Octopus and The Pit. I example medievalism in The Pit extensively, citing the courtly love structure of the Jadwin/Laura/Corthell...
triangle, with a special focus on Jadwin, who Norris characterizes throughout
the novel as a warring feudal lord whose modern battleground is the Chicago
Trading Pit for Future Exchanges.

I dissert that Frank Norris never abandoned his enthusiasm for the culture
and custom of the Middle Ages, as is often suggested by Norris critics. I show
that as his writing matured, his boyhood interest in the medieval period was
ameliorated into a sophisticated application of contemporary medievalism
through which he could voice social commentary that condemned existing Old
World traditions, such as courtly love conventions and feudal power structures,
as impediments to the modernization of the New World.
In 1890, the American author Frank Norris wrote the following lines in his antiquarian poem *Yvernelle*:

The feudal baron from his gloomy tower
Rode o'er his host of toiling serfs rough-shod;
And oft they felt his steel's resistless power,
And oft they writhed beneath his cruel rod.
The feudal baron yet remains to-day,
But, changed into the modern moneyed lord,
Still o'er the people holds more cruel sway,
But 'tis with hoarded gold and not with sword. (I.63-70)

These lines evoking the medieval aura seem dated appearing as they do in late nineteenth-century American literature yet were popularly received and even fashionable in Norris’s post-Gilded Age culture.

Norris was an American medievalist—caught up in a popular nostalgia for the political, social and cultural conventions of the Middle Ages—and his fixation on the Middle Ages was manifested through an intense antiquarian interest in the material culture of the medieval period and the literature that it inspired. Yet, throughout his short but prolific career, Frank Norris would mature in his paralleling of the medieval convention with the modern industrialization of the New World in a most surprising way—through the lens of the medieval courtly love tradition which structures *The Pit*. Though America seemed progressive and modern both industrially and politically in the nineteenth century, intellectual Americans at this time tended to look back to the medieval period for artistic inspiration in the modern world—an interest which
was shown in architecture, art, literature, and social customs. Because of a rapidly changing society characterized by social, political, and financial unrest, Americans reached past the cultural turmoil generated by the collisions of their undefined culture in the New World to seize upon what was perceived by many intellectual Americans to be the cultural standard of Western civilization: the Gothic heritage of the Anglo-Saxon, specifically, the culture of the High Middle Ages (Moreland 12).

Clare Simmons, a scholar of American medievalism speaking at the 1996 Conference on American Medievalism in York, England, defined an American medievalist as "one who uses medieval culture to comment upon his own culture: the technique that Norris used in Yvernelle. Though Norris, in the excerpt from Yvernelle, negatively parallels tyrannical medieval lords to nineteenth-century American robber barons, nineteenth-century medievalists more often invoked the positive, heroic ideals of the Middle Ages like those brought to life in the fictions of Sir Walter Scott.

As in Scott's novels Ivanhoe and Rob Roy, American medievalist writers typically embodied the idealistic desire for a perfectly ordered world, and characteristically displayed, according to Kathleen Verduin, the "ethos of chivalry; the polarization of gender; and, the elevation of manhood" (York 7-3-96), ideals that were also deemed important in developing America of the nineteenth century. Though the medieval period was comfortably situated in the past, its misperceived conventions, nonetheless, provided a way of seeing the present—not only in Britain, whose nineteenth-century medieval revival has
received considerable scholarly attention, but, ironically, in America as well, where medievalism was also developing.¹

FRANK NORRIS: AMERICAN MEDIEVALEST

The nineteenth-century American medieval revival, however, has been dubiously regarded by historians and literary scholars—some never even acknowledging its occurrence and others denying its influential nature—even though a regression brought about by medieval nostalgia is often seen as a recurring cultural response to periods of rapid change, coming industrialization, social unrest, and class struggle, precisely the situation in late nineteenth-century America (Lears xvi). The quite recent development of the field of American medievalist studies, carefully distinguishes the historical medieval period from the nostalgia for the period which occurred in America in the nineteenth century and is known as "medievalism," and this dissertation further delineates the peculiar concept of American medievalism that was uniquely Norrisian.

The historical Middle Age, the period of European history dating from about A.D. 400 to about 1500, has, surprisingly, very little in common with the nineteenth-century American post-medieval trend that bears its name. This post-medieval conception of the Middle Ages, known as "medievalism," is a modern manifestation of the presumed practices, customs and beliefs of the historical Middle Ages which may or may not correspond to any event or aspect of the medieval period. Norris, for example, apparently thought medieval man to be primitive and basically instinctual, as he probably had little factual knowledge of the period.² This lack of accurate knowledge about the medieval
period frustrates medieval scholars about medievalist writings and it is likely these historical inaccuracies in medievalist writing that has discouraged its legitimacy as an acknowledgeable trend in American literature.

Frank Norris, however, ignored the artificial trappings of the Middle Ages that he saw dotting the mainstream medievalist literature, focusing instead on a more valid and appropriate model of what he believed to be this bleak period reflected in the modern age—the primitive, violent world of natural man who is governed by his instinctive brutal behavior. Clearly, Norris's perception of the medieval period, like that of other medievalists, is a little confused; yet, nonetheless, he believed that the era revealed the true nature of primitive man, which Norris suggested paralleled the often irrational behavior of modern man; hence, his earliest medievalist works have consistently brutal themes. Though Norris's conceptions of the nature of medieval man are often conflated with nineteenth-century notions of the medieval period as an idealized time of political and social order, his contradictions indicate his unique, customized manifestation of the medieval in American literature.

Norris's medieval world was not that of the turreted castle inhabited by a beautiful lady and dashing knight, or the peaceful, rustic village filled with humorous, earthy characters attending harvest festivals as seen in Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott" or Scott's Ivanhoe. Frank Norris's medieval world was rather a stage for unbridled acts of violence and aggression which he imagined to be natural and instinctive in medieval man. Norris possibly misinterpreted the actualities of the medieval period because as a boy he had been enthralled with
the armor, weaponry and militarism that he had read about in Froissart's *Chronicles*. Norris, though, is not a satirist or parodist of medieval culture and tradition but focused, perhaps erroneously, on an aspect of the period that most interested him—violence. Unbridled violence staged in medieval settings came to parallel Norris's views of injustice in the modern world.

As Norris matured, however, he ameliorated the brutality of his early works, showing how this brutal behavior of the medieval period had evolved into socially acceptable aggression in the modern world. In so doing, he realized the possibilities for the broad application of the medieval heritage in American literature as an appropriation, not only of American expansionism, but of American identity in the New World. This idea is the motivation of Norris's last novel, *The Pit*.

Norris scholars seem reluctant, perhaps even threatened, by the proposal that a native son, such as Norris who is known for contributing to America's unique form of literary naturalism, may have been fundamentally inspired by the antiquated, idealized European tradition evident in his juvenilia. I am not, however, proposing that Norris was not a naturalistic and romantic writer—he was—a classification which is clearly evident in the themes of his novels. An author cannot, for example, be only a "medievalist," as literary medievalism simply refers to the manner in which an author incorporates allusions to the purported history or styles of the Middle Ages and not to any particular theme or philosophy. I am, though, suggesting that by adapting a new, valid way of looking at Norris—through the medievalist lens—unexplored aspects of his works...
will be illuminated that will more appropriately locate Norris's fiction (especially *The Pit*, though it is considered by Norris scholars to be a naturalistic novel) within the romantic movement of the late nineteenth century; for, after all, the medievalist impulse was a part of the romantic movement in literature.

**THE MEDIEVALIST IMPULSE AS INSPIRATION FOR NORRIS'S NATURALISTIC NOVELS**

The most significant advantage of seeing Norris through the medievalist lens is that it reveals the source of his brutal naturalistic style that was evidenced in the cruel nature of McTeague and the dissipation of Vandover, two of Norris's naturalistic characters. Norris saw the Middle Ages as providing evidence of man's instinctive nature that was being popularly discussed in emerging evolutionary theories. This view of man's brutality is, according to naturalist scholar Lars Ahnebrink, an element of American naturalism (11) an assertion also voiced by Charles Walcutt (20). Walcutt, an historian of the development of the American novel, locates the roots of the American naturalistic genre in the concept of natural man of the Middle Ages. Walcutt cites the instinctive behaviors of natural man--which Norris erroneously associated with medieval man--as elemental in American naturalistic literature:

All literature is founded on some concept of the nature of man. When a major new literary trend [naturalism] appears it either assumes or defines some new concept of man and therefore of his place in the world. Such a new image takes its shape against the background from which it has emerged and against which it has in some way reacted. Naturalism has its roots in the Renaissance, its backgrounds in the Middle Ages. The medieval idea of man (which lived on, indeed, through the nineteenth-century) was of a fallen creature in a dualistic universe.(4)
This citation from Walcutt validates the importance of Norris's early medievalism as influential to his development as an American naturalist. Walcutt states: "Seeing it [naturalism] in perspective involves a considerable step backward through the centuries" (4).

An earlier variation of this argument can be found in the writings of another medievalist, the English art and social critic John Ruskin, who writes in the Stones of Venice (1851-53) about the natural style of "universal" (not exclusive to Venice) Gothic architecture. He describes the decaying ruins of Venice in which the evidence of "vitality" remains (27). Ruskin cites "savageness," a word often used to describe naturalistic literature, as one of the "characteristics or moral elements" of Gothic (154). Like, and for the same reasons, Norris will also describe Jadwin in The Pit, whom he portrays throughout the novel as a noble lord, as a savage (The Pit 204). In a passage similar to Norris's previously quoted lines from Yvernelle and also to a passage in Norris's essay "The Responsibilities of the Novelist," Ruskin compares the manual labor of the medieval period, which was used to construct the Gothic cathedrals, with the new mechanization of the industrialized world in which modern man had little part:

It is verily this degradation of the operative into a machine which, more than any other evil of the times, is leading the mass of the nations everywhere into vain, incoherent, destructive struggling for a freedom of which they cannot explain the nature to themselves. Their universal outcry against wealth, and against nobility is not forced from them either by the pressure of famine or mortified pride. These do much and have done much in all ages; but the foundations of society were never yet shaken as they are at this day. [...] It is not that men are pained by the scorn of the upper classes, but they cannot endure their own; for
they feel that the kind of labor to which they are condemned is verily a degrading one. [...] Never had the upper classes so much sympathy with the lower, or charity for them, as they had at this day [the Middle Ages], and yet never were they so much hated by them: for, of old, the separation between the noble and the poor was merely a wall built by law; now it is a veritable difference in level of standing, a precipice between upper and lower levels in the field of humanity. (163)

This is both like and unlike Norris's argument in *Yvernelle*. Here, Ruskin voices the woes of modern civilization, paralleling the present with similar conditions in the Middle Ages, but cites a "veritable difference in level of standing" in the "field of humanity" in the modern age. According to Ruskin, the modern laborer as opposed to his medieval counterpart is degraded by the modern class system, which is inhumane and uncharitable. This accurate difference between medieval man and modern man is a point that Norris never makes or perhaps never understands. But Ruskin focuses his concerns, as does Norris in *Yvernelle*, on the personal degradation of modern man in the industrial workplace of late nineteenth-century America. Norris, however, most dramatically likens it to the stoop labor in the fields of medieval Europe.

Ruskin further talks about the "wildness" and non-conformity of the medieval Gothic style and its lack of uniform shape and appearance (178)—an account similar to Walcott's description of the metamorphoses within naturalistic literature. In Ruskin's example of the unconventionality of the medieval Gothic style as representative of the similarly non-conformist nature of medieval man, he parallels Walcott's definition of the same non-conformist aspects within mediavally-inspired American naturalism. This definition illuminates Norris's early works of American naturalism. Ruskin describes
medieval Gothic architecture as free of "any established conventionalities or external experience" in the following quotation from *Stones of Venice* (179):

> Undefined in its slope of roof, height of shaft, breadth of arch, disposition of ground plan, it can shrink into a turret, expand into a wall, coil into a staircase, or spring into a spire [...] whenever it finds occasion for change in its form or purpose, it submits to it without the slightest loss [...] subtle and flexible like a fiery serpent. (179)

Walcutt, in a similar fashion, describes the Protean qualities of American naturalism:

> In one form it [American naturalism] appears a shaggy ape-like monster; in another it appears a god-like giant. Shocking, bestial, scientific, messianic—no sooner does its outline seem to grow clear than like Proteus, it slips through the fingers and reappears in another shape. The critics reflect its elusiveness. Whereas one authority describes it as an extreme form of romanticism, another counters that it is the rigorous application of scientific method to the novel. When others say it is desperate pessimistic determinism, they are answered by those who insist that it is an optimistic affirmation of man's freedom and progress [like medieval man's building of a cathedral]. (3)

The recent scholarship on the nineteenth-century American medieval renaissance, initiated by Chandler, has opened a vast new way to read Norris and similarly inclined authors who were inspired by the medieval nostalgia of their generation. Chandler comments: "At the height of the [medieval] revival scarcely an aspect of life remained untouched by medievalist influence. The very beds people slept in were apt to be Gothic" (1). C. S. Lewis echoes Chandler's opinion in his comment upon the pervasiveness of medievalism in his comment upon the irony of the medieval trend in the New World: "If the thing [medievalism] at first escapes our notice this is because we are so familiar with the exotic tradition of modern Europe that we mistake it for something natural..."
and universal and, therefore, do not inquire into its origins" (3). The obscurity of medievalism which might have contributed to Norris readers' hesitating to consider medievalism as influencing Norris's writings is due to the newness of the study of medievalism as a post-medieval idea and the absurd conflicts of medieval Gothic style becoming fashionable in the New World.

The absurd anachronism created by this cultural phenomenon of medieval revival in modern times was indeed its undoing as a perceived, legitimate source of cultural influence. Medievalist scholar Kim Moreland effectively acknowledges, for example, the discrediting of medievalism in her statement that American medievalism is a "tradition that is seldom noticed because it runs counter to the major tradition at every point: medievalism is feudal and aristocratic rather than democratic and capitalistic, Roman Catholic rather than Puritan, European rather than native American, and regressive rather than progressive" (25). However, despite these opposing political, religious and cultural trends (with the obvious exception that there were no dominant American traditions budding in Europe) medievalism quietly emerged as Chandler positions it in the following passage:

The more the world changed [...] the more the partly historical but basically mythical Middle Ages that had become a tradition in literature served to remind men of a Golden Age. The Middle Ages were idealized as a period of faith, order, joy, munificence and creativity. Feudalism was seen as fatherhood [...] (1).

Chandler suggests the important role of historiography in the adaptation of seemingly "medieval" ideals to a very differently inspired and motivated modern society. for it is the perception of an ordered and idealized Middle Ages that
inspired medievalist writing in Americans of Norris's generation. In answer to
the oft-disputed question "whether men make history or history makes man," in
reading Norris we find that the response is the former in the case of his
medievalism—it was a construction of the medieval period drawn largely from
the writings of novelists and historians who often fancifully misinterpreted
history to recreate an imagined world.

Chandler, in her *A Dream of Order* (1970), defines the elements of the
medieval impulse in American literature as follows: 1) the fear of modern
capitalism's brutal power which was reminiscent of medieval feudal structure
(28); 2) a fierce sense of nationalism created by a "long tradition of pride in
Anglo Saxon origins" (24); 3) a spirit of freedom clearly associated with both
nature and the Middle Ages which served to naturalize man in the universe,
inspiring an interest in primitivism and the pastoral as an ideal, transcendental
state (thus, the materialism and mechanism of modern industrialism was seen as
inimical to the true nature of man) (7); 4) and, a desire for the genteel order of
chivalrous behavior and courtly love (as seen in some of the novels of Sir
Walter Scott) (7). Chandler describes the appeal of medieval order in a rapidly
industrializing America of the nineteenth-century and notes the influence of its
inspiration in architecture, art and literature (1-12). In outlining aspects of
popularized medievalism which appears in modern literature, Chandler
describes recurring elements which structure Norris’s fictions.

Nineteenth-century medievalists, however, have been viewed with
suspicion by twentieth-century medieval historians and literary scholars for
producing questionably inspired works. The works seem riddled with factual
inaccuracies, exceedingly fanciful, and, often, the authors rely upon
unacknowledged works of literature. R. C. De Prospo in his essay "The
Patronage of Medievalism in Modern American Cultural Historiography"
theorizes upon why the once popular trend of medievalism lacks intellectual
merit:

The attitudes of modern American cultural historiography toward
medievalism in early American culture range between two
extremes: V.L. Parrington considers it an impediment not only to
the growth of political liberties in the United States but also to the
emergence of an American national character, especially in New
England [. . .] Henry Adams, however, believed that "delight in
the phenomenon of medievalism is of course patronizing [. . .]
"man beleaguered by modernism and yearning for the simpli­
cities of a simpler time." (1)

Nonetheless, nineteenth-century American medievalist literature is indeed
notable as it provides a unique glimpse of the American spirit of positivism and
resourcefulness in seeking what was believed to be past glory as a remedy for
present mundaneness.

Leslie Workman, a pioneer of American medievalist studies who founded
the journal Studies in Medievalism, heralds the importance of this endeavor:

[With historiography] we are continually recreating the past. In
fact the realization that the Middle Ages we have is so largely a
post-medieval and principally a nineteenth-century construct, is
the thesis on which Studies in Medievalism was originally based
[. . .] Only when the importance of this approach is realized shall
we begin to treat medievalism not as a nineteenth-century fantasy,
but as a total response to a past culture which has largely shaped
our own. (6)

Workman highlights the fact that romantic, American medievalist authors really
needed to know nothing about factual medieval history to write what is known
as American medievalist fiction; it was familiarity with the style and content of contemporary, popular medievalism which allowed the cookie-cutter production of medievalist fictions to continue on into the early twentieth century.

**MEDIEVAL HISTORY vs. MEDIEVALIST MANIFESTATIONS**

The Middle Ages did, in fact, have to be transformed to create more modern romantic settings because these centuries were rather unappealing as a setting for writing that would appeal to the modern world. "The densest of the medieval centuries--the six hundred years between, roughly, A.D. 400 and A.D. 1000--are still known [in England] as the Dark Ages" [...](Manchester 3). Charlemagne, the first Holy Roman Emperor and greatest of all medieval rulers was illiterate, yet he realized the handicap of illiteracy in society and patronized a vast array of scholars. The pervasive illiteracy in medieval society necessitated an oral tradition which spawned exaggerated tales, a fable tradition which is largely responsible for myth-making during the medieval period. Even attempts at a respect for historical accuracy, such as were recorded in the Chronicles of Holinshed and the writings of Froissart of the Late Medieval period, relied almost entirely upon eye-witness reports. As there was little factual history of the era available outside of scholasticism, the enlightened (but still largely illiterate) post-medieval world was deceptively enchanted by various works of idealized, medieval art and literature. The mysterious, medieval centuries became in the nineteenth century a fairyland of romance and chivalry when, in fact, what is now known about the period in the twentieth century is, according to social historian William Manchester, "quite unlovely" (Manchester 1).
Manchester's assessment of the Middle Ages, though considered accurate by many has proven to be quite unpopular with some medieval historians who seek to depict the medieval centuries as an ordered, productive period much as nineteenth-century medievalist scholars sought to see the medieval period.

Historian Peter Brown, for example, opposes Manchester's dim opinions of the Middle Ages and voices an opinion shared by many modern medieval scholars. Brown states: "the recent achievements in Irish and Anglo-Saxon studies have revealed an insular world in the late sixth and seventh centuries of vast creativity, only partly dependent on Romania [Rome]. [. . .] The work of social anthropologists [. . .] has induced a sober respect for the skill with which preliterate and technologically primitive societies have been observed to create a 'resilient technology of human relations' (Brown 74-75). The violence of the period was "governed by the law of the blood feud—and this was not the 'law of the jungle'” (Brown 75).

The confused history of the medieval period that developed over the centuries is largely obscured by the legends that surrounded the period intermingling with supposed fact about conditions in the Middle Ages. These legends, or myths, created an impression of the Middle Ages that lasted for centuries. Many stories that are only loosely based on fact, emerged from the medieval period and have become quite familiar in the modern day. These include the legends of King Arthur; the story of the Pied Piper of Hamlin; the escapades of Robin Hood; and, the ride of Lady Godiva, to name a few. Though the slim historical bases of these stories are far more interesting than the famous
myths which they inspired, it is interesting to consider how such myths emerged. Arthurian scholar T.A. Shippey says of the importance of the Arthurian legend:
"Caxton published Malory's *Works* three weeks from what we now determine as the end of the Middle Ages. Could it not be a conduct book for an undefined culture which needed to codify its ideals?" (York 7-4-96). Shippey's theory suggests cultural myth-making as a necessary element of the perpetuation of medieval tradition. The post-medieval myth-making known as "medievalism" may, therefore, be not only necessitated by the uncertain history of the period but also inspired by its inherent tendencies toward an oral tradition.

The thousand year medieval period remarkably influenced English literature as it was repeatedly recalled in nationalist literature invoking the ancestral history of the Anglo-Saxons. The European medieval period was exalted for its perceived ideals and inevitably misrepresented in art and literature as a time of moral justice and courtly, chivalric behaviors. This depiction is evident in early examples of chapbook covers of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, which portray courtly figures performing aristocratic functions and noble knights righting the wrongs of the kingdom. These pictures portrayed a distant magical time to which modern peoples could bring their own meaning. Barbara Benedict comments upon this practice: "[...] as material is reprinted in different settings and according to different principles, they [publishers] strip it of its historical and political contexts. Texts become de-historicized and hence "timeless," immortal, or, in other words, eternally contemporary" (6-7). Medieval tales, then, interpolated by subsequent authors throughout the
centuries causes the Middle Ages to become an imaginary structure bearing very little resemblance to the actual historical period. This, was medievalism—a little history mixed with imagination.

The appearance of Caxton’s edition of the Canterbury Tales in 1477, merged the old centuries with the new, amusing readers with the wit, wisdom and humanity of the Canterbury pilgrims. Of similar merit, Le Morte d’Arthur, a work by Sir Thomas Malory of the life and death of the legendary King Arthur, based on earlier medieval works, appeared in 1495. Translations of these late medieval works telling tales of the earlier medieval period are still studied in modern universities today and, though they were written in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, they generate, as in the nineteenth century, an idealized perception of the medieval world.

MEDIVALISM IN ENGLAND

The medieval tradition in British literature, thus, came to represent a Golden Age for the Anglo-Saxon and a legacy for modern descendants of the Anglo-Saxon. This idealization persisted in minor works into the seventeenth century in a variety of writings about the legends of Arthur and his noble knights. However, in the eighteenth century a unique development in the medieval tradition occurred which was to partially transform its previously misrepresented material culture—the popularity of antiquarianism among the elite which swept Europe, and especially England. Suddenly, the little factual evidence—provided by antique armor, weaponry and manuscripts—began to merge with a body of medievally-inspired fiction, producing not only an
increased popularity of medievalism, but the inspiration for a new literary genre, Gothic fiction.

The Antiquarian Movement inspired medieval enthusiasts to obtain remnants of the Middle Ages and build fabulous collections that rivaled museum exhibitions. The power to acquire an antique, which required usually an aristocratic position and certainly great wealth, was the admission to select societies and interest groups who fancied themselves "medieval." The flamboyant antiquarian Horace Walpole said of his collecting craze in a catalog of his possessions: "Old castles, old pictures, old histories, and the babble of old people make one live back into centuries that cannot disappoint one" (Tillotson 179). It was this unique conception of a "new medievalism," fancifully realized through an intense interest in the material culture of the Middle Ages, that persisted through a number of celebrated medievalist movements, both in Britain and America, and even survives into the modern day on both continents.

In the eighteenth century, William Beckford and Horace Walpole were fabulously wealthy proponents of the Antiquarian Movement. Beckford and Walpole created their own versions of medieval castles in Fonthill Abbey and Strawberry Hill respectively, and surrounded themselves with the artifacts—some authentic, but most not—of the medieval period. These estates were Gothic recreations built solely for their aesthetic appeal to the intellectual interests of wealthy medievalists.

Walpole made fashionable the Gothic aspect of the romantic movement (Brochman 98). When planning his "little gothic castle at Strawberry Hill" in
1749, Walpole informed his friend George Montague, a fellow antiquarian: "If you can pick up any fragment of old painted glass, arms or anything I shall be excessively obliged to you" (qtd. in Ketton-Cremer 118-119). Because Walpole crammed a small Gothic home with exquisite and precious Gothic things, medieval revivalism "soon ceased to be regarded as a rather paltry middle-class craze" (Ketton-Cremer 120). Though it is impossible to deny that Strawberry Hill contained "some atrocities of the first water," Walpole always consulted Gothic work for his designs and never dreamed of inventing Gothic orders (Ketton-Cremer 121). Within his antiquarian circle he formed a group he called the "Committee of Taste" which collaborated in the decoration of his fancy library, which was composed "in a vein of medieval and heraldic fantasy which made it unquestionably the most remarkable room at Strawberry Hill" (Ketton-Cremer 127). In this phony, romantic setting, Walpole wrote the first English Gothic novel in 1764, The Castle of Otranto, in which he conjured up a medieval world of ruined castles, ancient manuscripts, and sublime settings. It is the earliest expression of the emerging romantic movement in English literature (xxxxxxxxxx), though its extravagant style puts off most modern readers.

