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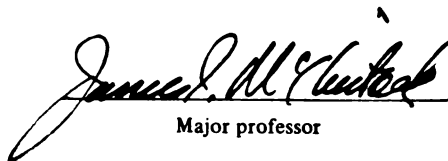
LETTING THE APE AND TIGER DIE:
THE MAN/ANIMAL DICHOTOMY IN THREE WORKS OF AMERICAN
LITERATURE
1906-1914

presented by

Victoria Ann Balloon

has been accepted towards fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

LETTING THE APE AND TIGER DIE: THE MAN/ANIMAL DICHOTOMY IN THREE WORKS OF AMERICAN LITERATURE 1906-1914

By

Victoria Ann Balloon

At the beginning of the twentieth century, American culture struggled to reorganize its world view and its view of the individual in the light of biological discoveries applied to cultural beliefs. Drawing upon evolutionary themes, some American writers struggled with the ambiguity between the civilized and the bestial aspects of human nature. While naturalism encompassed many of these literary explorations, "pulp" fiction also employed biological language to present the possibilities and consequences of a scientific world view. An analysis of three works and their authors demonstrates through specific literary examples the degree to which Darwinian evolution and Spencerian philosophy have filtered into the novels of this transitional period in American literary history. The use of Darwinian language by each author demonstrates contradictory themes; though they begin with the same Darwinian biology, each author presents a different view of what the man/animal ambiguity means to the human condition.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express a direct and heartfelt thanks to Jennifer S. Moore, research Diva and Technical Crew, without whom I would have never gotten this off the ground; and to Thomas D. Clareson, for helping me to realize that it is sometimes better to ignore critics than to take them seriously. Both of these individuals share my appreciation of higher education.

They say
The solid earth whereon we tread

In tracts of fluent heat began,
And grew to seeming random forms,
The seeming prey of cyclic storms,
Till at the last arose the man;

Who throve and branch'd from clime to clime,
The herald of a higher race,
And of himself in higher place,
If so he type this work of time

Within himself, from more to more;
Or, crown'd with attributes of woe
Like glories, move his course, and show
That life is not as idle ore,

But iron dug from central gloom,
And heated hot with burning fears,
And dipt in baths of hissing tears,
And batter'd with the shocks of doom

To shape and use. Arise and fly
The reeling Faun, the sensual feast;
Move upward, working out the beast,
And let the ape and tiger die.

-- Alfred Lord Tennyson
In Memoriam A.H.H.
Section CXVIII, lines 7-28.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Key to Abbreviations	vi
Chapter I	1
Chapter II	17
Chapter III	33
Chapter IV	50
Chapter V	68
Bibliography	77

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ALN Charles Child Walcutt, *American Literary Naturalism, a Divided Stream*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956.
- ERB Erling B. Holtsmark, *Edgar Rice Burroughs*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986.
- SNANT Charles Child Walcutt, *Seven Novelists in the American Naturalist Tradition: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974.
- TCALN Donald Pizer, *Twentieth-Century American Literary Naturalism: An Interpretation*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982.
- TT Erling B. Holtsmark, *Tarzan and Tradition: Classical Myth in Popular Literature*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981.

CHAPTER I

Modern criticism is at odds with itself when attempting to describe American literary naturalism or to classify which writers represent the genre. While there is loose agreement upon what naturalism is, where it originates, and which authors were "naturalists," each critic brings different views to the discussion. Though much of it is insightful, most of it is contradictory to what past critics have offered, creating confusion for those who seek to describe the genre rigorously. The lack of consensus among literary critics has resulted in areas of great ambiguity revolving around the tension between "pessimistic determinism" and social optimism, and the relationship between naturalism and realism. In order to clarify the issues surrounding naturalism, it is necessary to begin with the ideas that shaped the movement and then to analyze the ideas that critics have brought to the surface. Such an investigation will broaden an understanding of naturalism and demonstrate through specific literary examples the degree to which Darwinian evolutionary theory and Spencerian philosophy have filtered into the novels of this transitional period in American literary history.

The general view of American literary naturalism is that it began near the turn of the century and reflects a dichotomy of faith in science and doubt concerning a modern "scientific" world. The ambiguities of naturalism reflect the ambiguities of the effects of science on the world. Charles Child Walcutt describes this duality as a "divided stream:" on the one hand, naturalism is romanticism; on the other, it is the rigors of science applied to literary forms. On the one hand, it is optimistic, on the other, it is pessimistic.¹ Naturalism's canon of literary texts deals primarily with human behaviors determined by forces other than free will. Naturalist authors call upon a Darwinian view of heredity and environment to imbue descriptions of these human behaviors with an oppressive realism

documented by the scientific authority of biological fact.²

Charles Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* (1859) employed Auguste Comte's Positivist method to describe the mutability of the species and to challenge concepts of "purpose" and "design" in the natural world. In describing the biological "accidents" that culminated in the existing species, *The Origin* focused intellectual attention upon the biological, the natural, the animal nature in man. The mechanics of "natural selection" implied the nonexistence of an absolute morality or a Divine Cause.³ It was the first of many works that described nature as evolving. Absolutes in many fields, such as philosophy, law, and economics, began to shift.⁴

Many intellectuals saw Darwinism as undermining the Christian view of a personal God guiding the universe, the Creation as described by Scripture, and the rest of Christian doctrine. The *American Quarterly Church Review* in July 1865 said of Darwin's work: "If this hypothesis be true, then is the Bible '*an unbearable fiction*,' fabricated during successive ages?"⁵ Intellectuals scrambled to find ways in which religion and a science based on natural law could coexist, but the implications of evolutionary theory could not be ignored. Though it did not completely abolish the material/Divine dichotomy, evolutionary biology presented the possibility of describing man only in terms of biological and social facts.⁶

With God and the Bible removed from the minds' of American intellectuals as the source of ultimate wisdom and salvation, many were at a loss concerning where to look for an absolute morality and called into question the moral codes that guided both individual and societal behaviors. In light of these inquiries the fields of anthropology, psychology and sociology developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to try to unravel more of the mystery surrounding the physical, intellectual, and spiritual nature of humans. Naturalism is the literary movement that arose out of this confusion. While offering no answers, naturalism struggles with the implications of biological science, the questions surrounding the ultimate nature of humankind, and the ambiguities between the human and the animal.

Seen by some influential figures as inherently positive with "connotations of human progress, goodness and perfection," Darwin's theory of evolution entered the mainstream culture through the writings of Herbert Spencer and Thomas Henry Huxley.⁷ Perhaps more than any other intellectual, Spencer converted Darwin's biological evolution into a social theory claiming that the ultimate evolution of society culminated in an indefinitely maintainable utopia. Left unfettered, natural selection would guide social evolution into "the survival of the fittest," a term Spencer coined. According to him, anything such as labor unions and protective government regulations that interferes with natural workings is evil because it propagates the protection of the unfit within society.⁸

In a time when Christian absolutes had been overthrown, Spencer's ordered universe and "synthetic philosophy" provided a new kind of spiritual authority. Jack London says of him that, "to give up Spencer would be equivalent to a navigator throwing the compass and chronometer overboard."⁹ Though it was not explicitly mentioned, intellectuals, particularly those attempting to find ways for evolution and religion to coexist, assumed that Spencer's force of natural selection naturally favored "moral" qualities while it disfavored those qualities outside the acceptance of nineteenth century genteel society. In *Evolution and Ethics* (1890) Huxley reiterated Emile de Laveleye's position that "Darwinisme sociale" referred to the advocacy of "brutal individualism." Nature was impartial in ethical matters; she would treat the moral and immoral with equality.¹⁰

Questions surrounding the existence of an absolute morality, however, persisted. Heralded as "the American Spencer," William Graham Sumner describes his view of morals in a series of essays entitled *Folkways*. When some folkways are critical to the survival of the group, they become mores that exert pressure on society to conform. They are the ultimate authority and change only slowly. Outgrowths of historical experience, nevertheless they are not universal in nature. Therefore, good and bad are relative terms.¹¹ Like Spencer, Sumner believed that Nature would, if left unfettered, reward the

strong with survival and the weak with death. In his words, "if we do not like survival of the fittest, we have only one possible alternative, and that is the survival of the unfittest. The former is the law of civilization; the latter the law of anti-civilization."¹²

Naturalist authors, however, were reacting to more than intellectual theories. While a belief in Darwinian evolution and the desire to use it as a metaphor of human behavior is in some way responsible for the themes arising out of early American naturalism, other aspects of American life also contributed to naturalism. Economic booms and busts, waning faith in traditional religion, and a growing sense of cynicism surrounding public and social institutions found their way into writing.¹³ A great part of what shaped American literary naturalism in the 1890s was a full realization of the social, economic, and scientific changes that had occurred since the Civil War. The theme of the naturalistic novel begins with the American Dream¹⁴ The pre-industrial, pre-Darwinian American Dream of an individual rising above all obstacles through hard work and becoming successful and self-fulfilled changed at the turn of the century to the belief that American society was inflexible and closed. Survival was indeed a struggle, material achievement more admirable than moral prevailment. Self-serving industries, banks, corporations and political parties controlled the destinies of the nation, cities, and individuals, and all of it was quite beyond the control of any individual.¹⁵

American naturalists did not turn to the *Origin* as a primary source so much as they experienced Darwin as interpreted by Herbert Spencer. With sales of his books numbering almost 400,000 volumes in the last forty years of the nineteenth century, Spencer was an integral part of American culture.¹⁶ Despite the logical extrapolation of Darwinian evolution and Spencerian philosophy -- that if humankind is subject to material, scientific law, then free will and moral responsibility do not exist -- educated Americans seemed to view these scientific discoveries as heralds of a bright hope for increased freedom and opportunity. Such hope allowed the freedom to explore the sordid -- disease, mania, life-and-death struggle -- in ways never before possible.¹⁷ Although the theories Spencer and Darwin moved from descriptions of the least to the most

developed, Naturalist writers moved from descriptions of the complex to the simple, from the civilized to the bestial.¹⁸

In addition to Darwinian evolution and Spencerian thought, the writings of European naturalists, particularly French novelist Emile Zola, influenced American naturalism.¹⁹ Enlisting Zola's frank description and subject matter, naturalism was, to some degree, a rebellion against the repressive or "genteel" tradition of the nineteenth century. Concerning the popular American magazines of 1895, Frank Norris scornfully said:

They adorn the center table. They do not "call a blush to the cheek of the young." They can be placed -- oh, crowning virtue, oh, supreme encomium -- they can be "safely" placed in the hands of any young girl in the country over.... It is the "young girl" and the family center table that determine the standard of the American short story.²⁰

Most shocking of the naturalist's subject matter was their directness in the discussion of sexuality. Sexual conflict within an industrial context exemplifies the undercurrents of exploitation existing within the products of civilization.²¹ While Zola and those who emulated his realism were often tossed aside by critics as failures due to their use of "immoral materials," some had to concede that novels would in the future be shaped by these taboo subjects and that the sordid did constitute valid fictional material.²² However, critics rejected the usage of the sordid for purely sensational or purely realistic description as "ill-conceived extremes." An amalgam of romantic idealism and realistic detail was necessary to be critically accepted.²³

Because of its ambiguous nature, naturalism has suffered at the hands of critics. Viewing naturalism as "social realism laced with the idea of determinism," critics must also recognize and account for naturalist novels containing aspects of moral accountability and free will. For this duality naturalism is denigrated: first by its portrayal of man in a degraded state, and second for inconsistently allowing him attributes that allow him to stay above debasement.²⁴ What is needed to analyze

naturalism is a method that recognizes social influences and yet forgives stylistic inconsistencies. Literary critics use a variety of methods in attempting to demystify naturalism, but ultimately each method directs the analysis towards the same issue: the particular forces that shaped the movement, which in turn determine the overall character of naturalism and how naturalism relates to realism.

With a study of naturalism, the critic must consider whether or not texts "refer to a social reality" and whether or not they criticize that reality. As literature is a part of culture, the question becomes finding the reality in which a certain literature fits and identifying the themes common within the literature. Considering the historical and sociological conditions as described up to this point, some critics define naturalism as merely a variant of realism.²⁵ What most see is a theme of "pessimistic determinism" -- "determinism" because of the subjugation of free will to natural forces, "pessimistic" because of the inability of the characters to exercise free will.²⁶ Pessimistic determinism granted, there were, however, some naturalists who tempered pessimism with a romantic optimism towards mankind's future.²⁷

While Zola's naturalism deals almost entirely with the effects of biology and heredity as the force controlling the character, American naturalists also explore the effects of environmental and social forces.²⁸ The ultimate result for American naturalism is the negation of human moral responsibility. The tragedies of the novels are not a result of choices made or not made, but rather "the blind result of conditions, forces, physical laws, or Nature herself."²⁹ Realism strives to describe life using similar themes, but naturalist authors looked to the extraordinary and sordid to find subject matter. Naturalist authors recognized that natural forces were superior to human will, and thought that these forces could best be seen in instances that lead to sudden, dramatic, and violent outcomes.³⁰ Rather than dealing with an individual character as realism does, naturalism emphasized social groups, settings or events, or more stereotyped characters.³¹

Though these points seem to clarify the themes of naturalism and naturalism's relation to realism, when approached from a study of genre, the view changes. June

Howard sees part of the problem with studies of naturalism as the way critics define the genre. According to Howard, literary critics view naturalism as a genre made up of novels written within the context of popular literature and journalism "obsessed with class and commodities in a most embarrassing fashion." The history and documents of the period, however, indicate that naturalist writers were well aware of the confusion and discomfort brought about by relevant social issues and addressed more than superficial ideas.³² Howard differs from previous critics since her study does not describe naturalism as a reflection of ideology, but instead as an ideology in itself. It is the literary form that depicts and records the discomfort and struggle of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the realm of both social issues and how intellectuals and average persons were reacting to those issues. To study naturalism, then, is to study the historical moment, and a study of the genre uncovers meanings unknown when beholding only a single text.³³

Using George Luckás' description of realism as a form in which the characters are directly involved in events that the reader is able to experience through the significance within the characters' lives, Howard describes naturalism as leaving the reader as an observer because the characters themselves are observers of the events as they unfold within their lives.³⁴ Realism reports objectively to an objective world, but the imagery of the naturalist novel and writer is not objective. Instead, the naturalist novel emphasizes the significance of specific imagery, and in the case of authors London and Norris, specific animal imagery.³⁵

However, some critics view attention to specific themes and imagery not as revelation, but limitation. Seeking possible ways to re-analyze the literature, Lee Clark Mitchell looks to philosophy rather than traditional literary criticism. Aware that to limit naturalism to a "distinctive array of features" consisting of "particular scenes, or special themes, or characters and kinds of activities" is to miss the richness of the naturalist authors' works, rather than apply standards of literature to determine the "problem" of naturalist style – the "irritating repetitions and dislocations, its grammatical excesses and

wrenching maneuvers" -- Mitchell looks to the connections between style and philosophy. For him "the two are one and the same... an extreme philosophy can only be realized in correspondingly extreme styles."³⁶

Naturalism's styles disturb the reader because they do not fulfill the expectations of a traditional literary realism. The innovation of the naturalist was not in his subject matter, but in his narrative perspective towards the subject matter.³⁷ When that subject matter is the Self or individual, in realism, responsible characters have a solid concept of Self and an ability to make moral decisions, choosing their own courses of action. In naturalism, characters "happen." They have no realization of Self and abilities, or even inclinations, to choose a course of action. They are placed in familiar contexts only to demonstrate to the reader how alienated these characters feel.³⁸

By explaining the "narrative effects of determinism," Mitchell is aware that "the imposition of causality and motive on a series of past events is... the inevitable consequence of narration itself," an awareness that he in turn attributes to naturalist writers.³⁹ Mitchell argues that the determinism in naturalist fiction is less a result of "some physical 'universe of force'" than the influences of a carefully chosen grammar and syntax.⁴⁰ Moreover, he argues that:

Realist authors enforced a moral perspective on narrative action, a perspective involving the same considerations of intention and responsibility we habitually project on each other (and onto fictional characters as well). Those seemingly "natural" projective impulses are precisely what naturalists seek to subvert, and they do so in two major ways: through distinctive means of presenting plot crisis; and through stylistic strategies that serve to defamiliarize our sense of the "self."⁴¹

It does not disturb Mitchell that the writers about whom he speaks would never have had such a lucid, highly philosophical view of their own work.⁴² While a formalist approach does much to reveal aspects of naturalist style, it perhaps attributes too much to authorial intentions and totally ignores the social issues and theories of the late nineteenth

and early twentieth centuries -- aspects of American life mentioned in the letters and personal writings of naturalist authors. In order to fully address the complexities of naturalism, it is necessary, then, to draw upon not only textual evidence, but historical evidence as well.

