To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Gina M. Rossetti entitled " 'A Living Lump of Appetites': The Reinvention of the Primitive in Naturalist and Modernist Literature." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Mary E. Papke, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
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Accepted for the Council:

Vice Provost and Dean of
Graduate Studies

" 'A Living Lump of Appetites':
The Reinvention of the Primitive in Naturalist and Modernist Literature"

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Gina M. Rossetti
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ABSTRACT

When we consider the historical and cultural events that mark the late-nineteenth through early twentieth centuries, we discover a growing fear about the "vanishing Anglo-Saxon." This response to the non-Anglo-Saxon or "primitive" differs significantly, however, from earlier, more romantic definitions and philosophies wherein the primitive is considered a positive alternative to civilization. While earlier eras conceive of the primitive as positive, these eras' judgments change as one considers turn of the twentieth-century American literature. It is this reassessment of the primitive that is the focus of my study. I am particularly interested in how these ruminations about the primitive are codified scientifically and developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this dissertation, I examine selected literature written during the naturalist and modernist movements in order to determine the degree to which these texts advance theories about the primitive that participate in an agenda of fear and loathing. Pivotal to my study is a trajectory of the primitive that shows its many forms, its changes and contradictions, and the degree to which naturalist and modernist texts draw upon earlier romantic images of the primitive and transmogrify them.

In selected works by Jack London, Frank Norris, Eugene O'Neill, Theodore Dreiser, Gertrude Stein, and Nella Larsen, I will show how primitivism manifests itself therein and changes over time. I will argue that the primitive serves as a literary figure whose presence might link naturalism and modernism. Consequently, the primitive's many forms, contradictions, and slippages reveal the degree to which it is a transformational set of processes sustained and challenged by influences both within the dominant class and by

those that lie at its edge.

In sum, my dissertation will argue that the primitive is not static but is contradictory, transformational, and it is the source from which many naturalist and modernist texts draw their concerns, fears, and attractions. In doing so, my study will examine how and for what purpose the selected texts came to rely on the primitive.

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Introduction

> I think that the simplest account of the action of Ellis Island on the spirit of any sensitive citizen who may have happened to 'look in' is that he comes back from his visit not at all the same person that he went. . . . [He] goes about ever afterwards with a new look, for those who can see it, in his face, the outward sign of the new chill in his heart. So is stamped, for detection, the questionably privileged person who has had an apparition, seen a ghost in his supposedly safe old house. Let not the unwary, therefore, visit Ellis Island. (Henry James, *The American Scene*, 85)

Henry James's observation of Ellis Island underscores not only his impressions of the non-Anglo-Saxon's presence in the United States but his attempts to reacclimate to an American culture, from which culture he had been absent for twenty-five years, and to understand the complexities involved in being an "American." In the larger work from which this opening quotation is taken, *The American Scene* (1907), James examines the interaction between white Americans and newly arrived immigrants, and though his conclusions appear contradictory, his statements about the state of American culture are noteworthy. His experiences at Ellis Island are ones that affect, profoundly, his ruminations about the place of the immigrant in American society:

> the idea of the country itself underwent something of that profane overhauling through which it appears to suffer the indignity of change. Is not our instinct in this matter essentially the safe one--that of keeping the idea simple and strong and continuous, so that it shall be perfectly sound? To touch it overmuch, is to put it in peril of weakening; yet on this free assault upon it, this readjustment of it in *their* monstrous, presumptuous interest, the aliens, in New York, seemed perpetually to insist. . . . [In order] to recover confidence and regain lost ground, we, not they, must make the surrender and accept the orientation. We must go *more* than half-way to meet them; which is all the difference, for us, between possession and dispossession. (85-86, emphasis James)

James reviles the alien's outward difference but, at the same time, he suggests that the white American must "absorb" the alien in an effort to preserve his/her prosperity and position. In fact, his discussions about immigrants center on his

belief in assimilationism, and he speaks about this as "the fusion, as of elements in solution in a vast hot pot, always going on, and one stage of the process is as typical or as vivid as another" (16). Moreover, James argues that while the immigrants' manners and appearances will always remain strange to white Americans, their children "will fully profit, rise to the occasion, and enter into privilege" (120). In order to achieve this, the school and the newspaper will be crucial organs in a vast social mechanism that James envisions:

> the machinery is colossal--nothing is more characteristic of the country than the development of this machinery, in the form of political and social habit, the common school and the newspaper; so that there are always millions of little transformed strangers growing up in regard to whom the idea of intimacy of relation may be as freely cherished as you like. *They* are the stuff of whom brothers and sisters are made, and the making proceeds on a scale that really need leave nothing to desire (emphasis James, 120).

James's plan underscores the contradictory nature of the philosophies that mark the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's considerations of the non-Anglo-Saxon. While this period is one that initially registers optimism about the immigrant's arrival, this period also reveals a growing fear about the "vanishing Anglo-Saxon." It is this eventual turning away from the non-Anglo-Saxon or "primitive" that signals my interest. In particular, there was a very active campaign against the influx of immigrants to the U.S., as well as a general preoccupation about the "masses" given the era's climate of financial and labor crises. For example, some of the era's noteworthy events include the rise of the Know Nothing Party, a xenophobic political party in 1847; the rise of organized labor; the Haymarket riot in 1886; the Literacy Test Act of 1917 which marked the beginning of the end of America's open-door immigration policy; the adoption of the first quota law in 1921; and the passage of the Johnson-Reed

National Origins Act in 1924. In his important text on nativism, John Higham notes that with the economic panic of 1893 "the businessmen reflected on how unemployed aliens burdened the community and enlarged the stagnant pool of unused manpower. Seen in a context of hunger and want, the newcomer appeared more than ever a danger to society" (70). This campaign principally manifests itself in the era's nativist philosophy that perpetuates race-based theories about human nature. Combining a form of Social Darwinism with this era's preoccupation with "progress," these nativists posit a philosophy predicated upon a revulsion for the non-Anglo-Saxon or the "primitive."

This response to the primitive differs significantly from earlier, more positive definitions and philosophies. "Primitive" was first used in the late fifteenth century as a historical term (e.g., the "primitive" Church was a common example), but according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it took on an anthropological sense in 1781 in Volume Three of Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in reference to the first stage of human development. This primordial state was later romanticized by European Enlightenment philosophers, such as Locke, as well as by their contemporary American intellectuals in the eighteenth through mid-nineteenth centuries who believed that the primitive, the term used to describe both a state and a people, was a positive alternative to an overcivilized society. In an American context, this Enlightenment philosophy dominated early Republic rhetoric, and the Native American became a living symbol of the new nation's break with England. Helen Carr argues that the Native American was an early symbol both of the primitive and of American freedom. According to Carr, "since the time of Montaigne, one of the elements of a European critique of their own society had been the topos of the virtuous, childlike savage whose natural

goodness and good sense contrasted with the corruption and folly of courts and with the civilized abuse of power. This topos was part of the corpus of ideals by which the American rejection of monarchy was justified." Further, Carr explains that "the idea that the American colonist was, like the Indian, natural and virtuous by contrast with the corrupt, over-civilized European court was a constant motif in independence rhetoric" (24). The colonist associated himself, then, with the innocence and goodness he perceived the Native American embodied. This romantic primitivism persisted even in twentieth-century modernist painting wherein the primitive art of undeveloped peoples became a source of regeneration for those living in a desolate modern world.

While the primitive is conceived, initially, as a positive alternative to civilization, I will argue that it will take on new resonances that will signal its eventual marginalization. It is this reassessment of the primitive that is the focus of my study. I am interested particularly in how these ruminations about the primitive are scientifically codified and developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I will suggest that this negative aspect of the primitive occurs as a result of the rise of industrialization, the increase of the immigrant population, and the varied uses of nativism, phenomena which are then reflected in this period's literature. For Helen Carr, the primitive loses its romantic luster in the face of America's burgeoning desire for nation building because "if the Americans intended to establish an empire to legitimize the movement across the continent by which that empire could be achieved, they would have to revoke all European assumptions about the Indian" (24). This dissertation will examine selected literature from the American naturalist and modernist movements in order to determine the degree to which these texts advance theories about the primitive that participate in this agenda of fear and

loathing. Pivotal to my study is an emphasis on the fact that we are not confronted by simply one image of the primitive. Rather, there is a trajectory that shows primitivism's many forms, its changes and contradictions, and the degree to which naturalist and modernist texts draw upon earlier romantic images of the primitive and transmogrify them.

I will, then, consider selected works by Jack London, Frank Norris, Eugene O'Neill, Theodore Dreiser, Gertrude Stein, and Nella Larsen and show how primitivism manifests itself therein and also changes over time. I will chart this trajectory starting with the primitive as Native American, moving to the primitive as primordial beast, shifting to the primitive as brute working class, moving toward the primitive of the immigrant, and culminating, finally, in the primitive of the racial exotic. Ultimately, I will argue that naturalism is not simply pessimistic determinism or a failed realist aesthetic. On the contrary, naturalism produces contradictory images about the primitive and the devolution of this particular character and all those who encounter him or her. Naturalism rebukes the primitive for his or her debasement. At the same time, however, it necessarily posits a privileged class and confirms that class's elite status. While primitivism becomes the source of great entertainment and preoccupation during the modernist movement, this proliferation of the primitive is not always a positive gesture. Instead, the primitive is fetishized in order to control the limits of its own exoticism. To fetishize the primitive ostensibly reins in its destructive impulses, even while it further hierarchicalizes class and racial differences.

While of late there has been some interest in primitivism as it concerns modernism, particularly as the primitive gives way to the exotic, very few studies consider this issue in relation to naturalism. The only study that may come close is June Howard's *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*

(1985). While she considers the image of the "brute" in the fiction of Norris, London, and Dreiser (and, to a more minor degree, Crane), Howard's primary focus is a genre-based study. For my project, the primitive represents both a person and a type: The primitive is a member of the lower socioeconomic classes, can be of ethnic or racial origin other than Anglo-American, and can also personify an abstract quality (for example, overt sexuality or moral debasement). While my dissertation does not principally address Third World indigenous peoples, it suggests that once the "Native American threat" subsides from the American consciousness, those who occupy the lower classes as well as those who are non-Anglo-Saxons become the "new primitive" against whom the nation reacts. In addition, primitivism's implications involve multiple and contradictory layers. First, these implications produce a "fear of association" and confirm that the primitive class contaminates itself and members of other classes. Second, while people fear this primitive class, they also take a voyeuristic pleasure in watching the depiction of the primitive--an action that ultimately confirms the privileged status of the middle-class observer. Finally, attempts at squelching the primitive fail. The privileged class comes to fear this failure because the "absolute" line between the primitive and the non-primitive withers away, marking a kind of psychological corruption that makes a clear identification of the difference between the non-primitive and the primitive difficult.

While naturalism and modernism enjoy a rich critical tradition, there have been few studies that attempt to bridge these two literary periods. In fact, only three studies in the early 1980s that attempt to combine naturalism and modernism, and they do so by focusing on force and power as linchpins that unite the periods. Harold Kaplan's *Power and Order* (1981), Ronald Martin's

American Literature and the Universe of Force (1981), and John Conder's *Naturalism in American Fiction: The Classic Phase* (1984) critique traditional periodization that separates naturalism from modernism. Kaplan, Martin, and Conder cogently argue that to divide the two periods is rather difficult given their reliance on Hobbesian and Nietzschean definitions of power and order. While they address one method that might combine naturalism and modernism, they neglect opportunities whereby they might question how particular systems of power and order determine naturalism and modernism. In other words, how does this focus provide opportunities to examine the socio-cultural contexts that are affected by particular systems of power and order? By downplaying a political or ideological critique, Kaplan, Martin, and Conder overlook naturalism's and modernism's simultaneous engagements with class and race issues. They do so, in part, because they rely on new critical theoretical apparatuses that eschew political critiques. More recently, Paul Civello's *American Literary Naturalism and Its Twentieth-Century Transformations* (1994) questions why scholars conceive of naturalism as either "a static form largely confined to the late nineteenth century or as a literary anachronism in the twentieth" (2). Naturalism, Civello argues, must be considered a "narrative mode closely aligned with historical processes, one that is developed and transformed as it moves through time" (2). While Civello proposes that naturalism extends far into the twentieth century and transforms itself as it encounters modernism and postmodernism, his selection of only one author for each of naturalism's transformations runs the risk of jeopardizing the kind of theoretical flexibility he seeks.

To consider naturalism in terms of its engagement with politics is a recent and previously unexplored critical terrain traveled only recently by June

Howard's neo-Marxist *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism* (1985) and Walter Benn Michaels's New Historicist *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* (1987). Naturalism's traditional and conservative critical studies include, for instance, V.L. Parrington's *The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, Volume 3* (1930), in which he argues that writers such as Norris and London fail because their focus on the drives of lower-class characters runs the danger of creating grotesques, and their emphasis on a character's "animal impulses" may, in fact, turn man into an animal. In sum, Parrington concludes that naturalism is a failed realist aesthetic. Of those works which consider naturalism an example of pessimistic determinism, one might examine Lars Ahnebrink's *The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction* (1950). Ahnebrink argues that humans are animals who can be explained in terms of the forces that operate on them, principally heredity and environment. While later critics such as Charles Child Walcutt and Donald Pizer revise these traditional interpretations, they nevertheless still perpetuate many of the underlying assumptions that support these arguments. In terms of modernism, there has been the critical tendency to create a sharp line of demarcation between the "high" (white) modernists and the Harlem Renaissance writers. One text that maintains this division is Houston A. Baker, Jr.'s *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (1987) in that it argues that the influences that shaped high modernism had little, if any, importance for Harlem Renaissance authors. Other scholars such as Marianna Torgovnick and her *Gone Primitive* (1990) examines the intersection between modernism and non-white cultures in twentieth-century British imperialist fiction. While I focus on a different form of the primitive than does Torgovnick, I will suggest in my dissertation that the primitive is not static but is influenced by various cultural counter forces and

images. In doing so, my study will reconsider the ideological underpinnings of naturalism and modernism by focusing not on traditional period definitions but on the era's fears, fascinations, and preoccupations with the primitive. My study will also examine how and for what purposes naturalism and modernism came to rely on the primitive. Pivotal to my initial focus is a consideration of nativism's reliance on Social Darwinist rhetoric and its influence on late nineteenth to the early twentieth-century American culture.