William Beckford, likewise, constructed his Fonthill Abbey as a medieval castle. Its Gothic elements of turrets, towers and stained-glass windows were praised by Walpole and his circle (Brockman 68), even though Beckford referred to Walpole's Strawberry Hill as a "gothic mousetrap." Beckford, like Walpole, was a prominent social figure.
promoting the fascination with the gothic medieval through the enthusiastic study of the antique. "His [Beckford's] whole life was nostalgia for a past that he had not known, but which he wished in his ignorance to recreate" (Brockman 199). And Beckford's own Gothic novel, The History of the Caliph Vathek, an example of orientalism which appeared in 1786, is little less fantastic than Walpole's.³

Though the British eccentrics Walpole and Beckford may seem a bit to the side of this study of an American author, I contend that they are essential to this study. These medievalists of the eighteenth century exhibit interests that prefigure and make more understandable the anachronistic interests of Frank Norris and other medievalists of the nineteenth century in America. Though it is not documented that Norris read either Walpole or Beckford, he, like they, was nurtured in a similarly wealthy environment where he was afforded the leisure of pursuing his antiquarian interests which in turn inspired him to situate his writings in Gothic settings of the medieval period. The impulse for medieval nostalgia remained a feature in Britain from its establishment as a respectable pursuit in the Antiquarian Movement. This was largely due to the patronage of the literary and art worlds which, inspired by the perpetual popularity of the Gothic romance, produced from time to time new variations of medievalism.

Perceived impressions of medieval style began to manifest throughout the privileged classes on the continent in various art forms throughout the century, notably in what was believed to be medieval costume and personal, medieval affectations which tended to set the wearer apart from the classical
world, casting him or her into a realm of mystery, theatrically staged in the modern world. This fashion was nowhere more obvious than in the artistic-romantic dandyism of Byron, Shelley, Charles and Mary Lamb, and other English Romantics who garbed themselves in array thought to be “medieval.”

French author Theophile Gautier’s remark at the premiere of Victor Hugo’s Hernani indicates this pervasive misperception about medieval dress: adorned in a “flaming red waist coat” [and] “pearl gray trousers, their outer seams vertically banded in black velvet, a flat, broad-brimmed hat, and streaming shoulder length brown hair, he had worn a bright pink doublet” (Batterberry 220). He [Gautier] denied that the red coat had any “political, republican shade of meaning [. . .] There was nothing like that about it. We were just medieval!” (Batterberry 220).

Yet, this style of dress was far from medieval; for it, like most of the post-medieval art world’s perceptions of the period, was false. In fact, medieval people, both peasant and noble alike were practically sewn into their clothes, which were generally made of heavy materials to be worn in all seasons. The infrequently removed clothing smelled and became infested by parasites. There is perhaps no greater example of the diversity of the “true medieval” to the “modern medievalized” than in this misperception of costuming which was most celebrated by the wealthy social class of the nineteenth-century courts of Europe.

The most notable of medievalist movements and certainly the most influential on Norris’s generation was the Pre-Raphaelite movement which
began with the founding of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) in 1848. Unlike the foppish dandyism of the English Romantics, the medieval affectations of the PRB were genuine in their simplicity and drabness, their garb worn to cover the body in a practical and inconspicuous way. This style was notably worn by Jane Morris (wife of William Morris) whose simple beauty—and one assumes her dress—was an inspiration to the artists of the PRB.

Revolting against neoclassicism in art, the PRB sought inspiration in pre-Renaissance art and frequently adopted medieval subjects, a selection championed by John Ruskin who admired the art as well as the architecture of the Middle Ages, believing it to most accurately represent truth and beauty. Followers of the Pre-Raphaelite movement included the purest medievalist of British Victorians, William Morris, whose literary and artistic production remained prolific throughout most of Norris's life. Morris was also a key figure in the Aesthetic Movement, which drew upon the glorified medieval period as a source of inspiration in art, literature, music, and costume. Instead of embracing their unique perception of the medieval through physical objects of the period as their antiquarian ancestors had done, they projected their devotion to the beauty and simplicity of living a personally fulfilling life, free of artificial conventions. These Victorian bohemians became profoundly influential in art and literature on both sides of the Atlantic.

MEDIEVALISM IN AMERICA

The medievalist movement in late nineteenth century America manifested itself first in the arts and then in literature, much as it had in...
England. Though America apparently never experienced the type of flamboyant medievalism that was realized in Paris and London by the artist-romantic dandyism of artists and poets such as Oscar Wilde and his entourage,⁴ there was certainly a more stately and enduring record of the period in America which survives in Gothic Revival style architecture popular in government buildings throughout the United States and in the Arts and Crafts Movement which influenced American domestic architecture. Many American Ivy League colleges built in the period are of an architectural style known as Collegiate Gothic. Beginning in the 1870's, American scholar Charles Eliot Norton and architect Ralph Adams Cram became fascinated by the architecture of Gothic cathedrals, traveling through Europe to study the structures (Moreland 3). They inspired further interest in medievalism in architecture such as an attention to stained glass which began to be produced in America by John La Farge and Louis Comfort Tiffany, who contributed to a growing Arts and Crafts Movement, patterned upon the similar cottage industries of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (Moreland 3). And just as Morris, these medievalist artisans owed much of their inspiration to John Ruskin's Stones of Venice (1851-53).

The most important aspect of the American medievalist movement for Frank Norris, however, was the revival of literature from the medieval period. Not only were contemporary novelists writing novels in medieval settings with medieval themes, but they were also writing simplified editions of medieval texts for American readers. Translations of the writings of medieval mystics and popularized biographies of chivalric knights and medieval saints became,
surprisingly, common reading for Americans. But, more importantly, "allusions to medieval traditions, characters, and events were often included even in texts whose subjects were not medieval" (Moreland 4)—and this was the beginning of the medievalist tradition in American literature.

Yet, for all of the beautiful artistry that was inspired by the Middle Ages, this resurrection of European history was met with fierce opposition from some prominent American figures who opposed the reflection of feudal characteristics in the New World. Medievalism would most notably come under fire by a most notable contemporary voice—that of the American humorist Mark Twain. Twain's intensely articulated objection to the medievalist tradition in American culture, coupled with a frequently unacknowledged attraction to this tradition as evidenced in his own writings, testifies to the multi-faceted pervasiveness, yet elusiveness of this movement in American literature. Writing about the Louisiana State Capitol, a medieval castle that is the finest example of Gothic-style architecture constructed in the late nineteenth century South, Twain wryly remarks in Life on the Mississippi:

It is pathetic enough that a whitewashed castle, with turrets and things—materials all ungenuine within and without, pretending to be what they are not—would ever have been built in this otherwise honorable place. (237)

He blames the architecture of this "little sham castle" on Sir Walter Scott, who "had run the people mad a couple of generations ago, with his medieval romances" (Twain 237). Yet, Twain himself was a medievalist writer, setting three novels, one novella and a number of short stories in the Middle Ages in
addition to incorporating medieval motifs, characters and plot devices within his modern texts that were set in nineteenth-century America (Moreland 5).

Though medievalism was attacked by such prominent figures as Twain as being a non-progressive anachronism which hampered the progressivism of New World culture, this nineteenth-century invention of the Middle Ages still served as an historical link between the young nation and a much older tradition. Americans were not borrowing the history and traditions of another culture, but were merely re-appropriating what they believed to be their own claims to their Anglo-Saxon heritage.

Historian Norman Cantor validates this theory in his discussion of the American historians Charles Homer Haskins of Harvard and Joseph Reese Strayer of Princeton who also analogized the culture of the Middle Ages with that of the new American frontier at their respective universities in the early twentieth century. Strayer and Haskins saw the social ideology of the Middle Ages—the WASPish, northern European flavor of Anglo-Saxon culture—as similar to the American ideology present in Wilsonian progressivism which provided the "intellectual crust for the Haskins-Strayer American pie of medievalism" (Cantor 247). The cultural phenomenon that they project is not too far from the old European manner that Norris himself acquired in his personal demeanor during his Berkeley days when he was enthralled in the history, literature and costume of the Middle Ages. Strayer spoke for a generation of medieval scholars in the United States and England who were fascinated by what they regarded as the distinctive quality of western
civilization, which they saw rooted in the emergence of nationalism in the medieval world (Cantor 285). They believed that for the "American tradition of administrative history to open new vistas on the medieval world, it had to embrace "additional insight garnished from social theory and literary studies" (Cantor 285). They believed the modern state [American socio-political structure] had medieval origins (Cantor 246).

Twain, however, in his Life on the Mississippi, was responding not to this legitimate, scholarly appropriation of medievalism in the New World, but to the aggrandized Gothic style that he finds so artificial in progressive America. Norris in The Pit, his most mature example of American medievalism, demonstrates his agreement with Twain by juxtaposing the foppish medievalist artist CortheU, and Jadwin, the aggressive, imperialist stockbroker whom Norris characterizes as a medieval warrior. Norris, like Twain, disdains the fussy manifestations of salon medievalism, advocating instead medievalisms' legitimate application of America's Anglo-Saxon heritage: the providence of national identity in the New World which would incite expansionism, personal liberties and national pride.

In light of Twain's jaded perceptions, however, Norris's adherence to his unique motif of medievalism was the sincere embodiment of these deep-seated American beliefs that were, ironically, nationalistic and considered by many to be inherently American. Norris would never abandon his devotion to medievalism but, because of the expressed opposition of writers like Twain, he was compelled to adapt a more modern vehicle for his writing which would not
be associated with the customary romantic medievalism made popular by Sir Walter Scott half a century before. This modern adaptation is exemplified in *The Pit*, Norris's last novel, in a drama in which central characters carry out the conventions of medieval courtly love in contemporary Chicago—the heartland of America.

Yet, this anachronistic impulse of medievalism, as unlikely as it seems, inspired new world culture. Norris captured this rare spirit of the age in his controversial fictions by manipulating contemporary genres to fit his medievally inspired structures, themes and characters. For the critics, however, Norris's adaptation of the medieval tradition would seem to be simply juvenilia, when in fact I argue that every novel that Norris wrote contains to some extent, the literary conventions and details borrowed from the medievalist novels that he had read as a boy.

Norris wrote eight, early, short works that were set in the medieval period and had medieval plots. Though these stories are immature, they reveal his early inclinations toward the medieval tradition, and the establishment of a medievalist motif that would run throughout his fiction writing. These rather odd stories are important in the development of the Norris canon as they anticipate Norris's mature application of American medievalist technique in *The Pit*.

By 1900, Norris was an accomplished fiction writer with four published novels to his credit and a vast amount of published journalism. Norris fancied himself an authority on fiction writing and published three sets of essays which
instructed writers on the technique of writing the American novel for the twentieth century. His advice is essentially an advocacy of the structure of American medievalism as a valid framework for staging the Great American novel through which Norris sought to dramatize the national search for identity.

If the publication of Norris's last novel, The Pit, in 1902, was any indication of his future successes as a writer, his future would have indeed been bright, for Norris was developing into a masterful American author, capable of writing in the trendy romantic vein popular in the late nineteenth century but, more importantly, writing fiction that people wanted to read. A promising career, however, met an untimely end when Norris died of peritonitis at the age of thirty-two. Though Norris is not the only American author to write about his boyhood interests, he is one of a few American authors to successfully synthesize his juvenile interests into an adult fiction of merit, which not only became a national bestseller but told a good moral story that was appropriate to the American experience.
CHAPTER TWO
A PRELUDE TO AMERICAN MEDIEVALISM:
FRANK NORRIS'S EARLY WORKS OF MEDIEVAL CONVENTION

The juvenile writings of Frank Norris were inspired by a popular revival of interest in the Middle Ages that occurred in America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This nostalgic cultural phenomenon is known as the American medieval renaissance, and the literature inspired by this nostalgia is referred to as American medievalism. Between 1889 and 1893, Norris would produce seven works of medieval setting and theme that both contemporary and modern critics would label fancies of youth.\(^5\) I, however, will argue that within these seven works, Norris was developing what was to become his unique expression of American medievalism which would inform his brutally naturalistic fictions. However juvenile and raw, these seven works, cast in the medieval tradition, are essential to a new understanding of the Norris canon and these works warrant closer critical consideration as they prefigure the more conventional medievalism that would appear in his later novels. Norris's seven surviving works of medieval convention have never been critically examined. I consider these short pieces as examples of Norris's nostalgia for the culture and custom of the Middle Ages, noting specifically his pattern of meshing sketchy facts from the medieval period into imaginative stories that appealed to his late nineteenth-century audience.

Other American authors of the Edwardian period such as Twain, Crane, Fitzgerald, Adams and Hemingway, also experimented with medievalism,
but they would eventually abandon their boyhood interests in the Middle Ages for other literary inspirations. Frank Norris, however, would never achieve the renown of these authors, so his early works have not been as closely studied as theirs; thus, his life-long devotion to what appeared to be only a youthful interest would long go unacknowledged, and the study of his obscure medievalist writings would be largely ignored.

To show the significance of these early works to the Norris canon, I will look at Norris contextually, using Franklin Walker's 1932 biography of Norris, to show that Norris immersed himself in the study of medieval history, art and literature as a boy and developed these interests in his drawings and writings, an interest that would be the foundation upon which Norris's later naturalistic novels were built.

NORRIS'S JUVENILIA

Important to this study is a review of Norris's boyhood interests in the medieval impulse that was popular in the late nineteenth century. As a teen-aged boy living in San Francisco, Norris was fascinated by the medievalist stories read to him by his mother. He first expressed his interest in the culture of the Middle Ages through his skillful pencil sketching of the medieval armor and weapons of war that he saw depicted in The Home Book of Art (Walker 23). Clearly, Norris's personal interests in the medieval coincided with a cultural phenomenon of the American Gilded Age—a medieval revival in the creative arts. Franklin Walker describes Frank Norris in these developmental days, playing "lead soldiers" with his younger brother Lester in the playroom of the
family's great house in the Nob Hill area (19). Battles were staged between the opposing armies as the boys physically acted out the legends of the Middle Ages that lived in the popular works of Sir Walter Scott and the recently resurrected Chronicles of Jean Jacques Froissart edited by Sidney Lanier (1880). The toy "warriors" were assigned names of historically dubious, but famous, literary characters such as Ivanhoe, Front-de-Boeuf and Brian de Bois Guilbert. Frank and Lester would create period costuming for their soldiers from Frank's meticulous drawings inspired by medieval legend. The boys became quite knowledgeable about armor and weaponry (Walker 19-23). Norris's surviving drawings from this period of his youth depict elements of the European medieval period (primarily of French medieval objects since his favorite source was the Sidney Lanier translation of the fourteenth-century French historian Froissart's Chronicles), including armor, weaponry, horses, castles, and various other accoutrements. But more revealing of his adaptation of the popular code of medieval culture and literature, is the militaristic nature of these drawings which echoes the brutal combat of the Middle Ages.

After suffering a broken arm in a football injury at the Belmont School, Frank was confined at home for recuperation. During this period his interests in medieval drawing expanded into a new, non-graphic dimension: he began to create stories to accompany his medieval sketches. Frank became a marvelous story-teller, spinning wildly imaginative often horrific tales in medieval settings, and he developed a cycle of stories written for Lester about the adventures of the wily Gaston le Fox, a cycle he animated with illustrations. Frank Norris
dreamed of becoming a graphic artist—a dream nurtured by his mother, an
actress and litterateur—his father, a successful, self-made businessman,
dismissed his son's interests in art as frivolous.

The contention of Norris's parents over their son's future would have a
marked influence upon the family, factoring into the eventual dissolution of the
Norris marriage and directly into their son's literary future. In 1886, however,
Frank was withdrawn by his parents from the Boys' High School and placed in
the San Francisco Art Association where he would study with Eric Pape, Helen
Hyde, Guy Rose and Ernest Peixotto (Walker 25). Frank, though, quickly grew
tired of the formalities of studio art training and opted for sketching horses and
military exercises, which he witnessed at the Presidio and on Van Ness Avenue
(Walker 47).

Obviously dissatisfied with art study at home in San Francisco, Frank
dreamed of studying art in Europe. Following the advice of a respected friend,
Frank's father consented to his son's studying abroad and the Norris family
accompanied him to Europe. Initially, young Frank was enrolled at the
Kensington School in London and then at the Julien Atelier in Paris in 1887.
Mrs. Norris stayed with Frank until he was permanently settled in Paris. She
discouraged his speaking of argot and prompted him to learn formal French,
which might have even enabled him to read Froissart in the original language,
were he so inclined. The apartment where the Norris family stayed belonged to
a collector of medieval accoutrements, including swords, cuirasses and coats of
mail. Frank reveled in this good fortune and sketched the medieval objects. The
games of lead soldiers were revived with his youngest brother, Charles (Lester had died of diphtheria in June 1887), and Frank, once again, became more involved in his story-telling, reviving the cycle of Gaston le Fox, a correspondence which was to continue in his letters to Charles throughout Frank's stay in Paris. As Charles recollected, in one tale "the hero had escaped into Saxony, accompanied by a detective with a glass hat, who interrupted the narrative to tell [American author Frank] Stockton's story of the lady and the tiger. The hero was locked in a signal tower and the heroine tied to a switch [. . . ]" (qtd. in Walker 42). Unfortunately, this rambling boyhood serial was lost in the San Francisco fire of 1906.

After the departure of his mother and brother from Paris in April 1888, Frank settled into an Old World manner which suited his residence in the historical city. He lived in a pension which housed a museum near the Hôtel des Invalides—the Musée d'Artillery—where a vast collection of medieval arms and weaponry was displayed (Walker 34). Frank began to share his medieval interests with friends from school, including Ernest Peixotto and Guy Rose, whom he had known at the San Francisco Art Association. Together they explored the remnants of medieval Paris, collecting items of interest. Frank's proudest acquisition was a skeleton hand with a manacle still attached (Walker 36). He and his friends were inspired to take up fencing and purchased the necessary accoutrements for this medieval sport (Walker 36). They seemed to think, like medievalists of previous generations, that possessing a remnant of the medieval period would make them "medieval." The fruition of Norris's
medieval interest was his grand scheme to paint The Battle of Crécy, a visualization of the 1346 battle described by Froissart, on a huge canvas. This idea was praised by his art teachers, who believed that this was a project which might finally inspire the daydreaming Frank (French 23). He committed himself to portraying the event with historical accuracy and spent many hours in meticulous study of medieval objects in the museums. He was even granted admission to the Musée de Cluny to continue his sketches when the museum closed (Walker 39). Every detail was recorded in his diary, complete with notes and sketches. A diary entry dated 1889 reads: "This casque was only employed when fighting on horseback--as the head could not turn either to right or to left" (qtd. in Walker 39).

This careful academic study informed Norris's first published work: "Clothes of Steel: Armor of the Middle Ages. Ivanhoe's Coat of Mail Defenses Which Could Not Withstand Powder and Ball." He mailed the article to his mother in San Francisco who, apparently of her own initiative, oversaw its publication in the United States. The illustrated piece, which documented the development of armor from the Roman period until its disuse in the seventeenth century, was published in the San Francisco Chronicle on March 31, 1889. In addition to the narrative, the article contains seven original drawings by Frank Norris. Norris now had a new focal point--the use of archaic technical terms and clever phrases around which he could build a whole piece of writing. "Clothes of Steel" is an example of this focus. The article is glutted with period jargon which to Norris credited his authority on the arms and weaponry of the
Middle Ages. A great deal of the information in "Clothes of Steel" was drawn from the Bayeux Tapestry, which illustrates in seventy-two scenes the Norman Conquest of 1066 by William the Conqueror. Norris also credits the manuscript Bible of Charles the Bold as a source for his early writings (Walker 40).

It is likely that these were his only sources, as the article is written in the first person and appears to be drawn solely from observation of pictures and not from medieval literature. The piece is filled with archaic vocabulary highlighted with unnecessary quotation marks, often used even after the words have been defined within the text. The following excerpt reveals Norris's self-assertive style:

The “lorica” was composed of scales of bronze or iron riveted upon a leathern tunic, which descended to the knees. The “tre-lised coat” was a sleeveless tunic of stout cloth, upon which were riveted thin strips of boiled leater. The “gambison” was simply a short tunic thickly padded and was worn under the “brognic.” The “brognic” was of more complicated workmanship. It was the national armor of the early Normans, and was worn by them at the battle of Hastings. The famous tapestry of Bayeux affords a minute picture of a Norman warrior of the time, and I have reproduced it as faithfully as possible in figure 1 (1).

Norris was compelled to establish his authority because within the article he challenges Sir Walter Scott's historical accuracy in describing the armor worn by the knight Ivanhoe. Norris had been studying Scott since childhood and it is not surprising that what he thought to be his discovery of this error in Scott could have been his reason for writing the article for he is quite confident in his correction:

I doubt whether a third of the readers of "Ivanhoe" [sic] ever pictured that gallant knight in the costume given in figure 3. Scott, it is true, gives quite a different description, but with all
respect to the greatest of all novelists, Sir Walter was wrong ("Clothes of Steel" 5)

Strangely enough, the article was published anonymously, for regardless of the merits of his research, Norris was still insecure about his writing ability. "Clothes of Steel" would be Norris's only footnoted article.

Though he would still produce illustrated works, Norris's increasing interest in writing began to overwhelm his interest in pictorial representation. In a gesture symbolic of this change of focus, he gave the huge canvas that was to bear the Battle of Crécy to his friends Rose and Peixotto (Walker 41). The indecisive Norris was again refiguring, but this time, his transition would mark the beginning of his literary career.

Norris then devoted himself to writing a medieval novel entitled Robert d'Artois. In the tradition of the juvenile Gaston le Fox cycle, he employed characters and plot structures taken from Lanier's version of Froissart's Chronicles. Norris made a serious attempt at fiction writing that would entertain his audience. This work was also lost in the San Francisco fire, but even in absentia is notable as Norris's only novel-length work set in the medieval period. It is unlikely that anyone outside of the Norris family ever saw the Gaston le Fox cycle or Robert d'Artois; however, it was through the reaction of Frank's father that these stories became significant in Frank's future. Franklin Walker reports that Benjamin Franklin Norris was so outraged by the evidence of his son's activities that he demanded Frank's return to the United States. Frank Jr. reluctantly packed up his medieval trinkets, the notes, and a draft of Robert d'Artois and returned to San Francisco after a stay of less than two years in
Europe (Walker 43). His devotion to the medieval was certainly not abandoned, but was quite refreshed and had become almost instinctive in his artistic character. Walker comments that Frank arrived at the wharf in New York dressed as a "boulevard Parisian" however, "he would have preferred to return in full armor" (42).

Norris's Parisian spree was at an end, but his return to San Francisco would set up an important juncture in his writing career; his medieval interests were developing from boyish evocations of the medieval period to mature applications of medievalism set in the modern world. He soon found that he was more well-suited to Gilded Age California than he had suspected. Still harboring his interests in medieval culture, Frank continued his reading and writing on the period and his correspondence with young Charles. He was, however, beginning to take an adult interest in his surroundings which would prove to raise his writing of medievalism to a more significant role as an instrument of social commentary. Accordingly, Norris spent 1890 at the Norris family mansion, exploring the prosperous city and collecting stories of local color which he would weave into his fictions.

Frank's father, meantime, vainly attempted to retrain his wayward son for a profession, and an attempt was made to again enroll him in the Belmont High School in hopes of his gaining admission to the University of California at Berkeley in the fall of 1890 (Walker 45). Frank, however, assigned himself to nothing productive, preferring instead to pursue his own medievalist
entertainment in the form of reading, sketching and chivalrously romancing a number of local girls (Walker 46). In an effort to appear responsible, Frank joined the state militia but found it too strenuous. His interest in the military was limited to his obsession with feudalism.

YVERNELLE

It is at this time that Norris probably began work on Yvernelle: A Legend of Feudal France, his first published fictional work in which he follows nineteenth-century medievalist conventions, in the winter of 1890. Written as an homage to feudalism, the three-canto narrative poem was inspired, developed and marketed in the medieval, romance veins of Sir Walter Scott. In Yvernelle, Norris first displays his writing talents and receives initial recognition as an aspiring California author.

In the canon of twentieth-century responses to Norris, Yvernelle has received scathing criticism as the product of a misdirected notable American naturalist. In light of such unduly harsh (and I will argue unfounded) criticism, Norris critics have found it difficult to credit the work as more than a writing exercise unfit for publication. What, unfortunately, maligns the poem further is that Frank's mother, Gertrude Doggett Norris, in an attempt to advance her son's art, subsidized the decorative publication of Yvernelle by advancing the publisher, Lippincott, four-hundred dollars to produce the illustrated poem in a lavish, gilded, Christmas edition which appeared in the holiday season of 1891 (Walker 51). Yvernelle, regardless of its negative modern reception and heavily subsidized publication, has a good deal of significance for the Norris canon. In
the "Introduction," Norris clearly states his adapting of the medieval to the modern world when he analogizes the feudal structure of the Middle Ages to that of twentieth-century robber barons. *Yvernelle* manifests Norris's new historicism and his realization that for his medieval interests to be marketable he must posture the conventions of personal physical combat, chivalric love, and hierarchical government in modern times.

The poem is remarkable as a first fictional work and though the genre and form may seem unlikely, even ill-chosen to contemporary Norris critics, these features were appropriate for its holiday publication, especially for a Gilded Age interested in medievalism. The work, however, has received harsh reviews from modern Norris critics. Don Graham says of *Yvernelle*: "Norris was to spend the rest of his literary career repudiating such aesthetic flourishes" (The Fiction of Frank Norris 97). Graham, as most Norris scholars, ignores Norris's early interest in the medieval because it does not appear to be preparatory for the brutal naturalism that would appear in *Vandover and the Brute* and *McTeague*; however, these critics ignore the many parallels in the elements of American medievalism and American naturalism (Walcutt viii).