The critic who does this in the most detailed analyses is Charles Child Walcott. Seeking to define the forces that create the perplexing pessimism/optimism tension that lies at the center of naturalism's complexities, Walcott goes back in history to describe the positive/negative dichotomies arising out of the duality of man from the Middle Ages -- God/Satan, eternal/temporal, soul/body. This dualism began to break down during the Renaissance because of a new world outlook based on scientific theory applied to the workings of the universe.⁴³ Because of the particular American need to combine faith with fact, American transcendentalism became a "dynamic and emotional creed" to describe "American expansion, the statement of the American Dream of individual opportunity, freedom and greatness," thereby making man equivalent to God.⁴⁴

The American Dream coupled with science formed the ultimate union of natural authority and human intuition in the form of transcendentalism. Science would usurp the old, the outdated, the repressive mores, and bring humankind the knowledge of nature it needed to penetrate the unknowable, to demonstrate the temporal nature of morality, and "transform the Struggle for Existence into an aspect of cosmic amelioration."⁴⁵ In Emerson's system of Nature as a symbol of spirit, "man's mind is an aspect of spirit, his body a fact of nature." Each man can, through intuition, experience the Absolute because each is the Absolute. Natural facts are symbolic of spiritual truths, which, when duly contemplated, will yield up their ultimate meanings.⁴⁶ This ideal of liberty through knowledge "expresses America's belief in science and in physical progress as an image of spiritual progress," demonstrating a mindset believing in a Divine Plan paralleled in Nature -- the spiritual as revealed through the material, the result a monistic confirmation of spirit and nature.⁴⁷

Described by the two words "spirit" and "nature," the monism becomes a duality.

The Nature assumed to be a parallel of the Divine, once falling under the analysis of scientific thought, came to be seen first as controlling the will, then a thing uncontrollable by will as man's nature seemed more animal than Godlike.⁴⁸ Despite a monism that declared human impulses to be "natural" and "beautiful," a deep Puritan tradition distrusted human emotion and labeled its desires as sinful. Naturalism's frankness, therefore was denounced as mere sensationalism, and the naturalists' obsession with the darker side of human nature produced a conservative backlash that called naturalism "a rejection of American optimism."⁴⁹

In the shift from the esteem of religious authority to the esteem of scientific observation, the worship of the reason-nature monism became a challenge to the previously unquestioned moral and social values of religious authority. Embracing hard scientific fact, as those facts began to demonstrate a dark and overpowering Nature, humankind shrank before what it could not control.⁵⁰ In demonstrating that there are natural and social forces beyond the will of man, naturalism fed the growing conviction that humankind was helpless in the grand scheme of things.⁵¹ At the same time there remained an optimism that a knowledge of science and human nature would provide the means for society to exert control and find freedom. Despair at man's situation and hope for his salvation, submission to natural forces and rebellion against them are the sources of critical disagreement and literary tension in these works.⁵² As Walcutt states it: "all naturalistic novels are stretched in a perilous tension between man's freedom and his fated impotence."⁵³

Walcutt sees the themes of naturalism embracing three patterns: "the religion of reason-nature, revealed in an enraptured contemplation of Process; the attack on the dual (therefore unscientific) values of the past; the recognition and slowly growing fear of natural forces that man might study but apparently could not control." From these tensions a complete picture of naturalism is formed. Themes of determinism, survival, violence and taboo abound, each demonstrating the supremacy of natural and social forces over human will. Each theme traces itself back to the biology inherent in man,

brought into focus by Darwin's science and Spencer's sociology.⁵⁴ The forms of the novel -- clinical, panoramic, slice-of-life, stream of consciousness and chronicle of despair -- likewise demonstrate the uncontrollable forces of nature and society.⁵⁵

As we have already seen, because of the multiplicity of themes and forms and the ambiguity of style, critical theory surrounding the naturalistic novel often contradicts itself, and critics are often diametrically opposed. The greatest area of contention seems to lie in the pessimism/optimism tension surrounding the naturalistic novel.⁵⁶ Walcutt sees the discord as stemming from the relationship between science and literature -- "that scientific attitudes produce equivalent aesthetic effects." If one assumes that science is an idealistic endeavor, one tends then to attribute an optimism to naturalistic works. However, if one attributes "pessimistic determinism" to the novels, then one must conclude that the scientific tenets from which they stem are ones of "gloom and despair" from which no social purpose can be extracted.⁵⁷ The resolution comes as a distinction between the philosophy of the individual and the work of art. If a "socially minded man" wishes to create a work that demonstrates the need for human improvement, the work must show a "naturalistic" tragedy --

In which a human being is crushed and destroyed by the operation of forces which he has no power to resist or even understand. The more helpless the individual and the more clearly the links in an inexorable chain of causation are defined, the more effectively documented are the two assumptions which underlie the scientists' program of reform, for the destruction of an individual demonstrates the power of heredity and environment over human destinies. And if the victim's lot is sordid, the need for reform is "proved."⁵⁸

When reading such a work, the reader may be motivated into social action. This "social conclusion" is not explicit in the novel -- the novel itself demonstrates the ineffectuality of action. It is this overwhelming fatalism which produces the effect of heightening the reader's social consciousness.⁵⁹

Walcott's description of the "divided stream" reflects not only the optimism/pessimism tension in naturalism, but also the uncertainty "as to whether science liberates the human spirit or destroys it." Even as the naturalistic novel demonstrates the "degradation of man," it affirms hope through an "unspoken ideal which stimulates and justifies his pejorative attitude toward the world about him."⁶⁰ Because of these ambiguities, a description of literary naturalism and the criticism that encompasses it are also ambiguous.⁶¹

Following a historical analysis similar to Walcott's, Donald Pizer recognizes the critical opposition that naturalism has historically faced. Because of naturalism's focus on the sordid and the animal, the religiously minded of the turn of the century labeled it "sensational." Naturalism, then as now, challenges basic values of human nature, thus producing hostility in the reader. The themes that Pizer recognizes as creating this challenge are those of uncontrollable forces that result in the waste of the individual's potential; those of moderately successful persons unable to maintain their position or stability in an ever-changing world; and those of man without a clear picture of himself in this fluctuating society.⁶² In addition to these themes, naturalism's literary style also challenged the traditional values of the American experience, demonstrating a "social documentation" decried as "mere photography" that undermined the aesthetic validity of the novel.⁶³

Nonetheless, naturalism as a literary form thrived in America because of its documentary method, an organization of circumstances agreeable to the American character. Its sensationalism also holds appeal. More than surface violence and sexuality, "taboo" subjects offered a symbolic view of American society. In this naturalism is close to romantic fiction.⁶⁴ According to Pizer, "there is no neat definition applicable to the movement in America, but rather a variable and changing and complex set of assumptions about man and fiction which can be called a naturalistic tradition."⁶⁵ "Naturalism remains a useful term for describing a literary practice and a set of programmatic idea reflecting the laws of thermodynamics, Darwinian theory, and the

sociological thought derived from Adam Smith, Malthus, Marx, and Spencer."⁶⁶

Noting these differing methods of describing naturalism, one can readily concur that Walcutt's belief, that because of ambiguity in theme a description of literary naturalism and the criticism that encompasses must also be ambiguous, holds a great deal of truth. Criticism of American literary naturalism must be approached from several directions simultaneously in order to encompass the full range of naturalism's themes and tensions. While structural form and narrative voice can demonstrate some of the issues naturalist authors were grappling with, without an understanding of social and historical issues, any definition of naturalism is incomplete.

The struggles of turn of the century American intellectuals in shifting fields of economics, business, philosophy and sociology are complex, but one overreaching theme that encompasses the tension is the theme of humankind attempting to reorganize both its world view and its view of the individual in the light of biological discoveries applied to cultural beliefs. In an intellectual climate already made turbulent by rapid social change and scientific debate, the publication of *The Origin of the Species* "was seen to have implications far beyond biology. It struck at beliefs and behaviors from the most trivial to the most profound."⁶⁷ The ensuing controversies were complex, but from them one thing could be certain: "Victorians could no longer accept dogmatic religion centered on a literal reading of the Bible."⁶⁸ From Darwinian evolution arose Spencerian social theories, and from the implications of both arose the thoroughly enigmatic movement known as American literary naturalism. The novels of this movement are historical documents depicting the struggles of both characters and authors experimenting with ways in which to come to terms with what was fast becoming the ambiguity between Man and Animal, the Civilized and the Bestial.

An understanding of the tensions within naturalism illuminates both the struggles of the authors and the struggles of an American culture on the verge of the rapid technological expansion that would characterize the twentieth century. However, naturalism is not the only genre of literature to explore the possibilities and implications

of Darwinian evolutionary theory. Popular literature, working-class novels and "pulp" fiction, also employ biological theories and language to present the possibilities and consequences of a scientific world view. While pulp fiction is not given the same intellectual weight as the novels of naturalism, the way in which it also utilizes evolutionary language provides an interesting contrast to the sordid realism and pessimistic determinism present within naturalism. It is therefore that an analysis of specific works of fiction and the men who wrote them will illustrate the particulars of biological language describing the ambiguities between man and beast and become the basis for understanding evolutionary implications in literature at the turn of the century.

Notes

- ¹ Charles Child Walcutt. *American Literary Naturalism, a Divided Stream*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956) 3.
- ² Lee Clark Mitchell. *Determined Fictions: American Literary Naturalism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) vii.
- ³ Walcutt, ALN 8.
- ⁴ Paul F. Boller. *American Thought in Transition: The Impact of Evolutionary Naturalism, 1865-1900*. (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969) xii.
- ⁵ Boller 23-24.
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- ⁹ Malcolm Cowley. "Naturalism in American Literature," *Evolutionary Thought in America*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950) 304.
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- ¹¹ Boller 61.
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- ¹⁴ Donald Pizer. *Twentieth-Century American Literary Naturalism: An Interpretation*. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982) 3.
- ¹⁵ Pizer 3-4.
- ¹⁶ Cowley 302.
- ¹⁷ Charles Child Walcutt. *Seven Novelists in the American Naturalist Tradition: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974) 8-9.
- ¹⁸ Walcutt, SNANT 316.
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- ²¹ Harold Kaplan. *Power and Order: Henry Adams and the Naturalist Tradition in American Fiction*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 103.
- ²² James I. McClintock. *White Logic: Jack London's Short Stories*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wolf House Books, 1975) 38.
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- ²⁵ Walter Benn Michaels. *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 27.
- ²⁶ Cowley 313.
- ²⁷ Cowley 313.
- ²⁸ Cowley 315.
- ²⁹ Cowley 318.
- ³⁰ Cowley 322.
- ³¹ Cowley 328.
- ³² June Howard. *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985) xi.
- ³³ Howard ix.
- ³⁴ Howard 22.
- ³⁵ Howard 19.
- ³⁶ Mitchell ix-x.
- ³⁷ Mitchell xvi.
- ³⁸ Mitchell 3.
- ³⁹ Mitchell xi.
- ⁴⁰ Mitchell xv.
- ⁴¹ Mitchell xii.
- ⁴² Mitchell xvi.

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- 43 Walcutt, ALN 4-5.
44 Walcutt, ALN 10.
45 Walcutt, SNANT 12.
46 Walcutt, ALN 10-11.
47 Walcutt, ALN 12.
48 Walcutt, ALN 12.
49 Walcutt, ALN 13.
50 Walcutt, ALN 19-20.
51 Walcutt, ALN 15.
52 Walcutt, ALN 17.
53 Walcutt, SNANT 10.
54 Walcutt, ALN 20-21.
55 Walcutt, ALN 21.
56 Walcutt, ALN 22-23.
57 Walcutt, ALN 24.
58 Walcutt, ALN 24-25.
59 Walcutt, ALN 26-27.
60 Walcutt, ALN 28-29.
61 Walcutt, ALN 3.
62 Pizer TCALN 6-7.
63 Pizer TCALN *ix*.
64 Pizer TCALN *x-xi*.
65 Pizer TCALN *xi*.
66 Pizer TCALN 5.
67 Ruse, Michael. *The Darwinian Revolution*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979) *ix*.
68 Ruse 241.

CHAPTER II

The last ten years of the nineteenth century, often called the "Mauve Decade," saw the literary content of American magazines catering to romantic fictions and the sensibilities of young middle-class women.¹ Sentimental stories of animals abounded, proclaiming their virtues in sweet, genteel tones. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's "Loveliness: A Story" appearing in the August 1899 *Atlantic* provides such an example, opening with the lines: "Loveliness sat on an eider-down cushion embroidered with cherry-colored puppies on a pearl satin cover.... For Loveliness was a little dog... the essence of tenderness; set, soul and body to one only tune. To love and be beloved -- that was his life."²

Seven years later *Outing Magazine* published a serialized "dog" story of its own, but this tale was one of an altogether different spirit.³ Based on the tenets of evolutionary science, fraught with the lessons of an amoral universe and described in a language far removed from popular sentiment, Jack London's *White Fang* tells the tale of a wolf who learns quickly the laws of the Wild in his struggle to survive, yet chooses to adhere to the laws of the Civilized in order to reap the benefit of man's protection. Experiencing both extremes of human nature, White Fang first encounters the cruelty of Beauty Smith, driving him to realize the most vicious of his wolf instincts. Weedon Smith, the paragon of human kindness and breeding, rescues Fang and eventually overcomes the wolf's distrust of the civilized through patience and love. Despite his internal struggle between instinct and learning, Fang eventually accepts civilization over the wild to prove himself a loyal companion to his chosen master.

At the time of its publication *White Fang* was not only as well received as *The Call of the Wild*, but also thought to be the better of the two works. London pinned great

hope upon the story, being in rather desperate straits for the cash to continue with the building of his boat the *Snark*. London was not disappointed. Its advance sales for the United States were 35,000 copies, and it quickly became one of the six best sellers.⁴ Contemporary critics lauded *White Fang*, as "the kind of thing Jack London does best," praising it as "the best thing that has come from his pen since *The Call of the Wild*, and in some points a better dog story than the latter ever succeeded in seeming...." Some critics voiced minor disagreement, but still they conceded that *White Fang* "would be more enjoyed by the mass of readers" than its predecessor.⁵

Strangely, of London's "dog stories" modern critical opinion on the whole seems to favor *The Call of the Wild* as the superior, dismissing *White Fang* as a mere re-write of the first work, and a shoddy re-write at that. Generally defined in an aesthetic sense as "an uneven novel,"⁶ at the very least, *White Fang* "does not have the feel of the unconscious that is so powerful in *The Call of the Wild*."⁷ Walcutt describes *White Fang* as "not as bare, tense, and gripping" as the former work, nonetheless conceding that, "the best of London is to be found in the short stories, *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*."⁸ Most critics are not so generous. Lumping *White Fang* and *Before Adam* (1907) together, Earl Wilcox writes that the pieces "together constitute the high-water mark of London's blatant use of evolutionary concepts in two tawdry pieces of naturalistic fiction."⁹ Concerning *White Fang* he specifically states that the tale "is hack work in its artistry and uninspiring in its philosophy... the familiar story of a survival-of-the-fittest animal... in a bleak and pessimistic setting."¹⁰

Despite its harsh treatment by modern critics, by "recapturing the gritty intensity of the original," the same qualities that make *The Call of the Wild* great also strengthen *White Fang*.¹¹ While London is said to have preferred *White Fang* to *The Call of the Wild*, his original intentions were that the two works should be separate and distinct -- *White Fang* was not a sequel to its predecessor, but a companion novel.¹² Oddly, London did not recognize the similarities between the two works, writing to his friend and publisher George P. Brett: "You will find there is not much resemblance between [*White*

Fang] and *The Call of the Wild*, and I don't think anybody will dare to assert that I have humanized the dog."¹³ However, there were those who found London's portrayal of nature lacking in realism, and London received criticism as a "nature faker" from President Theodore Roosevelt, well known for his interest in conservation efforts and big game hunting.¹⁴

London in both lifestyle and habits seemed to identify with his shaggy protagonist, signing his personal letters "Wolf" and propagating an image of himself as a "lone wolf" individualist. Like White Fang that emerged from the savage Northland to realize a place within the civilized world of man, the biography of Jack London's own life reads like an example of Darwinian struggle and Spencerian survival of the fittest.¹⁵ He was born the illegitimate son of Flora Wellman and W. H. Chaney. Chaney refused to marry Flora or to accept the responsibility of a child, so when less than a year later Flora married John London, she named the child after him. As a boy Jack lived on the precarious edge of poverty, working odd jobs to support his family and getting only a scant primary education. Before adolescence his family settled in Oakland, California, and it was there that Jack taught himself to sail.