How and why does a division of higher and lower animal life forms transfer to the study of humans and lay the groundwork for an emergent nativism in American culture? It is true that in late nineteenth-century America racism was endemic. According to Carl Degler, most white Americans took it for granted that black people, Amerindians, or immigrants from Asia were morally as well as intellectually inferior to whites (14). Serving as a foundation for this cultural phenomenon, Degler reasons, is Darwin's hierarchical theory itself. As Degler concludes, "by acknowledging different levels of human societies--[Darwin] spoke frequently of savages and lower races who were intermediate between animals and civilized people--he implicitly accepted a hierarchy of human beings" (15). To suggest that all reinterpretations of Darwin's and Spencer's theories were racist is to skew the intellectual climate and to conflate the different ideological purposes of varied groups who relied on these theories to advance their agendas. For the purpose of my study, I will offer two related points. First, some of the era's sociologists such as William Graham Sumner, Franklin Giddings, and Edward Ross, attempt to find and use biological evidence of inherent inferiority among the lower classes as justification for perpetuating Anglo dominance in the culture's social organization. Second, while other authors such as Jacob Riis and Charles Loring Brace approach this

same issue from the progressivist tradition, their emphasis on "Americanizing" the primitives suggests that they, too, identify a kind of moral contagion that the lower classes possess.

In his *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (1883), for example, Sumner argues that the "strange and often horrible shadows of all the old primitive barbarism are now to be found in the slums of great cities, and in the lowest groups of men, in the midst of civilized nations" (55-56). Here, Sumner identifies the lower classes as primitives, and this categorization encourages readers to equate the lower classes with the innate primitivism that Third World peoples allegedly embody. Second, Sumner's comment outlines the dangers the primitive poses to the elite in American culture: The primitive is a dangerous atavism or pre-man whose presence threatens American culture's elite because intermingling with the low-born might result in a return to barbarism. Hence, Sumner's observations of "lower" men provide a rationale for his theories that delineate the primitive's differences from an American cultural and ruling elite. While he worries about the primitive's contagions, Sumner criticizes social reform efforts because they are counterproductive and antithetical to the "natural" order. Explaining, Sumner argues that "all legislative effort to prevent vice is really protective of vice, because all such legislation saves the vicious man from the penalty of vice." Further, Sumner explains that while the primitives are inferior to an Anglo-American heritage, their weaknesses are innate and Nature will remove these low-born persons from the "gene pool." More specifically, "a drunkard in the gutter is just where he ought to be, according to the fitness and tendency of things. Nature has set upon him the process of decline and dissolution by which she removes things which have survived their usefulness" (113-114). In sum, Sumner identifies the lower

classes as primitives who pose a threat to the upper class. This threat is mitigated, however, by the primitives' biological flaws that prevent them from sexually reproducing and endangering American identity.

Like Sumner, sociologist Franklin Giddings argues that a race's longevity rests on its biological superiority, which, in turn, gives rise to its economic and moral accomplishments. In his *Principles of Sociology* (1896), for instance, Giddings concentrates on the socioeconomic differences between Caucasians and African Americans and concludes that these inequities were the result of the African Americans' biological inferiority rather than a fundamental lack of equal opportunity that was offered to them. His theory combines biological "evidence" of racial inferiority with a focus on upward mobility to create his hierarchy of racial accomplishments. For example, he claims that "there is no evidence that the now extinct Tasmanians had the ability to rise. They were exterminated so easily that they evidently had neither the power of resistance nor adaptability. Another race with little capacity for improvement is the surviving North American Indian. Though intellectually superior to the Negro, the Indian has shown less ability than the Negro to adapt himself to new conditions" (329). Like Sumner, Giddings links a race's survival to its biological factors. While the African American has adapted, Giddings qualifies that his endurance has been the result of his encounters with and subservience to white men: "when deprived of the support of the stronger races [the Negro] still relapses into savagery. Yet, so long as the Negro is left in contact with superior whites, he readily takes the external impress of civilization, and there is reason to hope that he, unlike the Indian, will acquire a measure of the spirit of civilization" (329). While Sumner rejects American culture's "civilizing" of its low-born primitives, Giddings believes that, at least for African

Americans, exposure to the elite allows for innate savagery to temporarily subside. Even though they offer different formulas, Sumner and Giddings contribute to the culture's burgeoning nativism insofar as they envision American culture as stratified between a ruling cultural elite and a permanent primitive class.

Following Giddings and extending some of his premises was University of Wisconsin sociologist Edward Ross. His *Foundations of Sociology* (1905) posits a virulent race theory and claims that the "theory that the races are virtually equal in capacity leads to such monumental follies as lining the valleys of the South with the bones of half a million picked whites in order to improve the conditions of four million unpicked blacks" (354). Ross, like Giddings, focuses on the effects of an Anglo-Saxon-identified American culture once it comes into repeated and unmediated contact with the primitive. Specifically, Ross concentrates on the threats posed to American culture by African Americans and immigrants. According to Ross, "the Negro is not simply a black Anglo-Saxon deficient in school, but a being who in strength of appetites and in power to control them differs considerably from the white man. . . . I see no reason why races may not differ as much in moral and intellectual traits as obviously they do in bodily traits" (353). Ross's focus on racial differences leads him to consider the dangers posed to the United States by the influx of educationally and economically destitute immigrants. Observing this trend, Ross concludes that "they throng to us, beaten members of beaten breeds, often the more aboriginal men that have been elbowed aside or left behind in the swayings of the mightier European races . . . . The late comers lack the ancestral foundations of American character, and even if they catch step with us they and their children will, nevertheless, impede our progress" (393). This

"invasion" of lower races, Ross reasons, produces fear in the members of the upper class and triggered "race suicide" whereby "the higher race quietly and unmurmuringly eliminates itself rather than endure individually the bitter competition it has failed to ward off from itself by collective action" (383). Ross also suggests that the upper class reproduce at a much lower rate than the lower class, resulting in a plethora of these so-called "lower life forms." Ross's conclusion about the "withering away" of the upper class or "race suicide" foregrounds what later nativists such as Madison Grant will argue is the primary threat that the primitive posed to American culture.

At roughly the same time that Sumner, Giddings, and Ross outline theories that explained to a nervous public the primitive's many contagions, there was a simultaneous impulse for government and philanthropic leaders to combat social ills through a progressivist agenda. Progressivism accomplished many important and long overdue goals such as compelling the government to be responsive to the needs of its citizens, introducing poor and immigrant children to the public education system, and overhauling the poor's living conditions. Charles Loring Brace's *The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years' Work Among Them* (1872) represents a rather intriguing and complex example of this branch of Progressivism. According to Brace, in order to "prevent their [the urban primitive's] growth," American culture must "throw the influences of education and discipline and religion about the abandoned and destitute youth of our large towns [so that American culture might] draw them under the influence of the moral and fortunate classes, [and] they shall grow up as useful producers and members of society, able and inclined to aid it in its progress" (ii). On the one hand, Brace claims that education purges the primitive of his undesirable qualities. On the other, he attempts to locate

specific hereditary traits that link individuals to a permanent "primitive class." Brace also outlines the reasons he believes in a permanent primitive class, and he claims that "a most powerful and continual source of crime with the young is inheritance--the transmitted tendencies and qualities of their parents, or of several generations of ancestors. It is well-known to those familiar with the criminal classes, that certain appetites or habits, if indulged abnormally and excessively through two or more generations, come to have an almost irresistible force, and no doubt, modify the brain so as to constitute almost an insane condition" (42-43). In this passage, Brace identifies a biologically determined force that wills individuals toward a natural primitivism. Not surprisingly, Brace tracks this tendency only among the urban poor and not among the culture's elite class.

In a move reminiscent of Giddings' approach, Brace draws a parallel between the homeless in the city and the Native American:

> [There was] about them something of the same relation which Indians bear to the civilized Western settlers. They had no settled home, and lived on the outskirts of society, their hand against every man's pocket, and every man looking upon them as natural enemies; their wits sharpened like those of a savage, and their principles often no better. Christianity reared its temples over them, and civilization was carrying on its great work, while they--a happy race of little heathens and barbarians--plundered, or frolicked, or led a roving life, far beneath (97).

If one extends Brace's analogy, one concludes that this primitive class, like that of the Native American, is marked by its "failure" to cultivate a more civilized attitude, and because of this failure, they are marked for extinction. For both Riis and Brace, attempts at upgrading the physical environment of the immigrant and thereby hastening his or her assimilation (and erasure of primitive

qualities) overlooks the immigrant's ethnic or national background, religious beliefs and demands, community needs, educational level, and employment opportunities (Fine, 16). To this I would add that such a move simultaneously maintains the conditions that yield a permanent primitive class and attributes to this class the origin for crime, disease, sexual immorality, and political anarchism. As David Fine notes, xenophobia, fueled by the theories of European race scientists, perpetuated myths about the "primitive class" and suggested that the "continued entry of Southeastern Europeans would dilute and eventually wash away any traces of the people who built the nation. Characteristically, they expressed the process in terms of Anglo-Saxon 'race suicide' or biological 'reversion,' through intermingling, to a more primitive type" (5). For example, Francis Walker, who was the Superintendent of the Census in 1910, feared that America's "better classes" would engage in race suicide because they were "unwilling to live and work under the depressed conditions produced by immigration[.] Americans were no longer reproducing at the same rate as they had in the early years of the nation, and as a result the immigrants were replacing the native population" (6). The complementary contemporary interest in eugenics was in keeping with the period's fascination with nativism. For instance, Madison Grant's *The Passing of a Great Race* (1918) offers a eugenics-based solution to the culture's emerging problem: "A rigid system of selection through which the elimination of those who are weak or unfit--in other words, social failures--would solve the whole question in a century, as well as enable us to get rid of the undesirables who crowd our jails, hospitals, and asylums" (50-51). Additionally, Robert DeCourcy Ward, who was the co-founder of the Immigration Restriction League (1914), noted that "if the race is to progress, the fitter part should be the most fertile" (7). For these theorists, the

American was a descendent of the great Anglo-Saxon who was the founder of this nation. Consequently, American culture was a fixed and stable society, its values derived from this Anglo-European heritage. Therefore, the "immigrant, either through hereditary constitution or through environmental conditioning over the centuries, was seen as incapable of ever attaining the high level of civilization which characterized the Anglo-American" (Fine, 5), a constant threat whose reproduction must be entailed. In fact, Massachusetts Senator and co-founder of the Immigration Restriction League Henry Cabot Lodge proposed a literacy test in 1917 for any person desiring to emigrate to the United States because, according to Lodge, "our open-door policy allows the admission of races most alien to the body of the American people and from the lowest and most illiterate among those races" (6).

Brace's text was not, however, the only one to discuss the primitive in the urban setting. Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) is a primary example of such progressive reform, and it was hailed for probing the depths of the so-called "urban jungles." However, few have considered progressivism's "underbelly" that perpetuates many of the fears that the culture's burgeoning nativism expressed. In fact, Riis's descriptions of the urban primitives fomented middle-class fears of this urban dweller. For Riis, "the boundary line lives there [in the tenements] because, while the forces for good on one side vastly outweigh the bad--in the tenements all the influences make for evil; because they are the hotbeds of the epidemics that carry death to rich and poor alike . . . because above all they touch the family life with deadly moral contagion" (2-3). Given the impoverished state of these tenements and the landlords' collective indifferences to their inhabitants, these dwellings were no doubt unsafe. Rather than focus the reader's attention on capitalism's abuses that give rise to the

tenement problem, Riis places blame on the primitive class as the carrier of moral contagion, and he contends that intermingling with this primitive influence has rather deadly consequences for the Anglo-Saxon. Commenting about the Chinese, for instance, Riis argues that "the Chinaman smokes opium as Caucasians smoke tobacco, and apparently with little worse effect upon himself. But woe unto the white victim upon which his pitiless drug gets its grip" (70). How does he envision a solution for this threat? Riis encourages "Americanization" of the primitive class in order to dilute their ethnic identities so that they might subsume themselves under the banner known as "Anglo-Saxonism." According to Raymond Mohl, Riis's response parallels the era's attitudes toward the poor insofar as the blame for their conditions rested on the lower class. In his *Poverty in New York* (1971), Mohl argues that by concentrating on education, religion, temperance, and work, some progressive reformers believed that the urban poor could be purged of their moral contagions. In terms of education, for example, Mohl claims that "New York's moral reformers thought of education as the cure for all the social ills of mankind." Further, Mohl explains that "virtually all educational institutions of the city--public and private, religious and secular--subscribed to the doctrine of individual improvement. All aimed at inculcation of accepted behavior and values and creation of a sober and contented, hard-working, and law-abiding lower class" (188). Urban primitives, Mohl contends, were indoctrinated in middle-class morality, and "by demanding ethical conformity, by providing models of decency and decorum, by imposing values upon the lower classes from above, they became protectors of the social order" (189).

In sum, sociological discussions about the urban lower classes foregrounded the fears that undergirded the burgeoning nativist movement and

spell out how the lower classes will come to occupy the position of "primitive" in American culture. Whether they are dangerous atavisms who threaten the Anglo-Saxon order or unschooled individuals who need a middle-class sensibility so that they may better understand their subservient roles, these "primitives" take the role once held by Native Americans as a means for limning out the natures of a privileged elite. By considering the changing images of Native Americans, and examining Harriet Spofford's prototypically naturalist short story "Circumstance," one might see how the primitive's presence is intrinsic to American literary culture.