When it appeared in 1891, though, *Yvernelle* received pleasant reviews. One such reader, K.B. Oracle of The Wave, found *Yvernelle* "an exceedingly clever piece of work" [...] "[containing] descriptive writing that shows touches of real poetic fire and fancy." He especially liked the illustrations, describing them as the "finest [...] seen this season" (VII December 26 9). An anonymous reviewer in The Critic called *Yvernelle*, "[a] well sustained, interesting poem
with plenty of swing and music." Norris knows "how to tell a story and also
how to write in the manner of Sir Walter" (XIX December 5 316). Yvernelle is
theoretically praised in Publishers Weekly when an anonymous reviewer
describes it as "a skillfully worded and stirring poem that makes some very
telling points when Norris compares the feudal baron of yore with the money-
kings of today" (XL November 21-28 36).

The "Introduction" Norris writes for Yvernelle, however, is inappropriate
for the poem. Norris thinks the revival of medieval romance is important in the
modern world, but presents the argument through naturalistic reasoning; thus,
the introduction contrasts sharply with "the skillfully worded" medievalist poem
that follows. Filled with classical allusions and historical references, Norris
argues that the universal elements of man, power, and the forces of good and
evil are intrinsic in human nature and are, thus, ever-present in the history of the
world; however, in the concluding stanza of the "Introduction," Norris presents
the body of the poem as an example of a beautiful surviving remnant of a brutal
period. The "Introduction" and the poem together represent Norris's
compromised view of the medieval: the traditional romanticized feudal structure
of the Middle Ages as opposed to the natural brutality of man that Norris
believed prevailed in the barbaric medieval centuries. Thus, an understanding of
Yvernelle is important as the first example in the Norris canon of Norris's
distinction between the artificial nostalgia of salon medievalism and the
nineteenth-century applications of medieval parallels. Further, the importance
of this argument to the doctrine of the Norris canon warrants the inclusion of the
"Introduction" in this study as it justifies Norris's entrance with the medieval as an age-old structure of enduring merit through which modern arguments could be made and contemporary morals revealed, much like the mysterious attraction of the Grecian urn in Keats's poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn." Yvernelle, also, contains overtones of Poe's "Sonnet to Science," and prefigures the lamentation of the nostalgic Miniver Cheevy in Edwin Arlington Robinson's *Spoon River Anthology*—all, romantic lamentations for bygone days.

**YVERNELLE**

**INTRODUCTION**

The evil that men do lives
And with their bones is oft interred the good.
Well said, Antonius; and men condemn
Their ancestors with base ingratitude.
But that which for one man alone is true
Is often truer of a buried age;
Its virtues are perversely kept from view,
While all its vices swell the historic page.
Perchance the cause for such injustice lies
In that we readier do understand
The miseries which from such vices rise
Than those joys springing from a virtuous land.
For misery is the same in ev'ry age;
Oppression, famine, poverty, and strife
Ground down the Pharaoh's swart vassalage
E'en as with us they grind the humbler life.

Like as the eupatrid made the helot serve;
Like as the roman equite crushed the plebian
Like as the baron long oppressed the serf,
Wat'ring with blood and sweat his hungry glebes;
And list'ning to each epoch's woeful cries,
And hearing them reéchoed in our own,
With them we can the quicker sympathize.
We love to tell of ills ourselves have known;
Like evils swarm each land, each century;
Grief hath no age, no nationality.

But Pleasure's beaming front and joyous face
With ev'ry epoch changes swift its hue,
And ev'ry nation, each succeeding race,
Produces for itself enjoyments new.
The eupatrid with fair tumultuous glance
Before the Olympian games raised loud acclaim
Rejoiced to see the circling choric dance,
The chariot fly, or the dull cestus maim.
Within the Coliseum's mighty girth

The equite Habet cried with down-turned thumb.
Over the tournament's re-listed earth
The baron bent, while not a voice was dumb;
Real blood-real death-real gasp and dying moan-
Aroused the equite's mind, the baron's heart;
While we, a dainty age, and milder grown,
Find our diversion in the mimic art;
The merits of an age are all its own,
Its evils are those common to mankind
We cannot claim its virtues when 'tis flown,
We are but heirs of ills it leaves behind.
The glorious arts of Greece with Greece expired,
What age has ever followed where she led?
Where now that iron justice which inspired
The Roman sire his offspring's blood to shed?
And where is now that doubtless faith and blind,
The valour, love, romance, and poetry,
That sacred reverence for womankind,
That roused self-sacrificing chivalry?
Romance, pure Art, stern Justice, all are flown!
Flown with the age by which they were ordained.

Whate'er the merits be we call our own,
Such now, by us, can never be attained.
But ev'ry evil which their states perplexed
They have bequeathed to us to work us woe.
Still unresolved that evil which them vexed,
That never-ending strife 'twixt high and low.
The feudal baron from his gloomy tower
Rode o'er his host of toiling serfs rough-shod;
And oft they felt his steel's resistless power,
And oft they writhed beneath his cruel rod
The feudal baron yet remains to-day,
But, changed into the modern moneyed lord,
Still o'er the people holds more cruel sway,
But 'tis with hoarded gold and not with sword.
Still do his vassals feel his iron heel.  
His power awes—his government alarms;  
Still rings the world with sounds of clashing steel:  
‘Tis of machinery and not of arms.

Still live the grievances of feudal day,  
But all its romance perished when it died,  
E’en as the hue and fragrance pass away  
Soon as the rose is dead and flung aside  
The pride, the pomp, the pageantry, are fled;  
What once to all was well-known commonplace  
Is told in legends, or is wholly dead,  
Or undervalued by a colder race.  
Yet time there was when squire, page, and knight  
Portcullis, keep, and barbican were real;  
When tournaments were things of daily sight,  
And Chivalry arrayed in flashing steel;—  
And time there was when the brave errant-knight  
Was not a fancy of a minstrel’s tale  
But fought in very earnest for the right,  
Or wandered wide to find the Holy Grail;  
Or when on bridge or road, backed by his page  
He held his post with ever-ready lance,  
And pledged himself all comers to engage  
To win the favour of his lady’s glance. (II. 1-95)

The three cantos of Yvernelle, that follow the "Introduction" are filled with the romanticized conventions used by nineteenth-century authors, to characterize the Middle Ages. Yvernelle, likewise, is a stylized, inaccurate rendition of medieval history in which a fallible knight and an infallible lady can come together in an unlikely, though predictable ending. For the first time, however, Norris incorporates into this fairy-tale genre of medievalism a foreboding observation about the evils of the medieval past, alive in the present day. Norris will do this again in The Pit when he describes the board of trade building as a sphinx-like monster and in The Octopus when he compares the railroad track system to the tentacles of a menacing octopus. Though neither of
these "monsters" are particularly medieval, they are like the dreadful monsters of medieval literature which were mysterious and threatening to man.

_Yvernelle_ also exemplifies Norris's first using the medieval courtly love tradition. This convention of the twelfth century was a highly stylized code of behavior assigned to members of the court, which codified the manners of extramarital love. Made legendary by the Arthur/Guinevere/Lancelot saga that was popular in the Gilded Age, courtly love was an important part of chivalry as it prescribed how knights like Caverlaye would serve women of various station. Norris would again write about the courtly love tradition as the structure for two of his novels: _Blix_ (1899) and _The Pit_ (1902).

Yet, for all of its phony-romantic, Scott-like qualities of medieval romance, _Yvernelle_ contains some rather barbaric elements. In the opening speech of Guhaldrada, the knight Caverlaye is accused of infidelities, an accusation which defiles him within the standards of the chivalric code when his instinctive sensual response to Guhaldrada, while pledged to another, is revealed. Caverlaye's abandonment of Guhaldrada for the pursuit of Yvernelle is yet another act of un-knightly behavior for which it seems Victorian-medieval readers could have held him (and Norris, indirectly) accountable for corrupting the valorous code of knightly (gentlemanly) behavior.

Norris's diversions from the romantic remain sexual as Caverlaye greets Raguenel and Yvernelle. Raguenel is so offended that Caverlaye will not kiss Yvernelle on the lips that he banishes him from Camelon. In suspecting him of some indiscretion. Caverlaye considers confessing his infidelity, but chooses to
conceal his mistake. It is this chain of events that leads to Caverlaye's dramatic display of despair; his murder of Tentiniac, Guhalrada's brother; and, the flight of Yvemelle to a nunnery.

Acknowledging his love for Yvemelle and vowing to right the wrong he has done her, Caverlaye embarks upon a midnight ride to reclaim his beloved Yvemelle before she speaks her sacred vows. This journey is the highlight of the poem, pairing man and horse in a mad dash across the French countryside to reach a distant abbey before the stroke of midnight. Norris takes a particular interest in describing Caverlaye's horse, Bayard. Norris had spent many hours studying and sketching horses in San Francisco, and his extensive description and characterization of Bayard reflects his acquired knowledge. The horse becomes an integral part of Caverlaye's success, and is likened to a mythical creature in its power and bravery (Yvemelle Canto II). Though the personification of animals through the supernatural was common in medieval romance and Victorian-era medievalism, the purpose of this literary convention was the creation of fantasy in a fairy-tale environment. Norris's motivation was quite different, though, as he would develop the characters of animals, especially horses, in his writings as a means of linking the domestic characteristics of animals with the intrinsic animal nature of man.

In the third canto of Yvemelle as Caverlaye nears the abbey, he strips off all of his knightly garb (giving Norris another opportunity to intricately describe knightly accoutrements) in order to lighten his weight on the horse and increase his speed. In so doing, he strips away his knightly persona, and approaches
Yvernelle as a commoner. This is the first such episode of a trend in Norris's writings where men throw off the trappings of rank and society to symbolically become "everyman," just as Ross Wilbur will be forced to do in Moran of the Lady Letty (1898) and Curtis Jadwin will be similarly driven to do in The Pit (1902).

In the concluding verses of Yvernelle, Norris again praises the innocence of the romances of bygone days and reminds the reader that he is only the teller of this tale. He concludes with the following verse:

The knight, the ladye, minstrel, all are dead! Their mem'ries fade, their old-time splendours pale. My story's done. God rest them that have sped! And so, tis' ended like an old wive's tale (I.I.700-704)

Yvernelle demonstrates Norris's first use of fictional literature, with a medieval basis, as a vehicle for expressing his fear about the effects of America's modernization.

Doubtless, Norris was proud of this work and its decorative appearance. Though he had submitted an originally illustrated manuscript, his typically violent sketches were rejected by the publisher for the more appropriate engravings and full-page color pictures by Will Low, Church and Deilman (Walker 51). The rejection of his artwork must have been discouraging for the aspiring artist Norris who, after his unexpected admission to the University of California at Berkeley in 1890, wrote in a letter to the administration: "I entered college with the view of preparing myself for the profession of a writer of fiction" (McElrath "An Early Frank Norris Item" 83-86). Norris then committed
himself to an intellectual profession in which he was interested and to which he
would conscientiously devote the rest of his life.

MEDIEVALIST WRITINGS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA

While a student at Berkeley, Norris took every opportunity to publish his work. He wrote a number of articles for the student newspaper and annual yearbook, as well as speeches and comic burlesques for a number of special occasions. Though much has been made of Norris's wild experiences as a member of Phi Gamma Delta fraternity, it is possible that modern Norris critics are simply trying to prove Norris to be a "regular fellow" as he was known to describe himself; however, his participation in a fraternity is quite important to this study as it was Norris's first opportunity to associate in a group classified by race, gender, politics, religion and economic distinctions—an extremely WASPish environment in which Norris seemed to fit. Norris, however, did not share the anti-Semitism of the Fiji's—two of his best friends were Jewish.

Norris, though, probably saw fraternity membership as a modern-day knighthood, complete with heraldry, ritual and codes of conduct.

Symbolically, the collegiate fraternal structure represents a medieval brotherhood, an important factor that initially attracted Norris and continually nourished his interests in the medieval throughout his college years. Modern critics have argued that Norris's boyhood interest in the medieval waned during his Berkeley years, but I will argue the opposite. During this period Norris produced six medievalist works, a production that shows no sign of diminishing interest in medievalism. He was fueled by the fire of collegiate and local
interest in his writing and often chose his favorite setting for story-telling—the Middle Ages.

In his four years at Berkeley, Norris would continue writing historically inspired poetry, producing three medievalist pieces: "At Damietta, A.D. 1250"; "Brunehilde"; and, "Les Enerves de Jumieges." Inspired by Froissart's Chronicles, probably influenced by the works of composer Richard Wagner, and likely inspired by the contemporary writings of British Pre-Raphaelite William Morris, these works, like Yvernelle of the year before, demonstrate Norris's considerable ability to write interesting historical narrative in poetic form. Its late Victorian-era appeal has medieval quaintness, but the three poems also show an increasing use of brutality staged in historical events of the medieval period. Still, the unlikely pairing of brutal violence with romantic convention was becoming more and more awkward. It seems that Norris was inspired to write realistic fictions, but could not originate his own stories; thus, he adapted to his literary purposes the classic stories he had known as a boy through the Sidney Lanier editions of Froissart which were quite popular with the boys of Norris's generation and probably inspired a lot of medievalist writing in the period.

**AT DAMIETTA, A. D. 1250**

"At Damietta, A.D. 1250" was probably composed by Norris in 1890, as it appeared in the student literary magazine, The Occident, on October 31 of that year. In typical Norris style, the saga is highly dramatic in its rendition of the bloody siege of the Eighth Crusade, fought upon Egyptian soil, in which the
Saracens take the French King Louis captive, and his steadfast wife Margaret commits suicide to escape enslavement. It is, also, probable that Norris completely referenced this piece through Lanier's version of Froissart, which gives a sketchy and greatly inaccurate account; therefore, the inaccuracies in this poem and the unlikely thematic choice are possibly explainable.

Like Yvernelle, the piece is riddled with the jargon of medieval convention and the use of uncommon vocabulary that is specific to Islamic involvement in the Crusades. It is similar to Yvernelle in structure and content: the opening voice of a woman, Margaret of Champagne, laments the loss of her husband Louis, just as Guhaldrada laments the loss of her lover Caverlaye; the poem contains the wild horseback ride of a knight-messenger bearing the news of Louis's capture on the Egyptian battle front and the dramatic approach of the rider to the Hall, similar to the ride of Caverlaye to liberate Yvernelle, and his audible approach to the abbey; the rider, like Caverlaye, strips off all knightly accoutrements before reaching his destination; and, the chivalric devotion of the noble woman Margaret to Louis is analogous to Guhaldrada's obsessive passion for Caverlaye. The similarities in these works were a first example of Norris's adapting successful aspects of previous works to his current writing, an idea which accounts for conventional trends that would develop in Norris's later works.

But, "At Damietta A.D. 1250" is distinguished from Yvernelle in a number of ways. Norris initiates in this short poem a trend which will distinguish his writing from that of other contemporary medievalists: the
development of the strong woman. Through the character of Margaret of Champagne, however, Norris can epitomize her as a classic medieval character, and as a woman one who can make a strong and unemotional choice about her own death by the sword of her servant as an alternative to the possibilities of rape or torture at the hands of her enemies. Norris saw this as a brave and chivalric choice more expected of a man than a woman; yet, for all of the bravery of Queen Margaret, Norris, in the close of the poem, ironically seems to merit the seneschal of King Louis for his obligatory act of killing the queen.

Norris fabricated highly dramatic, brutal events and wove them into a medieval legend. The detailed accounts of chaotic battle and disorganized warfare are both graphic and memorable. Man's instinctive, violent response to bloodshed is described in the following lines about the medieval attack on Tunis:

The shrieks of men, crushed under those
Who recked not, if they fell or stood
But e'er swept onward mad with blood
The lances shivered to the hand,
The hoarse fierce shout of brief command,
And while the toppling ramparts fell
The crashing of the mangonel.
By thousands are the Christians slain,
The outward gates are sapped and ta'en,
And on the walls,-fit sign of loss,
The crescent rises o'er the cross. (II II. 28-39)

Norris believed that man (or woman) could go truly "mad with blood" because the sight of blood awakened the animal nature or "brute" within and all vestiges of humanity and civilization would vanish in the heat of the moment. This would be fully developed in "Lauth," his shocking short story which would
appear in 1892. Norris increasingly sought brutal topics as a vehicle for the
exposition of his increasingly naturalistic theories. Though he had proclaimed
upon his entrance to Berkeley that his interests and vocational pursuits had
changed from art to fiction writing, his enthusiasm for depicting violence in
either medium was still of foremost interest.

Norris continued to use antiquated terminology to “medievalize” his
subject. There were many possible sources for his jargon in San Francisco of
the 1890’s as a revived academic interest in the medieval, particularly the study
of the twelfth century and a renewed fascination with the Crusades, had
developed as a result of the medieval renaissance in the arts in this period. It
would, nonetheless, be interesting to know Norris’s source of inspiration for
such uncommon words as "paynimirie," (Muslim); "soldan." (Sultan);
"mameluke," (a member of a military class, originally composed of slaves, who
seized control of the Egyptian sultanate in 1250); "mangonel" (various military
engines designed for throwing large stones, darts and missiles); and."seneschal"
(an officer having full charge of domestic arrangements in the household of a
medieval prince or dignitary; steward). Norris probably took great pride, as he
had in “Clothes of Steel,” in this use of medievally “technical” jargon, which he
used to credit his knowledge of the medieval battle at Damietta.

The conclusion of “At Damietta, A. D. 1250” addresses an audience with
a medievalist interest in the Middle Ages and who might possibly even be
familiar with the story of the medieval Margaret and Louis and the sack of Tunis.
in 1250 A.D. Norris addresses his audience as if they are students of medieval history:

In history you know the rest:  
How that the siege though fiercely pressed  
At length was raised, and how at last  
The ransomed king at Tunis passed  
To saintlike death, from saintlike life.  
And how was calmed the holy strife.  
But long, long after when the fame  
Of sainted Louis' deeds became  
The theme of every Trouveres song,  
When through the winter's evenings long  
The strolling jongleur thrummed his note  
While e'er the yule-log's fires wrote  
Quaint quivering tracings on the wail  
And while the Chatelaine let fall  
The shuttle from her tappestry [sic],  
Wrapt in his maritial melody  
While on the arms of his great chair  
The Baron's fingers drummed the air.  
While the jester checked his fun,  
While the hounds were lying prone.  
While the boys were drawn away  
From their carven toy knights play.  
While the men-at-arms and Boors  
Gathered at the lower doors.  
Then while lai and geste  
Of deeds done on the last crusade  
That lai the jongleur would recall  
Of Damietta's Seneschal (III ll. 29-56)

Often, Norris misspells words and forces the rhyme but, like Yvernelle, the poem has a quaint rhythm and tells a moral though brutal tale reminiscent of bygone days. Though the subject is grim, Norris ends the piece on an upbeat note which surely lifted the somber tone and appeased the American audience.

Though Norris was gaining recognition as an aspiring author about the Berkeley campus and in San Franciscan social circles, he still was hesitant to take credit for his well-received works. "At Damietta, A.D. 1250" is signed
"Norrys," a nom de plume that would appear on a number of his works published at the university. And, though the poem was published in late 1890, Norris dates it "'94," an intentional inaccuracy which may be confusing in Norris study. This erroneous date was possibly an acknowledgment of his projected year of graduation which should have been 1894.

**BRUNEHILDE**

On November 21, 1890, his poem entitled "Brunehilde" was published in *The Occident*, again bearing the signature "Norrys." In the most graphically violent piece that Norris had yet produced, he vividly describes the tortured death of the medieval Brunehilde, the Austrasian warrior queen of the fifth century. Norris prefaces the work with a quotation in the original French from *Chronique de Clotayre*, a medieval manuscript written by Geoffroi Rudel (Lib vii, Chap. ccxii). Though “Brunehilde” is generally considered a Norse mythological figure and a character of Germanic legend, she did historically exist and Norris knew this obscure fact. A likely assumption, though, is that Norris's version of this brutal story was inspired by popular, contemporary composer Richard Wagner's similar librettos for Die Walkure (The Valkyries) and Die Gotterdammerung (Twilight of the Gods) which dramatized Norse mythology and were often performed in America in the late nineteenth century.

The character of Moran in *Moran of the Lady Letty* is often described as a Valkyrie, an image which becomes a common parallel for Norris's heroines.

Brunehilde was a strong woman, and Norris depicts her as feminine in appearance, but characterizes her behavior as male. He would continue this
unlikely characterization of women until he created his best example of the
warrior woman—the character of Moran—the protagonist of his third novel,

Moran of the Lady Letty (1898), and then became more refined in his
characterization of Lloyd Seawright in A Man's Woman (1900). These female
characters were developed by Norris to represent what he believed would be the
"natural" woman—a creature which acted on animal instinct and not what he
perceived as feminine emotion. That is, Norris was developing female
characters capable of committing brutal acts.

Brunehilde was a good choice for Norris to develop what was to become
his trademark "man's woman." A medieval armored warrior of fabled military
power, she fought like a man and died as a heroine martyred for her dedication
to her barbaric clansmen. Betrayed by her army, Brunehilde is dragged to death
by her own horse: an event which is the central subject of Norris's poem.

"Brunehilde" exemplifies the development of brutal Norrisian naturalism within
medieval themes, as seen in the following passages:

It was over—The long ordeal of shame:
The jibes and insults of her conquerors;
The taunts and blows of every hind and slave
Who in her days of power fed with dogs [. . .]
An army banded 'gainst one woman weak;
And worse than all, the calm and pitying smile
That curled around the lips of Fredegonde
Seeing her rival humbled to the dust,
The brutal exultation of Clotaire
Who spat upon her while they bound her down (ll. 1-12)

And gave the word to loose the plunging horse.
The fierce unbroken steed, with snortings wild
And thundering hoofs, swept furiously on.
While in his track, bound to him by her hair [. . .]
Was dragged and mangled the Austrasian Queen (ll.22.25)
Lay with him—quivering, but not yet dead [. . .] (ll. 39–42)

She thought not that the blood of the great kings
Red on her hands was to be answered for:
No sentiment of pity or remorse
Ran in the fevered movements of her brain.
She could forget her traitor army now,
Forget her ruin and Clotaire’s vile jests:
But she could not forget the calm cold smile
That curled upon the lips of Fredegonde.
And even while she dwelt upon it there,
And all her pride of woman and of Queen
Ramped at her rival’s triumph and her fall.
Then came a sudden rattling in her throat—
She strove to check it—stiffened—gasped—and died
(ll. 61–73).

The poem is based on an historical event of the sixth century which was most accurately recorded in Gregory of Tours’ Historia Francorum. Fredegunde, the servant of Brunehilde seduces Chilperic I of Neustria (ruler of west Frankish kingdom), convincing him to divorce his wife Galwintha and marry her. Queen Fredegunda then plots the murder of Galwintha (Bunson 567) the sister of Brunehilde of Austrasia (an area which was the east Frankish kingdom). This event incites a Frankish civil war which lasts from 567 to 613. Chilperic is murdered in 584 and Fredegunde dies in 597. Her son Clotayre I assumes the throne in 597. He captures and executes Brunehilde in 613 (Bunson 280). This historical account fills all of the aspects that Norris sought as inspiration for his writing: murder, intrigue, and women who possessed the characteristics of men.

In light of the historical facts, it seems that Norris again manipulates a tale to suit his story-telling, by creating the final scene where the dying Brunehilde must endure the hated presence of Fredegunde, an impossible audience as Fredegunde had been dead for sixteen years. Further, when
Brunehilde was executed, she was a very old woman of seventy-nine—certainly not possessing the voluptuous impression of the heroine Norris gives. Such deliberate alteration of historical fact, though, was an element of medievalism which granted Norris license to sensationalize such legendary tales for the modern world, a practice that Norris had once noted and criticized in Sir Walter Scott's medievalist fiction.

Brunehilde's hatred toward Fredegunde undercuts Norris's intended portrait of the unemotional woman, just as his championing of the seneschal in his previous poem, served to diminish the valor of Margaret. This twist in the plots of his works brings into question his sincerity when he depicts women as the equivalents of men. Though the heroines of his early works were often degraded, this trend would change in the later novels when Norris would develop leading women who could possess strength of character on the merit of their deeds and not on physical masculine traits. Page Dearborn of The Pit, and Travis Bessemer of Blix are later Norrisian examples of strong modern women who, like Brunehilde, are feminine in appearance.

LES ENERVES DE JUMIEGES

Norris publishes his last medieval poem, "Les Enerves de Jumieges" (The Nerveless of Jumieges), in The Occident on December 12, 1890. The subject of this poem, also drawn from Frankish history of the fifth or sixth century, is so misconstrued it is hard to identify the actual historical reference. As in Norris's other poems, "Les Enerves de Jumieges" opens with a direct
narrative statement, but this time in the voice of a man, presumably one of the last Merovingian kings.

The poem is certainly as grisly as "Brunehilde," for in it Norris describes in detail the slain bodies of the narrator's two sons who have been executed for treason:

The loathsome sight of my sons twain
Erstwhile revolted 'gainst my reign.
Repulsive to mine eye hath grown:
It irks me sore to look upon
The punishment of their misdeeds
Which I have brought upon their heads.
For they are lifeless, sodden, numb.
Their ears are deaf—their tongues are dumb,
With leaden-lidded fishy eye
And open palms they lifeless lie:
Their minds are sapped as though the brain
Had oozed in clamy sweat between
The festering segments of the skull
And left them brutish—senseless,—dull.
Each body is a living corse
In place of sons I have—remorse." (ll.1-16)

The narrator follows the same pattern as in the previous works, but seems to offer only an historical note (and an inaccurate one at that) embellished with graphic imagery that sets the dark and somber tone. The violent action suggested matched Norris's taste for bloody and inhumane treatment which he would later express was what he believed to be the unconscious, immoral and instinctive behavior of the natural world. His nineteenth-century audience wanted to read about this injustice in the medieval world as it served to make more understandable the inhumanities perpetrated in the modern world.