An injury to John London left him unable to support the family through his wages, so Jack undertook the tremendous responsibility of supporting the family. This loss of his freedom so young and the sacrifices he made to his family remained to color his perceptions of his childhood throughout his adult life.¹⁶ Writing in 1898 to Mabel Applegarth, his first love, the memory was strong:

Why, as you have laid down my duty in your letter, if I had followed it what would I have been to-day? ... Do you know of my childhood? When I was seven years old... I once opened a girl's basket and stole a piece of meat.... This meat incident is an epitome of my whole life. At eight years old when I put on my first undershirt made at or bought at a store. Duty -- at ten years I was on the street selling newspapers. Every cent was turned over to my people, and I went to school in constant shame of the hats,

shoes, clothes I wore. Duty -- from then on I had no childhood..... I remember how I was trying to save the money to buy a skiff -- eight dollars. All that summer I saved and scraped. In the fall I had five dollars as a result of absolutely doing without all pleasure. My mother came to the machine where I worked and asked for it. I could have killed myself that night. After a year of hell to have that pitiful -- to be robbed of that petty joy.¹⁷

However, honest work, with its long hours and dangerous tasks, did not pay enough, and young London turned to means of sustenance outside the law. At sixteen he was an oyster pirate. When fierce competition drove him from pirating, he became a member of the State Fish Patrol, using his position as a lawful means to ruin his former competitors. For a young London life on the waterfront was harsh, Spencerian philosophy in practice. Desirous to escape the sense of duty that bound him to Oakland and his family, at the age of seventeen London signed as a sailor on the sealing-vessel *Sophia Sutherland*.¹⁸

A year later when he returned, London had his first success at writing when he won a twenty-five dollar prize for a descriptive piece written for a writing contest hosted by the San Francisco *Morning Call*. However, with John London's failing health it was necessary for Jack to get steady employment. Exploited by unfair labor practices in the jute mills and as an electrician's apprentice, Jack again left Oakland, marching with Kelly's Industrial Army toward Washington, D. C.¹⁹ Joining them less for the social cause and more for the adventure, London's associations with the army were generally those that guaranteed him a meal. When the army disbanded upon the arrest of its leader, London began his way home as a hobo.²⁰

He entered Oakland High School eager to improve his skills as a writer, but after the completion of his first year he was self-conscious of his age and dismayed at the thought of two more years. Studying furiously he passed enough entrance examinations and was admitted to the University of California.²¹ At the university things were not as

Jack expected; the reality of his courses did not live up to his growing socialist ideals, and again his father's ill health interrupted London's life. He attempted again to write fiction, but uncertainty surrounding how to submit a proper manuscript and poverty leaving him without money for stamps forced him to give up his literary pursuits for a proper job.²²

Reports of the gold rush were coming down from the Yukon. Tales of adventure and riches in the frozen north promised London release from his toiling existence in low-paying jobs. Borrowing money from his sister, he set off to follow the gold rush to the Klondike in 1897. Gone for a year, London endured incredible hardship and illness that finally forced him to return to California. He found no gold, but his adventures and experiences would show him the way to his narrative voice.²³

In a short time London became one of the most famous young writers in America. Perhaps part of his fame came from the mixture of Darwinian, Spencerian, Marxist, and socialist philosophies in his work -- issues well known and hotly debated at the turn of the century.²⁴ While Joan London claims that their influence is not as strong as so many critics state, it is certain that Jack London was aware of and often explored the philosophies of Charles Darwin, Adam Smith, Kant, Benjamin Kidd, Herbert Spencer, Nietzsche and Marx within the context of his literary works.²⁵ Perhaps as a result of his own beginnings in poverty, London was very receptive to a view of life as an ongoing Darwinian struggle in which only the fittest were able to survive.²⁶ With traditional Christianity in nineteenth-century America falling under the scrutiny of science and his own background lacking in formal religious structure, it is unsurprising that the "secular doctrines" of Marx and Spencer inspired London.²⁷ He even claimed that Herbert Spencer's *First Principles* "would do more for mankind through the ages than a thousand books like Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* or Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*."²⁸

Like the popular literary critics horrified at the direction of American literature under the influence of scientific implications, London rejected extremes of realistic description and sordid sensationalism, yet he himself employed the "sensationally

shocking." However, he saw his own use of the shocking as relevant to the telling of the character's fate.²⁹ Realism used only to detail fact seemed little more than "photography," the same kind of "inordinate realism" that he criticized in his review of Frank Norris's *The Octopus*.³⁰ For London, to imbue the sordid experience with meaning, the work must also reflect "human significance." As a result, he "accepted the impulse to root his fiction in an expanding reality of harsh facts and yet, to depict ideals."³¹

London found optimism in the implications of Spencer and Ernst Haeckel, despite the pessimism that many naturalists saw in the scientific theory of the social Darwinists. Spencer's "persistence of force" in his *First Principles* solidified London's personal philosophy of survival gleaned from his life on the waterfront and his experiences on the road with Kelly's Industrial Army, while Haeckel's monist position requiring the mutual existence of matter and spirit allowed London to "hold a grandiose conception of man and find it consistent with a biological view of the human condition."³² With a strong Lamarkian sense of "acquired characters," that environment strongly influenced the use and therefore existence or nonexistence of certain traits, London felt scientifically justified in seeing the possibility of the ideal within the sordid.³³

Thematically "his work deals with an infinite variety of themes such as survival, socialism, cruelty, madness, obsessive jealousy, murder, Darwin's, Nietzsche's, Fiske's, Spencer's, and others' philosophical theories, and above all, with love."³⁴ London's work contains naturalistic themes such as "sociological and biological determinism; the survival of the fittest thesis; belief in the materialistic, primitive nature of man; accent on some reform and politically revolutionary themes; championing of anti-capitalistic and pro-socialistic concepts; use of the 'new woman' motif; and an implicit belief in determinism in all these forces."³⁵ Often London's stories illustrate how environment shapes the individual and how, despite a civilized appearance, external forces can reveal his atavistic core.³⁶ Most of Jack London's stories deal with the survival of the fittest as applied to an individual, but in his later works, London began to explore the survival of

species and the supremacy of one race over another.³⁷

Complex in his personality as well as in his ideas, London's works demonstrate his own philosophical polarities "between Social Darwinism and social justice, between individualism and socialism."³⁸ While he seemed to embrace both Spencer and Haeckel's determinism, he also spoke of his writing and his personal experiences in mystical, spiritual language.³⁹ While he often wrote letters expressing support for socialist causes, his allegiance to socialism is more of a hatred of capitalism and the industrial world; the revolution he speaks of is not so much one of teeming masses as it is one of individuals who dare to go against the system.⁴⁰

As a result of these conflicting philosophies equally embraced, despite his classification as a literary naturalist, London has a style distinctly his own.⁴¹ In his career London embraced the tensions between reality and ideals, the possibility of higher moral achievement despite the scientific tenets of man as animal. This is Walcutt's description of naturalism, defining both the optimism and the pessimism of the "divided stream." Likewise London's views define Pizer's tension "between the naturalist's desire to represent in fiction the new, discomfiting truths which he has found in the ideas and life of his late nineteenth-century world, and also his desire to find some meaning in experience which reasserts the validity of the human enterprise."⁴²

While his work does include themes of heredity and environmental determinism, it is seldom the only influential factor in the characters' actions. While the presence of characters possessing free will may be inconsistent with naturalistic theories, their presence is consistent within London's own complex and at times contradictory view of the world. His style of writing is frank, forthright and without emotional expression. He describes scenes of violence with utter detachment in blunt detail. Such descriptions horrified many of London's readers; nonetheless London wrote as many naturalists did of sordid subjects, emphasizing horror to invoke a reaction that could lead to social change.⁴³

For a man of London's complex views, the medium for social analysis and change

could arise out of some rather unlikely plots. In 1904 he wrote to Brett: "I'm dropping you a line hot with the idea. I have the idea for the next book I shall write... I'm going to reverse the process. Instead of devolution or de-civilization of a dog, I'm going to give the evolution, the civilization of a dog -- development of domesticity, faithfulness, love, morality, and all the amenities and virtues."⁴⁴ However, short on cash and juggling other projects, London postponed the writing of *White Fang* for some months.⁴⁵

A "sociological fable," *White Fang* uses animal protagonists to demonstrate "the sex-tragedy of the natural world" and "ethical retrogression" so as not to "offend the genteel readership" of the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Cosmopolitan*. While descriptions of sex and unethical behavior would no doubt be considered offensive when attributed to human characters, London's *White Fang* does not evoke indignation because, after all, "he is just a dog."⁴⁶

White Fang begins with a description of the "dark spruce forest" of the frozen Northland that so often appears in London's fiction. A recognition of the duality between the wild and the civilized is immediately apparent: "It was the masterful and incommunicable wisdom of eternity laughing at the futility of life and the effort of life. It was the Wild -- the savage, frozen-hearted Northland Wild" (3). London's Northland, then, becomes a metaphorical backdrop for humankind to confront the reality of life and simultaneously realize his identity in the grand scheme of Nature.⁴⁷ During the brief and violent story of the two trappers, there is an unknown force in nature, against which the two men are "puny adventurers bent on colossal adventure, pitting themselves against the might of a world as remote and alien and pulseless as the abysses of space" (4).

Born into the world the offspring of a wolf-father and his half-wolf, half-dog mother, London's description of *White Fang*'s psychological development is without the sentiment or humanizing metaphor prevalent in contemporary animal stories. As a wild beast learning to confront the ways of the civilized, *White Fang* must first learn the laws of the wild. The most obvious manifestation of Spencerian philosophy is the law of meat:

There were two kinds of life -- his own and the other kind. His own kind included his mother and himself. The other kind included all live things that moved.... Out of this classification arose the law. The aim of life was meat. Life itself was meat. Life lived on life. There were the eaters and the eaten. The law was: EAT, OR BE EATEN (78).

The law of meat is a strong echo of the sentiment in Spencer's *Social Statics*, in which:

Nature demands that every being shall be self-sufficing. All that are not so, nature is perpetually withdrawing by death.... He on whom his own stupidity, or vice, or idleness entails loss of life must, in the generalizations of philosophy, be classed with the victims of weak viscera or malformed limbs.... Along with the rest they are put to trial. If they are sufficiently complete to live, they *do* live, and it is well they should live. If they are not sufficiently complete to live, they die, and it is best they should die.⁴⁸

A life of Darwinian struggle is not the fate of the wolf, however, and soon he and his mother fall into the company of humans. These humans prove to be the very same ones who tamed his mother, whom the humans call "Kiche." Reluctant and fearful at first, the more White Fang is in contact with humans, the more "civilized" he becomes. He learns how to apply the law of meat to these new beings and the place that these new beings occupy:

The code he learned was to obey the strong and to oppress the weak. Grey Beaver was a god, and strong. Therefore White Fang obeyed him. But the dog younger or smaller than himself was weak -- a thing to be destroyed.... He became quicker of movement than the other dogs, swifter of foot, craftier, deadlier, more lithe, more lean with ironlike muscle and sinew, more enduring, more cruel, more ferocious, and more intelligent. He had to become all these things, else he would not have held his own nor

survived the hostile environment in which he found himself (108).

The codes White Fang comes to realize are a part of London's demonstration of the power of environmental forces upon the nature of man and animals. While White Fang "did not reason the question out in this man fashion" (62) so described by London, White Fang nonetheless "knows" the law. London is careful not to attribute a human morality to his protagonist and render *White Fang* little more than yet another sentimental dog story. White Fang does not "formulate the law in clear, set terms and moralize about it. He did not even think the law; he merely lived the law without thinking about it at all" (78).

London's specific descriptions of the law of meat and White Fang's action without thought demonstrate his purpose behind the philosophy of the novel:

... I am an evolutionist, therefore a broad optimist, hence my love for the human (in the slime though he be) comes from my knowing him as he is and seeing the divine possibilities ahead of him. That's the whole motive of my 'White Fang.' Every atom of organic life is plastic.... Let the pressure be one way and we have atavism – the reversion to the wild; the other the domestication, civilization.⁴⁹

The rest of *White Fang* is an exploration of this theory, a scientific demonstration of the plasticity of White Fang's nature. London often describes the nature of the characters, particularly Fang's as "clay." Of White Fang he says that "his heredity was a life-stuff that may be likened to clay. It possessed many possibilities, was capable of being molded into many different forms. Environment served to model the clay, to give it a particular form" (128).

London does not attribute the influences of the Northland only to White Fang. The human character that stands out in contrast to the wolf is Beauty Smith. Sounding like a case history from one of Formosa's notebooks, London describes Beauty with great detail:

To antithesis was due his naming.... Backward, from the apex his head

slanted down to his neck; and forward, it slanted uncompromisingly to meet a low and remarkable wide forehead.... In order to discover the necessary area, Nature had given him an enormous prognathous jaw. It was wide and heavy, and protruded outward and down until it seemed to rest on his chest.... In short, Beauty Smith was a monstrosity, and the blame of it lay elsewhere. He was not responsible. The clay of him had been so molded in the making (146-7).

Sounding out the biological correlation between physical characteristics and mental makeup, Beauty is obviously the product of both heredity and environment. In the true spirit of naturalism, London draws attention to the uncontrollable forces that created Beauty, explicitly stating that *he is not responsible*, thereby excusing his cruel treatment of White Fang.

Undeniably heredity plays an important part in White Fang's internal struggle between his wild and civilized natures, symbolized by his one-quarter dog and three-quarters wolf biological heritage. However, the work does not adhere completely to the tenets of naturalism, as the heredity and environment of *White Fang* are not the only influences on his actions. While the impulses of Fang's wild nature are strong and "there were days when he crept to the edge of the forest and stood and listened to something calling him far away" (96), London's work reveals his complex views in an ironic act of free will apart from biological influences on behalf of White Fang, who chooses civilization over the wild.⁵⁰

London does not demonstrate an absolute determinism. Concerning White Fang's ability to make conscious decisions, without ambiguity London writes that "quite deliberately he determined to stay behind. He waited his opportunity to slink out of camp to the woods" (109). During the great famine White Fang leaves the company of humans, but once the famine was over "of his own choice, he came to sit by man's fire and to be ruled by him" (114). White Fang's "masculine" wild impulses do not win over his "feminine" civilized impulses despite the obvious genetic weight on the side of the wild.

White Fang has free will.⁵¹

Whether London views tender displays as demonstrative of civilized behavior or necessary to soften the harshness of the otherwise totally Darwinian edge, he nonetheless also includes some sentimental touches that go against the naturalist grain. After White Fang's first day on his own, his mother finds him. With a tenderness equal to that of Phelps's little dog Loveliness, Kiche "nozzled him, and caressed him, and licked the cuts made in him by the weasel's teeth" (73), while "her joy at finding him seemed greater even than his joy at being found" (73). Even White Fang, "the Fighting Wolf," is guilty of "snuggling" once he learns to love and trust Weedon Scott (188).