* * *

In a review of American literature, no one image of the Native American predominates. Rather, there is a trajectory that simultaneously posits contradictory images of the Native American from beast to noble savage to emblem of a vanishing race. In the early days of the colonies, for example, texts such as *Of Plymouth Plantation* (Book I, 1630; Book II, 1650) and *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mary Rowlandson* (1682) represent the Native American as a threat to the religious "elect" who live in a hostile environment. According to William Boelhower's *Through a Glass Darkly: Ethnic Semiosis in American Literature* (1987), "the Puritan's voyage was a didactic project with a prefabricated script, and even before setting foot in the new world, they already had an ethical vocabulary for classifying what they would see. If the Puritans were the protagonists of the drama, the Indians were the enemy; if the former were civil, the latter were savage. For all practical purposes, the white men were going to a place that they considered uninhabited, since the savages, being etymologically of the woods, did not qualify as proprietors or inhabitants" (58). In more precise terms, the Puritans could not be "God's elect" without

engaging in a holy battle, real or metaphorical, against a menacing and heathen foe. The Puritans believed that the Native Americans were"wild beasts [who] roamed about with no fixed abode . . . they could not have towns and without towns there could be no such thing as history. . . . [The Puritans] were a story of biblical progress, a historical progression and a cultural advance" (58-59). Consequently, the Native Americans' presence was antithetical to this ecclesiastical project. To the Puritans, the Native Americans' lack of "developed property" underscored their heathen qualities. For the Puritans, industrious labor was inextricably tied to religious devotion. According to Puritan theology, the Covenant of Works argued that an individual's productive labor would be a testimony to his religious faith. Though some Puritan leaders would later reinterpret this covenant, industrious behavior remained an indication of a person's religious faith. There were, at the same time, however, less religiously-identified Puritans who challenged the "elect's" conclusions about Native Americans. Thomas Morton's *The New English Canaan* (1637), for example, offers a more empathetic portrait of Native Americans than the ones offered by Bradford and Rowlandson. Though Morton's celebration of the Native Americans's "innate wildness" differs from mainstream Puritanism, his depiction nevertheless relies upon the assumption that the Native Americans are incapable of any action other than primitive revelry.

While most colonial era discourse posits the Native American as a beast, a shift occurs with the rise of European Enlightenment rhetoric and its complementary theory of the noble savage. At this time, the Native Americans' "self-sufficiency" changes from its earlier representation as a marker of their heathenism to become a metaphor for American revolutionary rhetoric, and the patriots' separation from England is mapped on the figure of the Native

American. According to Helen Carr, the eighteenth-century belief in the Native American's primitiveness "played its central ideological role in the period's cultural and political bourgeois revolutions; in the nineteenth-century it fed into nationalism and the project of empire-building. In the States, bourgeois revolution, nationalism, and a new surge of colonialism all came into being simultaneously as they broke with their role as a colony" (67). At this time, concerns begin to center on the rise of the new "American" race, and writers such as William Byrd and J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur offer their visions about this new race. In his *The Secret History of the Dividing Line* (written in 1729 but unpublished until 1929), Byrd imagines that as the nation expands, the new American race will become one in that Native Americans, primarily women, will marry white people and the benefit will be two-fold: the offspring will possess the Native American's natural nobility and the white man's intellect and superiority. Thomas Jefferson envisioned a similar plan. As William Scheick notes in his study, Jefferson wrote a letter to the Delawares, Mohicans, and Munries on December 21, 1808, in which he "advised the Indians to abandon hunting and warfare for cultivation of the earth, which will lead to the need for laws of white civilization to protect property and life, which in turn will integrate the declining red race with the advancing white race" (39). Jefferson stated that "you will mix with us by marriage, your blood will run in our veins, and will spread with us over this great island" (39). This focus on the constitution of a new American race intensifies with Crevecoeur's sentiments expressed in Letter Three of his *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) in which he suggests that the "American" is an amalgamation of many races that form a new man:

> He is neither a European nor the descendant of a European. . . . He is an American, who, leaving behind

> him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced. . . ; here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world. Americans are the western pilgrims who are carrying along with them the great mass of arts, sciences, vigour, and industry which began long since in the East; they will finish the great circle. (826)

For Crevecoeur, the melting pot will erase racial markers and bring forth a new man who embodies the nation's spirit. The Native American, as well as individuals from other races, will "disappear" as the American race emerges. Though Byrd and Crevecoeur believe in the humanist ends of their plans, they suggest that all other races are in a state of decline, an assumption out of which the seeds for Manifest Destiny will grow.

In the nineteenth century, the melting pot metaphor gives rise to the philosophy of Manifest Destiny and the removal of the Native Americans. As Louise Barnett notes in her study, by classifying Native Americans as a declining race, Manifest Destiny enthusiasts were better able to promote their agenda. Barnett cites Theodore Roosevelt's *The Winning of the West* as a prime example of this. In the text Roosevelt argues that "the settler and pioneer have at bottom justice on their side, this great continent could not have been kept as nothing but a game preserve for squalid savages" (30). In short, according to Barnett, "the Indians were savages whose failure to cultivate was simply a convenient indicator of their great inferiority to the white man" (30). Thus, the Native Americans find themselves "out-of-place" in this new philosophy. Barnett concludes that "Indians, with their stubborn adherence to a primitive way of life, could have no place in the progressive and materialistic American world of the nineteenth century; whether or not they actually became extinct, as the writers of the frontier romance expected, their meaning for white

Americans was clearly linked to the country's past" (42). Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855) and Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales are two prime examples that offer portraits of the Native American as a declining race. For Helen Carr, Longfellow's poem "gave its readers, especially the liberal and humanitarian, a myth which helped to make possible, for America, the acceptance of the displacement and destruction of the Indian, and for Europe, the ravages of imperialism" (106). In fact, Longfellow's poem concludes with a very romantic picture of the young hero, Hiawatha, conceding his land to the new white inhabitants:

Thus departed Hiawatha,
Hiawatha the Beloved,
In the glory of the sunset,
In the purple mists of evening,
To the regions of the home-wind,
Of the Northwest and Keewaydin,
To the islands of the Blessed,
To the kingdom of Ponemah,
To the land of the Hereafter! (296)

This final stanza renders Hiawatha's removal as inevitable and attempts to compensate him by promising him rewards in the afterlife--that is, this characterization renders the Native American race as one whose next destination can only be death. Similarly, Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* shows that Chingachgook is the last of his race and that the future will be made without him or his heirs.

These multiple images of the Native American serve as an entrance into my reading of Harriet Prescott Spofford's "Circumstance." Published in 1860, "Circumstance" takes place in colonial New England at a time when relations between the white settlers and Native Americans were quite precarious. In the short story, the unnamed female main character is abducted on her way home

by a panther referred to as the "Indian Devil." Trying to escape from his grasp, the woman sings homespun songs, hymns, and lullabies in order to pacify the Indian Devil. All the while she sings, the main character imagines the peace and civility of her own home protected by her vigilant husband. At the story's climax, the woman's husband rescues her by shooting the Indian Devil and releasing her from her captivity. Upon leaving the forest, the husband and wife discover that in their absence their settlement has been destroyed by Native Americans and that their home's sanctity is, clearly, no longer assured.

By setting the actions of "Circumstance" in an earlier era, Spofford engages in what Phillip Fisher has identified as nineteenth-century American literature's practice of historical fiction. While Fisher's book addresses novels, his study applies, I believe, also to the issues at work in Spofford's short story. According to Fisher, the prevalence of historical fiction in nineteenth-century American novels "executes the past" through popular forms. This retroactive use of the past in popular settings and stories "transforms the present by rationalizing and making acceptable 'hard facts' including the killing of Indians, the system of slavery, and industrial capitalism" (8). More precisely, Fisher contends that historical fiction imposes on its subject a narrative that suits the present's ideological purposes. The historical novel, Fisher reasons, "is a device for practicing how to meet a certain but postponed future. . . . The historical novel pictures forces as beyond control, already underway, and creates figures who embody processes they do not control" (18). In terms of "Circumstance," then, the Native American's primitivism reveals itself in the form of the wild panther called the "Indian Devil." Its presence gives form and definition to the heroine, and yet its removal from the territory is vital to the white elite's survival. At the same time that the text engages in pernicious race

politics, it also suggests that perhaps the line between civilization and savagery may not be clear; in fact, the narrator observes that the Indian Devil represents the latent primitivism that even the heroine possesses. Thus, the fear in the text becomes the woman's need to reimpose the boundary between self and primitive before this line grows even more uncertain. This concern foregrounds naturalist concerns in that both are preoccupied with the middle and upper classes' unmediated encounters with the primitive.

From the beginning of "Circumstance," Spofford marks the line between civilization and savagery and does so with racial markers: "That home was one of a dozen log-houses lying a few furlongs apart from each other, with their half-cleared demenses separating them at the rear from a wilderness untrodden save by stealthy native or deadly panther tribes" (84). In this brief description, the narrator draws upon the Puritan binary of "settlement" versus "wilderness" and represents the Native Americans as beasts whose existence endangers white settlers and whose elimination is necessary for the survival of the established (white) settlement. The passage also calls attention to the ideology that informs our notions of "home." In their "Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do With It," Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty argue that "home refers to the place where one lives within safe, protected boundaries" (294). In "Circumstance," by contrast, the sanctity of the white woman's home is threatened by its proximity to the menacing primitive's world. Although the text's racial politics is not her discussion's central issue, Judith Fetterley comments that "Circumstance," much like other texts written by mid-nineteenth century American women writers, "exemplifies the insidiousness and pervasiveness of the racist imagination in white American literature . . . ; racist assumptions appear in such texts in part because they are so readily available and so easy

to invoke, particularly in circumstances in which hostility must be accomplished by stealth" (267). In "Circumstance," the protagonist lives in a precarious space, and she is vulnerable to threats from the Native Americans. As her journey begins, she disregards an apparition's warning about the dangers that the forest dwellers animals and Native Americans alike pose:

> She might have been a little frightened by such an apparition, if she had led a life of less reality than frontier settlers are apt to lead; but dealing with hard fact does not engender a flimsy habit of mind, and this woman was too sincere and earnest in her character, and too happy in her situation, to be thrown by antagonism, merely, upon superstitious fancies and chimeras of the second-sight. (85)

By dismissing the vision as little more than a hallucination, the woman, according to the narrator's description, minimizes the danger that surrounds her. The danger, however, is real and not an innocuous spectral vision.

This "danger" is the Native American himself, and his representation in the text is in purely physical and bestial terms:

> It was that wild beast--the most savage and serpentine and subtle and fearless of our latitudes--known by hunters as the Indian Devil, and he held her in his clutches on the broad floor of a swinging fir bough. His long sharp claws were caught in her clothing, he worried them sagaciously a little, then, finding that ineffectual to free them, he commenced licking her bare arm with his rasping tongue and pouring over her the wide streams of his hot, fetid breath. (85-86)

The narrator presents the Native American as the quintessential primitive, whose animal qualities mark him as non-human and whose "breath like the vapor from some hell-pit" (87) casts him as evil incarnate. Initially, the narrator represents the Indian Devil's threat as external to the protagonist and as "a death worse than any other that is to be named!" (89). While rape appears to be the danger, a notable shift occurs in this scene, in that the narrator suggests that

the Indian Devil is not an external threat but an internal drive that the protagonist possesses: to name this and acknowledge its existence is to remove forever the line that separates an individual's higher and lower natures. To associate the Native American with the white woman's lower nature is to "remind the New World civilization of what it would prefer to forget, that the savage element residing deep within each 'civilized' person as well as within the partially tamed American nation may erupt suddenly and can readily crack the delicate veneer of social order" (Scheick, 17). In considering potential threats to life, the narrator suggests that while most individuals fear death by fire, a far worse fate is one that destroys the individual from within because "fire is not half ourselves; as it devours, [it] arouses neither hatred nor disgust; [it] is not to be known by the strength of our lower natures let loose" (89).

In her analysis of this scene, Anne Dalke concurs that the narrator underscores the protagonist's struggle with her lower self but concludes, rather positively, that "the protagonist of Spofford's story succeeds in subduing that lower self, by rising above it" (77). The text resists, I think, the conclusion that Dalke draws. Indeed, the rifle shot that frees the protagonist from the Indian Devil is the same one that causes both the Indian Devil and the woman to fall, together, from the tree, "but the beast fell under her" (95). This scene's language underscores the Native American as the woman's "primitive underside," and the narrator notes that afterward the protagonist "seems to herself like someone newly made" (96). No longer can she return to her once romantic past because "desolation and death were indeed there . . . .Tomahawk and scalping knife, descending during that night, had left behind them only this work of their accomplished hatred and one subtle foot-print in the snow . . . . The world was all before them, where to choose" (96). This allusion to Adam and

Eve's expulsion from Paradise in *Paradise Lost* dramatizes the latent savagery of the beast, and for Spofford's short story, this is mapped onto the figure of the Native American.

While "Circumstance" focuses on the problems posed to white Americans by Native Americans, it also raises a more profound and disturbing question: To what extent is the heroine's subjectivity contingent upon the pairing of it with a dark and primitive Other? In her analysis of the heroine's use of homespun songs, Lisa Logan argues that "although she sings an expected song, one seemly for a woman and a mother, the circumstances of her singing disrupt the 'safety' of cultural images of 'woman.' The picture of a mother singing her child to sleep before the hearth, which a lullaby invokes, alters to a woman rocking and singing in the arms of a dark and savage panther. By shifting the circumstances of the heroine's singing from home to wilderness, Spofford suggests that a woman's voice might be heard in other spaces than the home" (121). While Logan's feminist interpretation places "Circumstance" in the tradition of silenced women's voices, one might also consider that the heroine's lullabies impose a middle-class value system on the Indian Devil who is believed to be without any redeeming qualities. That is, the singing woman represents an Anglo-Saxon identity because she can so easily evoke pictures of home and hearth which are cultural trappings that the Indian Devil cannot deploy. The heroine's subjectivity is achieved, then, at the expense of the primitive Indian Devil.

It is this reinvention of the primitive, combined with its multiple and contradictory images, that serves as the focus of my study. In Chapter One, "The Primitive as Primordial Beast," I examine the degree to which nativism is embedded in naturalism, and, more specifically, in selected writings of Frank

Norris and Jack London. In this chapter, concerns about the primitive reveal themselves in the nativist rhetoric which Norris and London deploy. In my discussion of Norris's *Vandover and the Brute* (finished in 1895 but unpublished until 1914), London's *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *The Sea-Wolf* (1904), as well several other writings, I show that Norris and London invoke the primitive when it serves their purposes for advancing an Anglo-Saxon identity.

In Chapter Two, "The Primitive as Brute Working Class," I will argue that Eugene O'Neill's play *The Hairy Ape* (1922) offers a startling example of the primitive figure by representing Yank as socially and evolutionarily inferior laborer. As one considers some of this era's novels such as Norris's *The Octopus* (1901) and London's *Martin Eden* (1909), however, these texts do not render the primitive's connection to a Darwinian retrogression to a pre-human world as explicitly as in O'Neill's play. In fact, Norris's *The Octopus* eschews any real focus on the working class. Instead, the novel's primary concern is the degree to which the Anglo-Saxon ranchers become "primitives" and act as unseemly and unlawfully as the Jewish railroad agents who are apparently to blame for the ranchers' collective decline. By focusing on the ranchers rather than the actual laborers, Norris links the primitive figure to the novel's apparent anti-Semitic rhetoric. While London's *Martin Eden* focuses on an actual working-class man, his novel presents the primitive as synonymous with Martin's poverty rather than his connection to an evolutionary regression.