In this poem, Norris again demonstrates how he increasingly manipulated fact and traditional fictional form to fit his own purposes—a
practice that he would implement in the writing of novels about what constituted brutal behavior in an American city. Norris would use this method throughout his literary career, but would advance to modern stories set in the modern age which were, oddly, still informed by the medieval tradition and often contained medieval references. When Norris again reveals his medieval roots in his final novel The Pit, the details are washed in a sophisticated, mature, modern story: yet, the events are no less brutal. After "Les Enerves de Jumieges," Norris's poetic endeavors were ended, and he would write solely in prose for the rest of his career.

NORRIS'S MEDIEVALIST WRITINGS MATURE

Norris attended the University of California at Berkeley from 1890 to 1894, but never attained a degree due to a grade deficiency in mathematics. The Berkeley years, however, were essential to his development as an author. He finished Yvernelle in his freshman year and began McTeague in his senior year. Over this four-year period, he produced four poems (three previously discussed in this chapter); four sketches; a play; and two short stories for University of California publications. He also published one poem and twelve short stories in local San Francisco magazines.

Though this flurry of publication seems a prolific outpouring for a full-time student, it was possibly not the greatest influential force on his authorial character. Norris was committed to experiencing and observing real life, and indeed did some "real" living while at Berkeley. He became absorbed in football, campus politics, and fraternity hazing, and in his eloquent advocation
of these activities used medieval analogies to condone the associated rowdy behavior. In defense of rumbles between freshmen and sophomores, Norris wrote:

If the boys of our universities want to fight, let them fight and consider it a thing to be thankful for. They are only true to the instincts of their race. We Anglo-Saxons are a fighting race: have fought our way from the swamps of Holland to the shores of the Pacific Coast at the expense of worse things than smashed faces and twisted knees. One good fight will do more for a boy than a year of schooling. If he loses he has at least had an experience which can be made profitable. It wakes in him that fine, reckless arrogance, that splendid brutal bullying spirit that is the Anglo-Saxon's birthright that got for us this whole mid-ocean country from under the guns of England; that got Texas and New Mexico and the whole Southwest for us, and California and the Northern boundary. (qtd. in Walker 66-67)

The medieval convention of nationalism—fierce national pride—as seen in this passage, became an important element in all of Norris's writings. The all-American, red-blooded, "be-man"—the hero of these nationalistic writings—became the worthy counterpart of Norris's warrior-woman character, both of whom were developed through his medievalist devotion to the power of the Anglo-Saxon. The strong ethnic pride of the Middle Ages, which came to be known as nationalism in the modern world, is a convention found in the sagas of the Middle Ages, and an element also found throughout the Norris canon. It is depicted in the proud entrepreneurism of the dentist McTeague in McTeague; in the bravery of the American explorer Ward Bennett of A Man's Woman; and in the patriotism of Presley in The Octopus. In fact, the character of the author Presley closely parallels that of Norris who was quite patriotic himself. He
would develop many characterizations of immigrants in his stories who exhibited fierce national pride in America.

**POPULAR EVOLUTIONARY THEORY AND THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL DARWINIST JOSEPH LECONTE**

Amidst all of the collegiate enthusiasm, however, Norris was maturing in his writing projects through a broader interest in his intellectual environment. During Norris's matriculation at Berkeley, the renowned evolutionist Joseph LeConte was on faculty. LeConte was a natural history scientist from Georgia who had achieved great fame as a public speaker on nineteenth-century issues, especially Darwin's recently published *Origin of Species and the Descent of Man*. LeConte was a reconciliationist—a fundamentally religious man who was a Darwinian convert—though he was theistic by nature, he would avow the theory of evolution as the divine manifestation of biblical scripture from a scientist's point of view. LeConte simply made the proposition of evolutionary theory more palatable for Christians and Jews of the era who were offended by this modern science. "Organized religion," said LeConte, "tended to resist change, to cling tenaciously to traditional beliefs, thereby petrifying into an institution that could no longer grow or receive new truths" (qtd. in Stephens 161). Norris would directly reflect this LeContean influence in Anselm's speech on the demise of Lauth in the conclusion of "Lauth."

Le Conte's interpretation of popular, evolutionary theory inspired Norris to write two sensational, medievally-inspired stories, "The Jongleur de Taillebois" and "Lauth." Though Norris was virtually recalcitrant about collegiate studies by his final year, he became consumed by ideas inspired by
LeConte's lectures, and most Norris scholars believe that, at this point, popular evolutionary theory became the most influential factor in the Norris canon.\textsuperscript{10}

But why would Norris have chosen to stage this evolutionary theory in a medieval setting if, in fact, this "new" idea was a progression away from his "old" medievalist style of writing? As Norris had done in his previous writings, he would merely incorporate this "new science" into his usual medieval structure in two short stories: "The Jongleur de Taillebois" and "Lauth."

\textbf{THE JONCLEUR DE TAILLEBOIS}

"The Jongleur de Taillebois" (The Juggler [or trickster] of Taillebois [a forest in medieval France]) published in\textbf{ The San Francisco Wave} on July 16, 1892, was the first of Norris's stories influenced by LeConte. Concerning this Gothic science-fiction, a friend remarked to Norris's stern father: "If I had a son who wrote a story like that, I'd have him put out of the world in a lethal chamber" (qtd. in Walker 72). Aside from this comment recollected by Charles Norris, there is no existing contemporary criticism of this sensational short story. "The Jongleur de Taillebois" is a brutal story of murder, deception and revenge set in the Middle Ages. Similar to the fictions of Rudyard Kipling, of which Norris was a devoted fan, it is a story of adventure and intrigue. "The Jongleur" is extremely well-organized for a Norrisian work of the Berkeley period as it involves numerous scene changes and the constant plot movement that was seen in\textit{ Yvernelle} and would later be found in\textit{ The Octopus} and\textit{ The Pit}.

By the time he composed "The Jongleur," Norris had become very skillful at bringing his reader into the mind of the narrator. Edgar Allen Poe had
also successfully used this technique in his popular Gothic-supernatural fictions. Norris would continue this psychological characterization, which allowed him to write moral allegories in a stream of consciousness technique through the voice of the protagonist. In "The Jongleur de Taillebois," Amelot's guilty conscience speaks to him through the black pine tree, follows him around feudal France, provokes his delirious confession to the murder of Yeres and aids his execution at the Petit Chatelet—an idea that is quite similar to that found in Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," where the murderer's guilty conscience drives him to confession. Norris also demonstrates, through much less sensational examples, this tortured conscience in the characters of Vandover in Vandover and the Brute (1890) and Laura Jadwin in The Pit (1902).

"The Jongleur de Taillebois," like "Lauth" which would follow a few months later, dealt in stark realistic terms with the barbaric, animalistic nature of man, a nature which becomes evident when it is stripped of all social vestiges. Amelot brutally slays Yeres in Taillebois forest. As significant and deserved as the murder seems in the mind of Amelot, the reader is never told the motive for the murder—yet another example of Norris's obsession with the overuse of medieval jargon in his fictions and the neglect of essential plot details. After bashing his victim's head with his arbalist, Amelot watches Yeres writhing in pain and is reminded of a cat that he has tortured in the same way. Without further regard, Amelot stabs Yeres apparently to death with his poignard and buries his dying body in the trunk of a black pine tree that is soon to be planted
in a reforestation project, a medieval practice of which Norris must have oddly had some knowledge.11

Fifteen years later, Amelot is traveling past Taillebois forest in a thunder storm when he is forced to reign his horse down the path along which he had slain Yeres so many years ago:

By the light afforded by the well-nigh incessant blaze of the lightning the place seemed strangely familiar to him, but the turmoil of external nature had so confused his mind that he could form no particular recollection [. . .] Then, with the suddenness and vividness of one of the flashes that illumined the spot, the tragedy that had been enacted upon it recurred to his mind. He saw Yeres rolling about in his death throes, saw him suddenly stiffen under his "misericordia" and, as another person, saw him drag the body to the place where the Black Pine was to be erected. [. . .] Yes, there it stood, the same great forest giant, but now, as he gazed, an indefinable feeling of awe mingled with dread seized upon him. The Pine seemed as if endowed with some unearthly personality, with something that was almost human, or a great deal more [. . .] (8-9).

The forest itself becomes magical and sinister as if it is plotting against the guilty Amelot. Modern Norris scholar Ernest Marchand comments upon Norris's elaborate descriptions of nature (of which this excerpt of "The Jongleur" is a good example) and its effective evocation of the primeval for his naturalistic plots: "In his [Norris's] hands nature is no longer merely primitive: it is 'primordial,' 'primeval' [. . .] "It is a stage for paleolithic man, or for his modern descendant, who is less removed in spirit than he thinks from his skin-clad forebear of the heavy brow-ridges" (Marchand 110). (This image is echoed in The Pit where the businessman, Jadwin, is described as "[looking] from under his heavy brows" (14), a suggestion that though Jadwin is civilized he possesses the physical characteristics of primitive man.) Norris, himself an artist,
described sublime settings in his writing as magnificently as the artists of the early nineteenth-century had painted them, and he developed this skill in his early medieval works and continued to employ its surreal affect in many of his writings.  

When a bolt of lightning uproots the Black Pine tree, exposing the skeleton of Yeres, Amelot is horrified and his guilty conscious, already made sensitive by the parallel activities of the forest and Amelot's mental state, consumes him. Later, he imagines that the flute he is playing at a court celebration begins to magically play the favorite song of Yeres. When Amelot attempts to quiet the instrument, it emits the death scream of Yeres, provoking Amelot to confess his crime. Convicted and sentenced, Amelot is executed upon a gibbet crafted from the remains of the Black Pine.

The character of Amelot was a new development in Norris's accustomed medieval imagery. In the following passage, Amelot kills Yeres for no apparent reason and without remorse—in fact, he takes pleasure in the memory of his observance of Yere's slow, agonizing death in the forest of Taillebois:

Now that the heat and excitement of the first attack was over Amelot saw that he had not struck with sufficient precision, and that his sword, glancing from Yeres' head, so quickly averted to avoid it, had only lighted upon and laid open the base of the neck behind the collar bone. But it was enough. If not precise, the blow had been powerful, and Amelot perceived with satisfaction that the gash in Yeres neck was large enough to let the life out of any man. It was only a question of time, and so, stepping back to avoid Yeres's furious rolling and tumbling, he waited. He had never killed a man before, and so the sight of one in his agony of violent death was to his mind a novel and interesting sight. ("Le Jongleur" 3)
Amelot is a mercenary knight—a knight without a soul—possessing none of the
chilicric characteristics that Norris idolized. Even at their worst, the self-
destructive, atavistic characters that Norris would later introduce in his novels
were pathetic in their helpless bondage to their brutal nature—but, not Amelot.

Interesting, though, is Amelot's reference to spiritual atonement for
misdeeds—common in the Middle Ages—yet, quite a romantic notion in a
brutally naturalistic story, but a conclusion that Norris would ironically include
in several of his naturalistic works. The story is naturalistic in the portrayal of
the violent death, but also in Norris's terms of showing the brutality of medieval
society. Upon his recollection of the murder of Yeres, Amelot remarks: "It was
here—By St. Guthlac, enough of that! He crossed himself devoutly. Let the past
guard well its own secrets: pilgrimages and offerings would atone" ("Le
Jongleur" 8). Possibly, Norris intended this comment to be merely attributable
to the guilty conscience of a murderer; nonetheless, it is notable as a diversion
for a cold-blooded killer; however, the act of physical and spiritual atonement
(pilgrimages and offerings) for sins was emphasized in medieval religion, a
tradition that Norris was surely aware of from his boyhood readings of medieval
tales.

"The Jongleur de Taillebois" marks a serious attempt to mesh medieval
convention with non-romantic fiction in the entertaining and popular structure of
the adventure story. The story, however, has a disturbing moral message.
Though the plot may not be purely original, it is a first attempt at originality for
Norris as it is a fictional work set in the medieval period and not merely the
inaccurate re-telling of an actual medieval event. Also, here Norris first incorporates LeConte's evolutionary theory which would emerge again in the themes of *Vandover and the Brute* (1898) and *McTeague* (1899).

**LAUTH**

On the heels of "The Jongleur de Taillebois," Norris published an even more controversial work in *The Overland Monthly* in March 1893 entitled "Lauth." Hailed happily, though erroneously, by Norris scholars as the final product of Norris's "adolescent infatuation with the Middle Ages" (French 49), "Lauth" presents a frustrated struggle between the Old World and the new as Norris clings again to a plot in a medieval setting to develop a quite modern science fiction plot equivalent to those of science fiction writers of his day.

Though the story is told by a third person narrator, the plot follows the pitiful Lauth's train of thought. Lauth, the protagonist, was a medical student in medieval Paris, who found himself unwillingly involved in a violent student revolt against the palace guards. Through the character of Lauth, Norris developed perhaps his greatest example of atavism and its affects on civilized man:

> He [Lauth] bent his weapon, fitted a bolt to the leathern cord, and sliding down to the edge of the roof, peered into the street below. Yet he hesitated to shoot. He was not a soldier, either by profession or inclination: [like Amelot of "Le Jongleur de Taillebois"] he had never taken life before, and he was unwilling to do so now. He laid his arbalist aside and contented himself with watching the progress of the fight below.

Yet soon he saw that it was fairing ill with his companions. The gens d'armes, forming a solid and compact front, were now forcing them backward with ever-increasing rapidity. Twice they had rallied in vain: another rush, and the soldiers would have
driven them in. He lost control of his more humane instincts and discharged his arbalist at random into the crowd of his enemies below. The course of the bolt was not so rapid but that he could not follow it with his eyes, and he saw it whiz through the air to bury itself deep in the neck of a stoutly built man who fought without a helmet. The man threw up his arms and fell sideward.

In an instant a mighty flame of blood lust thrilled up through all Lauth's body and mind. At the sight of blood shed by his own hands all the animal savagery latent in every human being woke within him-no more merciful scruples now. He could kill. In the twinkling of an eye the pale, highly cultivated scholar, whose life had been passed in the study of science and abstruse questions of philosophy, sank back to the level of his savage Celtic ancestors. His eyes glittered he moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue, and his whole frame quivered with the eagerness and craving of a panther in sight of his prey. He could not stretch his arbalist quickly enough again, and his fingers shook as he laid the bolt in the groove. ("Lauth" 118-119)

In an attempt to escape his shelter in the battle, Lauth sustains a fatal blow, yet is able to meticulously note and ponder the stages of the dying process. He initially defies death, but finally succumbs after an eloquent soliloquy on the mysteries of dying and his despair at dying without absolution—yet another unexpected remark in a brutal story—which echoes a very medieval concern. Lauth also ponders the possibility of falling into a comatose state and being mistakenly buried alive, another idea sensationalized by Poe.

In this story, Norris espouses LeContean evolutionary theory in his description of Lauth's reaction to the battle scene and to taking human life for the first time. Though Lauth is similar to Amelot of "Le Jongleur de Taillebois" in his innocence, he is much more affected by his animal instincts for survival and his pleasure in the violent physical acts of the riot. Amelot is only intrigued by the death of Yere's, yet, within Lauth, his ability to murder transforms him...
transforms him from a "highly cultivated scholar" to being reduced to the "level of his savage Celtic ancestors," clearly a Norrisian analogy to the belief that the early Celts were barbaric, or at least, more barbaric than he believed the medieval town and gown conflict of this story. Norris, continues, in "Lauth," to make religious reference mixed with graphic brutality, illustrating that in the Middle Ages ritual religious practice and compliance with the sometimes violent forces of human nature were mutually exclusive, which surely must have seemed contradictory to modern, Victorian-American readers.

Two of Lauth's medical school colleagues, Chavannes and Anselm, strive to restore life to Lauth's dead body, and as they labor over the corpse, Chavannes argues that man has no soul:

All forms of life were but the same: the vivifying spark that had once fired the body of Lauth was, in nature, no way different from that which flashed in the eye of a spirited horse, which gleamed in all the lower forms of animal life, which smouldered in the trees and vines and slumbered, sluggish and all but extinguished, in the mollusk and sponge. Man did but possess life in its highest development. Soul? There was no soul. What mankind called soul was but life. ("Lauth" 131).

Anselm agrees to assist Chavannes with reviving Lauth, but states that he believes "the soul, and only the soul, is the motor of existence" ("Lauth" 134) regarding the experiment purely from a scientific and not a religious standpoint. The belief that a life force exists rather than a soul, is certainly not medieval. It is a direct reflection of Norris's exposure to the teachings of LeConte while at Berkeley.

After Lauth's corpse is stretched upon Chavannes' dissecting table in the university lab, the blood of living sheep\textsuperscript{14} is transfused into his veins,\textsuperscript{15} again.
not a very medieval idea. The basic signs of life are restored in Lauth and after a few days, he is able to sit up and respond when spoken to. Chavannes and Anselm are both enthused and horrified by this transformation. However, when Lauth appears that he will make a complete recovery, he stands and shouts:

"This is not I: where am I. For God's sake, tell me where I am" ("Lauth" 143).

Lauth then collapses and assumes the appearance and characteristics of an animal.

Following his collapse, Lauth's degradation is cruel and certain:

From this time on the process of decay became rapidly more apparent: what little lustre yet lurked in the eye went out leaving it dull and fish like: the expression of the face lost all semblance to humanity: the hair grew out long and coarse and fell matted over the eyes. The nails became claws, the teeth fangs, and one morning upon entering the room assigned to Lauth, Chavannes and Anselm found him quite stripped, grovelling on all fours in one corner of the room, making a low, monotonous growling sound, his teeth rattling and snapping together. ("Lauth" 144)

The experiment of Chavannes fails, and he and Anselm mourn the inevitable demise of Lauth. Norris gives graphic physical details of Lauth's regression:

One by one the senses perished. It [Lauth] was already blind and deaf; now its vocal organs seemed to wither, and the unbroken silence of the shaggy yellow lips was even more revolting than its former inhuman noises. But still it lived [as an increasingly primitive life form]. Either it could not die or else was dying slowly. In course of time all likeness to the human form disappeared from the body. By some unspeakable process the limbs, arms, and features slowly resolved themselves into one another. A horrible sleepless mass lay upon the floor. And yet until decomposition had set in, some kind of life was contained in it. It lived, but lived not as do the animals or the trees, but as the protozoa, the jellyfish, and those strange lowest forms of existence wherein the line between vegetable and animal cannot be drawn. ("Lauth" 145)
Though Lauth's evolutionary regression may seem horrifying, Norris makes a
great argument for humanity in the grotesque experiment upon Lauth by
demonstrating that though the flesh may be weak, the will to live within the
human spirit is in the soul of man, and it is this which separates man from
animals—not an argument supported by popular evolutionary theory. Though a
modern critic, Warren French, notes the ambiguous detail of the story, he
dismisses it as "the most ineptly told story ever preserved between boards"
(French 51); however, it is important to note that "Lauth" is the only story with
an overt medieval setting to receive much attention from Norris critics. Despite
the weird sequence of details that precede his speech, Anselm's conclusive
statement to Chavannes describing the death of Lauth is a positive, life-
affirming directive. The condition of Lauth allows Norris, through Anselm, to
talk about life forces and the passage of time. Through the integration of earth
and time, the strange story delivers a universal message voiced here in Anselm's
closing statement about the significance of a living being:

"Chavannes, there is no such thing as man existing as a type by
himself. No: that which we call man is half animal, half God, a
being on one hand capable of rising to the sublimest heights of
intellectual grandeur, equal almost to his Maker: on the other
hand, sinking at times almost to the last level of ignominy and
moral degradation. Take life away from this being and at once
the soul mounts upward to the God that first gave it. Take from
him his soul—that part of him that is God—and straightway he
sinks down to the level of the lowest animal—we have just seen
it. Chavannes, follow me for a moment. Lauth died; life and the
soul departed together from the body; you found means to call
back life; the soul you could not recall: mark what followed."
("Lauth" 146)
The graphic horror of this science fiction is potentially controversial as it pairs the horrific description of the attempted resurrection of the dead with rudimentary Christian doctrine about the divine nature of man. It should spark more critical controversy from Norris scholars in the future because it is the first example in the surviving Norris canon of Norris's moralizing, a trait he would resume in his later works, especially with his minor characters in *Vandover and the Brute* and *The Octopus*. One might also have expected moral uproar from Norris's genteel San Franciscan readers because of the graphic nature of the story; however, in the end, Norris is trying to present a moral ending by showing the existence of the unique soul of humans—again, a LeContean inspiration.

Also, it is surprising that this strange, Gothic story ever saw contemporary publication in a mainstream periodical like *The Overland Monthly*. Possibly, its uncensored appearance is due to the fact that the editors relegated it to the genre of popular science fiction. Certainly this far-fetched story is no more shocking than Kipling's "The Mark of the Beast" (1898) (to which the inspiration of "Lauth" is often attributed) or, in my opinion, to H.G. Wells' strikingly similar *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, (1896) which would appear three years later. Norris's combined interests in the medieval and in the sensational possibilities of popular evolutionary theory had become a science fiction notion and possibly this is why "Lauth" was his last work staged in the medieval period.
NORRIS ABANDONS THE MEDIEVAL GOTHIC

As to Norris's compromised position in "Lauth," it is easily understandable in context: Norris was raised in a Christian home (Walker 4), an environment which generated the opinions reflected in Anselm's argument. Also, these were traditionally medieval arguments. Norris, however, was exposed to radical evolutionary theory at the University of California at Berkeley, an exposure that sets the stage in "Lauth" so that he could argue what was probably in the twenty-two year old Norris's mind the morally unthinkable, though it was made acceptable by the moderated evolutionary theories of LeConte. Any conflict which Norris may have experienced at this point in his career was apparently resolved after the publication of "Lauth," possibly due to his Parisian exposure to French naturalists who were capable of demonstrating the moral and physical ruin of man without stooping to the sensationalism characteristically found in freakish, science-fiction novels. This theoretical reconciliation of Norris's point of view marked the turning point in his career from awkward stories within medieval settings and conventions, through which Norris could stage brutal drama, to a more sophisticated application of evolutionary naturalism which could be discreetly staged in a prosperous, modern American city, such as Chicago in The Pit, a likely place for modern courtly love in the New World.

The body of Norris's medievalist writings, thus, becomes significant in a number of ways. The early poems and stories of medieval convention demonstrate Norris's unique version of the Victorian romance of popularized
medievalism. His depiction of the Middle Ages, popularly envisioned as a "barbaric" period, justified his use of physical brutality in his fictions, appropriating these violent stories to titillate his genteel, late nineteenth-century audience. His sensational works developed into the brutal realism of his later novels, serving as a vehicle for absurd plot developments that could never have been possible in the modern, civilized world. Finally, these often disturbing stories within the medieval convention created within Norris a confidence to pursue his own authorial course regardless of public opinion: only two years later, in the midst of a heated, censorial flurry, he would publish McTeague, which William Dean Howells thought "[. . .] brought a new mode into American literature with the 'effect of a blizzard.'" (qtd. in the Rinehart edition of McTeague vii)

Norris's medievalist writings also foreshadow many of the distinctive elements of his unique authorial style that would become more fully developed in his novels. Initially, Norris demonstrated a knack for floating from one genre to another, and then back again; a transience that would, in many negative ways, affect Norris's critical reception throughout his career. Norris, though, proves his excellent skills in writing sensational stories through his unusual choices of plots and characterizations. He introduced, in these medievalist works the "warrior-woman" or "man's woman" that would characterize his novels. The women were usually of Nordic appearance and with masculine names like Moran Sternensen of Moran of the Lady Letty (1898); Lloyd Seawright of A Man's Woman (1899); and, to some extent, Travis Bessemer of Blix. Norris also
developed the red-blooded, "he-man" in characters like Charlie Geary of *Vandover and the Brute* and Ward Bennett of *A Man's Woman*, all of whom would exhibit the brutal, non-emotional behavior which would ignite his violent themes. Through these characters, Norris could voice what were possibly his own WASP-ish, prejudiced views of society, views often concealed in verbal displays of American nationalism. Through the medieval pieces, Norris was able to show that brutish instincts of humans, regardless of civilization, were ingrained within them and were as controlling of their behavior in the modern world as these instincts had been in the medieval world of twelfth-century Europe.

In the twelve remaining years of his life, Norris continued to incorporate his interest in medieval nostalgia discreetly into his fiction writing. He presented his argument about the importance of the past in the modern world through a body of published essays, entitled "The Responsibilities of a Novelist" which I will discuss in the next chapter of this dissertation, about the profession of writing in America and the responsibilities of an American author. In these essays, Norris, both directly and indirectly, prepares his audience for the sophisticated application of medievalism which would appear as a structural background in his final novel, *The Pit*. 
CHAPTER THREE  
NORRIS DEFINES HIMSELF AS A MEDIEVALIST:  
THE EARLY ESSAYS

Norris wrote over two hundred short pieces for several popular American periodicals between the publication of "Lauth" in 1890 and The Pit in 1902. Though most of these were short stories, Norris also produced three groups of critical essays on the subject of writing and how contemporary American fiction should be read, in which he commented upon the conventions of literature and speculated on the future form of the American novel. Throughout these essays, Norris explained his critical beliefs, and made numerous references to his specific use of the medieval tradition and its appropriate application to the twentieth-century American novel. His comments illuminate, in retrospect, many aspects of his early medievalist works, for example, as I have shown in "Clothes of Steel," where Norris demonstrates a preference for truth over accuracy which is not just an artistic expression, but is particularly allied to his enthusiasm for medievalism. In these essays, he makes reference to similar techniques used in his novels, especially anticipating his mature, sophisticated appropriation of medievalism in The Pit. His last collection of essays, entitled The Responsibilities of the Novelist, is a group of eight essays, syndicated January-March, 1903. Norris critic Donald Pizer describes these essays:

"[They are] 'sincere' in [the] sense of the term, in that they express his ingrained interests and beliefs [. . .] Norris' rhetoric in his essays, however, suggests one of their important characteristics— their tone and style of his gradually assumed role of popular moralist. He had always partially played that role, but in his writings of 1901-1902, as he reached a continually
Norris’s assumed role of social moralist is perhaps nowhere more obvious than in his last two novels, The Octopus and The Pit.