The publication of *White Fang* for the most part evoked praise from critics, save for the charge of "nature faker" from President Theodore Roosevelt.⁵² While London did not seem particularly dismayed in his response to the press, in a later essay he defended his writing:

Time and time again, and many times, in my narratives, I wrote, speaking of my dog-heroes: "He did not think these things; he merely did them," etc. And I did this repeatedly to the clogging of my narrative and in violation of my artistic canons; and I did it in order to hammer into the average human understanding that these dog-heroes of mine were not directed by abstract reasoning, but by instinct, sensation, emotion, and by simple reasoning. Also, I endeavored to make my stories in line with the facts of evolution: I hewed them to the mark set by scientific research....⁵³

Writing *White Fang* as a "sociological fable" London demonstrates that the experiences of White Fang as a wolf are not so different from the experiences of Beauty Smith as a man. Both are at the mercy of external forces beyond individual control and must struggle against natural forces for survival in the foreboding Northland, the essential characters of both determined by heredity, their natures molded and shaped by environment. The ultimate result of the molding by these external forces is that some men are more beast than civilized, while some animals are more civilized than beast.

Beauty Smith represents the kind of man that is for London "the weakest of weak-kneed and sniveling cowards" (146). At the other end, through a combination of circumstance and superior intelligence, Fang makes choices that allow him to become a part of the civilized.

However, the reader is not to praise White Fang for his superior intelligence or condemn Beauty Smith for his cruelty -- London is very explicit in his description of their natures being molded by generations of evolutionary struggle, adaptation and natural circumstance. In the end neither Fang nor Beauty can be held "morally" accountable for the actions or reactions of a bestial or civilized nature shaped by external forces.

London's use of Spencerian and Darwinian theories in the work echoes popular sociological thinking at the turn of the century as well as lends validity to his personal sociological philosophy by association with the objective science of biology. While it is unwise to attribute too much intellectual rationalization to the Darwinian portions of his style, it is not overreaching to say that *White Fang* is London pondering the implications of environmental determinism and hereditary influence. By telling the story from an animal's point of view rather than a human point of view, demonstrating the potential of the civilized within the animal, and illustrating the power of natural forces over both man and animal, the ambiguity between man and beast in a material, deterministic universe overshadowed by struggle, progressive accidents, and external controls unfolds.

If the impetus behind the work was to stop here, *White Fang* would be little more than a pessimistic novel in the best of naturalist style. Because it was not within his own psychological makeup to accept an absolute determinism as the sole force in human existence, London's telling of *White Fang* moves beyond the traditional naturalistic definition. Conceding that when viewed as a whole, a species, a race, and all living things could ultimately be overpowered by uncontrollable forces, as an individual it is possible to execute free will in a manner that affects existence. Heredity is important insofar as it may tip the balance of power for or against the individual, but as *White Fang* demonstrates it is possible to make choices and thereby transcend an absolute

determinism.

London's balance between environmental determinism and free will is a delicate one, and perhaps this sometimes inconsistent balance is the reason that modern critics striving for a consistent naturalist school do not treat *White Fang* favorably. The force of circumstance does not negate that White Fang is an individual. With a nature likened to clay, he still makes choices and remembers experiences in such a way that he is able to learn from those choices. Balancing Fang's possession of free will is an environment that can make Fang the "Blessed Wolf" or the "Fighting Wolf," and it is over these influencing factors that the wolf has no control.

From out of the determinism implicit in social Darwinism London develops a view of the world as a harsh reality in which somehow ideal forms are able to exist. A peculiar polarity of his own consciousness, London did not allow his personal views to succumb to determinism, striving always to find the possibility of higher meanings in human existence. The portrait of *White Fang*, while it blurs the distinction between man and animal, clearly shows the possibility of ideals within the animal, demonstrated by Fang's intellectual superiority and ability to choose, and the possibility of ideals within the human, demonstrated by Weedon Scott's superior courage and intellect. The harsh reality is also present in *White Fang*: it is the cowardice of a Beauty Smith who is not morally accountable for his cruelty; it is the law of meat that renders all living things, even man, nothing more than a means of survival; it is the frozen Northland that looks upon all living things as an "offense."

Rising out of the shifting absolutes of the nineteenth century and a product of the twentieth century struggle to stay the confusion, *White Fang* demonstrates harshness with the possibility of hope, but only after the deterministic lessons of reality are learned and accepted. A delicate balance, then, that will not yield to either a pessimistic determinism or a hopeful idealism. However, not all views of the world encompassed the possibility of hope.

Notes

- ¹ Earle Labor. *Jack London*. (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974) 41.
- ² Labor, *Jack London* 41.
- ³ Earle Labor; Robert C. Leitz, III; I. Milo Shepard. *The Letters of Jack London, Volume One: 1896-1905*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988) footnote 1.
- ⁴ Labor, *Letters*, vol. 2 641, 649, 674.
- ⁵ Excerpts from *Dial* 41 (December 1, 1906) 389; *Nation* 83 (November 22, 1906) 440; *New York Times* 11 (November 17, 1906) 764.
- ⁶ Charles N. Watson. *The Novels of Jack London: A Reappraisal*. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983) 82.
- ⁷ Andrew Sinclair. *Jack: A Biography of Jack London*. (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1977) 122.
- ⁸ Charles Child Walcutt. *Jack London*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966) 22, 41.
- ⁹ Earl J. Wilcox. *Jack London and the Tradition of American Literary Naturalism*. Vanderbilt University, Ph.D. Language and Literature, modern. (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, Inc. 1966) 223.
- ¹⁰ Wilcox, *Jack London* 225.
- ¹¹ Watson 82.
- ¹² Watson 81-82.
- ¹³ Labor, *Letters* vol. 1 533.
- ¹⁴ Joan London. *Jack London and His Times: An Unconventional Biography*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1939) 327-8.
- ¹⁵ Walcutt, *Jack London* 5.
- ¹⁶ Sinclair 9.
- ¹⁷ Labor, *Letters* vol. 1 24.
- ¹⁸ Sinclair 11-14.
- ¹⁹ Sinclair 17-19.
- ²⁰ Walcutt, *Jack London* 9.
- ²¹ London 127-30.
- ²² London 136-138.
- ²³ Richard O'Connor. *Jack London: A Biography*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964) 78-82.
- ²⁴ Van Wyck Brooks. *The Confident Years: 1885-1915*. (New York: Dutton, 1952) 233.
- ²⁵ Earl J. Wilcox. "Overtures of Literary Naturalism in *The Son of the Wolf* and *The God of His Fathers*." Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin, editor. *Critical Essays on Jack London*. (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1983) 106.
- ²⁶ Wilcox, *Overtures* 108.
- ²⁷ Labor, *Jack London* 60.
- ²⁸ Labor, *Jack London* 33.
- ²⁹ James I. McClintock. *White Logic: Jack London's Short Stories*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wolf House Books, 1975) 41.
- ³⁰ Watson 15.
- ³¹ McClintock 43.
- ³² McClintock 43-44.
- ³³ McClintock 45.
- ³⁴ Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin. "Jack London: A Professional." From *Critical Essays on Jack London*. (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1983) 5.
- ³⁵ Wilcox, *Overtures* 107.
- ³⁶ Wilcox, *Overtures* 108.
- ³⁷ Wilcox, *Overtures* 128.
- ³⁸ Walcutt, *Jack London* 7.
- ³⁹ Watson 14.
- ⁴⁰ Walcutt, *Jack London* 23.
- ⁴¹ Wilcox, *Overtures* 107.
- ⁴² McClintock 54-55.
- ⁴³ Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin. "Jack London: A Professional." From *Critical Essays on Jack London*. (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983) 13.
- ⁴⁴ Labor, *Letters* vol. 1 454.

⁴⁵ Labor, *Letters* vol. 1 465.

⁴⁶ Labor, *Jack London* 69.

⁴⁷ McClintock 50.

⁴⁸ Herbert Spencer. *Social Statics: The Conditions Essential to Human Happiness Specified, and the First of Them Developed* (1876-97). (New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1954), 338 - 40.

⁴⁹ Labor, *Jack London* 80.

⁵⁰ Watson 91.

⁵¹ Watson 92.

⁵² London 327-8.

⁵³ Wilcox, *Jack London* 176. A quote from London's essay, "The Other Animals" in *Revolution and Other Essays*. New York: Macmillan and Co., 1912.

CHAPTER III

Of all the novels to come out of the naturalistic movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, few are as controversial, as much discussed, and yet still so little understood as Frank Norris's *Vandover and the Brute*. Completed in 1895, but unpublished until twelve years after Norris's death, literary critics consider it his first novel. The manuscript required considerable re-writing, and Norris's younger brother Charles added five-thousand words and omitted a chapter before the work was published.¹

The posthumous publication of *Vandover and the Brute* in 1914 by Norris's brother resulted in very mixed critical reactions. There were those who praised it as "a novel of which any writer might be proud." Although Frank Norris never revised the manuscript, some critics felt that "with all its unpruned crudities, it is still above the average work of the literary aspirant." However, despite the changing mores in America and the passage of time, the content of the novel shocked both critics and readers. Some recommended that "it ought to have been issued for private circulation only and placed in the hands of the few who would have regarded it as a human document and nothing more." Most recognized it, nevertheless, as "a story of ability and promise" and "a story of the most unpleasant nature written in a most unpleasant style."² Perhaps most telling is that during Norris's lifetime, his publisher, Doubleday and McClure, rejected outright the publication of *Vandover and the Brute* based on its "unsuitable," realistic contents.³

The novel begins with the brief childhood recollections of Vandover. His mother dies when he is very young, and his father, though loving, is unable to give him sufficient moral influence. When in adolescence he learns the mystery of sex, Vandover feels the first stirrings of the Brute inside him. He manages to attend college without developing

vices, but three years in San Francisco after graduating from Harvard mark a significant change. Convinced he can control the beast inside him, Vandover gives little thought to the consequences of his actions. Unwilling to commit to Turner Ravis, the virtuous girl who loves him, Vandover carelessly seduces another woman. When she finds that she is pregnant, she commits suicide; the shock of these incidents in turn hastens the death of Vandover's father. Thus begins the disintegration of Vandover the Man into Vandover the Brute, as Vandover is first cast from polite society and then begins to manifest the symptoms of a horrible disease resulting from his vices.

Modern criticism, while not displaying shock, demonstrates in numerous interpretations of Norris's complex ideas the ambiguous nature of the work and the difficulties present in trying to categorize a work dealing with broad human themes. As an unrevised first novel, Norris's work contains inconsistencies of plot and style that eclipse the work's larger themes. Much of the criticism after 1945 either questions its categorization as naturalistic fiction alongside such works as Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* and Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, or focuses upon the narrative flaws. It is unfortunate that modern criticism focuses only upon the style of the work or its classification rather than focusing upon the content of the work. Regardless of its naturalistic status, *Vandover and the Brute* is a complex study of evolutionary implications in an industrialized, turn of the century America, and Norris's explorations of the man/animal ambiguity reveal his fascination with popular biological theories.

Nonetheless, understanding how *Vandover* does or does not adhere to naturalistic tenets in part deciphers Norris's use of evolutionary themes within the work. Walcutt recognizes that Vandover's story is much like a tragedy in the classic sense, but says also that as a tragedy it is without impact. Vandover's illness is the focus of the shock; it does not present humankind in an inevitable struggle. There is nothing in the story that indicates an inevitable conclusion, nothing that speaks to a broader theory of human sociology. He notes also that while he achieves the shock effect he desired with *Vandover*, Norris does not present a clear, connecting path between his brand of

naturalism and Vandover's free will. The narrative moralization distracts from the determinist aspects of the novel.⁴ The melodramatic language of Norris's moral censure throughout the novel is often considered to be Norris's personal censure. An obvious emphasis on morality and Vandover's lack of adherence to moral codes leaves the reader with the feeling that if Vandover had only been a "better person," his tragedy would not have occurred. Norris's weak and at times unclear depiction of the environmental factors that shape Vandover's character flaws the naturalistic theme.

This argument over narrative censure, however, goes in both directions, for some note the possibility that Norris's use of a moral narrative voice is an attempt to show the social and psychological atmosphere surrounding Vandover, thereby demonstrating to the reader how society teaches Vandover to view sex in a negative light.⁵ If this is true, then there is a force over which Vandover is powerless – the petty social mores of his nineteenth-century society, which thrusts him out and does not allow him the possibility of recovery.

There are other possibilities of external forces that might explain Vandover's fall as an inevitable event, thereby redeeming the work as naturalistic fiction. Vandover's weakness of character ("nothing affected him deeply"⁶) may be a lack of Darwinian adaptability to change or loss, in which case a fact of his biology makes his degradation an inevitable event. On the other hand, Vandover's weakness of character is an instance of too much adaptability – that no matter what happens "his pliable character adapt[s] itself to the new environment"⁷ -- in which case a fact of his biology does not allow him the strength to change his behavior, and the result is the same.⁸

The need to determine external forces to classify a work as "naturalistic," however, seems short-sighted. The moral censure of the narrative voice and Vandover's story of repressed sexual instincts indicates internal biological tensions that correspond with external tensions such as those caused by heredity and environment. At least in *Vandover and the Brute*, Freud's psychological implications have as much a part in the language of naturalism as Darwin's biological implications. With the possibility of

Freudian undertones, the relationship of Norris to his work takes on a whole new dimension.

There is much speculation concerning the possible autobiographical content of the work. While there is no evidence to indicate that Norris himself fell victim to the vices of Vandover, the two share a similar history. From San Francisco to the East for schooling and back again, Vandover tries his hand at painting, but Norris tries to write. Each chooses a lifestyle that places them outside convention.⁹ Born in Chicago on March 5, 1870, Benjamin Franklin Norris, Jr. was the son of a businessman and a cultured lady who once tried her hand at a stage career.¹⁰ Never particularly interested in his father's business save that it allowed him all the advantages of his class, young Norris had all that his parents could provide, including a grand tour of Europe at age eight. At age fifteen his family moved to San Francisco, his father needing to escape the cold Chicago winters that bothered his hip ailment.¹¹ In San Francisco his father became extremely successful with real estate, and so the advantages of class continued to be at Norris's disposal.