In Chapter Three, "The Primitive as Immigrant," I will discuss the fear of the immigrant as reflective of American culture's concerns about this "invading force" as it appears in Cesare Lombroso's theories about the criminality and the return to savagery, Norris's selected writings from *The Wave* as well as his

novel *McTeague* (1899), and Theodore Dreiser's play *The Hand of the Potter* (1918). In Norris's and Dreiser's texts, there is a continued emphasis on the actions, manners, and styles that mark characters as primitives, and, with this form of the primitive, the immigrant becomes a tool for establishing the boundaries of American culture.

In Chapter Four, "The Primitive as Racial Exotic," I will first contextualize the racial primitive in terms of the twentieth-century's opening three decades, and, second, I will consider Gertrude Stein's "Melanctha" (1909) and Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928) in terms of this literary figure. In other words, I will focus on the twentieth-century's early decades in order to show the emerging fascination with racial primitivism. Stein's "Melanctha" deploys the racial primitive by focusing exclusively on the title character's sexuality, accessing "ready-made" assumptions about black sexuality. On the other hand, Larsen's *Quicksand* reveals her critique of the racial primitive insofar as her novel raises serious questions about this popular and problematic literary figure.

In the Conclusion, I will assess my project and discuss the implications that it has for future study in American literature.

Chapter One
The Primitive as Primordial Beast

> In *Therese Raquin*, my aim has been to study temperaments and not characters . . . . I have chosen people completely dominated by their nerves and blood, without free will, drawn into each action of their lives by the inexorable laws of their physical nature. Therese and Laurent are human animals, nothing more. I have endeavored to follow these animals through the devious working of their passions, the compulsion of their instincts, and the mental unbalance resulting from a nervous crisis. . . . The murder they commit [is] a consequence of their adultery, a consequence they accept just as wolves accept the slaughter of sheep (Emile Zola, *Therese Raquin*, 22).

Zola's description of human animals, and his complementary need to study them, provides an apt entrance into a discussion about American literary naturalism and the primitive as primordial beast. In the novels which are the focus of this chapter, the main characters are depicted not only as beasts but they represent their nation's growing fears about the loss of Anglo-Saxon identity. Nativism is thus embedded in naturalism's literary form, and the characters's moral disintegration is linked to the influx of human beasts into American culture, which in this case are individuals from the lower socio-economic and ethnic classes. In this chapter, I will suggest that the fear of the primitive thus takes special precedence in American literary naturalism and that the early texts that will be discussed, Norris's *Vandover and the Brute* (completed by 1895 and published posthumously in 1914) and some of London's early stories and novels, are steeped in this political ideology. For the well-born characters who intermingle with the "lowly," their descent from the upper class becomes an apt consequence to their class mixing. In London's *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *The Sea-Wolf* (1904), however, primitivism changes. In *The Call of the Wild*, primitivism comes to represent a crucial alternative landscape that challenges and critiques urban modern capitalism. In his *The Sea-Wolf*, London conflates primitivism with the philosophy of the

Nietzschean superman and offers an uneven and inconsistent critique of both concepts. In my chapter, then, I will suggest that the issues central to naturalism parallel the concerns in nativist philosophy and that the American naturalist movement, as practiced by Norris and London, becomes a means for fleshing out these concerns and fears with particular emphasis on the primitive.

The nativist's fear of the burgeoning ethnic and lower socio-economic classes or "primitives," and the resulting peril they posed to America's Anglo-Saxon heritage, takes root in naturalism as both movements are obsessed with atavism, cultural regression, and biological destiny. While John Higham notes that the history of nativism is difficult to confine to a "neat treatment" because it came about at a time that was relatively prosperous and that appeared to welcome progressive reforms, it touched, nevertheless, "the springs of fear and hatred; it breathed a sense of crisis. Above all, it expressed a militantly defensive nationalism: an aroused conviction that an intrusive element menaced the unity, and therefore the integrity and survival of the nation itself" (162). The central ideas of the era's prominent nativists are evident in the theories of William Graham Sumner, Cesare Lombroso, and Madison Grant. Notably, Sumner's belief in urban primitives, Lombroso's theory about atavistic criminals, and Grant's faith in the biological superiority of Nordic individuals permeated the intellectual climate and became embedded in the era's literature. For example, Sumner's *What the Social Classes Owe Each Other* (1883) identified the urban lower-class as primitives and argued that their degraded conditions were reminiscent of civilization's ancient barbarism. This era's literature not only characterizes good and evil in terms of race, but naturalism, as envisioned by Zola, becomes a project of bourgeois improvement whereby the authors, whom he terms experimental moralists,

conquer the undesirable. Zola writes that "we are experimental moralists showing by experiment in what way a passion acts in a certain social condition. The day in which we gain control of the mechanism of this passion we can treat it and reduce it, or at least make it as inoffensive as possible" (14). At the same time, Thomas Gossett in his *Race: The History of an Idea* (1997) suggests that in this era's literature "there was an increasing tendency to describe the characteristics of the heroes and heroines as well as those of the villains and minor characters in terms of race. In fact, race for some novelists came to be the principal means of explaining and understanding all the characters in a novel" (196). For many of the adherents of nativist philosophy, naturalism becomes the primary vehicle by which one might identify the primitive's contagions, and they use this literary form as an attempt to reclaim an imperiled Anglo-Saxonism.

Sumner's nativist theories unfolded in his *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (1883). Sumner criticized humanitarians who implored the rich to give aid and solace to the indigent. According to Sumner, one particular social class cannot support and uplift another class. To perform such an act violated the role of the state, compromised liberty, and perverted the laws of nature. In terms of sacrificing liberty, for example, Sumner argued that "we shall find that all the schemes for producing equality and obliterating the organization of society produce a new differentiation based on the worst possible distinction--the right to claim and the duty to give one man's effort for another man's satisfaction. We shall find that every effort to realize equality necessitates a sacrifice of liberty" (15). For Sumner, difficulties and deprivations undergirded the natural order, and he suggested that "certain ills belong to the hardships of human life. They are natural. They are part of the struggle with nature for

existence. We cannot blame our fellow men for our share of these" (17). Sumner envisioned a small and unobtrusive government in which free men contracted with each other; their labor, in turn, would allow the state to prosper and maintain order. If any man or woman failed in his or her labor, he or she became not only a burden to the state but reverted to the earlier brutishness and barbarism that had once characterized early life. Specifically, Sumner commented that "if society does not keep up its power, if it lowers its organization or wastes its capital, it falls back toward the natural state of barbarism from which it rose" (59). Here, Sumner's argument foregrounded some key points: first, labor, capital, and free enterprise among individuals were the means persons used to raise themselves out of barbarity; second, the urban and immigrant poor typically rejected industriousness, and, consequently, they "constantly neutralize and destroy the finest efforts of the wise and are a dead weight on the society in all its struggles to realize better things" (19). The poor's refusal to work imperiled the state because they caused the state's citizens to mirror their brutishness, and so the state and its people returned to an earlier form of primitivism. For Sumner, the urban and immigrant poor fomented this primitive contagion, and if they succeeded, the state and the well-born people would suffer and nature itself would become perverted.

The focus on the urban and immigrant poor as primitive contagions continued with Cesare Lombroso's theories about criminals. A criminal anthropologist, Lombroso's theories initiated a new standard whereby the criminal's punishment was based on his or her own characteristics rather than the nature of the crime itself. His theories not only revised old standards of crime and punishment, but they also advanced a new concept, one that

considers the criminal as the manifestation of an atavistic race. In his *Crime: Its Causes and Remedies* (1912), Lombroso suggested that "the criminal is an atavistic being, a relic of a vanished race. . . . This tendency to alter under special conditions is common to human beings, in whom hunger, syphilis, trauma, and still more frequently, morbid conditions inherited from insane, criminal, or diseased progenitors, is a return to the characteristics peculiar to primitive savages" (136). If the criminal were an atavism, Lombroso argued that one must understand his or her behavior by examining the lower species for characteristics which corresponded to those of the criminal. His conclusion led to an analysis of physical and psychological differences as reasons and rationales for actual and potential criminal behavior. His analyses included examining skull, brow, and jaw sizes, considering the development and size of wisdom teeth, hair texture, and skeletal abnormalities. Specifically, Lombroso observed that "in general, many criminals have outstanding ears, abundant hair, a sparse beard, enormous frontal sinuses and jaws, a square and projecting chin, broad cheekbones, frequent gestures, in fact a type resembling the Mongolian and sometimes the Negro" (18). In short, Lombroso used these physical differences as natural predictors for criminal activity among the urban and immigrant poor. The classification of these individuals as "atavisms" marginalized them and marked them as moral degenerates whose natural proclivity toward crime posed a danger to the culture.

The causes and effects of the dangers posed to American culture by the atavistic manifest themselves again in the writings of Madison Grant. In his *The Passing of the Great Race* (1911), Grant argued that democracy weakened the natural white aristocracy in the United States because it preached universal suffrage and equality. More specifically, Grant claimed that "in the democratic

forms of government the operation of universal suffrage tends toward the selection of the average man for public office rather than the man qualified by birth, education, and integrity. How this scheme of administration will ultimately work out remains to be seen but from a racial point of view it will inevitably increase the preponderance of the lower types and cause a corresponding loss of efficiency in the community as a whole" (5). He suggested that the American descendants of Nordic ancestry lost their natural right to govern because the culture accepted far too many individuals from "lower races." He also argued that this practice was contrary to the natural order because humanity lifted itself out of savagery by the agency of a few gifted men of genius. For Grant, "true aristocracy or a true republic is government by the wisest and best, always a small minority in any population" (7). Given its open door immigration policy, American culture further weakened itself by welcoming impoverished and uneducated immigrants to the United States. As a result, old Nordic ancestry and good blood lines were imperiled as the newly arrived immigrants "flooded" the culture with offspring who were descended from lower cultural stock. American democracy, Grant reasoned, tended "toward a standardization of type and [a] diminution of the influence of genius. A majority must of necessity be inferior to a picked minority and it always resents specializations in which it cannot share" (6).

While the theories of Sumner, Lombroso, and Grant clearly reveal the culture's coming to terms with large numbers of the urban and immigrant poor, the influence of nativist philosophy on naturalist literature is an issue that has not yet been examined by earlier literary scholars. Early and prominent scholars of naturalism such as Charles Child Walcutt and Donald Pizer elevated the study of naturalism as an important literary field. In their analyses,

they focus on the importance of the genre itself and the literature's appeal to its contemporary audience, but they obscure the literature's racist and classist impulses. For example, in his *American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream* (1956), Walcutt suggests that "the naturalist novelist, while he portrays with loathing and bitterness the folly and degradation of man, is also affirming his hope and faith, for his unspoken structures imply an equally unspoken ideal which stimulates and justifies his pejorative attitude toward the world about him" (29). Following Walcutt's analysis, Pizer's *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (1966) argues that "naturalism reflects an affirmative ethical conception of life, for it asserts the value of all life by endowing the lowest character with emotion and defeat and with moral ambiguity, no matter how poor and ignoble he may seem" (14). Walcutt's and Pizer's analyses thus focus on what they consider to be naturalism's ameliorist project. In a more recent study, Lee Clark Mitchell suggests that naturalism's power resides "not through cultural influences nor through authorial motives inferred from other sources (Dreiser's editorial announcements, say, or Norris's essays, or London's letters). What draws us to naturalism is not what lies behind its narrative structures but what exists in the conflicts and disruptions we feel as we read it even today" (xvi). While he de-emphasizes the cultural material on which I will focus, Mitchell's *Determined Fictions: American Literary Naturalism* (1989) provides an important study of naturalism's contradictions and slippages. Another study of naturalism that is invaluable to my project is June Howard's *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism* (1985). Her focus on class anxieties approaches the goals of my study. While her book focuses more exclusively on genre than does my study, her use of cultural analysis offers many important insights for my work and future naturalist studies.

For instance, Howard observes that in naturalism there is "a lived relation to two increasingly inescapable aspects of the conditions of existence in late nineteenth-century America: the decisive dominance in a national and even global economy; and the presence of class struggle in a nation with a constantly increasing, largely immigrant urban proletariat that was both very vulnerable to the recurrent economic depressions and relatively visible to the other classes" (71-72). While Howard notes this point, much of her study proceeds to reclaim naturalism as an esteemed genre, much in the way that Walcutt had done in earlier years. A closer look at the naturalist subject in nativist philosophy and the ideology that dominates it is essential, I believe, to rethinking naturalism itself, and Catherine Belsey's marxist-feminist theory about subject in ideology proves to be important to such an analysis.

Belsey's *Critical Practice* (1988) offers a marxist-feminist analysis that is grounded in the theories of Althusser, Lacan, and post-Saussurean linguistics. Specifically, her discussion of ideology and the subject's role in it opens up new possibilities for Norris's and London's fiction. Her grappling with ideology entails a necessary unpacking of the terms "common sense" and "truth" because "common sense offers a way of approaching literature. . .as the 'obvious' mode of reading, the 'natural' way of approaching literary works" (2). What remains out of sight, however, is that "common sense itself is ideologically and discursively constructed, rooted in a specific historical situation and operating in conjunction with a particular social formation. In other words, what seems obvious and natural is not necessarily so . . . but [is] produced in a specific society by the ways in which that society talks and thinks about itself and its experiences" (3). Drawing on Macherey and Althusser, Belsey argues that "ideology exists in commonplaces and truisms. . . . If it is true, however, it is

not the whole truth. Ideology obscures the real conditions of existence by presenting partial truths. It is a set of omissions, gaps rather than lies, smoothing over contradictions, appearing to provide answers to questions which in reality it evades" (58).