A PROBLEM IN FICTION: TRUTH VS. ACCURACY

In his "assumed role" as a literary guide for early twentieth-century American readers and writers, Norris consistently advocates in this essay collection the influential force of popular medievalism in his own writing. In an essay entitled "A Problem in Fiction," he addresses the issue of truth versus accuracy in art and literature to explain why artists and writers incorporate inaccurate details in the production of "truthful," though not accurate, art forms. Norris positions himself within this practice of medievalist writers, demonstrating this technique in the early poem "Brunehilde," a poem in which he romanticizes history by liberally reinterpreting the story of the sixth-century German queen. Though historical records show that Brunehilde was executed as an old woman, Norris portrays her as young and beautiful when she dies. Such a romanticization of history—which is an important aspect of the "medievalizing" of medieval history—in all of its inaccuracies, was appealing to the Victorian reading audience, who was enamored by the false impression that they were given of the Middle Ages.

In his earliest medievally-inspired article, "Clothes of Steel" (1888), Norris had criticized Sir Walter Scott for such inaccuracies in his description of armor in Ivanhoe; but, some thirteen years later—when Norris perhaps had a
better understanding of medievalist technique—he would encourage this practice in an essay entitled "A Problem in Fiction":

How shall the writer guide himself in the treatment of a pivotal, critical Scene, or how shall the reader judge whether or not the story is true? It is a crux, one admits. But the incident must be handled so as to seem true [. . .]. In the fine arts, we do not care one little bit about what life actually is, but what it looks like to an interesting, impressionable man and if he tells his story, or paints his picture, so that the majority will say "Yes, that must have been just about what would have happened under those circumstances," he is true [. . .]. Consider the study of a French cuirassier by Detaille; where the sunlight strikes the brown coat of the horse, you will see, if you look close, a mere smear of blue, light blue. This is accurate. The horse is not blue, no has he any blue spots. Stand at the proper distance and the blue smear resolves itself into the glossy reflection of the sun, and the effect is true. (173)

Norris charges the writer with the responsibility of portraying the truth, if even through inaccurate details, so that the reader may "judge" the artist "true."

He excludes, however, the fine arts, such as painting, from this responsibility, because he says art is a visual medium and the viewer must bring the story to the depiction on the canvas. He imagines the viewer might say, "Yes, that must have been just about what would have happened under those circumstances."

Norris, an artist himself, was perhaps recalling his own plans for the depiction of the "Battle of Crécy," which he would adapt from Sidney Lanier's edition of Froissart's Chronicles (The Boy's Froissart), a book which had inspired him as a child. In creating this scene, Norris must have assumed "what would have happened under those circumstances [at the medieval battle of Crécy]."

Norris also says that one must "stand back and view the work from a distance" in order to get the true effect of the painting. This advice must also be
applied to the "viewing" of medievalist literature—one must "stand back" from the literature, not questioning the inaccurate details of the story, to get a "true" impression of the work. In defense of the excesses of medievalist literature, that is, one cannot look at it too closely because the appeal of the work will be overwhelmed by its inaccuracies.

Norris directly demonstrates this idea in *The Pit* when Laura Jadwin attempts to recreate the atmosphere of a medieval castle in her modern San Francisco mansion. Laura and her medievalist artist friend, Corthell, are comfortable in this dungeon-like atmosphere because they can ignore the fact, for the sake of their medievalism, that there are electric lights throughout the house and a kitchen with electric appliances. Jadwin, on the other hand, cannot romanticize their environment because he is distracted by the modern details and he is not inclined, as are they, to recreate a medieval environment in the modern age.

Likewise, in "The Writer and His Craft," Norris develops his argument through analogy by bringing his knowledge of art to a description of a medievalist painting by the eighteenth-century French painter Detaille, which depicts a "French cuirasser" riding a horse in a medieval battle scene. Norris situates Detaille's painting in *The Pit*, but in a different context—when hanging on the wall in the Jadwin mansion, the Detaille represents a parallel between the modern businessman Curtis Jadwin and the unknown rider of the horse—both are seemingly powerful warriors in their respective environments.
In the "Writer and His Craft," Norris makes a similar observation of the relationship of truth and accuracy by his close reading of Sir Walter Scott's Ivanhoe (1819). Norris says that the use of specific jargon can define a character, establish a setting, and set the tone of fiction writing in any historical period even though the novel may be written in the nineteenth century. Norris considers Scott's use of inaccuracies in the following passage:

Take the scene in Ivanhoe, where Rebecca, looking from the window, describes the assault upon the outer walls of the castle to the wounded knight [...]. If you stop and think, you will see that Rebecca never could have found such elaborate language under the stress of so great excitement. [...] she could not possibly have done it [...] but is it not admirably true, true as the truth itself? It is not accurate, it is grossly, ludicrously inaccurate; but the fire and leap and vigor of it; there is where the truth is. Scott wanted you to get an impression of that assault on the barbican, and you do get it. You can hear those axes on the outer gate as plainly as Rebecca could [...]. In fiction it [accuracy] can under certain circumstances be dispensed with altogether [...]. Paint the horse pea-green if it suits you purpose; fill the mouth of Rebecca with gasconades and rodomontades interminable: these things do not matter. It is truth that matters, and the point is whether the daubs of pea-green will look like horseflesh and the mouth filling words create the impression of actual battles (173).

By exemplifying Rebecca's overwrought dialogue in Ivanhoe, Norris justifies his own practice of using over-written dialogue in a number of his early medievalist works. In the short story "Lauth" (1890), for example, Norris presents very deliberate, intelligent thinking in the dying Lauth, who catalogs the stages of his death:

A slight shiver shook his limbs. Was that death? No, not yet. What would the symptoms be like? He began to watch himself to detect their [the symptoms of death] approach, feeling his pulse...
with one hand to catch its first failing quiver [...]. Where would they bury him he wondered? ("Lauth" 128)

Though these are all reasonable thoughts, it is unlikely that Lauth would think so clearly in the agony of death; however, the dramatization of the scene created solely through the language of Lauth's thoughts and the description of the medieval pont (bridge) make the scene more horrifying—and this was the effect that Norris wanted to create—a more powerfully emotional effect than could be derived merely by saying that Lauth died on a bridge. Notably, Norris's embellishment of medievalist style in his obscure critical essays appeared seventy years before Alice Chandler's A Dream of Order or any other critical writing on the subject of American medievalism.

Norris's verbose style is medievalist rather than just romantic which may have been a point of conflict for some scholars in defining Norris as a medievalist. Medievalism is a part of the romantic movement in literature. Romantic writers were interested in the medieval because they believed that the medieval period was the beginning of western civilization—just as Norris did. Yet, Norris's use of medieval settings as a stage for naturalistic themes would certainly not be considered conventional romantic literature. Romantic writers did not really want to be knightly, but were only interested in what they thought "knights" stood for. Norris, on the other hand, was interested in how knights dressed for combat and killed people. For example, in The Pit, Norris depicts the modern character Curtis Jadwin possessing the attributes of a brutal, medieval knight fit for waging bloody battle on the floor of the Chicago stock exchange. Romantics would not conjure up this brutal knightly image to
describe a novel's protagonist because they romanticized the knightly role instead of realizing it in modern America as did the medievalist Norris.

In The Pit, the creation of the medievalist characters Laura Jadwin and Sheldon Corthell, aside from their created medieval surroundings in the Jadwin mansion, is generated through their antiquated dialogue and Norris's use of medieval terminology in describing their surroundings. This is how the reader recognizes their difference from the other characters of the novel. For example, Laura's character is revealed through the narrator's voicing of her thoughts, especially those in which she compares herself to a maiden pining for a lover like Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott"—an image that is evoked for the reader by Laura through the use of antiquated language. Like the Lady of Shalott, Laura is absorbed in selfish and self-absorbed images which adds to Norris's and Tennyson's implied criticism of art for art's sake.

Norris uses this technique repeatedly in A Man's Woman (1899) when he colors the character of the American Arctic explorer Ward Bennett by describing him as a conquering medieval warrior invading a frontier. In a most unlikely analogy, Norris describes Bennett's exploration crew as resembling armored warriors: "[...] in an instant their clothes were frozen to rattling armor" (A Man's Woman 8). The harsh Arctic environment requires the encasement of humans in rigid forms that may kill them, much like the encasement of medieval knights in armor before entering the potentially deadly battlefields. Bennett's power and integrity is depicted as that of a medieval lord in the following lines: "their [Bennett's men] minds, their wills, their efforts, their physical strength to
the last ounce and pennyweight belonged indissolubly to him. For the time
being they were his slaves, his serfs, his beasts of burden" (13). In continuing
this personification of Bennett as king, Norris adapts medieval description for a
situation in which Bennett is responsible for the death of one of his men and
confides his culpability to a fellow explorer, Adler:

Bennett, the inscrutable, who performed his wonders in a
mystery, impenetrable to common eyes, who moved with his
head in the clouds, behold! He was rendering an account to him,
Adler, the meanest of all his subjects, the king was condes-
ending to the vassal, was admitting to his confidence.
And what was this thing he was saying, that he was responsible
for Ferriss’s death? [...] Ferris was dead, but how was Bennett
to blame? The king could do no wrong. Adler did not
understand. (A Man’s Woman 203)

As Norris would demonstrate two years later in the character of Curtis Jadwin in
The Pit, the character of Bennett is endowed with the noblesse oblige of a
twentieth-century American king in his sensitivity to the loss of Ferriss. Jadwin
will, similarly, exhibit his own human frailties in his failure in the pit and his
abdication from the competitive business world. However, this unexpected
exhibition of weakness by the noble king Bennett is misunderstood by the vassal
Adler, just as it is similarly misunderstood by Jadwin’s vassal, Landry Court.

THE WRITER AND SOCIETY:
PARALLELING THE OLD WORLD WITH THE NEW WORLD

In another one of his essays, "The Writer and Society: The Novelist as
American," Norris compares the twentieth-century magnates [robber barons]
with medieval feudal lords, an analogy that reflects his characterization of the
railroad executive Shelgrim in The Octopus and the wheat tycoon Curtis Jadwin
of The Pit. Throughout The Pit, Norris compares the businessman Jadwin to a
feudal lord because of his wealth and his warrior-like aggression in conquering the wheat market. In the analogy, however, Norris emphasizes that the robber barons of the modern age are wealthier and more powerful than their medieval counterparts:

Had the Lion-Hearted Richard lived today he would have become a "leading representative of the Amalgated Steel Companies," and doubt not for one moment he would have underbid his Manchester rivals in the matter of a bridge. Peter the Hermit would have raised a company of gens d'armes sooner than girders. Had Mr. Andrew Carnegie been alive at the time of the preachings of all of this brothers-in-arms, would have equipped his men better and more effectively [. . .] Seven hundred years ago a certain Count Baldwin, a great leader in the attack of the Anglo-Saxon Crusaders upon the Old World, built himself a siege engine which would help him enter the beleaguered city of Jerusalem [. . .] and now a company named for another Baldwin and for all we know a descendant of the count [. . .] built an engine—only now the engine is no longer a mangonel but a locomotive. ("Responsibilities of the Novelist" 56)

In citing what he believes to be the superior power of modern business men over medieval lords, Norris makes a point about the values of twentieth-century American society. Norris suggests that modern society is dazzled by the wealth and glamorous life styles of nouveau riche Americans, an idea he exemplifies in The Pit when Laura Dearborn is dazzled by the wealth and glamour that she sees at the opera reception. He further states that modern lords are more popular than their feudal counterparts because of their noblesse oblige, and are, thus, able to "raise a company" in their defense more quickly than their medieval counterparts. Norris creates a connection between not only the mighty men of the medieval and modern worlds but also of their inventions when he parallels the mangonel or "siege machine" built by Count Baldwin of Edessa in
eleventh-century Europe, to the locomotive managed by Mathias W. Baldwin in twentieth-century America.

Norris compares the locomotive with the destructive mangonel, seeing both as fearsome objects which threaten men like monsters. Norris personified the railroad track system in *The Octopus* as a monstrous octopus, inimical to man as it wreaked a path of destruction across the American frontier as presented in the following passage:

Presley saw again, in his imagination the galloping monster, the terror of steel and steam with its single eye cyclopean, red shooting from horizon to horizon but saw it now as the symbol of a vast power, huge terrible, flinging the echo of its thunder over all the reaches of the valley, leaving blood and destruction in its path; the leviathan with tentacles of steel clutching into the soil, the soulless force, the ironhearted power, the monster the colossus, the octopus. (42)

The presence of monsters like the "octopus" was a horrific convention drawn from medieval literature, and one that Norris often used in his modern novels.

In *The Pit*, Norris again uses this technique in animating the building that houses the board of trade, stressing its resemblance to a slumbering sphinx overlooking the streets of Chicago. It is "black, grave, monolithic, crouching like a monstrous sphinx with blind eyes" (*The Pit* 39). The "sphinx" is "blind" and unseeing, and like the "octopus" unconcerned with the welfare of man.

Neither the octopus nor the sphinx is a medieval monster image; yet both suggest threatening monster images in medieval legend. The octopus is a metaphor for the railroad tracks that wind around southern California like serpentine tentacles. In the image of the sphinx, Norris picks up on primordial illustrations of power. The Board of Trade is described as a "monstrous sphinx"
because it preys upon the unwary, stealing their money. Norris attempts in this image to archaeologically dig up the origins of modern American business society, to show that these "modern" often unfair trade practices are ancient and enduring. It is also significant here that a drawing of an Egyptian pyramid appears on American currency.

Also in these lines, he anticipates two medieval references that occur in The Pit: the personification of the wheat tycoon Curtis Jadwin as a medieval king or lord; and the personification of "wheat" (Norris even capitalizes the word, sometimes spelling it as W-H-E-A-T), as an inimical force (like the locomotive) against man. The wheat market which kills Gretry and nearly destroys Jadwin is presented by Norris as possessing an ominous power over man, similar to the sphinx and other fearsome "creatures" that he had created in his earlier works (The Pit 339).

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE NOVELIST:
SIGNIFICANT ANACHRONISM

Norris justifies setting traditionally medieval tales in the modern era in an essay entitled: "The Responsibilities of the Novelist." This reference prefigures the plot of The Pit, in which Norris loosely parallels the romantic love triangle of Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot in the modern setting of twentieth-century Chicago. In both twentieth-century Chicago and medieval Camelot there is a love triangle. Norris, in the following passage, not only attempts to relocate the time and place settings of romantic fiction but, to put a new face on romantic heroines, suggests that though they may be poor and isolated, they still may possess and represent a conventional romantic ideal:
Romance does very well in the castles of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance chateaux, and she has the entree there and is very well received. That is well and good. But let us protest to limiting her to such places and such times. You will find her, I grant you, in the chatelaine's chamber and the dungeon of the man at arms; but, if you choose to look for her you will find her equally at home in the brownstone house on the corner and in the office building downtown. And this very day, in this very hour, she is sitting among the rags and wretchedness, the dirt and despair of the tenements of the East Side of New York. ("Responsibilities of the Novelist" 166)

Norris argues here that romance can be taken out of the historical period of the Middle Ages and placed in any modern setting of the New World. Moreover, he does not confine romance to royal courts, but says that romantic heroines may also be found in the "chatelaine's chamber" or the "dungeon." This idea of romantic fiction being possibly staged outside of the nobility amidst modest surroundings is exemplified in *McTeague* in the affair of the elderly Grannis and Miss Baker. They are neither young, beautiful nor wealthy, yet Norris creates a gentle, subtly acknowledged love between the two of them that is romantic, even though it is far outside the castle walls.

**THE FRONTIER GONE AT LAST: MEDIEVALISM VS. MODERNISM**

Norris again shows middle-class romance in the love affair and eventual marriage of Landry Court and Page Dearborn in *The Pit*. Page reveals to her duchess-like sister, Laura, that she and Landry anticipate a moderately wealthy, yet happy married life together in Chicago. Though the tortured Laura parallels the romantic heroine of an antiquated love story, Norris makes clear that the modern Page is also a romantic heroine of the novel, for she represents romance in the New World. In an essay, entitled: "The Frontier Gone at Last." Norris
acknowledges such romance that is possible within the new American frontier (53). This is directly related to the medieval legends in which knights would be sent out from the court and return with marvelous stories about their adventures. Norris parallels this crusading custom or quest for adventure in the following passage:

the frontier was Britain [...] the cultivated English farmyards of today was the wild west of the Frisians of that century; and for the little children of the peat cottages Hengist was the Apache Kid and Horsa Deadwood Dick—free booters, landifiers, slayers of men, epic heroes, blood brothers, if you please of Boone and Bowie. ("The Frontier Gone at Last" 55)

Here, Norris compares England to America, paralleling the farmlands with the "wild west" and medieval, legendary heroes with American folklore heroes of the frontier. Again, Norris convinces his reader that the cultural development of Europe had earlier paralleled twentieth-century American development, an idea that will lead to Norris's central point in the essay—the Anglo-Saxon's instinctive desire for expansionism—which prefigures Norris's theme of westward expansion at the end of The Pit. Yet, Norris literally comes full circle in his example of westward expansion by describing the Anglo-Saxon's circling from Europe in the fifteenth century and going around the globe to arrive back in merry old England—thus, the title "The Frontier Gone at Last." So, he concludes:

No sooner have we found that our path to the westward had ended than, reacting eastward, we are at the Old World again, marching against it invading it, devoting our overplus of energy to its subjugation. (56)

Norris suggests that the mighty commercial strength that is building in the United States will overpower that of the Old World and the New World will
appear to "conquer" the Old World. Indirectly, this comment on instinctive Anglo-Saxon expansionism prefigures the theme of The Pit. Old England will not be overcome by war, as it was in the medieval period, but by modern trade, which is the weapon that the character Jadwin of The Pit will use to conquer European villages from across the Atlantic in his attempted wheat "corner."

Norris clearly prefigures the development of the warrior/businessman Jadwin in the following passage:

> Competition and conquest are words easily interchangeable, and the whole spirit of our present commercial crusade to the eastward [westward, around the globe to Europe] betrays itself in that we cannot speak of it but in terms borrowed from the glossary of the warrior. It is a commercial "invasion," a trade "war," a "threatened attack" on the part of America; business is "captured," opportunities are "seized," certain industries are "killed," certain former monopolies are "wrested away." ("The Frontier Gone at Last" 56-57)

Norris appears to have his characterization of Curtis Jadwin completely in mind when writing these lines, as these are all terms that he will use to describe Jadwin's activities in his unsuccessful role as modern warrior. It is only through the use of carefully chosen language that the modern Jadwin would ever be perceived by the reader as symbolic of a medieval warrior/king—Jadwin is Arthur-like—but, as Norris had suggested in an earlier essay, this is the effect that medievalism will have in modern American fiction.

**NOVELISTS OF THE FUTURE: THE TRAINING THEY NEED**

**NORRIS PROJECTS THE FUTURE OF THE GENUINE AMERICAN NOVEL THROUGH THE IMAGERY OF THE OLD WORLD**

The entire essay collection both directly and indirectly prefigures Norris's last novel, The Pit, which he would begin writing only a few weeks after these
essays were finished. In an essay entitled "Novelists of the Future: The Training They Need," Norris prefigures the plot of The Pit in arguing the art of American fiction writing is not of the studio (suggestive of Corthell's salon world) but must be inspired by a vigorous life lived in this "great, new, blessed country of ours" (language which clarifies what Jadwin's life becomes in the end of the novel). In the following passage, Norris personifies the muse of American fiction, who will inspire the development of the American novel, as a medieval warrior woman who is fighting for God and country:

They [effete artists] would make the art of the novelist an aristocracy, a thing exclusive, to be guarded from contact with the vulgar, humdrum, bread and butter business of life, to be kept unspotted from the world, considering it the result of inspirations, of exaltations, of subtleties and above all things of refinement, a sort of velvet jacket affair, a studio hocus-pocus, a thing loved of women and of aesthetes [. . .] It is not an affair of women and aesthetes, and the muse of American fiction is no chaste, delicate, super-refined mademoiselle of delicate roses and "elegant" attitudinizings, but a robust, red-armed bonne femme, who rough shoulders her way among men and among affairs, who finds a healthy pleasure in the jostlings of the mob and a hearty delight in the honest, rough and tumble, Anglo-Saxon give and take knockabout that for us means life. Choose her [American fiction? The "robust" woman?] instead of the sallow, pale-faced statue-creature, with the foolish tablets and foolish, upturned eyes, and she will lead you [. . .] as you go she will show you things wonderful beyond wonder in this great new, blessed country of ours, will show you a life untouched, untried, full of new blood and promise and vigor.

She is a Child of the People, this muse of our fiction of the future and the wind of a new country a new heaven and a new earth is in her face from out the fillets that the Old World muse has bound across her brow so that it is all in disarray. The tan of the sun is on her cheeks. and the dust of the highway is thick upon her buskin, and the elbowing of many men has torn the robe off her, and her hands are hard with the grip of many things. She is hail-fellow-well-met with everyone she meets, unashamed to know the clown and unashamed to face the king, a hardy, vigorous girl.
with an arm as strong as a man's and a heart as sensitive as a child.

Believe me, she will lead you far from the studio and the aesthetes, the velvet jackets and the uncut hair, as far from the sexless creatures who cultivate their little art of writing [...] She will lead you [...] straight into the World of Working Men [...] straight to the heart of a new life, on the borders of a new time, and there and only there, will you learn to know the stuff of which must come the American fiction of the future. ("Novelists of the Future: The Training They Need" 13-14)

Despite Norris's mixed metaphors and his apparent loss of control of the analogy, this passage is significant in its anticipation of The Pit and the evidence of a new power in Norris's authoritative voice—power to foresee the future—likely prompted by the apocalypticism at the turn of the twentieth century, because Norris describes the warrior woman as "on the borders of a new time." This is a likely supposition as the essay was written in 1901.

Norris creates this image of a futuristic, American warrior woman as the defender of the new spirit of rebellion (mercantile) against the Old World tradition (the theme of The Pit), which he argues is plaguing the development of the American novel. Norris argues that the future of the novel should not be relegated to "women which are 'chaste, delicate, super-refined mademoiselles' (like Laura Jadwin), nor catering to aesthetes (like Corthell)—clearly an indication that, in Norris's opinion, the Old World characteristics represented by Laura and Corthell cannot sustain the American novel or perpetuate American progressive culture. The new figure of the warrior gives the truth about the American people. The novel must be advanced by the vigorous, aggressive spirit of the new world as symbolized by the "robust, red-armed bonne femme."
The survival of the American novel depends upon abandoning Old World salon culture, which Laura abandons at the end of The Pit, and embracing real-life experience, as is realized in Laura and Jadwin's western migration at the end of the novel.

Norris prefigures in this essay the character of the artist Corthell, describing him as an impediment to the development of the New World and aesthetes like him as an impediment to the development of the American novel. He depicts such salon types as Corthell as having "the velvet jackets and the uncut hair [...] the sexless creatures who cultivate their little art of writing." In The Pit, Norris characterizes Corthell as a long-haired eunuch, absorbed in his medievalist salon world of stained glass--sterile and, therefore, unable to participate in the fertility of the new frontier, as will be the newly fecund Laura and Jadwin once they escape the medieval world in which they live. This imagery becomes even more interesting when Norris personifies the muse of the fiction of the future as a surreal female figure. Unleashed from the bondages of the traditional, medieval, Old World, she emerges in the New World as the American savage: "the tan of the sun is on her cheeks, and the dust of the highway is thick upon her buskin, and the elbowing of many men has torn the robe off her." Norris says that this savage creature is a "Child of the People"--a leader away from the Old World structure of aristocracy and class, as she is "unashamed to know the clown and unashamed to face the king."

In this image, Norris creates a startling supernatural form of a woman--suggestive of Norris's conjured image of Laura Jadwin as the fertility Goddess
of Wheat—as the deliverer who has shed the medieval, Old World structure. She is not pale due to confinement in the parlor but has "the tan of the sun on her cheeks"; she is not confined by the customs of class and gender but has the "dust of the highway" on her antiquated boots; and she is stripped of her customary robe by her brutal experiences in society. Though this primitive creature certainly does not represent Laura's appearance at the end of the novel, she does, however, suggest the natural, warrior-like woman that Laura might become after settling in the American West.

Like the "bonne femme" of American fiction, Laura leads Jadwin away from the diseased kingdom of the Old World tradition recreated in the city; far from the "studio and aesthetes" that have threatened their marriage; and, into the "new world." Norris creates his warrior woman as a noble savage in the new world, but details her in the accoutrements of the past—the "buskin." Instead of using the past to explain the present as he had done throughout his career, Norris now uses elements of the medieval past to anticipate the future.