Yet all things were not well. His temperament and physical appearance at this time remarkably like that of Vandover at the same age, Norris did not fit in at the private school he attended. After a few weeks his father allowed him to withdraw, and Norris was sent to art school.¹² Desiring that their son continue to develop his artistic talents, when he was only seventeen, Norris went first to London, then to Paris to study art at the Académie Julien.¹³

While in Paris Norris mostly wrote, fascinated by tales of medieval knights. Incorporating these themes, he began to write a few of his own tales, which he sent back home for the amusement of his younger brother, Charles. His father did not approve, and by most accounts is said to have forced his return to San Francisco.¹⁴ There may be some indication, however, that Norris lost interest in an artistic career and was more than willing to return.¹⁵ His physical appearance upon return from Paris was something of a shock to his mother — gone was the lanky uncertainty of adolescence. Instead a young man of fashion and good looks greeted her.¹⁶

Norris's failure to paint successfully convinced his father that he ought to follow in his footsteps by becoming involved with the jewelry business. To that end, Norris enrolled at the University of California.¹⁷ Frank himself was hardly interested in becoming a jeweler, but complied. Under the new influences of college Norris lost his penchant for the Middle Ages and became interested in the life of a fraternity man in the 1890s.¹⁸ His inability to comprehend mathematics to the satisfaction of instructors made him unable to obtain a degree, but he did not waste his four years at the University of California. During this period Norris became acquainted with the theories surrounding biological evolution, Spencerianism, and social Darwinism, and his writings began to show the influences of Zola.¹⁹

In 1894 his parents divorced. Divorce was still an occasion for gossip at the time, and so it is hard to ascertain what Norris's reactions were. One result was that Frank lost the inheritance that usually went to the eldest son of a wealthy businessman when Norris, Sr. willed almost his entire fortune to his second wife, but with this falling out went the last objection to young Norris becoming a professional writer. His mother completely supported his desire to write, and she moved the family to Cambridge in 1894 so that Norris could study at Harvard.²⁰ Influenced by the styles of Kipling and Zola and the evolutionary theories he was exposed to under the tutelage of Professor Joseph Le Conte, as well as encouraged by the instruction of Harvard Professor Lewis E. Gates, Norris began his work on the central theme of the brute in man that would become an integral part of *Vandover and the Brute*.²¹ Norris at this time also began work on his first "naturalistic" novel, *McTeague*.²²

In 1895 Norris left Harvard. He arrived in South Africa as a reporter for a San Francisco newspaper. Investigating the unrest that led to the Boer War, he joined with the Outlanders against the Boers, was present for Jameson's raid and was at one time under fire.²³ A fever ended any possibility of subsequent African travel. For the next two years of his life, he was a reporter for the San Francisco *Wave*, writing stories, sketches, and essays.²⁴ Many of these sketches and stories were to become the backbone of his

later works. Inspiration came by studying the lives of the lower middle-class on Polk Street to gain insights into the details of an existence outside the genteel sensibilities of his readers.²⁵

His spirits, however, began to flag. His job as editorial assistant was not well paid, and a career as a journalist was not the career as a story-teller he desired. With American magazines full of sentimental fictions painting a portrait of life in rosy hues, Norris had little reason to believe that any of them would even consider the publication of *McTeague* or *Vandover and the Brute*.²⁶ It was at this time that he met Jeanette Black. Nine years older than she, Norris did not take any thought of romantic intentions seriously until Black announced plans to go to St. Louis to continue her education.²⁷ Inspired by his love for her, in a series of events much like the romantic fictions he despised, in 1898 Norris received his lucky break. With the serialization of his short novel *Moran of Lady Letty* catching the attention of S. S. McClure in New York, the publishing house of Doubleday, McClure, and Co. invited Norris to take employment with them, thus making him a career as a professional writer and allowing him enough financial freedom to marry Jeanette Black in 1900.²⁸

In personality, Norris maintained a boyish, adolescent air, never losing his love of college pranks. In a similar vein, he named his daughter Billy because "he thought it would be fun to call the name and have a female appear."²⁹ Both during his life and particularly after his death, Norris was described enthusiastically as having "personal charm, a ready wit," and "never guilty of affectation... that wretched, cheating imposition on the artist's suffering friends, called the 'eccentricity of genius.'" Such descriptions may reveal that, despite his outward desire to shock, in his personal dealings he was "something of a prig."³⁰ Biographers are convinced that, despite the sensationalism and frank presentation of sexuality within his novels, Norris himself was a puritan.³¹

Despite his supposedly prudish nature, Norris did eventually read, and was greatly impressed by, the naturalist works of Emile Zola. Norris did not, however, recognize the complex theories Zola held or the effort put forth in listening to working-class people to

present his characteristic style. Nor did Norris adhere quite so closely to the environmental determinism or heredity so crucial to Zola's philosophy. What Norris fully accepted was Zola's use of the melodramatic, which makes Norris's view of naturalism far more "romantic" than the views presented by the French naturalist school.³²

Unlike London's and the European naturalists', Norris's themes are not grounded in philosophies and intellectual abstractions, but in the superficial emulation of literary styles.³³ Impressed with what he saw as the style and content of Zola's novels, Frank Norris in his own mind linked naturalism and romanticism as literary styles set opposite realism. In *A Plea for Romantic Fiction* (1901), Norris defines romance as "the kind of fiction that takes cognizance of the variations from the type of normal life." This does not include noble heroism or idealized male-female relationships; Norris sees "romance" as something that "may even treat of the sordid, the unlovely." Realism, he states, "is occupied with the everyday behavior we encounter in our usual lives."³⁴ Thus for Norris, it is not the realism in naturalism that opens the possible explorations of the sordid and sensational, but the "romance" in naturalism.³⁵

Norris's peculiar distinctions between realism and romanticism lead W. M. Frohock to wonder if Norris "ever really understood the nature of French naturalism at all."³⁶ In Norris's opinion, naturalism should exist somewhere between realism and romance, an amalgam of the two that is "concerned with the unusual and extraordinary, with life on a social level unfamiliar to us, or with happenings unlikely to occur in life as we know it."³⁷ According to Norris:

Terrible things must happen.... They [the characters] must be twisted from the ordinary, wrenched out from the quiet, uneventful round of every-day life, and flung into the throes of a vast and terrible drama that works itself out in unleashed passions, in blood, and in sudden death.³⁸

With this working definition of romance and theory of naturalism, Frohock's query seems justified. Among naturalists, Norris is the least interested in progress and reform, and shows little faith in science. His literary style is more dependent upon the

manipulation of language to demonstrate the "romantic" aspects of his characters.³⁹ Norris's fiction, while dealing with "forces" beyond human control, fails to illuminate the reader of the nature of these forces; nor does his fiction offer any philosophical truth demonstrating how society might better its condition. On the contrary, the "scientific-philosophical quest" is what most of Norris's fiction ridicules.⁴⁰ Therefore, despising the "niceties of form" prevalent in the popularized fictions of the 1890s, Norris sought to shock audiences with tales based on Zola's style of working-class surroundings, but in American settings.⁴¹

Popular and scientific interests in themes of brute atavism and degeneracy were at the forefront of popular interest in 1894 – the same time that Norris was working on *Vandover*.⁴² Norris's attraction to the primitive in man and the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race undoubtedly stems from his attraction to the themes of melodrama and excitement such theories encompassed.⁴³ At the University of California Norris was taught to see evolution as the ascension of man from the beasts, moving upward in a progression of civilization, intelligence, and spiritual forms, yet as individuals maintaining within an atavistic core that can be released depending on circumstances.⁴⁴ This approach, shocking in its implications and full of melodramatic possibilities, appealed to Norris as the kind of intentionally sordid naturalism he sought in his rebellion against the sentimental fiction popular in American magazines to produce a shock effect among readers. Such a detailed exploration of the animal nature within the supposedly "civilized" human was an altogether different approach to human nature.⁴⁵

As a novel, *Vandover and the Brute* is Norris's attempt to achieve a French naturalist work. America in the 1890s, however, was not Paris, and the frank discussion of sex and depravity no doubt alienated Norris's publisher, and certainly would have shocked the public had it been published then.⁴⁶ *Vandover and the Brute* is, as the title suggests, the story of the tension between the "self-aware" human and the "subhuman brute." Vandover's chameleon-like ability to adapt to any environment is the weakness of character that starts into motion the tragedy of his downfall.⁴⁷ His weakness allows the

brute to break free and overcome his "good," artistic nature.

As a study of Darwinian themes, *Vandover and the Brute*, is full of rich imagery, but for those working within a naturalist framework, *Vandover and the Brute* is a difficult novel to analyze. Unlike most works defined as "naturalistic," the work primarily focuses not upon the explicit external determinism or environmental force of Walcutt's definition, but upon a more individual, internal study of human nature.⁴⁸ The kind of external determinism typically associated with naturalism's Darwinian ideas -- sociological structures, struggle within nature -- is not the conflict. Rather, it is Vandover's moral choices and circumstance that demonstrate an inherent moral weakness, and it is his own animal nature that results in his decline.⁴⁹ It is this animal nature, this "brute" that requires fulfillment through vice, to which Vandover eventually succumbs in the form of a horrific illness that literally leaves him acting like a wolf, making the novel a fascinating study for the possibilities of themes arising out of Darwinian biology.

The most striking and indeed the most obvious Darwinian imagery arises out of Norris's use of the brute/aesthetic components of Vandover's psyche to demonstrate the internal tensions and finally the degradation of Vandover the Man as Vandover the Brute consumes him. Norris demonstrates that the beast has been a part of Vandover since adolescence, and it is his sexual curiosity that causes the beast to awaken and stir:

... One Sunday at church, when the minister was intoning the Litany, he [Vandover] remarked for the first time the words, "all women in the perils of child-birth."

He puzzled over this for a long time, smelling out the mystery beneath the words, feeling the presence of something hidden, with the instinct of a young brute. He could get no satisfaction from his father and by and by began to be ashamed to ask him; why, he did not know (10).

When Vandover at last learns "the terse and brutal truth," his initial disgust is not an instinctual reaction, but an intellectual one. The clues that unfold and lead to the discovery of the obstetrics article in the encyclopedia are the result of an instinctual, brute

curiosity expressed in intellectual forms, but the subsequent guilt and shame that the various responses to his questions elicit are the result of a Victorian morality that viewed sex as a necessary evil.⁵⁰ Eventually, "little by little the first taint crept in, the innate vice stirred in him, the brute began to make itself felt" (11), and the brute aspect of Vandover ever after is associated and aroused by sensual, sexual pleasures, sensations that for Vandover never go beyond physical, animal reactions: "... he loved these sensuous pleasures, he loved to eat good things, he loved to be warm, he loved to sleep. He hated to be bored and worried – he liked to have a good time" (32).

It is also at this time "That certain little weakness of Vandover's character, his self-indulgence, had brought him to such a point that he thought he *had* to be amused. If his painting amused him, very good; if not, he found something else that would" (65). Once evidenced, it becomes apparent that Vandover lacks the internal strength to resist the temptations for which the brute calls. Vandover is not a fool; he is aware of the presence of the beast, aware of the possibility he might be consumed by it. He does struggle:

It was all the better half of him that was aroused -- the better half that he had kept in check ever since his college days, the better half that could respond to the influences of his father and Turner Ravis, that other Vandover whom he felt was his real self, not Vandover the easy-going, the self-indulgent, not Vandover the lover of women (112).

The other Vandover, the better Vandover, wrestled with the brute in him once more, never before so strong, never so persistent. He had not yet destroyed all that was good in him; now it had turned in one more revolt, crying out against him, protesting for the last time against its own perversion and destruction. Vandover felt that he was at the great crisis of his life (214).

However, Vandover has never learned to discipline himself through sacrifice or denial,

and his weakness of character creeps in, and "his pliable character adapted itself to the new environment; he had nothing to do; there was lacking both the desire and the necessity to keep him at his easel..." (180). Because of this weakness, in the end, not even his art can salvage any human dignity:

It was gone -- his art was gone, the one thing that could save him. That, too, like all the other good things of his life, he had destroyed. At some time during those years of debauchery it had died, that subtle, elusive something, delicate as a flower; he had ruined it (229).

Vandover's spiritual devolution complete, Norris adds another dimension to this metaphorical struggle of human/animal by rooting it in physiological causes to produce dramatic results. The connection between Vandover's sins and the "lycanthropy" he experiences is somewhat vague. Pizer proposes that the physical "Brute" Vandover manifests is the result of spirochetes in his nervous system – the latter stages of syphilis. That Norris never explicitly mentioned this fact in the work means that he must subtly introduce the connections between vice and the horrible manifestations of the disease. This extreme subtlety, however, does not really fit with Norris's style in the rest of his works. In all probability, Norris was caught in a stylistic dilemma: he was unable to state the cause of Vandover's behavior, but to obscure such a crucial element of the plot seriously flawed the work. Caught between these stylistic problems and the objection of Doubleday and McClure, *Vandover and the Brute* remained unpublished.⁵¹

Nevertheless, Norris attempts with Vandover's internal struggles to form a link between physical, social, and moral decline.⁵² The degradation of Vandover's psyche makes him an outcast; though the brute is within him, it is a thing apart, representing the Other, the unfamiliar against which man has no hope.⁵³ Critics have varying opinions concerning how convincingly Norris executed the connections between the force of the brute and Vandover's degradation as an inevitable decline. Most find *Vandover* a flawed naturalist work because it "concentrates on fate rather than forces, on catastrophe rather than causality."⁵⁴ It seems that Norris's delight in sordid melodrama may have obscured

his most important theme. Only a very small portion of the novel describes in detail the effects of the city and society on the individual:

It was night. He looked out into a vast blue-gray space sown with points of light, winking lamps, and steady slow-burning stars. Below him was the sleeping city. All the lesser staccato noises of the day had long since died to silence; there only remained that prolonged and sullen diapason, coming from all quarters at once. It was like the breathing of some infinitely great monster, alive and palpitating, the sistole and diastole of some gigantic heart. The whole existence of the great slumbering city passed upward there before him through the still night air in one long wave of sound.

It was Life, the murmur of the great, mysterious force that spun the wheels of Nature and that sent it onward like some enormous engine, resistless, relentless; an engine that sped straight forward, driving before it the infinite herd of humanity, driving it on at breathless speed through all eternity, driving it no one knew whither, crushing out inexorably all those who lagged behind the herd and who fell from exhaustion, grinding them to dust beneath its myriad iron wheels, riding over them, still driving on the herd that yet remained, driving it recklessly, blindly, on and on toward some far-distant goal, some vague unknown end, some mysterious, fearful bourne forever hidden in thick darkness (230-1).

Perhaps the only place in the novel where the discussion of the forces at work is explicit, nonetheless, Norris seems to try to make a case for the city being the force against which no one has control. The language here speaks of a pessimistic determinism arising out of the mid-century turn toward scientific evidence. From this passage Norris gives the reader an unmistakable sense of Vandover's fear of something large and powerful. Norris's description shows a dispassionate life, "like some enormous engine," as an extended Spencerian metaphor demonstrating, survival-of-the-fittest. It is telling,

too, that the "force" Vandover fears is not a living thing, a product of an impartial Nature; Norris describes it as an engine, a machine that is a product of a technology that already has gotten out of hand. These themes of social Darwinism embrace the popular images of Vandover's fear.⁵⁵

Social Darwinism as described by Spencer defines the personal philosophy of Charlie Geary, Vandover's "friend" from Harvard who eventually swindles Vandover out of his father's property. Geary is not intellectual about this philosophy; it is merely the product of his experience:

Every man for himself -- that was his maxim. It might be damned selfish, but it was human nature: the weakest to the wall, the strongest to the front All of life was but a struggle to keep from under those myriad spinning wheels that dashed so close behind. Those were happiest who were farthest to the front. To lag behind was peril; to fall was to perish, to be ridden down, to be beaten to the dust, to be inexorably crushed and blotted out beneath that myriad of spinning iron wheels (328-9).

There is some critical discussion concerning Norris's use of social Darwinian constructs in *Vandover*. Does Norris merely intend these constructs as a means to describe the fears and concerns of his characters with the cliché imagery of the time, or does Norris intend these constructs to convey his own concerns?⁵⁶ Norris's characters are described by some critics as unaware of a sense of self, that they are "little more than occasions for passing events," marking "the bodily intersections of outer force and inner desire."⁵⁷ If this is true, then Norris might have used them as the means to convey his personal concerns about the changes in American society. This is not improbable; Norris was familiar with themes of degeneration, atavism and life-forces. However, Norris's familiarity does not adequately explain possible connections between how the text of *Vandover* employs images of social Darwinism and the themes such images are meant to convey.⁵⁸

In this respect, the greatest loss to the contemporary reader is that Norris never did

revise his manuscript, and the modern critic can only wade through the first draft of a first novel in an attempt to piece together which ideas were those Norris tried to convey, and which ideas were conveyed as a result of a young writer's inexperience with such a broad and demanding theme. Whether expressing his concern about the direction of an industrial America or merely intending to shock with his subject matter, Norris is fascinated by the possibilities of brute behavior within civilized settings. The use of excessive detail to describe the story has for some critics proved to be little more than a stylistic metaphor for the monotony of the life Norris portrays, but these dispassionate descriptions fit a naturalist tone and strip away any possibility of sentiment.⁵⁹

The structure of the novel demonstrates the steady degradation of Vandover's condition.⁶⁰ In their own way, Norris's lengthy descriptions reflect the result of his own experiences in school and his observations of life on Polk Street. His experiences in part confirmed what his professors at the University of California taught; while humankind evolved up from the beasts to develop higher consciousness, humans as individuals could just as easily devolve back into the brute from whence they came, a vestigial nature that could easily be awakened if circumstances were right. Although atavism and possible devolution were confined mostly to the individual, one of the themes in *Vandover and the Brute*, the city as a directing force unto itself, opens up the possibility of the devolution of classes. Certainly the residents of San Francisco's Polk Street, in their lower middle-class surroundings presented Norris with ample proof of possibilities.