Fundamental to her discussion is a focus on ideology's role in realist fiction. Belsey argues that in realism "the text acts in conjunction with the expressive theory and with ideology by interpellating the reader as subject. The reader is invited to perceive and judge the 'truth' of the text, the coherent, non-contradictory interpretation of the world as it is perceived by an author whose autonomy is the source and evidence of the truth of interpretation" (68-69). While Belsey's comments address the concerns of realism only, they also hold out interesting possibilities for naturalist fiction. Like realism, naturalism purports to present truisms in each text, and the reader is called upon to bear witness to the depths of degradation to which the main character descends. While naturalism generally avoids the facile reconciliation of tensions common in realism, it possesses a similar need to explain as inevitable, true, and unalterable the final resolution of the main character's development. Indeed, if the naturalist author is a scientist, as Zola explains, whose novel is an accurate portrayal of observed facts, then what follows is a "final truth" that the author concludes from the experiment he or she conducts. In his *The Naturalist Novel* (1893), Zola quoted physician Claude Bernard when he suggested that "in the experimental method the search after facts, that is to say, investigation, is always accompanied by a reason that so ordinarily the experimentalist makes an experiment to confirm and verify the value of an experimental idea. In this case you can say that an experiment is an observation instigated for the purpose of verification" (4). While they offer few positive conclusions, naturalist

novels call upon enlightened and self-actualized readers (subjects) to observe the dangers that engulf the modern urban world, and the readers take away from this momentary descent into the abyss the satisfaction that they are not these characters. Therefore, this contrast between the subject (the reader) and the subjected (the naturalist fiction characters) is the very essence of language and ideology since "it is through language that people constitute themselves as subjects. Consciousness of self is possible only through contrast [and] differentiation" (59).

The concern with nativism and naturalist literary form manifests itself prominently in the writings of Frank Norris. In *Responsibilities of the Novelist*, a collection of essays about his theory of the naturalist novel, Norris purges romanticism of sentimentalism and suggests that this reinvigorated literary form is not only the essence of naturalism but the only form appropriate to exploring "the unplumbed depths of the human heart, the mystery of sex, the problems of life, and the black, unsearched penetralia of the soul of man" (67-68). In his magazine fiction, non-fiction, and novels, Norris re-defines Zolaesque naturalism, conflates naturalism with a robust romanticism, and pairs this new romanticism with Anglo-Saxon imperialism so that literature serves as a tool for westward expansion. For instance, Norris's "The Frontier Gone at Last," from *The Responsibilities of the Novelist*, associates the American impulse toward westward expansion with Anglo-Saxon heritage and suggests that the great American epic about the West is a tool for revitalizing Anglo-Saxon dominance: "today we are the same race, with the same impulse, the same power, and because there is no longer a frontier to absorb our overplus energy, because there is no longer a wilderness to conquer, we remember the old days when our ancestors before us found the outlet to their activity checked and,

rebounding, turned their faces eastward and went down to invade the Old World. So we" (56). This romanticism, grounded in veritism, is a "robust, red-armed *bonne femme*, who rough-shoulders her way among men and among affairs, who finds a healthy pleasure in the jostlings of the mob and a hearty delight in the honest, rough-and-tumble, Anglo-Saxon give-and-take knock-about that for us means life" (158). Norris's "romanticism" is found "among the vicious ruffians male and female of Allen Street and Mulberry Bend. I tell you she is there, and to your shame be it said you will not know her in those surroundings" (166). This "underworld," then, is the setting, subject, and object of Norris's naturalist fiction, a place wherein the "primitives" reside; these primitives are also, then, subject to Norris's voyeurism and condemnation.

In this chapter, I do not intend to label Norris and London as "racists" *per se*. Rather, I will suggest that their fiction reveals their engagement with nativist philosophy and that American naturalism, at least as it was practiced by Norris and London, participates in and produces for its readers important theories about American "primitives." Indeed, Norris's nativism is rather complex because it defies easy classifications. In his magazine writings, for example, Norris defines "primitivism" differently. While I do not intend to oversimplify, I will suggest that for Norris there is a "good primitivism" through which white men advance the race by recalling their once glorious Anglo-Saxon or even Viking ancestry and using it to satisfy their imperialist impulses. Norris's essay "A South Sea Expedition: One Hundred Colonists from California Who Will Attempt the Farthest West," published in *The Wave* on February 20th, 1897, documents, for example, the mission of the South Pacific Colonization Company. Concurring with their agenda, which was to engage in imperialistic nation building, Norris writes, sympathetically, that these men are not only "the

types of that sturdy, shouldering Anglo-Saxon race, that of its first exodus from the salt marshes of Holland, have been steadily, stubbornly pushing West " but "true" Anglo-Saxons "responding to the same impulse that ever drives their race toward the setting sun" (8). These men conquer not only the land but also the women who reside there. For Norris, intermarriage between native women and Anglo-Saxons will advance the imperialist cause because a phenomenal race will come forward, and "in about two hundred years a race having in its veins the strain of Anglo-Saxon combined with that of the rich strong blood of a South Sea savage--[that will be] vigorous enough, surely" (8).

As long as the Anglo-Saxon pursues conquest, he may intermarry with "savages." The inheritors of the Anglo-Saxon or even Viking traditions can assimilate to this earlier type and conquer the lower races. An example of this may be found in Norris's novel *Moran of the Lady Letty* (1898). Briefly summarized, *Moran* chronicles the high sea adventures of Ross Wilbur, an upper-class, effeminate aesthete who is kidnapped by Chinese sailors, and Moran Sternerson, a stern sea captain, whose link to her Viking past and, in particular, to the warriors known as the Bersirkers, serves as a catalyst to Wilbur's eventual quest toward Anglo-Saxon manhood. Aboard ship, Moran commands the crew and Wilbur in their battles against a rival Chinese ship as both compete for valuable whale blubber. Described repeatedly as "coolies," the Chinese characters are to be dominated and destroyed. In the novel's main battle scene, Moran calls upon her Viking past: "the fury of battle had exalted her to a sort of frenzy . . . once more she had lapsed back to the Vikings and sea-rovers of the tenth century--she was Brunhilde again, a shield maiden, a Valkyrie, a bersirker and the daughters of bersirkers, and like them she fought in a veritable frenzy, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, every sense exalted, every

force doubled, insensible to pain, deaf to all reason" (216). This thrill of the battle not only awakens Moran's dormant race consciousness but also masculinizes Wilbur insofar as the "sight of his smitten enemy rolling on the ground at his feet, the primitive man, the half-brute of the stone age, leaped to life in Wilbur's breast--he felt his muscles thrilling with a strength they had not known before" (214). On the one hand, this battle reawakens "the horrid exhilaration of killing, the animal of the race, the human brute suddenly aroused and dominating every instinct and tradition of centuries of civilization" (217). On the other hand, however, because this battle and Moran's warrior qualities are "deaf to reason," they also challenge Wilbur's authority to rule as a man, and he concludes that he must conquer Moran or, more specifically, "her force, her determination, her will, her splendid independence" (218). Once installed as the conqueror, Wilbur resolves never to return to the aesthete's world but to go to Cuba where he notes that "I've got a crack little schooner out in the bay here, ... It may be a crazy idea, but it's better than dancing" (258). In *Moran*, Wilbur's adoption of and regression to an animalistic primitivism, that is derived from an Anglo or Viking past, is necessary for his transformation into a conqueror. Notably, Wilbur must destroy Moran because only he, as a man, can adequately control the primal beast that lives within every human.

The other side of Norris's theory entails a "bad primitivism" in which there is both an overflow of "lower races" who intermarry and create "monster races" and the permanent reversion to a brute of an upper-class man who as long as he is not engaged in acts of imperialism should not engage in racial or class mingling. In his essay "Among the Cliff-Dwellers: A Peculiar Mixture of Races from the Four Corners of the Earth," which appeared in an 1897 edition of *The Wave* , Norris writes fearfully about the great influx of immigrants, suggesting

that the disappearance of "true" Americans occurs with the intermarrying of these so-called lower types to each other. He muses, "imagine the Mongolian and African types merged into one. He should have the flat nose, and yet the almond eye, the thick lip and yet the high cheek bone. But the ideas of the man, his bias, his prejudices, his conception of things, his thoughts--what a jumble, what an amorphous formless mist" (6). Here, Norris's fears of miscegenation coincide with Madison Grant's nativist theories concerning "race suicide." In his *The Passing of the Great Race*, for instance, Grant examined how the upper-class coped with the prospect of race suicide: "the small birthrate in the upper-classes is to some extent offset by the care received by such children as are born and the better chance they have to become adults and breed in their turn. The large birthrate of the lower classes is under normal conditions offset by a heavy infant mortality, which eliminates the weaker children" (47-48). Related to Norris's essay and appearing in the same edition of *The Wave* is Norris's short story "A Case for Lombroso." A story indebted to Lombroso's philosophy, the text chronicles the lives of two characters--Cresencia Hromada, a young Spanish woman, and young Stayne, a white, upper-class man. The intermingling of these different types is doomed from the beginning as the narrator notes that Cresencia's and Stayne's tale parallels Aesop's fable about the two jars: "they were superlatively beautiful jars, and they were floating in a cistern. They made the discovery that so long as they kept apart they were safe--the moment they should come together they would break and fill and sink" (6). The reader learns that Cresencia is of the oldest and purest Spanish blood and that her family is of unmixed blood in which there are no "alien crosses." While untainted blood is fine for Anglos, for Cresencia "her race was almost exhausted, its vitality low, and its temperature refined to the evaporation point.

Today, Cresencia might have been called a degenerate" (6). Ironically, Cresencia's race can be revitalized only through intermingling with the Anglo-Saxons. In this text, however, because Stayne is not a "high seas conqueror," such a prospect would result in his eventual downfall. Because of her racial heritage, Cresencia exudes excess animalistic passion. Norris notes that "red-hot, degenerate Spanish blood of her [that] sang in her veins . . . [;] she used to sit in her room rolling her head to and fro upon her folded arms, or biting at the bare flesh of them, in a very excess of passion" (6). Despite warnings from others about Cresencia's wild nature, Stayne is seduced by her passion, and his association with this "degenerate" type causes him to become abusive and base. In their relationship, he becomes a villain and a brute who comes to deplore his own baseness just as she comes to loathe herself for her own degradation. Returning to the frame of the Aesop fable, Norris's narrator concludes that "had they never met, Miss Hromada and young Stayne would yet have been as fine specimens of womanhood and manhood as you could wish to know. Once having met, they ruined each other" (6). Writing a fictional illustration of Lombroso's philosophy, Norris thus offers his own nativistic warning about racial intermingling.

As is the case with Norris, London's work reveals a fascination with the Anglo-Saxon and an impulse toward presenting both "good" and "bad primitivism." In terms of "bad" primitivism, London's texts fail to move beyond cultural stereotypes. One might consider, for example, London's short story "The Inevitable White Man" (1908) wherein Captain Woodward rationalizes imperialism and criticizes humanists who object to global expansion. Woodward observes that "I've seen a few who claimed they understood niggers, and I always took notice that they were the first to be eaten. . . . The

white man's mission is to farm the world. What time has he got left to understand niggers anyway?" (1557-1558). London's attitude toward the "white man's burden" presents itself, also, in his journalism; for example, in his coverage of the Russo-Japanese War, London included "The Yellow Peril" wherein he imagines that the Japanese and Chinese will combine forces and threaten the safety of Western white culture, and he suggests that "today, far more voices are engaged in denying the yellow peril than in prophesying it" (347). This threat to Anglo-Saxon identity dominates his novel *Valley of the Moon* (1913) whose main character named Saxon recalls the once glorious pioneer past but laments that the current influx of immigrants has erased that once golden era: "the Saxons were a race of people . . . [;] they were wild, like Indians, only they were white" (17). Notably, Saxon identifies with a cultivating and primitive impulse but does so by invoking an Anglo-Saxon heritage rather than identifying with the Native Americans. She spouts nativist rhetoric when she announces that "we're Saxons and all the Americans that are real Americans, and not Dagoes and Japs and such. . . . We crossed the plains and opened up this country and now we're losing even the chance to work for a living in it" (164). Here, one notes that while the Anglo-Saxons and their pioneer descendants needed some primitivism to conquer the land, the time has arrived when they no longer predominate and their status is imperiled. One might compare *Valley of the Moon* with his earlier novel *A Daughter of the Snows* (1902) wherein Frona praises the Anglo-Saxon and notes "we are a race of doers" (85). *Daughter* suggests that the Anglo-Saxon's supremacy rests on a foundation of constant strife with "lower" races, while, at the same time, the dominant white race establishes its moral superiority by acting as builders and law givers to the so-called inferior races. In short, this sense of "losing ground"

becomes a psychological battle for London's fictional characters.

In contrast to London's "bad" primitivism, his novel *Before Adam* (1907) explores the chasm between higher and lower life forms and underscores his fascination with "good primitivism." Briefly summarized, *Before Adam* chronicles the life of a twentieth-century unnamed white man whose nightmares bring him back to his primitive roots in Pleistocene Africa where he was Big-Tooth, an ancestor living at the very beginning of humanity. The novel's setting is a ferocious younger world plagued by conflict between early humans and protohumans. The narrator realizes that he "[is] the connecting link that somehow lived both lives" (5), and his racial memories dominate the novel in the form of material objects passed down to successive generations. London strips this younger world of its romanticism and shows that even among protohumans, there is a clear hierarchy of higher life forms: the most highly evolved group known as the Fire People, who resemble twentieth-century humans; the Folk, one of whom is Big-Tooth, who are in the midst of evolving from living in trees to living on the ground; and the Tree People, who are the least evolved species and most closely resemble apes. Along with these racial memories is the knowledge that one must have moments of unmediated contact with this earlier primitivism in order to live and dominate in the present. Musing, the main character concludes

> I, the modern, am incontestably a man; yet I, Big-Tooth, the primitive, am not a man. Somewhere, and by straight line of descent, these two parties to my dual personality were connected. Were the Folk, before their destruction, in the process of becoming men? And did I and mine carry through this process? On the other hand, may not some descendent of mine have gone in to the Fire People and become one of them? I do not know. One thing only is certain, and that is that Big-Tooth did stamp into the cerebral constitution of one of his progeny all the impressions of his life, and stamped them

> in so indelibly that the hosts of intervening generations have failed to obliterate them (241).

London's focus on racial memory as a "good primitivism" legitimizes the well-born's ability to "tap into" a natural wildness, whereas the "low" born have nowhere to turn because their extinction has already been predestined.