Norris's essay collections are essential to his definition as an American medievalist and to understanding his thematic purposes in The Pit. If, in fact, Norris had abandoned his early medievalist style, as all Norris scholars claim, then why would he have advocated the correct use of medievalist convention and style throughout a critical essay collection written only months before his death? Clearly, Norris is not rejecting anti-modernism in these essays, but is suggesting its sophisticated application as a means for locating American identity in the twentieth century. As indicated in the quotation about Scott in the
previous chapter, Norris is moving out of medieval settings to cast his medievally-conceived heroes and heroines, such as Laura, Jadwin and Corthell, in the modern world. In so doing, Norris shows the timelessness of human experience. He shows that love, heartache, joy and despair can occur in any setting and in any century. This maturity of his writing style, moved Norris away from his medieval settings—where errant knights are murdered in the dark forests of medieval Europe—to the modern stage of buildings in twentieth-century Chicago where modern “knights” financially slaughter their adversaries in the bright lights of the Board of Trade.

Norris consistently uses medieval references in his medievalist writings throughout his career. In his early writings that I have previously described, Norris was mimicking the adaptations of medieval tales that he had enjoyed as a boy; but by the time of his writing of The Octopus in 1899 and The Pit in 1901, Norris had begun to use his enthusiasm for the conventions of the medieval period in a very sophisticated, medievalist style. He actually staged medieval dramas in both The Octopus and The Pit in modern settings.
CHAPTER FOUR
TRADING OLD INNOCENCE FOR NEW:
THE COURTLY LOVE TRADITION AND PASTORAL CONVENTIONS
IN THE PIT

The Pit. Norris's last novel, written in 1901 and published posthumously in 1902, is a completely developed work in the American medievalist tradition as in it, unlike in his previous medievalist works, Norris appropriately adapts the medieval tradition of courtly love that is defined and described in this chapter, and various other conventions of the Middle Ages into a genuinely contemporary drama. The Pit is an example of the American medievalist style in literature, as its characters express an anxiety over impending modernization and a lamentation for the glorified past; yet, ironically, the past for which the moderns pine is not their own recent past, but the European medieval period of the twelfth century. Norris parallels a realistic and romantic modern drama of nineteenth-century Chicago—a city which Norris equates throughout the novel with European medieval kingdoms—with the medieval courtly love tradition entertained by the European nobility in the High Middle Ages to demonstrate the ageless truism that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Norris does not reconcile his brutal views of the Middle Ages with courtly love, because he believes courtly love to be also a brutal aspect of the Middle Ages, likening it to "battle" (The Pit 60). He did not write The Pit as a criticism of European values and courtly love but as an acknowledgement of medieval customs at play in the modern world. This was a genuine application of modern...
medievalism which demonstrated Norris's maturity as a writer and his ability to comment on contemporary concerns in a medievalist structure.

**COURTLY LOVE IN THE MODERN WORLD**

Norris uses the courtly love structure as the controlling motif of the novel to symbolize the cultural traditions of the Old World at play in the interrelationships of his modern characters. The modern characters are divided among themselves—some attempt to recreate the idyllic love structure popularized by the Arthurian legends while others pursue realistic marriage partners and the modern American dream complete with the GE kitchen. Norris creates a convoluted scenario through which he tells his tale; yet, in a most clever opening scene at an opera reception where everything is "staged," Norris, through the voice of his heroine Laura, introduces all of his major characters, defining both their courtly and modern roles in the ensuing drama. This important initial scene clearly establishes the medievalism of the novel. Through Laura's imagination, the modern "court" is created: Jadwin is the lord of the manor, symbolic of Arthur; Laura is the noble lady, representative of Guinevere; Sheldon Corthell is a courtly suitor, reminiscent of Lancelot; Landry Court is Jadwin's noble knight and a suitor of Laura; Mr. and Mrs. Cressler represent the old aristocracy; and Page and Aunt Wess appear to be the attendants of the Lady Laura.

The courtly love structure is most clearly manifested in the flurry of courtship activities surrounding Laura Dearborn whose manner is described as that of a "chatalaine of the days of feudalism" (The Pit 134), and is further
developed, both before and after her marriage to Jadwin, in the competitions among her three suitors, most particularly in the rivalry of the modern businessman Curtis Jadwin and the medievalist artist Sheldon Corthell. Norris's parallels of Jadwin and Corthell illustrate the disparity of the Old World and the New; however, various subplots representing the courtly love tradition also mirror the novel's medievalist theme and are essential in the characterization of Jadwin, Corthell and Laura. These related plots are all manifested in Laura's imagining Chicago as a medieval kingdom and her acquaintances as courtly nobility; thus, Norris establishes his parallel plot most convincingly in the imaginative fantasies of his ingenue heroine.

In The Pit, Norris medievalizes modern drama through the medieval courtly love tradition—a convention of the medieval period, popularized by the cycle of Arthurian legends of the twelfth century. Mythographer Joseph Campbell cites the ancient Arthurian legends of mid-twelfth century Britain as the central myth of western civilization (Campbell 209). The adulterous behavior of Lancelot and Guinevere within this myth became the core of the courtly love tradition when Marie de Champagne commissioned Chretien de Troyes in his "Le Chavalier de La Charette" (ca. 1174) to take the theme of the adulterous Lancelot as the texture of his romance (Walsh 5). The term "courtly love" becomes here a description for the relationship transgression between Lancelot and Guinevere. Andreas Capellanus, a chaplain of the French royal court who was amused by the courtly play, wrote a treatise prescribing the appropriate courtly behavior "[of] any potential lover who was not a serf"
Capellanus's treatise was taken quite seriously as a model for artificial courtly protocol—so seriously, in fact, that C. S. Lewis cites this tradition of the French troubadours as the inspiration of the courting patterns of other European countries that "colored the literature of most of western Europe for centuries" (Lewis 3-4). He proclaimed it a "twelfth-century invention of the troubadours of Provence [which] had the status of an ever-fixed star" (qtd. in Walsh 5). "Courtly love was assembled both as a critical concept and a phrase by Gaston Paris, and transmitted to the world of English literature largely by C. S. Lewis, where it is still widely disseminated outside the ranks of professional medievalists" (Burnley 150) as an artificial figuring of life and love in a sixteenth-century manor house.

So, what was the appeal of courtly love to a nineteenth-century novelist, and why did Norris employ this absurd anachronism for what he proclaimed would be his greatest novel? Quite simply, he never outgrew his boyhood interests in medieval tales, for it was upon these early interests that he drew for the creation of the courtly love triangle of Laura, Jadwin and Corthell which Norris developed as a loose, modern manifestation of the Arthur/Guinevere/Lancelot legend. Norris's application of the medieval courtly love tradition was an expression of his newly configured adult interests and understanding of medieval literature. This is obvious in Norris's description of Laura's physical desire for Corthell and her physical awareness of Jadwin upon their first meeting. As Norris matured, so did the manifestations of his interests in the
medieval tradition. His interests progressed from aggressive sword play to no less aggressive adulterous sexual play.

According to his biographer, Franklin Walker, Norris was familiar with Sidney Lanier's *The Boy's King Arthur Being Thomas Malory's History* (1880) and though he may have read Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* (ca. 1469) upon which Lanier's edition is based, it is likely that Lanier was Norris's only source of the Arthur/Guinevere/Lancelot tale that enjoyed a popular revival in Gilded Age America. In Lanier's introduction to *The Boy's Froissart*, which Norris is also known to have read as a boy (Walker 12), Lanier suggests to his young readers that the historian Froissart "helps youth forward and age backward" (Walker iv). Lanier goes on to explain that boyhood interest in medieval tales may parallel an adult interest in the situation of the modern world; hence, Norris's early interests in medievalism, through the tales edited by Lanier, may have inspired the subtle medievalism within the modern novels in the Norris canon:

> As you read of the fair knights and the foul knights--for Froissart tells of both--it cannot but occur to you that somehow it seems harder to be a good knight nowadays than it was then. This is because we have so many more ways of fighting now than in King Edward the Third's time. A good deal of what is really combat nowadays is not called combat. Many struggles, instead of taking the form of sword and armor, will present themselves to you after a few years in the following shapes; the strict payment of debts; the utmost delicacy of national honor; the greatest openness of party discussion, and the most respectful courtesy towards political opponents; the purity of the ballot-box; the sacred and liberal guaranty of all rights to all citizens; the holiness of marriage; the lofty contempt for what is small, knowing and gossipy; and the like. Nevertheless, the same qualities that make a manful fighter then make one now. To speak the very truth; to perform a promise to the uttermost; to reverence all women; to maintain right and honesty; to help the weak; to treat high and low with courtesy; to be constant to one love; to be fair to a bitter foe;
to despise luxury; to preserve simplicity; modesty and gentleness in heart and bearing; this was in the oath of the young knight who took the stroke upon him in the fourteenth century, and this is still to win love and glory in the nineteenth. (Lanier ix)

A reading of Lanier suggests that Norris did not outgrow his juvenilia and his retention of these early interests matured. No longer only absorbed in the violent nature of medieval barbarism that tainted his earlier writings, Norris now understood the theory behind the use of medievalism in modern literature as a means of explaining, maintaining and even validating the culture of the middle class in nineteenth-century America. Lanier’s popular versions of medieval classics prepared a generation for the nostalgia for the Middle Ages that would occur in the late nineteenth century and for the medievalist literature that would be written by Norris and other anti-moderns of the period.

The love triangle of Arthur, Lancelot and Guinevere is a timeless romantic Victorian structure that, when set in early twentieth-century America, was as appealing to audiences as soap opera drama is in the present day. It was, also, economical romance for people who could not afford or were otherwise disinclined to attend the opera or theatre, and who were not opposed to other fine arts such as the paintings and illustrations of William Morris and other Pre-Raphaelite artists. Accordingly, his re-telling of a medieval love story proved to be a blockbuster for Norris, selling over 94,000 copies in its first year of publication, making it one of the most popular novels of 1902. By 1932, nearly 190,000 copies had been sold, a figure which revealed the popularity of scandalous romantic fiction, proving it to be as intriguing to late nineteenth and early twentieth century audiences as in the Middle Ages. Norris was a keen
observer of people around him, and as he matured he became quite skilled in writing fictions that people wanted to read.

In *The Pit*, Norris analogizes medieval custom and behavior of the twelfth century with that of late nineteenth century America in two important illustrations: the courtly love triangle of Laura, Jadwin and Corthell; and, the turbulent drama of the commodities trading pit—an arena which Norris compares throughout the novel with a medieval battleground. He successfully meshes these romantic and realistic story lines by evolving them both as an imaginary medieval kingdom set in the modern world. Norris also adapts the medieval convention of the interpolated tale in the prefiguration of Jadwin and his predetermined failure in the commodities trading pit. The medieval story-telling structure becomes a vehicle for Norris's expression of his fearful views on the rise of competitive American industry and his negative opinions about the survival of romantic love in a modern world. Norris perceived the same forces at work in the medieval world as in the modern, the instinctive, human desire for control, power and acquisition.

Within the courtly love tradition, conjugal relationships are based upon politics and/or economics. Men and women are mercantile warriors, evaluating their salability and prizing their intact, but often negotiable virtue. Marriage becomes merger for political or financial power, for the code of courtly behavior is absolute. Love only exists outside of marriage. Norris considered nouveau riche Americans of the Gilded Age to be American royalty practicing the same social customs as members of the medieval court; consequently, these modern
Americans practiced an adapted form of the courtly love tradition. This is the situation in The Pit; though the characters go through the motions of a courtship code, they are merely following what is their modern social order, which they seem to have inherited from the medieval period by way of the Victorian.

As I have shown, Norris rarely used an original idea for his medievally conventioned works, and though The Pit is a novel set in his contemporary time, Norris obviously sought out a tried and true plot for his love story—that of Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot—a tale which has provided a sensational love interest for over seven hundred years. In Norris's version of the love triangle, Jadwin (the king of wheat, symbolic of Arthur) abandons Laura (his queen [of wheat], a modern Guinevere) because of the allure of economic warfare in the pit, and allows Corthell (the crafty courtier) to hover about his wife while he is away at "war" in the pit. Corthell woos the naïve, lonely Laura who, in her misunderstanding of the courtly love code, compromises her virtue with the more experienced Corthell.

The appeal of the courtly love tradition was its perpetual nature. There are no winners or losers in the courtly play as flirtations are rarely consummated; upon consummation the game would be over, thus ending the amusement created by love tensions. But, beyond simply relieving the tedium of castle life, the courtly love tradition had a very practical purpose—the courtly lover was to be prepared to physically protect the queen or lady of the castle from attack by marauders in the absence of the king or lord of the manor. This is exemplified in The Pit when Corthell accompanies Laura to the theatre in
Jadwin’s absence. Though courtiers were often no more than figureheads protecting the queen, they exhibited a genuine love for her that was fiercely allegiance. (Laura calls herself a "Queen," and plays the role of "Duchess" to Jadwin’s character named “Arthur” in the societal play which is organized by Mrs. Cressler) (The Pit 117-118). Courtiers would vie for the lady’s regard in feats of often outrageous deception, staged solely for the purpose of winning her favor (Campbell 232). Though Corthell never deceives Laura, he does tell her that he will leave the country if she does not love him (The Pit 135). The lady, however, protected her virtue and would allow no physical exchange with the courtiers even though this may have been her desire. One immediate example of this very early in The Pit occurs when Landry Court kisses Laura. The breaking of the coded behavior so enrages Laura that she banishes Landry from her courtship because he has broken the courtly code (The Pit 125).

Norris modernized other aspects of the courtly love tradition—to a certain extent—by equating "love" with commerce. Jadwin and Laura’s love interludes and subsequent marriage are essentially negotiations that end in a commercial union, just as frequently occurred in the courtly love tradition of the twelfth century. Medieval courtly marriages, as well as many marriages of the nineteenth century, were arranged for either financial gain or political alliance. The concept of idealized romantic love only existed outside of marriage in the quasi-adulterous state where it was acknowledged by the courtly players, but certainly not sanctified by medieval culture and custom. The courtly love tradition, as described by Donald R. Howard in his biography of the medieval
poet Geoffrey Chaucer, explains the courtly love structure as being only among
the nobility and largely for the allowance of romantic love play. Romantic love
was rarely expected in an arranged marriage that was staged solely for the
purpose of uniting aristocratic families, producing offspring, and legitimating
the status of courtly ladies and noble knights (Howard 106).

Laura and Corthell operate from a modern agenda of immoderate
expectations based on the courtly love traditions that they have read about in the
nineteenth-century medieval revival writings, especially those of Scott,
Tennyson, and Ruskin. Jadwin, whom Laura and Corthell cast as the king of the
manor, (against whom they can play the conspiring lovers), would certainly
never consider himself such; but, in order to make the subplot work, Norris puts
Jadwin in the kingly role playing his part in Laura's and Corthell's contrived
structure of courtly love. Laura and Corthell, unlike other characters of the
novel, have the free time to live in their fairy-tale world which justifies their
actions in their eyes in the latter stages of the novel. Their courtly love subplot
creates a "play within a play" effect in the novel, as its frivolity is pitted against
the more serious actions in the commodities trading pit.

Norris sets up the courtly love subplot of the triangle of Jadwin/ Laura/
Corthell to mirror the dynamic, external plot of the novel—Jadwin's warfare on
the floor of the wheat trading pit. Jadwin's actions in the pit are motivated by
the same passionate instincts as romantic love, because Norris equates love and
power in the modern age with wealth and acquisition. By this parallel, Norris
shows the orchestrations necessary to commit the aggressions in American
business that are similar to those generated in courtly love and war—in essence, love is war.

Yet, Norris develops within the courtly love plot a dilemma for the main character, Laura, a dilemma caused by her not quite understanding the rules of the courtly game. The lack of understanding allows Norris to spoof middle-class, moneyed-men like Jadwin and to criticize the affects of medievalist writings and art on impressionable minds like Laura's. Norris largely exposes this sociological facet of his theme by his portrait of the character of Corthell, for in him is a parody of a medieval courtier, and with Corthell's parodic characterization, Norris illuminates the courtly love theme as an expression of the artificiality of idealized nineteenth-century salon conceptions of the medieval, in contrast to a distinctly American version of new medievalism.

From the first page, Norris makes his initial anachronistic jump by situating the western, industrial city of Chicago as his medieval realm; yet, this is very clearly and believably done through the voice of the ingenue Laura, who, newly arrived in the city, looks upon Chicago as a magical kingdom. Laura, though, instinctively fears the city, and it is her ambiguous emotions about Chicago that establish the push/pull power of the city throughout the novel. Yet, the inimical, industrial city proves to be magical and fulfilling for Laura, as it is only in the city that she can actualize her fantasies about the medieval world and draft the people around her into the script of her courtly love drama, which the reader knows that Laura is imagining because of her paralleling herself and her
companions as characters in the Arthurian legend, as quoted earlier in this dissertation (The Pit 21-22).

The expansive, dirty, industrialized, mid-west city of Chicago (which Carl Sandburg called the "hog butcher of the world") seems an odd setting for a courtly drama; yet, through the eyes of Laura Dearborn, it is convincingly a medieval kingdom. Chicago was an appropriate choice for Norris's purposes in writing a medievalist novel in that it is a "new" American city located in the heartland of America. Here lies Camelot. The city exemplifies the monstrous, industrializing American city that social historian Alice Chandler said initially motivated the rise of the American medievalist movement (Chandler 10). The rapidly developing industrial cities in America were often seen as examples of the ruin of Anglo-Saxon culture. Such cities evoked a yearning for western-expansion, individuality and personal power which Chandler says provided the core of the American medievalist movement—in essence, the mechanistic structures of industrialism prompted a longing for the pastoral life that harkened back to "Old England," erroneously considered representative of the European medieval period. This emotion evoked in the heart of some nineteenth-century Americans the desire for a modern "grail quest" in the search of a more authentic life, one lived for personal fulfillment not motivated by social expectations. Laura and Jadwin simulate this grail quest at the end of The Pit.

In The Pit, however, none of the characters seems fully aware that the focus of their nostalgia lies elsewhere than in Camelot. Only when the city pervades the characters' lives, controlling their free-will choices and, in some
cases, destroying their dreams, do they become aware that Chicago—their American Camelot—is pretty brutal close to the surface. An escape from Chicago will become the desire of Laura and Jadwin as, in the end of the novel, they "head west" in a symbolic search for individuality that they believe can be found outside of the commercial arena of the city. Many of the characters in the novel make a similar migration for self-discovery, having run the gauntlet of the city of Chicago only to retreat, not in defeat, but to a personal/pastoral setting that they feel the untamed American frontier holds for them.

Yet, the plot of The Pit revolves around the moderns' experience in nineteenth-century Chicago, and the heroic struggle between the clinging, parasitic traditions of the Old World and the temptations of modernity and freedom. All of the characters share a similar dream of finding personal fulfillment and prosperity in the magical city. Every character (except for Corthell) has migrated to the great city of Chicago from an outlying agrarian town; each has left his/her pastoral setting to pursue a dream of opportunity in the city; and, each has aspired to dreams that can only be realized in the city. Only in such a city as Chicago could Norris parallel the medieval world with the modern: his chatelaine is Laura, a country girl turned by marriage into a nouveau riche socialite; his warrior, Jadwin, a daring stockbroker; Laura's courtier, Corthell, a brooding lover; his knight, Landry Court, a servant of Jadwin and lover of Laura; his courtly lady, Page, the attendant of Laura; his castle (the Jadwin residence), a mansion in Chicago; his treasure, wheat; and, his
battleground, the trading pit for future exchanges. It is Laura’s imaginings that initiate her medieval world experience in the city of Chicago.

The importance of the city as a backdrop is highlighted in the first scene of the novel in which all characters are introduced when they gather at the Chicago Auditorium to see a performance of Gounod’s opera “Faust” (1859), another dramatic example of nineteenth-century romantic medievalism. There are similarities between the plot of the opera and the plot of The Pit, for “Faust” parallels the actions of the heroines, Laura and Marguerite, who forfeit true love for riches (Hochman 104). Additionally, the devil Mephistopheles has a lot in common with the wily courtier, Corthell, because he tempts Marguerite with power and riches through flattery just as Corthell tempts Laura.

Though Laura, at the beginning of the novel, is a regally beautiful woman adorned in the gown and jeweled aigrette of a queen, she soon reveals in her bold assertive manner at the gala event that she does not behave in the courtly manner that she expects of others. Her attendant younger sister, most aptly named Page, is present to advise on courtly protocol; yet, the willful Laura decides to address the ever-regal Curtis Jadwin, (whom she will later identify as lord of the manor), and awkwardly approaches him in a most inappropriate way, making a scene which Norris describes in the following passage. Laura contends that her actions are "perfectly natural and not at all bold," though she makes an embarrassing blunder:

abruptly, drawing her cape about her, she crossed the vestibule and came up to Jadwin [. . .] Then, as he appeared to understand that this young woman was about to speak to him, she noticed an expression of suspicion, almost of distrust, come into his face
[. . .] Why should this girl speak to him? Something had gone wrong, and the instinct of the man, no longer very young, to keep out of strange young womans' troubles betrayed itself in the uneasy glance that he shot at her from under his heavy eyebrows. (The Pit 14)

Andreas Capellanus specifically describes the courtly form of address between women and men, especially those exchanged among various social classes; but, in this case, the roles are unclear. The wealthy wheat magnate Jadwin is surely a member of nineteenth-century Chicago nobility, but Laura's class is more difficult to determine. Jadwin behaves as a gentleman, adhering to courtly custom, but Laura seems not to know what her role is. This is her first display of misapplying the social conventions of the courtly code.

On Laura's first night in Chicago, she is dazzled by the glamour of the opera house and her wealthy new acquaintances in the city. In a lengthy paragraph that evokes the pensive image of Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" (1832), Laura establishes the medieval structure of the novel:

She [Laura] looked back with immense pity to the narrow little life other native town she had just left forever, the restricted horizon, the petty round of petty duties, the rare and barren pleasures-the library, the festival, the few concerts, the trivial plays. How easy it was to be good and noble when music like this [the opera] had become a part of one's life; how desirable was wealth when it could make possible such exquisite happiness as hers of the moment. Nobility, purity, courage, sacrifice seemed much more worth while now than a few moments ago. All things not positively unworthy became heroic, all things and all men. Landry Court was a young chevalier, pure as Galahad. Corthell was a beautiful artist-priest of the early Renaissance. Even Jadwin was a merchant prince, a great financial captain. And she herself-ah, she did not know: she dreamed of another Laura whom everybody, everybody loved dearly and tenderly, and who loved everybody, and who should die beautifully, gently, in some garden far away--die because of a great love--beautifully, gently in the midst of flowers, die of a broken heart, and all the
world should be sorry for her, and would weep over her when they found her dead and beautiful in her garden, amid the flowers and the birds, in some far-off place, where it was always early morning and where there was soft music. And she was so sorry for herself, and so hurt with the sheer strength of her longing to be good and true, and noble and womanly, that as she sat in the front of the Cresslers' box on that marvellous evening, the tears ran down her cheeks again and again, and dropped upon her tight-shut, white-gloved fingers. (The Pit 21-22)

Yet for all of her ease in her rural home, Laura felt the allure of Chicago, "the great grey city [which] threw the spell of its fascination about her." Though Barrington was "picturesque [. . .] [it was] lamentably narrow" (The Pit 41). The migration from rural life to city life is one of only two dislocative gestures Laura makes, the other being her much later departure from the city. However, "all things seemed to point her [Laura] westward, all things seemed to indicate that one phase of her life was ended" (The Pit 41). Nonetheless, it is ironic that Laura, who appears to enjoy the security of her childhood home, would create a new/old medieval world in a place that she finds so ominous and threatening.

Unlike other classless heroines of the Victorian period, Laura has gained some financial independence from inheriting some money from Aunt Wess's late husband; however, Laura is very dependent by nature, a trait which is only amplified by her move to the city, and she possesses a passive, even reclusive nature that causes her to rely upon the attention of others for validation. Laura's personal insecurities eventually cause her troubles, as it is her desire to continue the courtly love games with her suitors that leads to her dissatisfaction in her marriage with Jadwin and her flirtatious dalliance with Corthell. Laura acknowledges her dependence on the rules of courtly love play when, at the
when, at the beginning of her dilemma, she remarks to Corthell that if he leaves her. "It would break up the play--your going. It would spoil my part. You play opposite me, you know. Please stay" (The Pit 123). Both Laura and Corthell know that she is literally referring to the societal play which they are rehearsing for the charity performance: yet, the buried reference to courtly love play is equally obvious to them both.

COURTLY PLAY IN CHICAGO: THE AMERICAN CAMELOT

Though Laura shows that she is delighted by the rich possibilities and love play when she weeps on her white gloves, introduces herself to Jadwin and is courted by Corthell at the opera reception, she also fears the other aspect of her new setting--the inimical environment of Chicago. Upon leaving the opera, her carriage passes the front of the Board of Trade Building, which she finds "black, grave, monolithic, crouching on its foundations, like a monstrous sphinx with blind eyes, silent, grave-crouching there without a sound [...]" (The Pit 39). Yet, the tiny windows of the office cubicles emit light, animating the building like a living being (The Pit 37). Dark figures move quickly along the shadowed sidewalks between the buildings as the business of the world is conducted through the night. The dark image of the Board of Trade suggests that the new order of modern business does not have to obey the biological clocks of nature--what takes place in this building is unnatural. The form of the sphinx is an ancient eastern image which seems quite unlikely in this novel; however, Norris may have included this non-Christian man-beast to suggest the horrible monsters that are found in medieval literature which are often
challenged by knights. An example of such a creature is the monster Grendel in

*Beowulf*. Jadwin will perform a similar knightly medieval challenge when he
attempts to take over the wheat market, a modern monster symbolized here as a
"monstrous sphinx" (*The Pit* 41).