It is unfortunate that the literary atmosphere of turn of the century America did not permit the publication of *Vandover and the Brute* in Norris's lifetime. With the possibility of publication, Norris would have undoubtedly made revisions to the manuscript; the voice of the more mature writer would have resolved the thematic ambiguities and inconsistencies that are so often the focus of modern criticism and overshadow the work's merits. As it exists, *Vandover* can only provoke literary analysis of its internal structure, leaving an analysis of its historical or social context within American culture a matter too uncertain to be given the attention such a work deserves.

If Norris had made revisions, however, it is doubtful that he would have changed the overall tone of the work. The decline of Vandover's higher self into its brute possibilities would still be the focus, and the outlook for the individual would be just as grim. In a city where Vandover's sins seem justly punished, the success of a Spencerian Charlie Geary and the downfall of an innocent Dolly Haight are equally assured. The pessimism apparent in the work indicates the bleak possibilities of allowing the foot to slip on the evolutionary ladder; Norris reminds us we can not for a moment think that we are free from our brutal past. The consequences of devolution are present, the division between animal and human not so wide that the two will never meet. The veneer of civilization is thinner than we think.

Notes

- ¹ Franklin Walker. *Frank Norris: A Biography*. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1932) 100-1.
- ² Excerpts from *Boston Transcript* (Ap 22, 1914) 8; *Literary Digest* 48 (Je 20, 1914) 1494; T. Cooper. *Bookm* 39 (Je 1914) 444 ; *Outlook* 107 (My 30, 1914) 264 .
- ³ Donald Pizer. *The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964) 136.
- ⁴ Walcutt, ALN 155-6, 120-1.
- ⁵ Joseph McElrath, Jr. "Frank Norris's *Vandover and the Brute*: Narrative Technique and the Socio-Critical Viewpoint." Don Graham , editor. *Critical Essays on Frank Norris*. (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980) 179.
- ⁶ Frank Norris. *Vandover and the Brute* (1914). (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978) 59.
- ⁷ Norris 180.
- ⁸ Barbara Hochman. *The Art of Frank Norris, Storyteller*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988) 75.
- ⁹ W. M. Frohock. "Frank Norris." from Walcutt SNANT 67.
- ¹⁰ Walker 9; Frohock 56.
- ¹¹ Walker 9-16.
- ¹² Walker 24.
- ¹³ Frohock 56.
- ¹⁴ Walker 40-42; Frohock 56.
- ¹⁵ Walker 42.
- ¹⁶ Walker 42.
- ¹⁷ Walker 45.
- ¹⁸ Walker 51.
- ¹⁹ Frohock 56-57; Walcutt, ALN 115.
- ²⁰ Walker 90.
- ²¹ Walker 75, 94.
- ²² Walker 86-89.
- ²³ Brooks 220.
- ²⁴ Frohock 78.
- ²⁵ Walker 130-3.
- ²⁶ Walker 144-5.
- ²⁷ Walker 152-5.
- ²⁸ Frohock 78; Walker 267.
- ²⁹ Joseph McElrath, Jr. "Frank Norris: A Biographical Essay." Don Graham, editor. *Critical Essays on Frank Norris*. (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980) xxiv.
- ³⁰ McElrath xli.
- ³¹ Frohock 68.
- ³² Frohock 58-59.
- ³³ Walcutt, ALN 115-6.
- ³⁴ Frohock 58.
- ³⁵ Walker 79-81.
- ³⁶ Frohock 58.
- ³⁷ Howard 17; Frohock 58.
- ³⁸ Harold Kaplan. *Power and Order: Henry Adams and the Naturalist Tradition in American Fiction*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 90.
- ³⁹ Walcutt, SNANT 15.
- ⁴⁰ Hockman 9.
- ⁴¹ Brooks 221-2.
- ⁴² Dillingham 68.
- ⁴³ Dillingham 56.
- ⁴⁴ Frohock 59.
- ⁴⁵ Frohock 91.
- ⁴⁶ Frohock 66-67.
- ⁴⁷ Howard 63.
- ⁴⁸ Walcutt, ALN 117.

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- 49 *Ibid.* 119-20.
50 McElrath, "Narrative Technique..." 181.
51 Frohock 68.
52 Howard 91.
53 Howard 95.
54 Howard 172.
55 Graham 2.
56 Graham 2.
57 Mitchell *xii*.
58 Hochman 58.
59 Walcutt, ALN 118-9.
60 Walcutt, ALN 119-20.

CHAPTER IV

Perhaps the most prolific conveyance of mid-nineteenth-century popular fiction for the middle and working classes was the dime novel, sensationalized romances ranging from detective stories to tales of law and lawlessness on the western frontier.¹ What the dime novel was to the nineteenth century, the "pulp magazine" was to the beginning of the twentieth century. Pulp magazine stories were of a fantastic nature, dealing with beings from other planets, lost civilizations in remote areas of the globe, and the possibilities of travel in time and space. Based however loosely on some scientific possibility and extrapolated into a fantasy tale, these stories demonstrate the assimilation of science and scientific tenets into popular consciousness.

One such tale that appeared in the pulp magazines was Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan of the Apes*. Told by a narrator as recollections of a series of conversations, it begins with the abandonment of Lord Greystoke and Lady Alice on the coast of Africa. Amid the savage beasts of the jungle a son is born, but a year later Lady Alice dies. Lord Greystoke soon follows, but by a twist of fate a she-ape adopts their son and raises him in the jungle as one of the great anthropoids. His adoptive mother names him "Tarzan," or "white-skin," and the subsequent story illustrates his physical and mental growth as well as the realization of his human intellectual potential. Events are further set into motion by the arrival of a party of Americans, in particular a woman named Jane, with whom Tarzan falls in love. With the help of a French officer who recognizes Tarzan's aristocratic lineage, Tarzan follows Jane back to America, where he finds out the secret of his aristocratic identity.

Because *Tarzan of the Apes* and other adventures dealing with Tarzan appeared in pulp magazines, the stories received very little scholarly attention. The critics who did

examine the works resigned them to the genre of the purely sensational, turn of the century "popular" fiction with no intellectual merit. *Tarzan of the Apes* appeared as a novel in 1914, the same year as the posthumous publication of Norris's *Vandover and the Brute*. The general feeling about *Tarzan*, then as now, is that "only persons who like a story in which a maximum of preposterous incident is served up with a minimum of compunction can enjoy these casual pages."² The plot of *Tarzan* evoked the remark that the work "... exhibits a fantastic imagination but quite transcends the most elastic probabilities. The writer has a convincing style worthy a better cause."³

A review appearing in *The New York Times* was more positive: "Crowded with impossibilities as the tale is, Mr. Burroughs has told it so well, and has so succeeded in carrying his readers with him, that there are few who will not look forward eagerly to the promised sequel."⁴ Such a compliment is rare; it praises the work while recognizing the fantastic nature of the plot. It is probably the reliance of the plot upon such improbable circumstances that kept *Tarzan* from seeing more widespread intellectual attention. In a literary era of naturalism that prided itself on sordid realism, the heroic aspirations of *Tarzan* seemed oversimplified to the point of the ridiculous.

Nevertheless, *Tarzan of the Apes* and the subsequent adventures of *Tarzan* did not escape popular attention. In the March 1922 issue of the *Wisconsin Library Bulletin*, a Professor Noble wrote a sweeping condemnation of the *Tarzan* series based upon their lack of literary value and their harmful effect on young readers. Burroughs responded that the stories were never intended for children; however, imaginative fiction in and of itself, he felt, was not dangerous. Of his *Tarzan* stories he reiterated that he wrote them primarily to entertain, not to instruct. Recognizing the nature of his own work, however, Burroughs conceded that reading nothing but *Tarzan* stories and pulp fiction would be a poor literary diet, indeed.

To Burroughs' reply came an additional voice from England. William G. Hale of the Free Public Library gave enthusiastic support for Burroughs and his work, pointing out that the plot of *Tarzan* was no less probable than the talking animals of Kipling's

tales, that both authors were within the realm of poetic license. While Hale cringes at some of Burroughs' literary constructions, his article of support gives an insightful opinion on what Noble's real criticism of the work is:

It is the true and close parallel which Mr. Burroughs draws between the ape and the man showing the essential relationship between the two. Such parallelism vexes the egotism which would fain keep man on a separate plane of creation by himself, disowning the crowd of animal forms from which he has sprung, and to which in moments of primal emotional stress he so plainly reverts.⁵

There is much truth in the observation. While neither a part of the naturalistic genre nor a scholarly tradition, *Tarzan* demonstrates a writer coming to grips with the implications of Darwinian biology through an exploration of the ambiguity of human nature in the light of Darwinian science. From *Tarzan of the Apes* it becomes apparent that Burroughs understands very well the ambiguities between the civilized natures of animals and the animal natures of civilized humans. Burroughs, in both his life and in his writings, demonstrates a deep understanding of the bond between animals and humans.

Edgar Rice Burroughs was born in Chicago on September 1, 1875, into an upper middle-class home. His father was George Tyler Burroughs, a retired Union Major who became successful in the distillery business. Edgar was the youngest of five children, two of which died very young, leaving only Burroughs and two brothers.⁶ Burroughs began his education at Brown School, but when he was twelve a diphtheria epidemic and his somewhat delicate health prompted his parents to remove him from Brown School and send him to Miss Coolie's Maplehurst School for Girls, much to young Burroughs' embarrassment. After a year he left to attend the Harvard School. Though he had done very well at Miss Coolie's Maplehurst School for Girls, such was not the case at Harvard School. When Burroughs left "on account of ill-health," George Burroughs demanded a character reference be sent to Phillips Academy, to insure his son's acceptance into their program.⁷

Between schools and fifteen years old, Burroughs joined his brothers on their recently purchased ranch in Idaho, beginning as a tenderfoot but quickly learning the life of a cowboy, usually through painful experience.⁸ In time he became an expert horseman and demonstrated a deep sensitivity to the animals with which he worked.⁹ His stay ended when his father called him home for school. Having enjoyed rugged adventure and the lack of authority or discipline, Burroughs was hardly eager to resume studies.

He did well in Latin and Greek, but his other grades were poor, and soon it was requested that Burroughs withdraw from Phillips.¹⁰ Burroughs' father insisted that he finish high school, so he sent his son to the Michigan Military Academy in Orchard Lake. The emphasis on physical conditioning and horsemanship was much to Burroughs' liking; the rigorous discipline was not. His pranks and schemes often got him punished, resulting in several attempts to run away, but Burroughs eventually graduated in 1895.¹¹ Upon graduating he accepted a position as "professor of geology," but caring nothing about geology and knowing even less, he soon left his position to enlist in the 7th Cavalry Division. Because of his age he needed special permission to enlist. With the intercession of his father it was granted, but soon Burroughs realized that life was not as romantic as a cavalryman in the Arizona Territory as he thought it would be. Six months later he was begging his father to use his influence to get him out of the army. It took some time, but in March 1897, Burroughs was discharged.¹² Despite his abrupt departure from the army, Burroughs' experiences in the military gave him a regard for "courage honor, skill in combat... spartan endurance... and indomitable hope and confidence in the face of adversity."¹³

Drifting, Burroughs worked for his brothers in Idaho and his father in Chicago. During this time he tried to hone his artistic abilities in art school, and briefly ran a stationary shop. He married his childhood sweetheart Emma Hulbert in 1900 and quickly realized the need to "settle down" in solid employment. In 1903 he and Emma struck out on their own for Idaho, where Burroughs was to work with his brothers dredging for gold on Snake River. The failure of the mining venture began the long string of failures at

employment Burroughs was to experience. Working his way back to Chicago, he got a temporary job as a railroad policeman on the Oregon Short Line Rail Road Company, but resigned after a few months. He briefly held a job as a timekeeper, door to door book salesman, and a stenographer for the Sears, Roebuck & Co. mail order department in Chicago. By the time he found himself with Sears, Roebuck, Burroughs was thirty-one years old.¹⁴

In 1908 Emma and Burroughs had their first child. With the addition of their daughter, Joan, Burroughs made a very ill-timed but characteristically impulsive decision to go into business for himself. In his *Autobiography*, Burroughs describes the affair: "Having a good job and every prospect for advancement I decided to go into business for myself, with harrowing results. I had no capital when I started and less when I got through."¹⁵ His second child, Hulbert, was born in 1909. During this time Sears, Roebuck invited him back, offering him a managerial position, but Burroughs declined, still determined to make it on his own. His declension of the offer was typical of his character. In the meantime he ran a small business selling pencil sharpeners and pawned his wife's jewelry to pay the household bills. In 1911, the business unsuccessful, out of boredom and desperation, he began writing a short story, a fantasy titled *Under the Moons of Mars*.¹⁶

By the time he had half finished *Under the Moons of Mars*, the pencil sharpener business had failed and Burroughs continued his writing while working for his brother. Burroughs sent the first half of his story to the *All-Story Magazine* under the pseudonym "Normal Bean," partially as a product of his own wit, to express himself as an ordinary fellow; partially to conceal any connection between himself and such a tale of fantasy.¹⁷ Much to Burroughs' annoyance, editor Thomas Newell Metcalf thought it was a typographical error, and changed it to "Norman." The story ran as a serial from February to July of 1912, and Burroughs earned four hundred dollars -- not enough to make a living, but enough to make him determined.¹⁸

With his first success, Burroughs wrote another tale, *The Outlaw of Torn*. After

much revising and haggling *All-Story Magazine* editor Metcalf turned the tale down, but Burroughs had seen too much of failure to be daunted by his refusal. Confident of his writing, Burroughs was eventually able to persuade A. L. Sessions of *New Story* magazine to accept the manuscript in 1913. During this time he had come up with another idea for a story, and in March of 1912 he ran it across Metcalf:

The story I am now on is of the scion of a noble English house -- of the present time -- who was born in tropical Africa where his parents die when he was about a year old. The infant was found and adopted by a huge she-ape, and was brought up among a band of fierce anthropoids...¹⁹

Metcalf was enthusiastic. Burroughs wrote the tale in only six months, and it was quickly accepted for publication. By this time Burroughs had become a more shrewd businessman, and when he sold his story, he sold only the serial rights for seven-hundred dollars. *All-Story Magazine* printed *Tarzan of the Apes* in October of 1912.²⁰

With the appearance of film and mass communications, the character Tarzan quickly became an American icon. His continuing fame well into the twentieth century caused many fans to question precisely what authors influenced Burroughs in his career as a whole and in the writing of *Tarzan*. From the early beginnings of his education the ancient classics of Greece and Rome fascinated Burroughs. The memory and influence of the works of Homer, Livy, Plutarch, Ovid, and Virgil, all read by Burroughs in their original languages, remained with him and is reflected in his writing style. Rudyard Kipling, Charles Dickens, Owen Wister, Thomas Macauley, Jack London, Zane Grey, and Anthony Hope are also authors whose stories have an influence in Burroughs' writing style and themes.²¹

Burroughs himself states that he liked Kipling's poetry and read avidly in Latin the classics of Rome, but he hated Dickens and Shakespeare. From his early readings he recalls with fondness the *Graustark* novels, *Prisoner of Zenda*, and the short stories of Jack London.²² So great was his admiration of Jack London that in 1916 Burroughs expressed a desire to pen his biography. Unfortunately, neither editor Bruce Barton nor

Bob Davis responded with enthusiasm to the proposal. Davis did heartily recommend that Burroughs solicit other literary magazines, but with the lack of support, Burroughs eventually dropped the project.²³

Burroughs was no doubt a fan of London's tales of adventure in the Northland. Populated with rugged heroes much like those of Burroughs' days in Idaho and full of Spencerian philosophies of survival, London's strong yet honorable heroes in an uncompromising, unyielding environment may in some way have been the prototype for Tarzan in his jungle. However, the naturalistic themes that made the works of London and Norris innovative explorations of the world in which they lived have caused critics to relegate Burroughs to literary obscurity. Though influenced by Kipling and by a strong belief in the tenets of Darwinian evolution, Burroughs' works belong more to the genre of sensationalized, romantic fiction than the genre of naturalism.²⁴

Which is not to say that his works are without literary worth. Though Burroughs' literary style and syntax are often harshly criticized, Erling B. Holtsmark finds merit in Burroughs' techniques.²⁵ Holtsmark creates a unique view of the Tarzan stories by comparing them to the rhetoric of Latin and Greek writings. While this at first seems an unfitting way to analyze a work of pulp fiction, by drawing on myths, legends, and works of the ancient world, Holtsmark demonstrates the stylistic elements common to both Burroughs and ancient works.