Before I begin my discussion of *Vandover and the Brute* in light of my focus on nativism, I will connect the novel's issues to two of Norris's earlier magazine fictions. One is an obscure short story entitled "Lauth" published in the *Overland Monthly* in March 1893, and the other is the short story "A Reversion to Type" published in the August 1897 edition of *The Wave*. Both texts focus on the "primitive within the self" and devolution. Set in Paris, "Lauth" chronicles the life and death experiences of the title character. A scholar, Lauth participates in the French Revolution. Seduced by "the roar of an angry mob" (242), Lauth "lost control of his more humane instincts, and discharged his arbalist at random into the crowd of his enemies below" (243). When Lauth witnesses his victim's death, "a mighty flame of blood-lust thrilled up through all Lauth's body and mind. At the sight of blood shed by his own hands all the animal savagery latent in every human being woke within him, . . . [he] sank back to the level of his savage Celtic ancestors" (244). Although he is eventually killed in battle, Lauth's struggles do not end with his death. Two physicians use Lauth's corpse to determine if life or the soul animates the human body. One might conjecture that this debate addresses whether lower life forms, or members of the lower classes in particular, possess an innate tendency toward the good, as embodied by the soul. When Lauth's body is reanimated through sheep's blood transfusions, he devolves in the life chain from man to dog to protozoa. Because Lauth is reanimated after his soul left his

body, the doctors conclude that he represents the vilest life form: "it lived, but lived not as do the animals or the trees, but as protozoa, the jelly-fish, and those strange lowest forms of existence where in the line between vegetable and animal cannot be drawn" (259). Using scientific discourse to authenticate his theories about human brutes, Norris legitimizes many of the theories that undergird nativist philosophy.

In his "A Reversion to Type," Norris underscores the degree to which the individual's adoption of vices unleashes within himself or herself dormant and inherited moments of moral degradation. Unfamiliar with his ancestors' proclivity toward vice, an upstanding floor walker, Paul Schuster, falls into a period of debauchery. The narrator warns that the most dangerous effect of such acts is that they release unknown familial demons because "Schuster, like the rest of us, was not merely himself. He was his ancestors as well. In him as in you and I, were generations--countless generations--of forefathers. . . . Getting drunk was an impulse belonging to himself; but who knows what inherited tendencies, until then dormant, the alcohol unleashed within him?" (81-82). Indeed, Schuster engages in highway robbery, an act for which his grandfather was imprisoned. The text suggests that immoral behavior not only releases previously unknown, inherited dispositions but also that criminality itself is the sign of an atavistic race, a conclusion that Norris draws from Lombroso's writings.

These two short stories help contextualize the moral and physical disintegration that *Vandover* later explores. The novel's contemporary reviews split their focus on what is important in the text. For some reviewers, their concerns centered on the text's impressive nature, given that it was written in Norris's youth and was believed to have been destroyed in the San Francisco

earthquake. Yet, these critics did not offer any serious discussion of the novel. On the other hand, other reviewers situated the novel and Norris within a Zolaesque context. The reviewer from *The Evening Mail* suggested that in reading the novel "it is a mistake to imagine that [sordid behavior] belong[s] solely to the underworld, but the horrible and the *outre* [exists also] in the cultured and moneyed classes" (25). In contrast, the reviewer from *The Nation* suggested that readers should not cringe at the novel's sensational material but consider that "Norris was inspired by the example of the French naturalists, particularly by Zola . . . and it is curious to note how San Francisco life falls into clear perspective, seen in the method reflected from the brilliant and clear-cut Latin atmosphere" (40). These reviews, despite their different foci, underscore the novel's tensions. Specifically, one must ask whether *Vandover and the Brute* offers simply a defense of Victorian sexual *mores* or whether the novel's ideology is far more muddied and suggests that what is "at stake" in the novel is not so much the threat of insatiable sexual appetites but, rather, the danger of porous class lines. Vandover's "descent" and eventual primitivism suggest that the real danger in the novel is the loss of social position. Indeed, the novel's subtitle *A Study of Life and Manners in an American City at the End of the Nineteenth Century* underscores the text's anxieties about social class. In *Vandover*, then, the primitive is the lower-classes and the contagions they are believed to embody. In his wanton crossing of class lines, Vandover's unmediated contact with the primitive proves to be dangerous; his "fall" is both a warning to other well-born individuals and a fitting end to his dangerous behaviors.

To read the novel as critique of the artist's sexual debauchery is not unusual; in fact, the novel abounds with numerous examples of Vandover's

"hidden beast." Initially, Vandover is introduced to the reader as a young man who is surrounded by ready-made wealth. His home contains the latest "etchings [and] china or bric-a-brac" (5). This description not only establishes Vandover's family wealth, but it also sets him up as one who will be prone to satisfying his desires. As a dilettante, his pleasures are derived from and satisfied by his appetites, which include his art and his "hunger." In his efforts to satisfy his desires, Vandover is introduced to the body as grotesque matter. This occurs in two key events: his mother's death and his coming to knowledge about reproduction. His mother's death shapes Vandover, and its grotesqueness profoundly affects him; as he recalls, "she drew a long sigh, her face became the face of an imbecile, stupid, without expression, her eyes half-closed, her mouth half-open. Her head rolled forward as though she were nodding in her sleep, while a long drip of saliva trailed from her lower lip" (4). His mother is here reduced to the level of an animal, and this affects Vandover insofar as "this scene of death was the only thing that Vandover could remember of his mother" (4). In a related incident involving the body's functions, Vandover peruses the *Encyclopedia Britannica*'s section on obstetrics, which "profusely illustrated with old-fashioned plates and steel engravings" (8) the female reproductive organs. This discovery "was the end of all his childish ideals, the destruction of all his first illusions" (8). Readers who imagine that Vandover's artistic and aesthetic loss begins early in his life might consider that the encyclopedia's engravings and his mother's death give Vandover the impetus to remake himself, to assume a pliable nature in order to avoid the grotesqueness which he connects to the body. Vandover's actions are undermined, however, because he, too, is grotesque in that he possesses a material body. As long as he indulges his tastes, he will be subject to his body's

passions. Further, while Vandover remakes himself constantly, "his personality was not strong, his nature pliable and he rearranged himself to suit his new environment" (13). While this is a valuable reading of Vandover's actions, it overlooks, I think, the novel's early focus on money and class differences as equally important influences on Vandover's moral character. Vandover's father is a businessman whose ownership of cheaply-built cottages yields him rent money from the city's industrial poor. On the first of each month, Vandover's father "would bring home the little canvas sack of coin with him before banking it, and call his son's attention to the amount, never failing to stick a twenty-dollar gold-piece in each eye, monocle fashion, exclaiming 'Good for the masses,' a meaningless jest that had been one of the family's household words for years" (5). This repetitive event mocks the impoverished and suggests to Vandover the role that money and power play in one's class position. Additionally, the event underscores another question: to whom does Vandover turn for moral guidance? While the loss of his mother and his reading of the obstetrics article give Vandover a skewed vision of women, I would suggest, however, that the novel's critique of Vandover's early behavior is marked by his proximity to the lower classes. The narrator notes that "any feminine influence would have been well for him at this time: that of an older sister, even that of a hired governess" (6). The only influence Vandover has is a housekeeper who "looked after him a little, mended his clothes, saw that he took his bath Saturday nights, and that he did not dig tunnels under the garden walks. But her influence was entirely negative" (6). As a result, "Vandover grew in a haphazard way and after school ran about the streets almost at will" (6). Vandover's moral education rests on his exposure to well-born women whose apparent chastity will guide him toward his own personal improvement. If his

care is entrusted to a housekeeper, who one might reasonably conjecture is from the lower classes, Vandover will no doubt adopt the manners of the low-born. In her *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*, Howard argues that "a governess, but not a housekeeper, can provide the proper influence--ultimately because she is and the housekeeper is not of the proper, asexual class" (66). It is not so much his mother's death but rather his insularity from women of his class, those who are Victorian "Angels in the House," that suggests that Vandover's "immorality" derives from his "class mixing."

Further, to consider the novel a critique of Vandover's gluttonous morality, one that results in his loss of artistic sensibility, assumes that Vandover is, in fact, an accomplished artist. Vandover's artistry is a hodgepodge of fine and performing arts, and his forays into these areas are ironically undermined and reveal his lack of seriousness. When one examines Vandover's artistry closer, one notes that he is merely a copyist, one whose own work lacks any original material and whose selection of idealistic and sentimental art books, such as *The Home Book of Art*, render his aesthetic judgments suspect. For instance, Christine Harvey King argues that in undermining Vandover's artistry, Norris privileges naturalism. Specifically, King claims that "the subtexts of Norris's novels consistently present an argument for choosing literary naturalism over other forms of contemporary art. . . . The aesthetic point of Norris's novels is that their artists are not the moral workers Zola calls for, but dilettante amateurs, and Norris subjects their failures to debilitating ironic treatment" (14). Vandover's subjects for his "great" paintings, the Maine seacoast and the British cavalry officer entitled "The Last Enemy," suggest that he is ignorant of his era's demand for naturalist subject matter. In several moments, Vandover turns his back on San Francisco as his artistic subject

because he objects to its crass, urban landscape. In other words, Vandover's penchant for homespun sentimental paint subjects underscores his lack of artistic seriousness and questions his aesthetic judgment. This problem manifests itself, once again, with his inability to select "good literature." That is, Vandover's consumption of highly melodramatic and escapist novels suggests a flawed literary judgment. If Vandover "loses" his artistry, one might question if he had any worth having at the novel's beginning.

Vandover's adaptability to new experiences and his desire to possess the "right" sensibility encourage readers to consider his decline as a defense of Victorian sexual *mores*. His decline, however, is a reflection of the era's anxiety over class mixing rather than a defense of a particular sexual doctrine. Rather than possess a firm conviction, one that is molded by his class for the advancement of his class's status,"Vandover allowed his ideas and tastes to be moulded by this new order of things. . . [;] he [was] very curious to see for himself the other lower side of their life that began after midnight in the private rooms and fast cafes and that was continued in the heavy musk-laden air of certain parlours amid the rustle of heavy silks" (21). In this underworld where the "primitives" reside, "there was no recoil of conscience, no shame, no remorse" (22); rather, Vandover "drifted into the life of a certain class of the young men of the city" (22). The focal point for this underworld is the Imperial, and in its first description, Norris uses decoration to show the first moment when Vandover's class sensibilities become muddled. Entering the Imperial, there was "a large copy of a French picture representing a *Sabbath*, witches, goats, and naked girls whirling through the air. . . . Elsewhere were nickel-in-the-slot machines, cigar lighters, a vase of wax flowers under glass, and a racing chart setting forth the day's odds, weights, and entries. On the end wall over the pantry-slides

was a second 'barroom' picture, representing ladies of a harem at their bath" (32). In addition to the public rooms, the Imperial also has a number of private rooms where unspecified debauchery occurs, and "it was this part of the Imperial that was most frequented, and that had made its reputation" (33). In the primitives' den, well-born men who visit the club discover that "their manners changed: they lounged clumsily upon their seats, their legs stretched out, their waistcoats unbuttoned, caring only to be at their ease. Their talk and manners became blunt, rude, unconstrained, the coarser masculine fibre reasserting itself" (35). Norris uses the Imperial, then, as a class marker that simultaneously announces its "low" status and, like Circe, entices men, and in particular Vandover, to surrender their well-born sensibilities and succumb to its pleasures.

Within the Imperial, Vandover meets a number of primitives, beginning with Toby, the "red-eyed waiter" (70) whose brutish presence signals the Imperial's level of depravity. For June Howard, red eyes are markers of human brutes in naturalist fiction. Additionally, there is Ellis, once a member of Vandover's social class circle and now a regular customer at the Imperial; his appearance is such that "the skin around his eyes was purple, and swollen, the pupils themselves were contracted" (41). His physical collapse foreshadows Vandover's as he, too, will be destroyed because of his class mixing. Citing these examples, one might argue that the novel's emphasis is on sexual debauchery rather than porous class lines. In fact, one might cite a conversation that occurs in Chapter 7 wherein Vandover and his two affluent friends, Dolly Haight and Charlie Geary, discuss sexual ethics. An adherent of strict moral virtue, Haight argues that men must protect women from the voracious male sexual appetite. Moreover, he criticizes Vandover and Geary

for their sexual activities with lower-class women. If the novel were solely about "right living," Dolly would emerge triumphantly as the hero. However, this does not occur; in fact, Dolly's character is undermined from the moment the reader first meets him. At the outset, Dolly's masculinity is in question, and he is depicted as an effeminate virgin who believes in the virtue of well-born women. Indeed, Norris effectively "kills" Dolly when his cut lip becomes the precise spot where Flossie, a prostitute, kisses him and infects him with syphilis. A novel that defends Victorian sexuality would depict Haight with less derision and absurdity. At the same time, one must consider why Geary, who also frequents so-called "fast women," does not suffer from Vandover's fate. In fact, he emerges as a successful lawyer and venture capitalist who is quick to note that while he "knows" fast women, he makes sure that they know neither his name nor his address, cautionary moves that Vandover never follows. Rather than condemn all sexual activity as immoral, the text shows that there is a more precise method of using low-born women so that one does not succumb to the depravity of that class.

This focus on class lines manifests itself more prominently in an examination of the text's women. At the Imperial, one meets Flossie, one of those women "who are not to know one's last name or address; . . .There was upon her face the unmistakable traces of a ruined virtue and a vanished innocence" (38). At the same time, however, the narrator also notes that Flossie neither drinks nor gambles. Her mimicry of "lady like" behavior only distances her further from the high-born women she emulates. While Flossie's appearance clearly signals her "profession," Ida Wade, by contrast appears to be more wholesome even though she, too, is subject to vice: she "belonged to a certain type of young girl that was very common in the city . . . [;] she was

virtuous, but the very fact that it was necessary to say so was enough to cause the statement to be doubted" (50). When Vandover arrives at Ida's home, her lower-class status is announced through a description of the furnishings. While Norris scholar Don Graham notes that "there is no corollary between bad taste and Ida's ethical conduct" (34), he overlooks the fact that home furnishings are clear class markers, and Vandover's association with Ida underscores a decline in his social status. Entering the home, one observes that the "parlour and front room on the second floor were furnished with bay windows decorated with some meaningless sort of millwork . . . [;] two Corinthian pillars on either side of the vestibule supported a balcony; these pillars had iron capitals which were painted to imitate the wood of the house, which in its turn was painted to imitate stone" (51). The Wades' parlor is cluttered with an array of imitation knick-knacks that signal their low social status. For Norris, this hodgepodge of decorative items underscores Ida's primitiveness and shows the degree to which Vandover's upper-class sensibilities have begun to weaken. In his association with Ida, the brute within Vandover appears again because "it was as if the brute in him were forever seeking a lower level" (233). In contrast to these "fast women," Turner Ravis represents upper class womanhood. Her family's conservatively decorated home and insistence on family loyalty and unity suggest that she is the one with whom Vandover should associate. At the same time, however, she enjoys drinking and gambling with her other wealthy friends, activities that call into question her feminine virtue. Unlike Vandover, Ravis keeps her questionable activities within the confines of her class, and because of this she does not suffer Vandover's fate.