Observing the dark building, Laura imagines, the deafening noise of the
brokerage district to be have been created by a battlefield:

Yes, here was drama in deadly earnest-drama and tragedy and
death, and the jar of mortal fighting. And the echoes of it
invaded the very sanctuary of art, and cut athwart the music of
Italy and the cadence of polite conversation, and the shock of it
endured when all of the world should have slept. [. . .] It had all
the significance of field hospitals after the battle. (*The Pit* 38)

Just as she did while sobbing at the Opera Hall in her imaginary reenactment of

"The Lady of Shalott," here too Laura initiates, in this observation, more
medieval imagery of the trading pit as a medieval arena for knightly combat.

And just as she has conjured up medieval sword imagery cutting athwart the
music and conversation of the courtly opera reception, Laura here sees the
trading pit as an echo of the courtly environment of the opera house; though it
seems alien to the cultured world she desires, it too, is a part of the medieval
world.

Though Laura fears the power of the pit, she is, as yet unaware that the
pit will nearly destroy her and also influence her eventual marriage to the wheat
tycoon Curtis Jadwin. But, she is also a thoroughly modern American woman
and she desires the wealth that the stock market can produce. Laura tries to
incorporate the pit in her otherwise quite fantastic "Lady of Shalott" world, but
she finds it to be something in which individuals are swept away. Here, too.

Laura unknowingly prefigures what is to happen to Jadwin:

There is something terrible about it [...] something insensate. In a way, it doesn't seem human [like a sphinx]. It's like a great tidal wave. It's all very well for the individual just so long as he can keep afloat, but once fallen, how horribly quick, it would crush him, annihilate him, and with such horrible indifference! I suppose it's civilization in the making, the thing that isn't meant to be seen, as though it were too elemental, too primordial; like the first verses of Genesis. (The Pit 58)

Laura, in another global perception here, acknowledges the power of the pit.

She does not realize, however, that the pit will become her husband's obsessive passion, like a lover constantly pulling him away from her. Laura unknowingly admits this threat into her life when she chooses Jadwin over Corthell as her husband. Within the courtly love tradition, the ladies of the court wanted to choose a knight with a "gentle heart," as Joseph Campbell says, not just some "lusty boy" (Campbell 231). Corthell is the lusty boy that Laura should avoid, because "Corthell stirred troublous, unknown deeps in her, certain undefined trends of recklessness: and for so long as he held her within his influence, she could not forget her sex a single instant" (The Pit 121). In Laura's ideal medieval world, only chaste medieval courtship was a possibility. Sex seemed threatening and intrusive to her. Corthell was the embodiment of this unrealized passion within her--she both desires and fears him.

But, Laura chooses Jadwin the king-figure, who is consistently associated with the modern city of Chicago, for her mate--an odd choice considering her fearful feelings about the city of Chicago and especially her fear of the ominous trading pit. "[Laura] was frightened of the vast cruel machinery
of the city's life, [...] but the men who could dare it [...] seemed, in a sense, more terrible than the city itself [...]. It was a life in which women had no part" (The Pit 58). In this statement Laura seems to be accepting her role in this new industrial society. Though her thoughts seem a progression away from the antiquated medievalism of Sir Walter Scott's fiction, they can also be read as the acceptance of a subordinate medieval role for women; for, also in the medieval period, women often "had no part."

Yet, Laura considers the differences in Jadwin and Corthell carefully and bases her consideration of the two men upon a new definition of herself, as Norris indicates in the following passage:

[...] she was a daughter of the frontier, and the blood of those who had wrestled with a new world flowed in her body. Yes, Corthell's was a beautiful life; the charm of dim painted windows, the attraction of darkened studios with their harmonies of color, their orientalisms, and their arabesques was strong [...]. But the men to whom the woman in her turned were not those of the studio. Terrible as the Battle of the street was, it was yet a battle." (The Pit 59)

Laura admires the chivalric beauties that Corthell lays before her but is more attracted to the power of Jadwin. She was not drawn to Corthell "but [to] the fighter, unknown and unknowable to women as he was; hard, rigorous, panoplied in the harness of the warrior, who strove among the trumpets, and who [...] set the battle in a rage around him, and exulted like a champion in the shoutings of the captains" (The Pit 60).

The sexual imagery in this medievalist reference suggests that Laura is attracted to Jadwin sexually, because of the medieval trappings "panoplied in the harness of the warrior [Jadwin]" (The Pit 60). To Laura, "Life never had
seemed half so delightful. She felt romance, unseen, intangible, at work all about her. And love, which of all things knowable was dearest to her, came to her unsought" (The Pit 70). Though Chicago seemed frightening, she had found more in the city than "the clash and trepidation of empire-making, more than the reverberation of the thunder of battle, more than the piping and choiring of sweet music" (The Pit 69). By her transforming Jadwin, the wheat tycoon and king of the city into a medieval warrior, Laura, through her association with him, makes the frightening, even alien city more acceptable for herself.

Norris constantly parallels the new American city, Chicago, with European medieval kingdoms. It was, "The great Grey city, brooking no rival, imposing] its dominion upon a reach of country larger than many a kingdom of the Old World" (The Pit 57). To Norris, Chicago "was Empire"[.. .] Here [.. .] throbbed the true life—the true power and spirit of America; gigantic, crude with the crudity of youth, disdaining rivalry; sane and healthy and vigorous; brutal in its ambition, arrogant in the new-found knowledge of its giant strength, prodigal of its wealth, infinite in its desires" (The Pit 57). Yet, in the midst of its early twentieth-century industrial power, the medieval roots survive in Gothic architecture throughout the city, and in the "Gregorian chants" of newsboys heard drifting up from the streets (The Pit 233). Norris makes these subtle ties to demonstrate the coexistence of the Old World and the new within the city—an idea by which he examples the central theme of the novel.

As the novel progresses, the city becomes increasingly associated with Jadwin, though Laura continually identifies with the medieval world that she
feels Corthell represents. For example, when he first meets Laura at the opera reception, Jadwin begins his calculated, methodical pursuit to wed and bed her—not to "win" her romantically, but to take her physically over as he might a business competitor or a besieged castle—all despite Jadwin's awareness that Laura seems smitten with the more courtly Sheldon Corthell. And though Jadwin appears to love Laura, his acquisition of her suggests his following of the tradition of arranged marriages that were customary in the medieval period. Theirs was a bartered arrangement: Jadwin was wealthy and regal and Laura was beautiful and a "duchess."

Laura, an uncommonly beautiful woman with dark hair and ivory skin like "a heroine of romance, doomed to dark crises" (The Pit 8), appropriates, as Norris points out, "the unperturbed assurance of a chatelaine of the days of feudalism" (The Pit 134). Laura initially, though, cannot accept her role as a twentieth-century woman because in her imagination she envisions being the courtly lady married to a powerful warrior. This fantasy explains her initially unlikely choice of Jadwin over Corthell, and her frustrated longing for the physical passion of Corthell throughout the novel. However, after the honeymoon, Jadwin rarely comes home from the trading pit; Laura feels the angry resentment of a non-feudal, modern woman, not the stylized acceptance of a courtly lady who is accustomed to an absent husband in an arranged marriage. Laura does, however, react as a courtly lady would in the absence of her lord when she accepts the advances of the courtier Corthell. Jadwin not only condones this extramarital companionship but encourages it, for he, unlike
Laura, understands the code of courtly love and could never imagine his regal wife would accept the courtship of any suitor.

Another factor in Laura's choosing the "warrior" Jadwin for her mate stems from her own self-assuredness about her appearance. Aware of the power of her beauty, Laura considers herself a warrior like Norris's heroine Moran of Moran of the Lady Letty (1898), fit as a woman warrior to contend with a man of equal power. Near the end of the novel Laura thinks: "she [. . .] was beautiful; she knew it; she gloried in her beauty. It was her strength. She felt the same pride in it as the warrior in a finely tempered weapon" (The Pit 353).

Norris, as he had done in the earlier "Brunehilde," uses sword imagery to describe strength of character in order to assign masculine aspects to his heroine. Because Norris feels that love is war, it is, I suppose, fitting that Laura should be equipped for warfare of New World love just as Jadwin is equipped for it. Norris makes it clear that beauty is Laura's weapon in the love games involving Jadwin and Corthell.

Like the city of Chicago, Jadwin represents, in Laura's eyes, a melding of the Old World and the New. Corthell, on the other hand, is a one-faceted character absorbed only in the antique culture and antiquated customs of the Old World. If Laura and Jadwin are both armed warriors, equally equipped for a fair fight, then how will Laura ever equally contend with the unarmed Corthell? So, Laura eventually sees Corthell as defenseless against her strong character because he only desires her for her beauty, sexuality, and her ignorance of antiquated culture. Jadwin, however, does recognize Laura's beauty but also
respects her intelligence and strength, especially after he is defeated in the pit.

In the following passage in which Norris parallels the Old World and the New, Laura reveals her admiration for Jadwin by comparing him unfavorably with Corthell:

He [Jadwin] was a heavy-built man, who would have made two of Corthell, and his hands were large and broad, the hands of a man of affairs, who knew how to grip, and, above all, how to hang on [. . .] Uninvolved in the crash [of the commodities market], he had none the less been close to it, watching it, in touch with it, foreseeing each successive collapse by which it reeled fatally to the final catastrophe [. . .] And abruptly midway between two phases of that music drama, of passion and romance, there came to Laura the swift and vivid impression of that other drama [the recent market crash] that simultaneously— even at that very moment—was working itself out close at hand, equally picturesque, equally romantic, equally passionate [. . .] And here he sat, this Jadwin, quiet, in evening dress, listening good-naturedly to this beautiful music, for which he did not care, to this rant and fustian, watching quietly all this posing and attitudinising. How small and petty it must all seem to him! (The Pit 33)

Laura likes Jadwin’s noble manner. Like a medieval lord of the manor, he could enjoy the entertainment in the castle whether he genuinely appreciated it or not, regardless of the conflict he had experienced in the day’s business. A similar example is offered in “At Damietta A.D. 1250” (1890) when the Baron drums his fingers watching the court entertainment. Laura notes the apparent openness and clarity of his world, which is completely the opposite of Corthell’s stained-glass world through which everything appears in an artificially colored light. Jadwin’s black and white world, just like the brutal and non-artistic world of the sphinx-like monster looming over the real-world atmosphere outside the opera house that she dreads, is more authentic than Corthell’s world of soft music and stained
glass, even though it is this medieval-like world of Corthell's that Laura has
convinced herself that she loves.

Laura's attraction to Jadwin is encouraged by Mrs. Cressler, whose
husband Charlie Cressler is a friend and business acquaintance of Jadwin's.
Mrs. Cressler shouts exuberantly, "He's a bachelor, and rich!" (The Pit 65),
when she learns that Jadwin is interested in marrying Laura. Laura says that she
does not believe that Jadwin is a "woman's man" (The Pit 66) and that she fears
marrying such a man. But, Mrs. Cressler continues: "All the better [...] Who
would want to marry a woman's man? I wouldn't. Sheldon Corthell is that. I
tell you one thing, Laura, and when you are as old as I am, you'll know it's true:
the kind of a man that men like—not women—is the kind of a man that makes the
best husband" (The Pit 66). Mrs. Cressler's matchmaking interests in Laura and
Jadwin (or "J," as the Cresslers call him) suggests that the eventual union of
Laura and Jadwin is an arranged marriage in the medieval courtly love tradition.

Jadwin, initially attracted to Laura for her "grand manner" (The Pit 16),
even in the beginning will allow none of her "finesse" (The Pit 101). She cannot
choose her own manner of courtly love or her "own time and place for fencing,"
rather, he treats the courtship like a military campaign (The Pit 102). In his
military maneuver to acquire Laura as his wife, he conscripts her friend, Mrs.
Cressler, as an "auxiliary" in his campaign, "and a series of recontres followed
one another with astonishing rapidity" (The Pit 102). Laura seems to be of the
impression that Jadwin's acquisitive romantic pursuits are merely a passionate,
courtly attempt to win her affections and will temper into a milder manner once
they are married; however, she comes to realize that this is a trait of his character, like that of a medieval warrior, which will only intensify with time. Jadwin enjoys playing the game of competition for Laura which he relates to his daily competitive play in the pit. It is, however, after the nuptials that Jadwin should practice defensive maneuvers because the suitor Corthell does not accept that the competition for Laura's favor is over.

Eventually, the besieged Laura is overcome by her warrior suitor Jadwin despite her protests of "I love-nobody. I shall never marry" (The Pit 102). Yet Laura, in an act which shows her approval of medieval ideals, shifts her affections from Corthell and comes to live only for the love of the king Jadwin and, in the end, to experience both personal growth and fulfillment from the union. Laura learns "that love, the supreme triumph of a woman's life, [is] less a victory than a capitulation" (The Pit 181).

Though the Cresslers are only minor characters in the novel, they foreshadow the evolution of many aspects of the characters of Laura and Jadwin and many events that will develop from the couple's union. The Cresslers prefigure Jadwin's defeat in the stock market, exampling the interpolated tale that was a popular convention of medieval literature. That is, the Cresslers represent the old aristocracy which will be replaced by Jadwin and Laura when they become the king and queen of the pit. In the opening scene at the opera reception, Mrs. Cressler, duly adorned in her royal ermine cape, formally introduces Laura to the "court" and to the future king Jadwin who will choose her, with the help of the Cresslers, as his wife. This courtly love structure of the
novel's society is a strong medievalist convention that the American Victorian reading audience surely enjoyed as it offered courtly love in the New World.

In an episode reminiscent of "The Monk's Tale" in the Canterbury Tales, Charlie Cressler and Hargus, who have lost the great mass of their fortunes in their failed attempts to corner the wheat market, foreshadow throughout the novel the fate that Jadwin will suffer in such an endeavor. Mr. Cressler represents a fallen king who loses throne and treasure as a result of threatening the balance of nature. Yet Cressler, unlike the future king Jadwin, has been a farmer in rural Massachusetts, and has once lived in harmony with nature and did not try to manipulate it. As a powerful king, Cressler was able to control the food supply of wheat for millions of people; but as a fallen king, he is reduced to feeding handfuls of wheat to pigeons on the window sill (The Pit 237). The fallen Cressler eventually commits suicide in his despair, a fate which Jadwin is spared by his escape from the city after his fall from power. Laura's devotion to her husband becomes Jadwin's salvation, for it is by her motivation that they escape the city, and her physical strength that actually leads the weakened Jadwin to the carriage which will take them away from the blood-letting of the kingdom. Thus, it is this prearranged marriage of Laura and Jadwin by the aristocracy that proves, in the end, to be fortuitous for the royal couple and for their kingdom, because in leaving Chicago, they become non-regal and American.
THE KING AND THE COURTIER: JADWIN AND CORTHELL

The marriage of Jadwin and Laura changes the rules of the courtly love play, however, because the lovers' roles are now altered. The noble Jadwin is still king, but Laura has become a noble lady. No longer should she be confused about her status as she was in her first meeting with Jadwin at the opera reception. As the married lady of the manor, Laura abandons the phony staged settings of courtly love, becoming governed by different applications of the courtly code, which she still does not understand. Corthell, as the suitor of a married woman, also has a new set of rules about how he is to form a relationship with a married woman, but these are rules that he does not follow.

After the marriage, both Jadwin and Corthell become more intimately involved with Laura. In the dissension between Jadwin and Corthell, Norris can voice in a sexual context the contemporary conflict between traditional medievalism of the Old World and modern progressiveness of the New World. Beyond depicting courtly love rivalry, the conflict between Jadwin and Corthell is quite personal as both offer to Laura quite hostile versions of the other's masculinity.

Jadwin characterizes Corthell's "soft" world as a demasculinated existence in comparison with the virility of the men of the wheat trading pit, the contrast rendering yet another instance of setting the virtues of the Old World against those of the New World:

"But, I don't believe they [men] were made-anymore than Christ was-to cultivate beyond a certain point-their own souls, and refine their own minds, and live in a sort of warmed-over oven, dilettante, stained-glass world of seclusion and exclusion. No sir,
that won't do for the United States and the men who are making it the greatest nation of the world" (112).

In a statement that anticipates the couple's eventual westward migration, Jadwin declares people like Corthell, and even Laura for her association with a lackey like Corthell, an impediment to modernism and progressivism—he labels them un-American. In criticizing Corthell, Jadwin is radically undercutting him and symbolically banishes Corthell from the castle. Jadwin's comment makes Laura feel un-American and guilty for her involvement with the artist who has come to Chicago by way of the Old World.

Like Jadwin, Landry Court finds Corthell's aversion to anything modern extremely effete: "Just let anything get popular once and Sheldon Corthell can't speak of it without shuddering" (The Pit 52). Jadwin is offended that Corthell talks about "the decadence of American industrial arts." (The Pit 53) Ironically, though, the self-assured Jadwin, knowing that his wife enjoys the companionship of the effeminate Corthell, encourages the artist to visit his wife often and escort her to cultural events when he is detained late at night at the Board of Trade. Obviously, Jadwin feels no real physical threat by the possibility of sexual advances being made by someone whom he considers to be a eunuch; moreover, in the courtly love tradition, a virtuous woman like Laura would never compromise her virtue.

Though Jadwin would never consider himself medieval in terms of modern progressivism, he does admire the battle scenes that he sees depicted in Laura's collection of medievalist art. Here the wealthy Jadwin identifies with the medieval warrior image. While giving his friend Gretry a tour of his
mansion, Jadwin admires one of Laura's medieval-style paintings by Detaille which prefigures a description of Jadwin masterfully driving a runaway carriage, as he will do when he escapes the city of Chicago:

It was one of the inevitable studies of a cuirassier; in this case a trumpeter, one arm high in the air, the hand clutching the trumpet, the horse, foam-flecked, at a furious gallop. In the rear, through clouds of dust, the rest of the squadron was indicated by a few points of colour. (The Pit 199)

Jadwin is associated with the trumpeter, for as the "bull" of the wheat trading market, he also leads battles as described later in the novel: "Jadwin's voice rang like a trumpet call 'Into the Pit.' [...] And straight into the turmoil and confusion of the Pit, to the scene of so many of his victories, the battle ground whereon again and again, his enemies routed, he had remained the victor undisputed, undismayed came the 'Great Bull'" (The Pit 341-342). Following this victory, Jadwin becomes the "general" and his assistant Landry, his "one remaining soldier," his "young armor bearer" (The Pit 344). Jadwin's modern actions at the pit are obviously compared by Norris to those of the figures of the painting; however, Jadwin would never make a similar connection between himself and a medieval character because to do so would place him outside his consistently modern realm where he is empowered.

Corthell, on the other hand, finds Jadwin's actions barbaric. The artist, though, never criticizes Jadwin personally, because a courtier would never criticize the lord of the manor; but, the self-centered Corthell constantly chides himself for the loss of Laura as a lover and, once becoming aware of his disappointment that she marries Jadwin, decides to resume his courtship of
Laura by way of their courtly love games that echo another adulterous love pair--Lancelot and Guinevere:

"She is unhappy. [...] It is not difficult to see that [...] Unhappy and lonely. Oh, fool, fool to have left her when you might have stayed! Oh, fool, fool, not to find the strength to leave her now when you should not remain!" [...] Neither he nor Laura had once spoken of Jadwin throughout the entire evening [...] By slow degrees the companionship tended toward intimacy [...] How Corthell asked himself—did she regard the affair? [...] Was she willing to afficher herself, as a married woman, with a cavalier? Her married life was intolerable, he was sure of that; her husband uncongenial. He told himself that she detested him [Jadwin]. (The Pit 252-53)

Laura and Corthell play a courtly love game. He says he loves her but it is her innocence that appeals to him and his Mephistophelian-like power over her that encourages him. Like Satan in the Garden of Eden, Corthell seduces her. Laura loves Jadwin but is confused by his inattention in comparison to the eager, loving attentions of Corthell. He appears to offer her the beautiful chivalric life which she thought she was getting when she married Jadwin. Laura can appeal to Corthell but cannot provoke similar, preferable attention from Jadwin. Again, this is all a result of Laura's misunderstanding of the courtly love tradition.

Corthell sees her confusion and takes full advantage of her naïveté. Laura puts up little resistance to Corthell's advances as she gradually immerses herself in his artificial, yet quite sensual, world.

After Laura marries Jadwin, he purchases a famous mansion in Chicago which Aunt Wessels calls a "palace" (The Pit 151), and for a while Laura equates money and possessions with love and happiness. Though the "palace" is equipped with all of the modern conveniences—including electric lights—Laura
eventually makes it her Gothic sanctuary where only she, and the too frequent visitor Corthell, take refuge from the modern world. The increasingly infrequent visits of her husband, indicate his awkwardness and discomfort in the dimly lit surroundings of his home as it is transformed by Corthell.

Laura has moved from her own medieval atmosphere, a Gothic style rental house in Chicago which Norris has described as "distantly ecclesiastic[al] with a suggestion of Gothic to some of the doors and windows" (The Pit 54), to Jadwin's "rustic" modern palace. Symbolically, she has abandoned tasteful, traditional surroundings for the "new" atmosphere of Jadwin. The artist Corthell laughs at the Jadwins' collection of art, considering their tastes barbaric and symbolic of the tastelessness of the American nouveau riche. It is a revelation of Corthell's insincerity that he can make sport of Laura's art knowledge when her cultural innocence is her appeal to him. Corthell becomes, increasingly, distasteful as he seduces Laura in her desperation over her husband's apparent disinterest in her.

In a desperate attempt to get Jadwin's attention, Laura dresses in costumes of medieval femmes fatale which complement her surroundings, portraying classic characters like the medieval Theodora, and two characters from the opera, Juliet and Carmen. The lady of the manor poses as a sex kitten to seduce the king, showing again Laura's misunderstanding of her role and Jadwin's in the courtly love structure. Norris describes the grotesque drama in the following passage:

Laura [... ] stood over against the organ in the full costume of "Theodora" [...] "What the devil!" he [Jadwin] ejaculated,
stopping short in the doorway. [...] Laura ran forward to him, the chains, ornaments, and swinging pendants chiming furiously as she moved. "I did surprise you, I did surprise you," she laughed [...] "Isn't it superb? [...] Say now that your wife isn't beautiful. I am, am I not?" [...] "Say it, say it." [...] Say that I am beautiful. (The Pit 271)

The distraught Laura now inhabits only one room of the house—the study—where she has recreated a medieval chamber complete with medieval tapestries and flickering candles which faintly illuminate the velvet couches, books and musical instruments.

Laura is a victim of her psychic-romantic delusions of what marriage, and especially marriage to a king, like Jadwin, should be. She expresses her ideas to Page in the following passage:

A man ought to love a woman more than she loves him. It ought to be enough for him if she lets him give her everything she wants in the world. He ought to serve her like the old knights—give up his whole life to satisfy some whim of hers; and it's her part if she likes to be cold and distant. That's my idea of love. (The Pit 149)

Laura's frustrations are caused by her romanticization of Jadwin when she met him at the opera reception. She is not only a victim of her definite choice in marriage but of her belief in an outdated structure made popular by idealized medievalist literature of the period. To Laura's disappointment she has married a "warrior" who is a modern American man who does not adhere to her fairy-tale expectations. Her sister Page, who offers the voice of reason to Laura throughout the novel, reminds her that this is not the path of true love: "they [courty ladies] weren't cold and proud to their knights after they'd promised to marry them," Page tells Laura. "They loved them in the end, and married them
for love" (The Pit 149). Page implies that the selfish Laura married Jadwin for reasons other than love. She is also assuming that Laura has been having an inappropriate relationship with Corthell, which, to some degree, she has.

Page's maturity is considerable in contrast to Laura's. Introduced in the beginning of the novel at the opera reception as Laura's younger sister by two years, Page represents what a modern Laura might be. Page is more cosmopolitan "[...] her keenness of appreciation for the glamour of the city which so awes Laura a little lost by two years of city life and fashionable schooling [...]" (The Pit 10). Page can acknowledge the cultural arts in the present without losing herself in the past; she is able to argue her opinion clearly without being overcome with selfish emotion; and, she is capable of entering into a realistic, happy marriage with a stock broker that is not wrought with selfish expectations and indiscretions. Ironically, the physical appearances of Laura and Page are nearly identical, which makes their character differences all the more striking.

Page's strong opinion about the impropriety of Corthell's nocturnal visits in Jadwin's absence finally moves Laura to consider banishing Corthell from her life. Throughout the novel, Page is always emotionally balanced while Laura is not. When Page finds Corthell's matchsafe left in Laura's room, she attempts to hide the evidence to preserve Laura's honor and Jadwin's trust. Laura lashes out at Page in an emotional rage that is the first revelation of Laura's increasing desperation:

Have I got to answer to you for what I do? Have I got to explain? [...] I'll do as I please, do you understand? As I please, As I
please! I will be happy. I will, I will, I will! [. . .] Don't you touch me; go away from me; go away from me. I hate you all. I hate this house, I hate this life. You are all killing me. Oh, my god, If I could only die! (The Pit 265)

Laura is never able to clearly express such frustration to Jadwin; so, though Page is not a fully developed character until the end of the novel, she becomes increasingly important as a source of counsel for her sister's problems.