Burroughs uses two methods in particular to emphasize the civilized/bestial dichotomy. Polarity, or "the habit of organizing a view of reality into sets of opposites" presents man and ape in various forms to demonstrate not only differences, but also similarities.²⁶ The passage in which Tarzan is compared to the younger Lord Greystoke in eating habits and manners evokes many polarities -- raw and cooked, uncouth and refined, bestial and civilized (69). This example is also an aspect of the second method, synkrisis, or "the direct comparison for the explicit purposes of contrastive judgment, of individual animals, humans, or events."²⁷ It, too, emphasizes the aspect of the beast within the civilized and the civilized within the beast by showing Tarzan of the Apes in

comparison with the younger Lord Greystoke of Britain. One eats raw flesh and wipes his hands upon naked thighs while the other sends back a chop cooked too rare and dips his fingers in scented water (69); one roars out the challenge of the bull ape to the jungle, the other speaks softly to the House of Lords (84) In each case the same kinds of action placed side by side demonstrate the civilized and bestial aspects of both worlds.

Holtsmark also shows that in naming the animal inhabitants of the jungle Burroughs again relies heavily upon the ancient classics. In the naming of Numa the lion, Burroughs writes:

I try to originate all the peculiar names for people, places and animals in my stories. Sometimes I must unconsciously use a word or name that I have read and forgotten, as for instance Numa the lion. There was a Roman emperor, Numa, of whom I had forgotten until I was recently reading Plutarch's *Lives*. The name must have been retained in my sub-conscious brain, later popping out as original...

Likewise, Duro the hippo, Horta the boar, Pisah the fish, Tantor the elephant, and a host of others all can trace their names back to Grecco-Roman nouns and adjectives that describe their characteristics.²⁸ One of the most interesting names Holtsmark emphasizes is "Kala," the name of the great ape who is Tarzan's mother. The feminine form of an untranslatable Greek adjective, it evokes images of "the beautiful, the moral, the right, the fine." As Holtsmark points out, "that Burroughs, the student of Classical Greek just happened to call Tarzan's foster mother Kala, 'she who is beautiful, good, fine,' is hard to believe."²⁹

Holtsmark's emphasis on style and technique does not, however, place Burroughs' writings within the realm of American literary naturalism. Though his writings focus on an individual within nature and contain elements of biology and heredity, Burroughs takes nothing from Zola's form or themes. He is not addressing larger social or economic issues in the face of an American culture emerging from nineteenth century industrialism, nor does he call into question prevailing morals. While *Tarzan of the Apes* does possess a

harsh, survival-of-the-fittest environment, there is no situation nature can present with which Tarzan, either through his superior intelligence or his close link to the jungle, can not successfully cope. The "divided stream" aspect of Walcutt's naturalism -- the tension between pessimistic determinism and romantic optimism -- is notably absent, because Tarzan is an idealized, heroic figure.

This may be the reason for the continued popularity of *Tarzan*, for in the face of incredible danger, Tarzan is always in control of his destiny, always calm and collected. He cuts through the false pretenses of civilized morality to the heart of any given situation.³⁰ Not only is he able to do this successfully, but he does it with great composure. While Tarzan's self-determinism makes him a hero, it also marks a significant difference between Burroughs' work and those of literary naturalists. *Tarzan of the Apes*, with its fast-moving adventure and sensational improbabilities, is the kind of "romance" that made pulp magazines so popular at the turn of the century.

Tarzan is a romance not in that it encompasses Platonic truths, but in that Burroughs draws upon the theme of the mythic hero and the fair-haired woman in distress. Based upon his love of Greek and Roman literature, Burroughs' heroes are firmly grounded in legendary traditions of the strong individual who is accomplished in both physical and mental skills, very much the Anglo-Saxon superman that London and Norris both admired. To some extent, Burroughs, like Norris, is concerned with "romance" as it presents the sensational and the sordid. Without addressing contemporary social issues or questioning the status quo, however, Burroughs' work enforces rather than challenges the Victorian morality.

What Burroughs does have in common with London and Norris is that he uses Darwinian language in his writings to explore the ambiguities of the civilized and the bestial. In particular he uses his writings as an arena to examine the roles that heredity and environment play in the development and character of an individual's nature. Thematically, *Tarzan* encompasses "the conflict of heredity and environment; the lone man pitted against the forces of nature; the search for individual freedom; escapism...; a

destructive civilization, with man, its representative, displaying all its vices, as opposed to the simple virtues of nature's creatures."³¹

Burroughs had a decided interest in both the biology and sociological implications of Darwinian evolution long before he became a writer, as Irwin Porges describes:

The item, a book preserved throughout the years in Burroughs' personal library, is *Descent of Man*, by Charles Darwin... On the flyleaf appears a notation "E. R. Burroughs Jan '99," and beneath it a pencil drawing by Ed of a large monkey or ape in a typical position, somewhat crouching, knuckles resting on the ground. On the right of the drawing he had written "Grandpa."³²

Later as a successful writer Burroughs, totally convinced of the scientific veracity of evolution, issued a statement to the International Press Bureau and Universal Service concerning the 1925 Scopes Monkey trial:

It really does not make much difference what Mr. Scopes thinks about evolution, or what Mr. Bryan thinks about it. They cannot change it by thinking, or talking, or by doing anything else. It is an immutable law of Nature; and when we say that, it is just the same as saying that it is an immutable law of God -- that is, for those who believe in God -- for one cannot think of God and Nature as separate and distinct agencies.³³

Considering Burroughs' intellectual views and his amazing creativity, Holtmark remarks that Tarzan "was the ideal vehicle" for the writer to explore the nature versus nurture controversy within Darwinian evolution.

Burroughs uses the personal growth and development of Tarzan the individual to retrace the development of the human species.³⁴ Despite his human parents' early deaths, Tarzan's mental and physical progress exists within the context of his genetic heritage. As the "missing link" between the anthropoid apes and humanity, Tarzan and his story is phylogeny reflected in ontogeny.³⁵ Of his intentions with the *Tarzan* story, Burroughs said, "I liked to speculate as to the relative values of heredity, environment, and training

in the mental, moral, and physical development of such a child, and so in *Tarzan* I was playing with this idea."³⁶

There are numerous speculations concerning where Burroughs got the idea for *Tarzan*. It is alleged that Burroughs, under the influence of Kipling, "stole" the theme of child-raised-by-wolves and changed it to that of child-raised-by-apes.³⁷ Burroughs, while conceding that there might have been some dim influence from his youthful readings, nonetheless denies any real influence. Instead, he reaches back to his grammar-school lessons:

As a child I was always fascinated by the legend of Romulus and Remus, who were supposed to have been suckled and raised by a she-wolf. This interest, I presume, led to conjecture as to just what sort of an individual would develop if the child of a highly civilized, intelligent and cultured couple were to be raised by a wild beast without any intercourse whatsoever with members of the human race. It was because that I had played with this idea on my mind at various times, I presume, that I naturally embodied it in the story after I started writing.³⁸

Burroughs was quick to remind both critics and accusers that "the Mowgli theme is several years older than Mr. Kipling. It is older than books. Doubtless it is older than the first attempts of man to evolve a written language. It is found in the myths and legends of many peoples..."³⁹ As for Kipling, the fact "that Mr. Kipling selected a she-wolf to mother a man-child might more reasonably subject him to charges of plagiarism than the fact that I chose a she-ape should condemn me on a similar count."⁴⁰

As the thematic inspiration for *Tarzan of the Apes* came from the legend of Romulus and Remus, so the philosophical influence on *Tarzan* came from Darwin and Spencer. In his jungle home Tarzan is keenly aware of the struggle for survival and that only the fittest in this struggle can survive.⁴¹ The language Burroughs uses to describe the jungle creates a metaphorical backdrop for events. "A great jungle teeming with myriad animal life" (19), "fierce" (111), "untamed" (163), and "primeval" (24), these

iterative descriptions evoke a world that, though at times governed by random violence, can be influenced by man's imposition of order.⁴² Even without the presence of man, there is order. In language reminiscent of London's law of meat, Tarzan reflects upon his life in the jungle:

Often they hunted him, and more often he hunted them, but though they never quite reached him with those cruel, sharp claws of theirs, yet there were times when one could scarce have passed a thick leaf between their talons and his smooth hide (63).

Survival of the fittest is also an intellectual abstraction echoed in Lord Greystoke's words to comfort the Lady Alice: "Hundreds of thousands of years ago our ancestors of the dim and distant past faced the same problems which we must face, possibly in the same primeval forests. That we are here today evidences their victory" (16). Though the couple die, their son lives, and it is through Tarzan's individual "evolution" from the primitive to the realization of his intellectual potential that Burroughs demonstrates the eminence of heredity over environment, particularly as it tips the balance in the fight for survival.⁴³

While modern social and anthropological theories indicate that environment is more influential on the development of an individual than heredity, Burroughs placed Tarzan in a situation that culminated with heredity as the strongest factor. Tarzan can not deny his humanness any more than he can deny his British aristocratic heritage.⁴⁴ In his detailed analysis of Burroughs' rhetoric, Holtsmark succinctly captures Tarzan's character:

Tarzan is repeatedly said to have a dual nature, one human and one animal. His animal aspect gives him superhuman sensitivities of smell, hearing, and sight, as well as physical strength beyond the imagination of any mere man. But he also has intelligence of mind beyond that of any animal, and this mental acuity derives from generations of superb British stock.⁴⁵

Repeatedly Burroughs shows how Tarzan, without previous knowledge or training, is able to draw upon his aristocratic lineage, a heritage which causes him to desire clothing to cover himself (59), warns him against cannibalism (72), and awakens within him the genteel manner of wooing women (156, 168-9). Though raised as a beast in a Darwinian jungle, Tarzan nonetheless demonstrates "Burroughs' strong belief in the effects of innate quality..."⁴⁶ For all of Tarzan's fierce training, his bestial nature can not drown out the civilizing effect of his aristocratic genes.

Although he possesses ethical sensibilities and superior intelligence, Tarzan is also an animal. Burroughs does not let the reader for a moment lose sight of Tarzan's physical skills, particularly as the jungle hones them for survival (154-5). Possessing a beast's great dislike for civilized pretensions, Tarzan would far rather eat his meat raw (69) and with bare hands than adhere to the delicate use of silverware (209). He would far rather deal with the unscrupulous suitor of Jane in the same way he deals with Sabor the lioness than adhere to the manners of a "gentleman" (239). Often Burroughs describes Tarzan's physical prowess or appearance with animal imagery. He uses numerous similes of animals to describe humans and human qualities to describe his animal characters.⁴⁷ Burroughs said of his work that:

It pleased me... to draw comparisons between the manners of men and the manners of beasts and seldom to the advantage of men. Perhaps I hoped to shame the men into being more like beasts in those respects in which beasts excel men, and these are not few.⁴⁸

It is therefore with admiration that Burroughs describes the fearlessness of Lady Alice as that "of a lioness protecting its young" (23) and the fierceness of Jane as that of a "tigress" (156). Likewise it is no surprise that the villainous Snipes reminds Tarzan of Pamba the rat (100). Tarzan himself is at times "catlike" (61), a "charging bull" and a "wolf" (155).

It is also by human/animal comparisons that Burroughs makes a distinction between physical evolution and moral evolution. Often in his fiction, "physical

primitivism" exists alongside "moral superiority." Kala, as she selflessly nurses Tarzan after the fight that nearly kills him, possesses "unselfish and sacrificing devotion" to such a degree that "no human mother could have shown more" (46). Tarzan feels her death keenly; to him "she had been kind, she had been beautiful" (67). The lesson Burroughs drives home is that individual or societal evolutionary supremacy is inversely proportional to moral development.

Tarzan reflects often upon the differences between the primeval jungle and the civilized world, unable to determine which sphere is "best." For Burroughs the jungle/civilization polarity emphasizes the contrary elements within each; however, Burroughs does not simplify the dualities so clearly. Kala, though "a fierce and hideous ape," demonstrates a motherly devotion worthy of the Madonna (67); Terkoz, also an ape, possesses the same fierce external appearance but lacks the she-ape's moral character. He is a "bully" whose own base needs determine his actions (92). Sometimes the external appearances reflect the internal reality, sometimes they do not.⁴⁹

Ultimately, Burroughs stresses to his critics that the purpose of *Tarzan of the Apes* was to entertain.⁵⁰ The somewhat improbable plot of Tarzan, under fire by critics attuned to the levels of naturalism's sordid realism, caused Burroughs to reflect:

... I do not believe that any human infant or child, unprotected by adults of its own species, could survive a fortnight in such an African environment as I describe in the Tarzan stories, and if he did, he would develop into a cunning, cowardly beast, as he would have to spend most of his waking hours fleeing for his life.⁵¹

Nevertheless, Burroughs makes his fantastic premise work. One result of a fantasy intended as escapism is that there is no absolute determinism in a negative sense. While heredity is the most powerful influence on Tarzan, it is not portrayed with the same kind of oppressive determinism as in *White Fang*. Tarzan's heritage is an inherently positive determining factor. Descended from aristocratic stock, Tarzan *will* be strong, intelligent, good-looking, and genteel, but these are hardly qualities that inspire the

thematic tensions of literary naturalism. Jack London's *White Fang* and *Beauty Smith* are also determined by heredity, but unlike Burroughs, London makes it clear that neither *Fang* nor *Beauty* should be praised or condemned; their existing forms are merely the result of generations of Darwinian evolution. Neither can be held morally accountable for actions guided by these deterministic forces, but Tarzan is continually praised for his higher intelligence, physical prowess, and Victorian morality, all of which are a result of his aristocratic heritage.

Because Tarzan is such a commanding and powerful figure set against a primeval backdrop, the harsh realities of social Darwinism are never impressed upon the reader. The jungle and its creatures are dangerous in ways that Burroughs describes in detail, but ultimately, they are non-threatening. With Tarzan operating as an effective force, none of Burroughs' characters will suffer under the harsh realities of an amoral nature. In Burroughs' work, Tarzan becomes the ultimate Darwinian achievement, the perfect balance of environment and heredity, bestial and civilized. The ambiguities, tensions, and struggles that mark a naturalist approach to Darwinian biology are absent.

Like London, Burroughs believes in the supremacy and unlimited possibilities of the individual while expressing grave doubts about the species as a whole. For Burroughs, too much of the animal resided within the human nature for ultimate moral achievement, as his writings are quick to demonstrate. On an individual level, however, Tarzan demonstrates the paragon to which man can aspire.⁵² While London's use of Darwinian language in *White Fang* creates a harsher view of the world than does Burroughs' use of Darwinian language in *Tarzan*, London's outlook for the individual, like Burroughs', is positive. Norris is unlike both writers in that his use of Darwinian imagery expresses a negative outlook for society: the devolution of the individual into an animal, the result of a bestial heritage humankind can neither escape nor control.

It seems, then, that Darwinian language, imagery and themes appearing in the literature of the early twentieth century come from the same source, yet quickly diverge. Against the backdrop of an apathetic environment, or "Nature," the man/animal

dichotomy develops into an optimistic outlook for the individual or a pessimistic prophecy for humankind. Darwinian biology applied to both human nature and social theory has elastic possibilities as it appears in American culture, entering popular consciousness with the possibility of demonstrating a progressive optimism or a threatening determinism. Like Walcutt's divided stream of literary naturalism, Darwinian imagery also possesses a tension between the positive and negative.