The novel's emphasis on the dangers of class mixing is foregrounded, once again, with Vandover's sea voyage to Mexico. On his return trip,

Vandover "took passage from San Francisco on a second-class boat" (91). This is significant because the ship unambiguously marks the social class of its passengers. On board, "the air was foul with the stench of bilge, the reek of the untrimmed lamps, the exhalation of so many breaths, and the close, stale smell of warm bedding" (92). Unused to these accommodations, Vandover "had not been able to get a stateroom, and so had put up with a bunk in the common cabin at the stern of the vessel" (92). In his selection of a second-class boat, Vandover further imperils himself among those of the lower or primitive class. If he once believed that this ship's passengers were free of the animal impulses that have dominated him, he now finds that aboard the ship, among the low-born, the animal impulse is enormous. Indeed, the ship's eventual wreck and the chaos that ensues underscores this point. As the passengers flee to the undersized lifeboats, a Jewish passenger attempts to make his way onto a lifeboat. His desire to live meets with the passengers' fury, and they shout "push him off! We're swamping! Push him off! Let him drown!'. . . . It was the animal in them all that had come to the surface in an instant, the primal instinct of the brute striving for its life and for the life of its young" (103). The passengers unquestioningly accept the Jewish man's undesirability. This moment shocks Vandover because it varies so starkly from the heroic pictures he had seen of sea rescues. Instead, "there was nothing picturesque about it, nothing heroic. It was unlike any pictures he had seen of lifeboat rescues, unlike anything he had ever imagined. It was all sordid, miserable, and the sight of the half-clad women, dirty, sodden, unkempt, stirred him rather to disgust than to pity" (105). Notably, Vandover fails to include himself in this description of the "sordid."

Surviving the shipwreck, Vandover attempts to return to the upper class. Three main actions, however, prevent his reentry: his father's death and his

eventual squandering of his inheritance; Ida Wade's pregnancy and suicide, which are attributed to her relationship with Vandover; and his continued forays among the primitives. As a result, Vandover immerses himself, completely, in the primitive's world: Vandover "rubbed elbows with street walkers, with bookmakers, with saloonkeepers, with the exploiters of lost women. The bartenders of the city called him by his first name, the policemen, the night detail, were familiar with his face, the drivers of the nighthawks recognized his figure by the street lamps, paling in the light of the early dawn" (153). Vandover comes to identify himself as a primitive or brute who has surrendered himself to the pleasures of the lower-class. Consequently, "[Vandover], pleasure-loving, adapting himself to every change of environment, luxurious, self-indulgent . . . had shut his ears to the voices that shouted warnings of the danger, and had allowed the brute to thrive and to grow" (159). Vandover's misery reaches a crisis moment when Ida Wade's father sues him for ruining his daughter. Once again, the lawsuit might appear to uphold the novel's defense of Victorian sexual *mores*. However, Wade files the lawsuit not to protect his late daughter's virtue but to earn enough money in order to "buy out" his business partner's interest in their carpet cleaning company. Indeed, Wade muses that "it was his dream to own the carpet cleaning establishment in which he now had but a three-fourths interest. Summer was coming, the time of year when people were going into the country, leaving their carpets to be cleaned in their absence. If he could obtain complete ownership of his business within the month he fancied that he saw an opportunity to make more money than he had done before any previous season" (189). For Wade, his daughter's virtue and wrongful death are commodities whose value will enable him to pursue wealth and attain upward mobility. Hence, his new social position and financial independence

replace virtue and mourning.

Another notable aspect in the lawsuit and its eventual settlement is the role that Vandover's friend Charlie Geary plays. Hired by Wade, Geary convinces Vandover that he can also act in his interest and that he does not need to hire an attorney. The lawsuit is settled out of court when Geary decides that if Vandover sells his property near the railroad, a piece of property that Geary wants to purchase, he can raise the money that Wade wants. In undervaluing the price of the property, Geary attains it at a lower rate so that he can then sell it to a shoe manufacturer who wants the property in order to build housing for his laborers. Geary recognizes the financial value and establishes himself as the landlord for these properties. Geary's "art of the deal" confirms his belief in survival of the fittest. Even though his law firm represents those who are crushed by monopolistic companies, Geary ascribes to a more predatory economic theory. Indeed, his willing sacrifice of Vandover merely points to the inevitability of the strong crushing the weak. Musing, Geary notes that "the infinite herd of humanity [is] driven on as if by some enormous, relentless engine . . . . All 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" (242). The text proves Geary's theories insofar as his success rests on his ability to run with the herd. Vandover's inability to maintain or assume a more commanding class position, rather than his penchant for sexual satisfaction, results in his devolution.

With his final descent into the lower classes comes the onset of Vandover's untreated syphilis, a condition which triggers Lyconthropy-Pathesis, or the belief that one has been transformed into a werewolf. As a result, "in his

distorted wits he fancied that he was in some manner changing . . . [;] that he was no longer human that he was sinking, all in a moment, to the level of some dreadful beast" (203-204). Residing in Lick House, which is located in the "sordid and grimy wilderness, topped with a gray maze of wires and pierced with thousands of chimney stacks" (199), and barking like a dog, Vandover becomes the complete primitive, a beast whose final plunge signals a warning to the well-born about the primitive class's contagions. Driven into madness, Vandover's slide continues as he leaves Lick House and comes to reside in Reno House whose "lodgers were for the most part transients. . . . [And] Vandover sank to the grade of these people at once with that fatal adaptability to environment which he had permitted" (233). Vandover's final career is as a janitor at the cottages he had once owned. These cottages are now inhabited by the city's factory workers. Vandover's situation is rendered more pathetic as he is ordered, bullied, and pitied by common factory laborers. In the novel's closing moment, Vandover and a young boy lock eyes, and "for an instant the two remained there motionless, looking into each other's eyes, Vandover on the floor, one hand twisted into the bale rope about his bundle, the little boy standing before him eating the last mouthful of his bread and butter" (260). Here, Vandover kneels in submission to the low-born boy and works, silently, in his service. Once an owner of these cottages, Vandover now wallows in their filth, an apt end, according to nativist philosophy, for Vandover's class mixing. The novel thus chronicles and rationalizes Vandover's devolution, legitimizes the innate degraded state of the primitive or lower class, and forecasts as inevitable the destruction of the upper-class by its unmediated contact with the primitive.

If nativism informs *Vandover and the Brute* and focuses attention on how

an upper-class man becomes a primitive, its character changes radically in London's *The Call of the Wild* in which novel Buck's reversion to primitivism serves as a critique of modern urban capitalism. Before I discuss London's novel, however, I will consider his earlier short story "Batard" (1902) as an important precursor. Notably, the short story focuses on Batard's natural wildness as a mixed breed dog and the actions of Black Leclere, his equally evil and bestial owner. The narrator attributes Batard's evil nature to his mixed pedigree and reveals that "[Batard's] father was a great grey timber wolf, but the mother was a snarling, bickering, obscene, husky, full-fronted and heavy chested, with a malign eye, a cat-like grip on life, and a genius for trickery and evil" (387-388). In addition to his biological predisposition, Batard's environment also contributes to his depravity, and under LeClere's influence, "[Batard] became a big bristling beast, acute in knavery, overspilling with hate, sinister, malignant, diabolical" (388). Batard's owner, whose ancestry is also mixed, lacks the proper breeding to draw out of the dog more refined attributes; as the narrator notes, "with a proper master Batard might have made an ordinary, fairly efficient sled dog. He never got the chance: LeClere but confirmed him in his congenital iniquity" (388). Unlike *Wild*'s Buck who is redeemed for a short period by the good influence of the pure, Anglo-Saxon John Thornton, Batard lacks, by contrast, a higher-born master who will help subdue his bestial nature. Emphasizing LeClere's primitiveness, the narrator recalls a battle between man and dog wherein LeClere foregoes weapons and fights Batard "on all fours." Recalling this scene, the narrator notes that "it was a primordial setting and a primordial scene, such as might have been in the savage youth of the world . . . [;] a ring of grinning wolf dogs, and in the centre two beasts, locked in combat, snapping and snarling, raging madly about,

panting, sobbing, cursing, straining, wild with passion, in a fury of murder, ripping and tearing and clawing in elemental brutishness" (392). "Batard" foregrounds, then, the link between primitivism and nativism. While this short story is supposed to stand in marked contrast to that work extolling Buck's noble nature in what many consider to be London's quintessential dog allegory, I would suggest that atavism also takes center stage in *The Call of the Wild* insofar as it represents an alternative to the abuses London envisions as inherent in capitalism.

The contemporary reviews of *Call of the Wild* hailed it as a grippingly realistic text, its focus on the survival of the fittest representing the human struggle. Some of these reviews praised London for his realism despite his use of a dog as the text's hero. For example, an anonymous reviewer from *The Argonaut* crowned London as the "American Kipling" who depicted a dog's removal from a lazy California life for the freedom and masterless challenges of the Klondike. Similarly, a reviewer from the *Spectator* praised London's use of a canine hero for a text about "the survival of the fittest under conditions which give free play to primordial instincts, it is seldom pleasant, and often positively gruesome, reading" (64). Other reviewers focused less on the dog hero and more on the novel's Darwinian impulses. J. Stewart Doubleday from *Reader* argued that *Call of the Wild* not only represented the Darwinian "survival of the fittest" but that "Buck's call" also depicted "the triumph of barbarian life over civilized life" (64-65). Similarly, Kate Blackiston Stille noted in *Book News Monthly* that Buck's reversion to primitive life was an act that occurred with humans as well, and she commented that "*The Call of the Wild* penetrates to the very marrow and flows in the blood of the veins . . . [;] this is true of men who leave their wives and firesides to sleep on the bare ground" (67). In an effort to

render true Buck's experiences to a human audience, Johnannes Reimers argued in the *Stockton Evening Mail* that the novel was about humans and how "man is a beast of prey" (69). The contemporary reviews thus focused on the issues that made London's novel popular.

At the same time, however, one might also focus not so much on the uniformity of London's message but on its gaps and tensions. In his study, modern critic Earl Wilcox notes that London offers an inconsistent naturalist analysis. Specifically, Wilcox argues that "the naturalism that characterizes the novel is not consistently developed. . . . The book gives no help to either the sociologist or the biologist who turns here expecting to find Taine's, Darwin's, or Spencer's theories put into practice in fiction. Indeed, the ideas of Spencer and Darwin are certainly confused in the philosophy which does come through" (101). Wilcox offers an important starting point for my analysis because his reading and mine focus on the problems inherent in London's novel. Our analyses differ in that Wilcox concludes that the book's confused presentation of naturalist philosophy reflects London's ignorance of Taine's, Darwin's, and Spencer's theories, whereas I believe these gaps point to larger conflicts at play in *Call of the Wild*. For the purpose of my discussion, I consider *The Call of the Wild* to be a socialist critique of capitalism, particularly as it focuses on the profit gained from Buck's labor. Joan London notes in her biography of Jack London that *The Call of the Wild* "despite its Klondike setting stems from [London's] experiences in the East End [which is the setting in] his preceding book *The People of the Abyss*" (252). Modern critic Joan Hendrick also connects *The Call of the Wild* to *The People of the Abyss* in terms of the latter's socialist critique of labor conditions in London. Specifically, Hendrick notes that "written after his vision of the urban jungle and its city savages, [*The Call of the Wild*] conveys

London's revulsion from modern life as it expressed itself in this escape to the howling and naked savagery of the wilderness jungle" (94). She also notes that London's bouts with poverty and vagrancy manifest themselves in Buck's kidnapping and removal to the Klondike. While Hendrick eventually celebrates the utopic possibilities of Buck's socialist folk tale world more than I do, her analysis offers an important reconsideration of London's socialism in *The Call of the Wild*. As I see it, Buck's reversion to the primitive provides the groundwork for a socialist folk tale that returns him to a pre-capitalist culture and reunites him with his native tribal community.

London's socialism is complicated by the fact that the wolf community is rank-ordered, and while they may be free from human-imposed labor, it is a community that is organized by status. Another complicating element is that Buck's primitiveness is linked to racial memory. That is, London pairs his socialist yarn with his racial philosophy that glorifies an Anglo-Saxon legacy. If Buck returns to a pre-capitalist society, he also returns to one that legitimizes the Anglo-Saxon memory as that of a culture that has been systematically displaced in the new urban jungle. As a result, London's socialism is complicated by his racism insofar as men and dogs are identified and classified according to their pedigrees. In addition, the text's hero hails from a mixed canine ancestry, a revelation that renders more complex London's race philosophy. In sum, I will argue that primitivism in *The Call of the Wild* is linked to at least three foci: Buck's degradation as a worker whose labor brings profit to others; Buck's "call" which signals his return to a pre-capitalist society but one that is not entirely free from valuations of rank and order; his racial memories of the "younger world" to which he returns and which reifies Anglo-Saxon fears about their lost ground in the new urban populace, a fear that

manifests itself in his annihilation of members from the Yeehat Native American tribe. As a result, these three issues call into question earlier, more romantic interpretations of Buck's "survival."