Page is Norris's example of the happiness that Laura could have known in a marriage with realistic expectations and of the possibility of a successful marriage in the city. When Laura is pining away for lack of Jadwin's attention on her birthday, Page makes her announcement: "Laura—Landry [Landry Court is a business associate of Jadwin's and a former courtier of Laura's] and I—Well [. . .] we're going to be married in the fall. [. . .] We've talked it all over, and know just how much it will cost to live and keep one servant. I'm going to serve the loveliest little dinners; I've learned the kind of cooking he likes already" (The Pit 329). The agitated Laura offers only a half-hearted response to the happy news of Page's suburban plans. Page is expressing the joy of being in love with a man and the excitement of living a modest life with him in a loving marriage—an experience that Laura dreamed of with Corthell, but would never know because of her medieval views of love, relationships and marriage.

The continued relationship of Laura and Corthell after Laura's marriage, perpetuates the courtly love tradition in the novel. They seem perfectly matched: the selfish Laura can act distant, indifferent and aloof; and the doting Corthell is, apparently, content to maintain an unconsummated adoration of Laura—the perfect courtly love match of medieval legend; yet, this is not the true
motivation of the seemingly courtly Corthell, for it is his intention to convince Laura to run away with him, an act that would break the courtly love code. The courtly suitor was never supposed to "get" the maiden or lady of the castle—that was the prerogative of the lord of the castle, in this case, Jadwin. Thus, Corthell does not properly fulfill his role as courtly lover which further adds to Laura's confusion about the courtly love tradition.

Yet, for all of the deception and confusion, Corthell and Laura are willfully consumed by the artificiality of their twentieth-century perversion of medievalism. The artist Corthell "pass[es] his life gently, in the calm, still atmosphere of art, in the cult of the beautiful, unperturbed, tranquil; painting, reading, or piece by piece, developing his beautiful stained glass" (The Pit 59) amidst the "odor of pastilles" (The Pit 101). Laura knows that, unlike Jadwin, Corthell is a man "women could know, with him they could sympathize" (The Pit 59). Laura truly wants Corthell to love her because he makes her "feel her sex" (The Pit 34) but, because of this, she begins to associate Corthell with solely a sexual love which she finds dishonorable. He does not meet her courtly love standards of a lover with a gentle heart. Yet, from the beginning of the novel, the vain Laura revels in his affections as he professes his love for her at the opera. Laura recalls this meeting:

His face, dark, romantic, with the silky beard and eloquent eyes, appeared to be all she cared to see, while his low voice, that spoke close to her ear, was in a way a mere continuation of the operatic melody [...] "So that it is hardly necessary, is it, to tell you once more that I love you?" She [Laura] was coming a little to herself again. Love was, after all sweeter in the actual—even in this crowded foyer, in this atmosphere of silk and jewels, in this showplace of a great city's society—than in a mystic garden of some
romantic dreamland. She felt herself a woman again, modern, vital, and no longer a maiden of a legend of chivalry" (The Pit 24-25).

Although Laura may think she can extract herself from the imagined realm, she cannot, and Corthell remains her link with the idealized medieval world throughout the novel. As a result, he causes the destruction of her world.

Jadwin is the modern counterpart of the antiquated Corthell. Jadwin's sexuality is expressed through his "brute" sense which Laura finds offensive. During their courtship, Laura is offended by Jadwin's sexual virility and the animal-self lying just beneath the surface:

[...]. [Jadwin] took her swiftly and strongly into his arms, and turning her face to his, kissed her cheek again and again. Laura submitted, protesting: Curtis! Such foolishness. Oh dear, can't you love me without crumpling me so? Curtis! Please. You are so rough with me dear." She pulled away from him, and looked up into his face, surprised to find it suddenly flushed; his eyes were flashing. "My God," he murmured, with a quick intake of breath, "my god, how I love you, my girl!" [...]. Then abruptly he was master of himself again. (The Pit 158)

Curtis Jadwin is the vehicle in The Pit for Norris's consistent depiction in his novels of the animal or "brute" nature of man as Norris had coined man's atavistic impulses in his early medievalist writings. Jadwin would later think himself "a brute [...]. a senseless, selfish ass, who had no right to such a wife" (The Pit 204).

Though Laura loves all of the sexuality of Corthell's character she is, however, most in love with his ability to appropriately love her. She remembers her relationship with him and the beauty that he once represented to her in his assumed medieval world:
[... ] Corthell and Jadwin had come into her life, the artist and the man of affairs. She remembered Corthell's quiet, patient, earnest devotion of those days before her marriage. He rarely spoke to her of his love, but by some ingenious subtlety he had filled her whole life with it. His little attentions, his undemonstrative solicitudes came precisely when and where they were most appropriate. He had never failed her [...] He remembered for months, years even, her most trivial fancies, her unexpressed dislikes. He knew her tastes as if by instinct [...] (The Pit 311)

Laura knows that Corthell is a more appropriate choice for her; yet, she chooses and inevitably remains steadfast to Jadwin, Corthell's opposite, as he is the more appropriate marriage partner because he is the American hero, and he has money and power.

Through the character of Corthell, Norris is able to demonstrate the medieval tradition manifested in the modern world and then defeated in the modern world. Corthell underestimates the strength and intelligence of Jadwin and Laura, who emerge in the novel as American heroes, capable of escaping the city and starting a new life "out west." In Laura's abandonment of Corthell, Norris shows the American heroine both literally and symbolically extracting herself from the European tradition and looking towards the future—just as the warrior woman of Norris's essay described previously—Laura, the American heroine, looks towards the West

FLEEING THE OLD WORLD KINGDOM
FOR THE NEW AMERICAN FRONTIER

The conclusion of The Pit is quite suspenseful as the survival of Jadwin and the future of Laura become tied to the financial rise and fall of the stock market. Attention is averted from the pitiful Laura to the powerful Jadwin as he struggles to maintain feudal control over the world's wheat supply. When
Jadwin is victorious in the wheat market, he surveys the damage he has wrought, perceiving it as: "the debris of the battle-field, the abandoned impediment and broken weapons of contending armies, the detritus of conflict, torn, broken, and rent, that at the end of each day's combat encumbered the field" (The Pit 94). Jadwin, the king of wheat, attempts to rule the world wheat supplies through such warfare. Though his economic warfare is bloodless, Norris characterizes these skirmishes as medieval battles.

The natural forces against which Laura and Jadwin contend are further symbolized by the uniquely American theme of the novel: man's noble, yet eternally futile and often self-destructive, attempts to control nature—a component that Alice Chandler establishes as elemental to the American medievalist tradition. This is succinctly summarized in a comment by the broker Charlie Cressler who is ultimately defeated by the force of the market and gives an ominous warning in the beginning of the novel:

He [Cressler] was never wearied of protesting against the evil and the danger of trading in margins. Speculation he abhorred as the small-pox, believing it to be impossible to corner grain by any means or under any circumstances. He was accustomed to say: "It can't be done; first, for the reason that there is a great harvest of wheat somewhere in the world for every month in the year; and, second, because the smart man who runs the corner has every other smart man in the world against him. And, besides, it's wrong; the world's food supply should not be at the mercy of the Chicago wheat pit." (The Pit 18)

Cressler's comment foreshadows Jadwin's aggressive attempts to corner the market. Gretry's sudden death of a heart attack in the excitement of the trading pit examples the indiscrimination with which natural force, represented by the wheat, can destroy. The moral issue of cornering the wheat market for power
and financial gain and consequently limiting the food supply of the world reveals the gravity and selfishness of Jadwin's actions. That Jadwin can threaten the lives of European citizens from across the Atlantic is yet another powerful example of Jadwin as a modern feudal lord: he is actually taking control over foreign lands by cornering European wheat fields.

When Jadwin is dramatically defeated in his attempt to corner the wheat market at the end of the novel, and is reduced to near poverty and death, the reader is compromised over whether to rejoice or despair—Laura is victorious in regaining the attentions of her husband, but the kingdom of the mighty Jadwin is financially wasted. Jadwin has attempted to halt the perpetual nature of the "round table" (a balanced system of trade), which Norris analogizes to the perpetual nature of the courtly love tradition. Jadwin can only temporarily stall the natural force represented by the wheat, and his fall is inevitable. The aftermath of the fall allows a positive and traditionally medievalist ending, prompting the Curtis Jadwins to a new venture as they relinquish their luxurious belongings and "palace" and pack a few belongings in a cart (symbolic of a pioneer's wagon, as the Jadwins have gone from a carriage to a cart) to form a new life away from the heart of the city and its pervasive power over both of their lives. The Jadwins make a symbolic grail quest, in search of their own individuality away from the trappings of civilization. They escape to a more natural, Edenic world away from the artificiality of the city and its towering, monstrous structures. Laura is able to break the spell that Corthell holds over her and abandons her fantasies of courtly love and her courtship with Corthell.
With Jadwin fallen from power, the structure of courtly love is also destroyed as a controlling force in her life. The symbolic round table is overturned with the financial "death" of Jadwin, ending the perpetual nature of courtly love which can be analogized to the perpetuality of the Arthurian round table. Consequently, the medieval spell is broken for all of the principal characters: Corthell is relegated to Europe; Jadwin is dethroned, yet elevated to live the life of an average American man; and Laura abandons her romantic, artificial medieval world for the realism of modern America.
CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION
LOCATION AN AMERICAN NATURALIST IN
THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT:
NORRIS ABANDONS THE OLD WORLD FOR THE NEW
WORLD AS INSPIRATION FOR THE AMERICAN NOVEL

Amidst the many aspects of the cultural transformation that prevailed in America at the turn of the twentieth century, the phenomenon of medieval nostalgia—a late manifestation of the romantic movement inspired by a similar nostalgia in England—captured America in a most turbulent time of its development and became a pervasive but subtle influence in the arts that served to comfort reluctantly modernizing Americans. As I have said throughout this dissertation, Americans were interested in medievalism because they were looking to cope with the problems in this underdeveloped country; hence, they looked to the conventions of the European medieval world because they believed it to be the beginnings of western civilization. Americans saw life and history as “just beginning” (R.W.B. Lewis 5), and though the distant European past was respected, the new American myth “described the world as starting up again under fresh initiative in a divinely granted second chance for the human race, after the first chance had been so disastrously fumbled in the darkening Old World” (R.W.B. Lewis 5). Jadwin tells Laura at the end of The Pit that, by leaving Chicago with their hopes for a new life free from the strife of the city, they are “starting over again” (The Pit 362). Norris recognized this American association with European tradition and correctly interpreted its western manifestation in The Pit in his characterization of the courtly structure evident.
at the opera reception, an event that would set the stage for this, his greatest medievalist novel.

Frank Norris was captivated by this artistic impulse and, like many medievalist artists of his generation, incorporated his boyhood fascination with medieval stories into his fiction writing. He hoped to write the great American novel which he wrote in a letter to his friend William Dean Howells would be “as big as all outdoors” (qtd. in Walker 239) and would accurately depict the American experience for his generation. With The Pit, Frank Norris wanted to situate himself in the first ranks of American authors.

Though he was inspired by the romantic medieval tradition made popular by Sir Walter Scott and went on to publish the romantic narrative poem Yvernelle, Norris’s apostasy from what he considered the foppish medievalism of the salon world—as manifested in the manner of Sheldon Corthell in The Pit—was motivated by his belief that the true nature of primitive medieval man was brutal. This theory began to take shape in a number of post-“Yvernelle” works of medieval convention which can only be characterized by their medieval settings and absurdly graphic brutality.

Losing interest in the dark medieval settings, but not in the possibilities that these settings evoked, Norris began to stage his theories about brutal human nature that he associated with the medieval period, in the modern world, where, ironically, Norris could see parallels between the physical brutality exhibited in the Old World and the socialized brutality perpetrated in the New World. Norris realized that the brutal nature of man had never changed: this nature was overtly
expressed in the modern world after it was mitigated into socially acceptable modern forms.

Interested in popular evolutionary theory, Norris developed his early interests in medieval brutality through the sensational possibilities suggested by popular Darwinism, into the naturalistic motif that would inspire his two brutally naturalistic novels: *V andnover and the Brute* and *McTeague*. Norris is considered among the greatest of American naturalist writers of the nineteenth century; however, the inspiration for his brutal fictions actually lies in his early interest in medievalism—a trend of the British Romantic movement that was realized in America. Charles Walcutt supports this theory of duality in Norris's naturalistic inspirations in a comment on the dual nature of American naturalism: "[it is] an extreme form of romanticism [. . .] [in addition to being] [. . .] the rigorous application of scientific method to the novel" (Walcutt 3).

Yet, Norris would return to his romantic/medievalist roots to write *The Pit*, which he hoped would be a great novel about America. After the publication of *The Pit* in 1902, Frank Norris posthumously became recognized as a uniquely informed writer, capable of producing a best-selling medievalist novel that scholars have read as both naturalistic and romantic, but that I am now reading as romantic in orientation. Norris had completely evolved from his early graphic depictions of medieval violence into a sophisticated critique of American romantic medievalism in *The Pit*, in which he not only told a good, contemporary story but also exemplified the innovative concept of depicting modern American expansionism through an analogy staged in the medieval
nostalgia that was developing in America. In this anti-modern/modern tale, Norris maintains his youthful enthusiasm for depicting violence but mitigates its demonstration to a covert form, exposing twentieth-century repressed perversions of spousal abuse: for example, Jadwin's neglect of Laura, and Laura's psychologically abusive "affair" with Corthell.

That Norris moves from historical to contemporary settings shows his evolution from the medieval to the modern so as to cast medieval themes in modern settings, a transcendence which allows him to move his medieval inspirations to more sophisticated ground. Norris casts medieval stereotypes in modern American roles, and these characters adhere to medieval tradition. In his modern tale, Norris uses allusions to medieval convention to contrast present-day inhibitions, artificiality, loss of individuality, and weakness with the romantic ideals upheld by medieval romance writers. He often adapts the chivalric code—especially the courtly love code—to ameliorate what he perceived to be the codeless world of twentieth-century America.

Norris's allusions to the Old World become even more deeply intertwined in his visions for the New World. America is seen as a medieval construct, paralleling the experience of civilization all over again, as demonstrated in the Haskins-Strayer "American Pie" model discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation. At the start of the twentieth century, Americans wanted to authenticate what they did and establish a sense of authority along with a strong sense of self. In order to do this, Americans had to create a past, and, thus, appropriated the European tradition as their own while still
acknowledging that they lived on the edge of the prairie. This newly created authority relied upon the logic of imperialism, which was predominant throughout Anglo-Saxon history, and inspired within Americans the spirit of expansionism as is seen in the conclusion of *The Pit* when Jadwin and Laura move away from the medieval-structured city to the western frontier. This migration illustrates Norris's union of tradition and modernity as he modernizes the ancient Laura and civilizes the noble savage Jadwin, displacing them to the wild west where they may flourish and prosper in the modern paradise.

As I mentioned earlier, Jadwin is Norris's "American Adam," as described by R.W.B. Lewis in his book of the same title, because Jadwin is "the hero of the new adventure: an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent interests" (R.W.B. Lewis 5).

In the universal merging of the Old and New Worlds, Norris pushes past an informational form and develops a romantic drama that defines the American dream in a twentieth-century concept. Within the courtly love structure of the Jadwin/Laura/Corthell triangle, Norris can, through his knightly patina, demonstrate what his characters traditionally expect of their lives in the opening of the novel, as contrasted with the modern romantic possibilities that they come to realize are the promise of the new American frontier. But, despite its medievalist structure and conventions, *The Pit* is a novel of America,
acknowledging the indebtedness to the traditions of the Old World, but more importantly, commending the zeal of the American people to push forward and brave the New Frontier in their own authentic way. Jadwin and Laura represent genuine American heroes who are forced to abandon their old world obsessions—Laura deserts the medieval Corthell and her dreams of becoming a beautiful player in a courtly love drama, and the defeated Jadwin is forced to abdicate his throne at the board of trade, relinquishing his power as a conquering feudal lord—to pursue a more fulfilling life pioneering the New World.

Jadwin and Laura experience a heightened physical awareness of each other as they leave Chicago/Camelot—the American Eden—to embrace what awaits them outside the kingdom in the unstructured, outside world—the American wilderness. Just as C. S. Lewis describes Adam’s and Eve’s new physical awareness of one another as they leave the Garden of Eden in his Preface to Paradise Lost, Laura and Jadwin, likewise, are—in Jadwin’s words—“starting all over again” [. . .] “we’ve both been through a great big change, honey [Laura], a great big change” (The Pit 366). Jadwin is the American Adam speaking to the American Eve as they embark on the American adventure. “J” remarks to Laura as Adam might to Eve: “The world is all before us where to choose” (The Pit 363). The Old World is both literally and symbolically forsaken as unnecessary to the progression of Laura and Jadwin and, thus, symbolically unnecessary to the future of America as represented in the American novel. In light of Norris’s tremendously successful publication of The Pit which romanticizes the American experience through a medievalist
frame, it is likely that Norris, were it not for his untimely death from peritonitis in 1901, would have continued to write in this romantic vein which had inspired him from boyhood. With The Pit, Norris illustrated the cultural phenomenon of uniquely American medievalism in the twentieth century and proved his ability to appropriate the traditions of the Old World in the literature of the New World.
NOTES

1 Medievalism is a force in American literature that has been established as a facet of literary study of the Romantic movement in American universities only in the past twenty years. Leslie Workman and Kathleen Verduin are largely credited for bringing the study of this cultural phenomenon into existence in this country.

2 It is uncertain what Frank Norris actually knew of the true history of the Middle Ages in San Francisco of the 1890's. It is likely that all of this knowledge of the era which inspired his medievalist works came solely from medievalist writings including the novels of Sir Walter Scott, the poetry of Alfred Lord Tennyson, and the popular tales of Jean Jacques Froissart edited for children by Sidney Lanier (1879). Every bit of medieval citation in Norris's collected medieval works can be traced to one of these sources which was popularly read in post-Gilded Age America.

3 Beckford's The History of the Caliph Vathek is an example of orientalism. Like medievalism, orientalism is a similar structure of the romantic movement evoking oriental custom and convention as a structure for romantic fiction just as medievalism evokes medieval custom and convention (Lears xiv).

4 Though there is little evidence in America of the fancy dress balls popular in England where period costuming was displayed, it does seem that Frank Norris and some of his friends, while studying art in Paris, acquired some dress styles that they assumed appeared "medieval." Their unconventional dress served to set them apart from conventional, fashionable Parisians.

5 Norris critics view Norris's works of medieval convention as immature writings. I, however, will argue that this medievalism rooted his later modern works and should not be ignored. Critic Warren French denounces the importance of these early works: "Fortunately, Norris soon lost interest in his rendezvous with the past. His prose tales of the Middle Ages are not memorable" (50). William Dillingham, referring to "Yvernelle" remarks that Norris "[...] felt embarrassed at having composed an immature saga of the Middle Ages, [...]" (27); but, there is no evidence that Norris ever disavowed his medieval interests or these early authorial attempts. Joseph R. McElrath, likewise, refers to Norris's medieval phase (particularly the writing of "Yvernelle") as "the indiscretions of youth" (Frank Norris Revisited 9).

6 Franklin Walker published in 1932 a complete and detailed report of Norris's early life in a biography entitled Frank Norris. Written with the collaboration of the Norris family and friends, and with excerpts from Norris's
existing letters and journals, Walker was able to recapture many details of Norris's interest in the medieval which would have been lost to the world, leaving the Norris canon forever incomplete and undefined. Though a few biographical accounts of Norris have appeared in the later twentieth century, they rely heavily on the Walker text (as does this study) and are really little more than introductions to critical studies.

7 All of the names given to young Frank’s lead soldiers are character names from Sir Walter Scott’s Ivanhoe.

8 Camelon is the legendary site of King Arthur’s palace.

9 Norris's conflicted views of women are ever-present in his writing. Reared by a very strong mother and an often-absent father, Norris’s women were always strong, but are never invulnerable to masculine courage and strength which can "rescue" them and resurrect their assumed inherently dependent femininity. This is evident in many of the medieval works and becomes more developed in A Man's Woman and Blix.

10 The influence of the lectures of Joseph LeConte unquestionably influenced Frank Norris. LeConte’s blending of popular Darwinism into mainstream Christianity as practiced in America in the Victorian period was probably quite shocking for the properly Christian Norris. LeConte sought to explain nature through a combination of popular science and a manipulated interpretation of Old Testament language. Norris, on the other hand, sought in his fictions to explain and justify the nature of man’s brutish actions through a manipulation of the Darwinian/LeContean popular theories of evolution. Norris made science fiction literature out of the popular sciences of evolution.

11 Medieval man “drained marshes, raised dykes, cleared woods and canals, cut roads, built homes, advanced the frontier of cultivation, and won the battle between jungle and man” (Durant 559). Much of the terrain of modern Europe is a result of this early ravaging of the land. There were, however, attempts during the medieval period at the reforestation of cleared lands. Norris may have been aware of this fact in creating the plot of “The Jongleur de Taillebois” and its aspects of the hole in the ground awaiting the planting of a tree. This is where Amelot buries the murdered Yeres.

12 Norris, like many medievalist writers, including William Morris, John Ruskin, Gabriel Rosetti and A.S. Byatt, was an accomplished artist. It was common for medievalist writers to combine artistic imagery with their medievalist texts.

13 Poe appears to have been especially influential in Norris’s early works, though there is no documentation that Norris read Poe. "Lauth" is an example of the gothic, macabre themes inspired by Poe-esque science-fiction. When Lauth...
observes the battle scene at the Grand Pont he animates the ravaged houses and shops: 
"[..] their windows shivered, their doors crushed in, leaving in their place yawning openings like eyes and mouths agape with wonder" ("Lauth" 115), an account similar to Poe's narrative description of the dismal House of Usher. As in "The Jongleur de Taillebois," Norris deals with the subject of life after death and questions the meaning and finality of death. Both works suggest the possibility of live burial, a gothic topic which Poe made classic in his literature.

14 Norris is always sympathetic in his writing to the plight of animals. In reference to the sacrificed sheep in "Lauth" Anselm says of the creature: "Poor, gentle little creatures [..] What right have we to sacrifice your lives? The God that made us made you as well" (136). Anselm goes on to assert that, all lives being equal creations of God, if man has the right to take the life of a sheep, then he must, theoretically, have the right to take the life of a man. Norris loved animals from his early days of sketching horses at the Presidio, and though he would record their misfortunes in his stories, it was never without a note to the cruelty and pain that the animal suffered.

15 In a 1978 article, Steven Tatum relates Norris's specific knowledge of the transfusion of blood from living sheep to human corpses for the purposes of revivification of life to the 1873 publication of Gustave Lemattre's "On the Transfusion of Blood." The work was a scientific note on the history and present day practice of such experiments and the supposition that such "creations" might bear the animal characteristics of the donor creature, as was the effect upon Lauth.

16 Both "The Jongleur de Taillebois" and "Lauth" are works of science fiction. In outrageous plot developments, Norris would introduce the supernatural in a number of his stories. Science fiction editor Sam Moskowitz featured a later Norris story entitled "Grettir a Thorhall-stead" in an anthology of Gilded Age science fiction works entitled Science Fiction by Gaslight (1971). Moskowitz notes: "He [Norris] is never thought of as one of the important writers of horror and the supernatural. "Grettir at Thorhall-stead," never as much mentioned in scholarly books on occult literature, should prove a bombshell to the academics as well as to the cognoscenti" (ix). In a later collection entitled Horrors Unknown he refers to the work as a "once-in-a-decade find by Frank Norris, author of The Octopus" (back flap).

17 Gertrude Doggett Norris was a devout Episcopalian while Benjamin Franklin Norris, Sr., was a practicing Presbyterian. In his later life, Norris Sr. became a Sunday school teacher and an avid follower of the Reverend Dwight L. Moody. Norris's specific knowledge of the Bible and his general conception of morality were a result of his rearing in a Christian home.
18Richard Gretry (1741-1813) is the name of the composer of the opera “Richard the Lionhearted.”

19In the dedication of The Pit, (Norris's last novel published posthumously in 1902) to his brother Charles Gilman Norris, Frank Norris remembers their childhood play: "In memory of certain lamentable tales of the round (dining-room) table heroes; of the epic of the pewter platoons, and the romance-cycle of 'Gaston le Fox' which we invented, maintained, and found marvellous at a time when we both were boys." This is an indication that Norris maintained his interest in medievalism until the very end of his career, as he declares his saga of the “battles” in the modern commodities market to be an inspiration of these boyhood interests in medieval battles.

20An excerpt from a letter written by Frank Norris to his friend William Dean Howells in March 1899, reveals Norris's motivation behind his writing of The Pit. He writes to Howells:

I have the idea of a series of novels buzzing in my head these days. I think there is a chance for somebody to do some great work with the West and California as a background [...] which will be at the same time thoroughly American. My idea is to write three novels around the one subject of Wheat. First a story of California (the producer), second, a story of Chicago (the distributor), third, a story of Europe (the consumer), and in each to keep to the idea of this huge Niagara of wheat rolling from West to East. I think a big epic trilogy could be made out of such a subject, that at the same time would be modern and distinctly American. The idea is so big that it frightens me at times. but I have about made up my mind to have a try at it (qtd. in Walker 239).

Norris's excitement in describing his ideas for this trilogy of the American experience—which was to be The Octopus, The Pit and the never written The Wolf—evidences his enthusiasm for the project and his strong belief in the need for fiction which captured the American experience. As in the theme of The Pit, Norris here expresses a desire to move away from the European tradition as evidenced in modern America and embrace subjects that were “modern and distinctly American” (Walker 239).


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VITA

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