Notes

- ¹ Michael Denning. *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America*. (London, New York: Verso, 1987) 9-16, 205.
- ² *Nation* 99 (October 1, 1914) 409.
- ³ *Springfield Republican* (July 9, 1914) 5.
- ⁴ *New York Times* 19 (July 5, 1914) 299.
- ⁵ Irwin Porges. *Edgar Rice Burroughs: The Man Who Created Tarzan*. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975) 364.
- ⁶ Richard A. Lupoff. *Edgar Rice Burroughs: Master of Adventure*. (New York: Canaveral Press, 1965) 6-7.
- ⁷ Porges 17.
- ⁸ Porges 17-19.
- ⁹ Erling B. Holtsmark. *Edgar Rice Burroughs*. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986) 2-3.
- ¹⁰ Holtsmark, ERB 3.
- ¹¹ Holtsmark, ERB 3.
- ¹² Holtsmark, ERB 4.
- ¹³ Lupoff 6-7.
- ¹⁴ Holtsmark, ERB 3-4.
- ¹⁵ Porges 104.
- ¹⁶ Holtsmark, ERB 4-5.
- ¹⁷ Porges 4.
- ¹⁸ Lupoff 8-9.
- ¹⁹ Porges 123-4.
- ²⁰ Porges 127; Holtsmark, ERB 6.
- ²¹ Holtsmark, ERB 35.
- ²² Porges 194.
- ²³ Porges 278.
- ²⁴ Erling B. Holtsmark. *Tarzan and Tradition: Classical Myth in Popular Literature*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981) 5.
- ²⁵ Holtsmark, TT 3.
- ²⁶ Holtsmark, TT 13-14.
- ²⁷ Holtsmark, TT 53.
- ²⁸ Holtsmark, TT 89.
- ²⁹ Holtsmark, TT 89-90.
- ³⁰ Holtsmark, ERB 74.
- ³¹ Porges 133.
- ³² Porges 75.
- ³³ Porges 366.
- ³⁴ Holtsmark, TT 145.
- ³⁵ Holtsmark, TT 151.
- ³⁶ Porges 133.
- ³⁷ Holtsmark, ERB 34.
- ³⁸ Porges 129. Professor Rudolph Altrocchi of the University of California at Berkeley wrote to Burroughs asking him to recount his inspiration for the *Tarzan* series. Burroughs could only reiterate the influence of the Romulus and Remus legend and Kipling, but he also remarked upon a story he had heard. A man had been shipwrecked off the coast of Africa and was adopted by a group of apes. When the man was finally rescued, a female ape followed him into the waters and threw a baby after him. Efforts on the part of Altrocchi to locate the exact tale Burroughs spoke of were unsuccessful (Porges 130).
- ³⁹ Porges 130.
- ⁴⁰ Porges 132.
- ⁴¹ Holtsmark, TT 115.
- ⁴² Holtsmark, TT 9.
- ⁴³ Holtsmark, TT 146.
- ⁴⁴ Porges 133.

- 45 Holtsmark, TT 92.
- 46 Lupoff 179.
- 47 Holtsmark, TT 55.
- 48 Porges 134.
- 49 Holtsmark, TT 150-1.
- 50 Porges 212.
- 51 Porges 135.
- 52 Holtsmark, TT 144.

CHAPTER V

Exploring the man/animal ambiguity arising out of Darwinian biology to determine if it is a positive or negative notion demonstrates that the language of Darwinian biology and the ambiguity it describes is, like Walcutt's definition of naturalism, a divided stream. As within naturalism, the use of Darwinian language by each author studied demonstrates contradictory themes of hope despite harsh conditions and despair over human ineffectuality. Though they begin with the same Darwinian biology, each author presents a different view of what the man/animal ambiguity means to the human condition. It seems that the discussion of the ambiguity is as ambiguous as the ambiguity itself.

Each of the three authors presents as a backdrop for dramatic events an environment in which the survival-of-the-fittest is the rule. In London's *White Fang*, the Northland is harsh and unyielding. In Norris's *Vandover and the Brute*, the city of San Francisco is fraught with debauchery and greed. Burroughs' jungle environment in *Tarzan of the Apes* is a place of exotic dangers and pitfalls, much like London's Northland. There exists within each work the assumption that "Nature," the environmental backdrop, presents both beauty and danger. Unlike a sentimental portrait of pastoral harmony, this "Nature" is impersonal and apathetic to the individual.

From the three environments constructed develop three different views of man/animal ambiguities. From the frozen Northland the civilized within the animal demonstrates a "sociological fable" in which White Fang, though controlled to some extent by environment and heredity, is able to demonstrate self-determinism through deliberate choices. San Francisco provides the animal within the civilized ample opportunity to partake of vices that result in the horrifying degeneration of man into

beast. The savage jungle allows the best of human nature and the best of animal nature to develop into a heroic, almost mythological figure. Based upon similar environmental backdrops all three authors explore implications of Darwinian biology and Spencerian evolution which in turn results in three different possibilities resulting from the dual nature of humankind.

The civilizing of *White Fang* is undoubtedly intended to be positive. The work shows order arising out of chaos much like Spencer's upward evolution from "incoherent homogeneity to a definite coherent heterogeneity." For those unable to see animals as other than "dumb beasts," *White Fang* may offend the sensibilities of readers, but London carefully concealed his fable under fur to avoid the alienation of his more sensitive readers. Humankind is still at the top of the evolutionary ladder. Granted, by his presentation of the intelligent possibilities within the wolf, London may expect humankind to share its rung, but London does not demonstrate that which is human as falling so much as he shows that which is animal as rising. This becomes evolution in a positive sense. Man still has a chance for survival in the Northland.

Not so with Norris's San Francisco. *Vandover and the Brute* demonstrates chaos from order, the psychological entropy of a civilized individual. Like *White Fang*, *Vandover* presents the reader with both aspects of the man/animal within human nature, but *Vandover* offends. It is not because of sordid subject matter and realistic detail that the work shocks, but because Norris demonstrates that humankind's better nature, its civilized self, can be destroyed by the atavistic core of its primal heritage. Humankind slips on the ladder and devolves into a beast. Against the temptations of the city no one is safe; both hedonistic Vandover and virtuous Dolly Haight fall victim to the same fate. In an environment where life rushes on "like some enormous engine, resistless, relentless," the only way to stay on the top rung of the evolutionary ladder is through the "ruthless individualism" of social Darwinism. Such an arbitrary system of reward and punishment is a grim possibility to contemplate without some voice of hope, and Norris gives none.

Burroughs' style in *Tarzan of the Apes* is radically different from either naturalist's

work, but the result is similar to London's view of the man/beast duality. Burroughs shows that the anthropoid apes exhibit the same hierarchy and rituals as primitive man, while a group of mutineers who argue and shoot each other in the back like animals. Very consciously Burroughs blurs the distinction between man and animals to demonstrate the dual nature of both. In some instances the atavistic aspects of human nature drown out the civilized, as with Snipes; in other instances the civilized wins out over the brute, as with Kala. Terkoz the ape and Tarzan are opposites: one is the lowest level to which an animal can sink, the other is the highest level to which man can aspire. Though the mixture of man and animal within human nature has positive possibilities, there are no real internal or external tensions in the work that are the result of thematic struggles. Tarzan is an idealized form, and therefore static. There is no room for "evolution" because Tarzan is already the highest possible achievement.

What is it that causes Vandover to fall while White Fang and Tarzan rise above the harsh reality of their environments? White Fang survives in the Northland because of his strength and intelligence. With intelligence he possesses some degree of free will, enabling the wolf to make decisions that effect change. By suppressing his wild instinct, Fang allies himself with civilization to reap the benefits that insure survival. Tarzan, too, relies on his physical strength and intelligence derived from heredity, but unlike White Fang's wild instincts, Tarzan's instincts are civilized. As the descendant of aristocracy, Tarzan relies upon his instincts for guidance when confronted with civilized forces.

Vandover does not possess intelligence to the same degree that White Fang and Tarzan do. Vandover is aware of the struggle between his civilized and bestial nature, but because he has never has to discipline himself, because he never tries to deny himself physical comforts or pleasure, Vandover does not suppress the bestial instincts within him in the way the White Fang does. Nor are Vandover's bestial instincts the same as Tarzan's. While the animal nature of Vandover only motivates him to seek comfort, the animal nature of Tarzan motivates his very survival.

These three works share the view that an individual will succeed or fail within a

harsh environment based on their ability first to utilize intelligence in a form superior to that of their peers; and second to suppress the negative aspects of their animal natures (suspicion, fear, desire for immediate gratification/physical pleasure) so that they may utilize the positive aspects of their animal natures (physical strength/prowess and a protective instinct). The crucial fact in the display of the bestial nature which makes the display a positive act is that *it demonstrates selfless behavior*.

Vandover fails on the first criterion, for he is unable to suppress the negative aspects of his animal nature, his purely physical love of sensual pleasure and comfort. Charlie Geary makes a better candidate for success; he at least controls his animal nature and utilizes intelligence to gain objects beyond mere physical comforts. However, as he strides toward his goals of fortune and political power, Geary uses his friendship with Vandover to trick him out his property, and with this first success uses his fortune for selfish gain. Geary's lack of altruism demonstrates that he is little more than a very clever beast.

If Dolly Haight had not also succumbed to the same disease as Vandover, if he had married Turner Ravis and lived happily ever after, then Norris's work might have indicated the possibility of hope despite a harsh environment. Morality would demonstrate the means for individuals to resist the vices of the city. With the unjustified fate of Haight, however, Norris's picture is complete. Only a few men are able to resolve the internal tensions between atavism and civilization, and even for those that can success is not assured. The temptations of the city's seamier side lie in wait, and no one, regardless of their personal behavior, escapes the results of vice.

White Fang utilizes intelligence and allies himself with the civilizing force of humankind, but he is not truly civilized until he is able, despite his natural suspicion, to trust Weedon Scott. What makes White Fang a positive and noble character is that he channels his animal nature -- his strength and his territorial instinct -- into a selfless gesture symbolic of his trust in Weedon Scott when he protects the family from an escaped convict. Likewise Tarzan keeps his bestial nature well in hand for those he loves

and respects, a gesture of his selfless devotion. If he had rescued Jane from Terkoz only to claim Jane as his own by force, or if he has strangled Robert Canler in accordance to his initial desire, then Tarzan would not be worthy of our admiration. It is the control he exerts over his primal impulses and his greater intelligence that make him a positive figure.

Stylistic and thematic differences also contribute to the differing views of the man/animal ambiguity. This is particularly evident in both the relationship of the individual to his environment and the struggle of the individual to resolve his dual nature. London and Norris, through their emulation of Zola's naturalism, demonstrate similar thematic tensions between the individual and environment/heredity. Burroughs alone demonstrates an individual in harmony with both surroundings and biological heritage. The Northland and San Francisco are alienating to those who dwell within, while Burroughs' jungle, though the alienating Other against which Jane and Professor Porter, and even the savages who live there must struggle, is not so for Tarzan. Though a nobleman at heart, Tarzan is of nature through anthropoid associations, yet above nature through human heritage. As a hero from a mythic tradition, Tarzan will conquer all obstacles, possessing a sense of self-identity and connectedness with his environment not possessed by individuals in naturalist works.

London and Norris's works struggle with not only the nature of man and beast, but whether these natures are fundamentally positive or negative. Their descriptions of the internal and external aspects of Darwinism – Vandover's disease and scenario of the two hunters followed by wolves – are described in a very realistic fashion that borders on the revolting and frightening. The uncertainty over which aspect will eventually dominate the individual's nature is the root of dramatic tension. In Burroughs, while the beast in the man and the civil in the beast are both issues, neither theme presents dramatic uncertainties. From the beginning the reader knows that the blend of both aspects will be positive. The internal and external aspects of Darwinism within Tarzan's world are not described with sordid realism that presents them as a part of the Other. There is no

ambiguity.

The Darwinian aspects of environment described by the three authors demonstrate several things. If the primary tension between the individual and his environment is survival, then the struggle can be an ennobling experience. Industrialism, however, removes the individual from Nature, and an environment with struggles of life or death consequences no longer exists. In the city, animal instincts become vestigial. They turn inward, no longer demanding simply life, but *comfortable* life. Vandover's situation illustrates the results of a pampered, weak-willed individual left without moral influence within a decadent society. Tarzan's deliberation over which is the "best" sphere in which to live illustrates his awareness of his dual nature. He knows that if he chooses the jungle, he can utilize both of his natures, but in civilization, only the human side of him is appropriate. There is no room for a positive expression of the beast.

The presentation of the struggle against Nature as an ennobling force and the spontaneously altruistic acts of both Tarzan and White Fang demonstrate unresolved attitudes concerning scientific implications. Darwinian biology effectively removed God as First Cause. On the one hand, the individual acting within a Darwinian framework is left without moral guidance, and he is left to a horrible fate. On the other hand, two individuals acting within a Darwinian framework demonstrate altruistic characteristics that sound suspiciously moral. The selfless behavior depicted by London and Burroughs, while it makes their works optimistic, seems excessively romantic, almost sentimental. This is not so glaring in *Tarzan's* case because Burroughs is working from a heroic rather than naturalistic framework. However, the presence of a spontaneous morality in White Fang seriously challenges the realism of the work. *Tarzan* and *White Fang*, may have allowed Americans to be more comfortable with the possible tensions between a civilized and a bestial nature, but *Vandover and the Brute*, with its total lack of effective morality, may be closer to a realistic picture of possible outcomes in the man/animal struggle.

It is important to recognize that authorial intentions are not always clearly indicated in literary results. The danger of any literary analysis is to attribute too much to

philosophy and over-analyze the intent of a given piece. Not all of London's novels and stories demonstrate an optimistic view for the individual; and likewise, not all of Norris's works deal solely with internal struggles apart from a social determinism. Even Burroughs' Tarzan "devolves" into a primitive savage (albeit only for a short time) in later works. Comparisons between London, Norris, and Burroughs are valuable, but to place too much emphasis upon the differences among these three specific novels is to lose sight of the fact that the three works described do not represent the entire range of the authors, nor do they even represent the entire range of turn of the century fiction.

Donald Pizer states that the naturalistic author is torn between describing the uncomfortable truths arising out of scientific theory and finding meaning in events to reaffirm the dignity and importance of human existence.¹ Criticism that sees only naturalism's efforts to depict "those details which are unpleasant, obscene, shocking, or horrible"² fails to recognize the other branch of the divided stream, the very real struggle to find a romantic optimism that balances sordid realism. The works focused upon demonstrate only a small cross-section of the numerous possibilities of how the man/animal dichotomy within an individual's nature manifests itself, but they nonetheless demonstrate the ways in which turn of the century literature addressed concepts and consequences of science.

George J. Becker describes the efforts of the realist writers to resolve the ambiguities of the man/animal dichotomy as the efforts of "collectors" or "experimenters." Becker goes on to say that in an age when the spirit of scientific investigational techniques was applied to the social sciences:

They [realist writers] want to know, they want to see, as in a laboratory, what happens to a given creature under varied conditions of experience... Each starts with the particular man, hoping perhaps to reach generality, but initially disenchanted with all previous generalities.³

London, Norris and Burroughs all describe the premise for their novel as the placement of an individual within a specific environment, the outcome of the situation based on the

variable influence of environment and heredity. Their attempts to resolve the man/animal duality show the concerns of a newly industrial American society troubled by the implications of a science that, while opening the possibilities of further technological advancement, demonstrates a deterministic vision of humankind. "Disenchanted with all previous generalities," each hopes that his view will, in demonstrating the brute possibilities of the individual, also reveal the civilized possibilities that give life its higher meaning.

Notes

- ¹ Donald Pizer. *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature, Revised Edition*. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984) 11.
- ² George J. Becker. *Realism in Modern Literature*. (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1980) 112.
- ³ Becker 17.

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