London begins *The Call of the Wild* with an epigraph from John O'Hara's poem "Atavism": "Old longings nomadic leap,/Chafing at custom's chain;/Again from its brumal sleep/Wakens the ferine strain" (5). As the lines suggest, the story that unfolds focuses on the "natural" reawakening of dormant passions. Immediately complicating this epigraph, however, is the discovery of gold that is revealed in the novel's opening sentences, a discovery that triggers Buck's kidnapping and forced labor. From the novel's beginning, one observes the tension between the "survival of the fittest" and anti-capitalist rhetorics. Significantly, the culture's valuation of gold, not Buck's innate wildness *per se*, plunges him into the primitive as a laborer in the gold rush. Sold initially to a dog breaker referred to as "the man in the red sweater" (12), Buck not only learns how to defer to men but he also observes the money transactions between unknown men and the man in the red sweater: "Now and again men came, strangers, who talked excitedly, wheedlingly, and in all kinds of fashions to the man in the red sweater. And at such times that money passed between them the strangers took one or more of the dogs away with them. Buck wondered where they went, for they never came back; but the fear of the future was strong upon him, and he was glad each time when he was not selected" (12). Eventually, Buck is sold to two representatives from the Canadian government, Francois and Perrault, who need the dogs to deliver dispatches reporting on the status of the gold rush. Buck's first owners thus subject him to forced labor, a pattern that will repeat throughout much of the novel.

The novel's labor crisis and the culture it breeds present themselves In

three key moments: Curly's death, Buck's thievery, and Buck's challenge to Spitz. Buck's never-ending labor is underscored by Perrault's desire to shatter records in their travels to Dawson in order to exchange information about gold finds that will benefit the Canadian government. One learns that Perrault, "as [a] courier for the Canadian government, bearing important despatches, was anxious to secure the best dogs" (19). This new environment fosters action, alert behavior, and ruthlessness. As a result, Curly, the only female dog, and her humane disposition are out-of-place in the Klondike, and the other dogs target her for their barbarism. Curly's death scene, wherein "[the huskies] closed in upon her, snarling and yelping, and she was buried screaming with agony, beneath the bristling mass of bodies" (15), is emblematic of the labor relations of this environment. Unable to foster community, the dogs turn against each other in a "rooting out" of rival competitors. Witnessing Curly's death, Buck learns that fairness and equity are not transcendent values in the gold rush's brutal economic environment, and "once down, that was the end of you. Well, he would see to it that he never went down" (16).

Buck's new education and his environment's lack of equity reveal themselves further with his pilfering of food. The narrator notes that Buck steals the food not because he is hungry but because "it was easier to do [this] than not to do [it]" (22). The narrator also suggests that Buck's thievery "marked further the decay or going to pieces of his moral nature, a vain thing and a handicap in the ruthless struggle for existence" (21). In separate analyses, A. Paul Reed and Michael Kuman cite this line as an example of the novel's Darwinian "survival of the fittest" argument. However, Buck's "ruthless struggle for existence" might also suggest his economic situation rather than his perceived atavism. Indeed, London maps his critique of capitalist labor

practices onto an atavistic moment in order to reveal the depraved acts that this economic system encourages in those at the bottom. While focusing on the professionalization of writing in the novel rather than a socialist critique, Jonathan Auerbach notes that "the central paradox informing the narrative is that Buck must learn to be wild. Wildness in the book . . . entails disciplined education" (91-92). To focus on Buck's regression as a moral critique rather than as an economic one overlooks his position as a pawn in a much larger economic system. Buck's thievery and Curly's death suggest that those who do not control their own labor must commit acts of aggression against those who control the workers's labor and subsistence; failing to do this, one falls victim to the savagery that marks this depraved environment.

Buck's ruthless environment, coupled with its emphasis on competition, manifests itself further in his challenge for Spitz's lead dog position. Just as Perrault attempts to outperform other government couriers, so, too, does Buck challenge Spitz's dominance. Indeed, Buck's challenge is rendered in human terms as the narrator notes that "all that stirring of old instincts . . . [which] drives men out from the sounding cities to forest and plain to kill things by chemically propelled leaden pellets, the blood lust, the joy to kill--all this was Buck's" (33). While Spitz is the more experienced fighting dog, his superior track record proves futile against Buck's spirit. As they fight, "the silent and wolfish circle waited to finish off whichever dog went down" (35). The fighting dogs and the expectant hungry pack render the brutality "natural," and while this supports a Darwinian enactment of the survival of the fittest, dominance in this novel is also characterized in real labor and economic terms. At the fight's conclusion, when "Buck stood and looked on, the successful champion, the dominant primordial beast who had made his kill and found it good" (36), his victory underscores the

breakdown of community and the ruthless and rugged individualism that are needed in Buck's brutal capitalist environment.

These incidents, along with his sale to another gold rush owner, mark Buck's degraded labor environment. In the chapter entitled "The Toil of Trace and Trail," Buck is sold once again, this time to three neophytes whose ignorance about the Klondike and reckless pursuit of a goldmine windfall mark his and the other dogs' further victimization. One learns immediately about Hal's, Charles's, and Mercedes's inexperience, and their reckless pursuit of gold reveals their indifference to the dogs' sacrifices. For instance, Mercedes's willful helplessness underscores her profound indifference to real workers' plights. The narrator notes that "it was her custom to be helpless. . . . She no longer considered the dogs, and because she was sore and tired, she persisted in riding on the sled. She was pretty and soft, but she weighed one hundred and twenty pounds--a lusty last straw to the load dragged by the weak and starving animals" (53). Ignoring the advice from experienced Klondike men, Hal believes that the dogs' unwillingness to pull the sled shows that "you've got to whip them to get anything out of them. That's their way" (48). This observation is immediately refuted by John Thornton, who notes that the dogs' unrelenting labor, heavy load, and systematic starving are the reasons behind their refusal to work. Frustrated by their own incompetence, Hal, Charles, and Mercedes punish the dogs for their own failures and deprive them of food. London ironically notes that "it was a simple matter to give the dogs less food; but it was impossible to make the dogs travel faster, while their own inability to get under way earlier in the morning prevented them from travelling longer hours. Not only did they not know how to work the dogs, but they did not know how to work themselves" (51). This depiction of the three neophytes, and their eventual fall

through the ice, suggests that the bourgeoisie are unable to manage labor, are ignorant to the workers' problems, and contribute willfully to the workers' degradation, all of which eventually lead to their own and the workers' destruction.

In marked contrast to Mercedes, Hal, and Charles, John Thornton is regarded as the ideal owner whose kind treatment of Buck bespeaks an enlightened attitude towards labor. Many moments support this romantic depiction of Thornton, such as his rescue of Buck from the abusive neophytes, his uncanny rapport with and momentary "taming" of Buck, and his insistence on rest for his dogs. However, this romantic picture is undermined by his wager for money on Buck's labor and his tricks against Buck to prove to others his dog's unthinking devotion to him. These incidents underscore that even with Thornton Buck still does not own his own labor. While Thornton may act more kindly in his overall treatment of Buck, he owns his labor and uses him to uncover an ancient and rumored goldmine.

The novel's continual emphasis on the dogs' labor suggests that its focus on primitivism is a starting point for its socialist critique of capitalism, and Buck's removal to the wild lays the groundwork for a socialist folk tale. That is, in escaping from man-centered society, Buck not only takes back his labor but also returns to a "younger world," the same world that has been the subject of his numerous dreams. In his dreams, Buck's younger world, one that is much like the one that is depicted in the later London novel *Before Adam*, has many atavistic features that remind Buck of his ancient heritage of wild dogs and that tell him this environment, rather than the one populated by modern men, is his natural home: "each day mankind and the claims of mankind slipped farther from him. Deep in the forest a call was sounding, and as often as he heard this

call, mysteriously thrilling and luring, he felt compelled to turn his back upon the fire and the beaten earth around it, and to plunge into the forest!" (62). This yearning for the "younger world" is underscored by his "reunion" with his natural wild brother in the woods, and his ecstasy with this new life occurs, rather interestingly, at the moment when Thornton is murdered by the Yeehats. At key moments when Buck becomes an instrument for profit, he is plagued by a series of dreams that bring him back to the "younger world" or pre-capitalist tribal community. On the one hand, these dreams might suggest Buck's natural inclination toward atavistic qualities. On the other hand, it might also suggest that Buck rejects his present condition wherein he does not own his labor. Hence, Buck's adaptation to the Northland marks not his acquiescence to a Darwinian "survival of the fittest" scenario but his rejection of forced labor. His return to the wild chronicles, then, an alternative space to capitalism.

One problematizing moment in this socialist folk tale, however, is that this alternative world is not utopic; while this life is one wherein Buck no longer works in service to man, it is a world still marked by rank, order, and fear. Indeed, this ranking system manifests itself in this world's obsession with racial memory and the displacement of the Yeehat Native American tribe, acts that fit too comfortably into London's own problematic race theories. Some critics such as A. Paul Reed, Michael Kumin, and Charles Child Walcutt romanticize Buck's murder of the Yeehats because they consider it Buck's vengeful retribution against those who murdered Thornton. I would suggest, however, that the murder of these (pre)men represents a dangerous quality in this younger world, one that is already marked by the prejudices and hierarchies that dominate the civilized world. His murder of the Yeehats reveals that Buck adheres to a false consciousness and that these men are further displaced in Buck's return to a

pre-capitalist community. That is, the Yeehats' erasure suggests that they, unlike the dog, do not have a mythic homeland that marks their rightful ancestral heritage. Moreover, this younger world's culture of fear suggests that Buck's existence will be one in which he must battle enemies constantly to maintain his dominance, a situation that appears unchanged from that in the "civilized" world he left.

In *The Call of the Wild* , the problematic combination of three foci about primitivism mark the novel's key conflicts. While many critics note its indebtedness to a Darwinian survival of the fittest scenario, the novel also points to a socialist critique of labor combined with a racialist dream for this "new and improved" society. Nowhere in the text does Buck emerge as one who possesses a "revolutionary" consciousness because even in the younger world he acts according to the dictates of the civilized world. Moreover, the socialist utopia that should mark this younger world is not present as this world still maintains a rank-ordered society as governed by the wolf community. When Buck "sings a song of the younger world, which is the song of the pack" (86), he perpetuates a divided dream, a dream that on the one hand repudiates the enforced and degraded labor of the novel's hero, and on the other hand, continues to point to a kind of rightful place for the chosen people in which their preeminence can be reinstated.

In London's next novel, the depiction of primitivism dramatically changes. In *The Sea-Wolf*, there is a clear demarcation between savages, who are the low-born crew members; the primitive,Wolf Larsen, whose Nordic heritage marks him as both a good and a dangerous figure; and the upper-class aesthete, Humphrey Van Wyden, renamed by Larsen as "Hump." Here, primitivism is identified with the extraordinary individualism that underlies the

Nietzschean "superman." In the text, the superman (Larsen) is a dangerous atavist whose attractiveness as a strong character threatens the social order. Hump's numerous descriptions of Larsen remind one of Milton's depiction of Satan in *Paradise Lost* in which the source of danger is rendered in exotic and romantic language. This glorification underscores the tension in the text because Larsen is "a magnificent atavism, a man so purely primitive that he was of the type that came into the world before the development of the moral nature. He was not immoral, but merely unmoral" (557). For Hump, Larsen is the descendent of the great Nordic warriors, and within him he possesses the pride of their race (555). Indeed, Hump imagines that Larsen is the prototype from whom humankind derives its origin, and he concludes that Wolf Larsen "is the perfect type of the primitive man, born a thousand years or generations too late and an anachronism in this culminating century of civilization" (540). While he thus notes Larsen's prowess, Hump indicates as well his inevitable decline and displacement within a more civilized, twentieth-century culture. Moreover, the name of Larsen's ship, *The Ghost*, underscores his liminal place in the civilized era. In short, Larsen and his vessel are a variation of the Flying Dutchman crew who cannot dock in modern culture's harbors but who haunt the consciousness of the overcivilized individual. At the same time that Larsen is a magnificent "throw back" to the Viking era, he is also a "mad wolf" whose eyes possess no "clearness or sanity in them--nothing but the terrific rage of a madman. It was the wolf in him that I saw, and a mad wolf at that" (547). One might consider Mary Kay Dobson's application of Samuel Shivers's definition of the demoniac to Wolf Larsen. Dobson outlines six characteristics that Larsen shares with the demoniac: "he or it is a personification of instincts or passions; the energy or drive are enormous, making the character almost unconquerable in one respect

or another; the animal, beastly qualities are emphasized, especially those equipping one to survival in the heartless world of natural competition; there is no conscience or moral reflection; there is an *idee fixe* in most cases; and the demoniac has a fine body, keen mind, and a strong and unrelenting will" (134-135). He is, in other words, both less and more than human.

In contrast to Larsen's magnificent primitivism, a common barbarism marks the crew members. One of Hump's early acts is to rank the men according to their level of savagery, and he notes that "the hunters were arguing and roaring like some semi-human amphibious breed. The air was filled with oaths and indecent expressions. . . . Through the dim smoke-haze the bunks looked like the sleeping dens of animals in a menagerie" (513). Initially, Hump recoils from this environment and all that marks it: soiled clothes, spoiled food, and brutish men. Assimilation into this abysmal lower class is Hump's first fear, one that is underscored when he borrows the cook's cheap and rank clothes. As in the case of Vandover's Mexican sea voyage, Hump's greatest danger aboard ship is this melding of different classes or, to borrow June Howard's term, proletarianization, wherein Hump's autonomy and control are threatened by his impressment into Larsen's service. In her discussion of *The Sea-Wolf*, Howard argues that "the shipwreck metonymically suggests the intrusion of uncontrollable, contingent forces into the life of a middle-class narrator. Van Weyden's facile cliches about men are put to flight as he actually experiences his own vulnerability and that of his class as a whole" (112).

The Sea-Wolf's contemporary critics praised London for his novel's depiction of high-seas adventures. At the same time, however, some critically commented about Hump's reliability. In a *New York Times Saturday Review of Books and Art* published in 1904, the reviewer noted that while Hump was the

novel's hero, his many silences in his philosophical exchanges with Larsen raised questions about Hump's privileged status. In the novel, the reader was never privy to Hump's literary and aesthetic opinions. This reviewer raised, then, a key question about Hump's literary judgments, one that I will extend as I consider the degree to which Hump's literary tastes are satirized and his ability to read characters and situations is rendered suspect. In another contemporary critique, one published in *The Independent* in 1905, the reviewer argued that London satirized the Nietzschean superman and suggested that Larsen was both the superman and the blond beast whose physical and psychological collapse at the novel's conclusion mirrored Nietzsche's own breakdown. This biographical approach to the novel is taken further by modern critic Michael Qualtiere who argues that the novel not only satirizes Nietzschean philosophy, but also its depiction of Larsen's mysterious illness mirrors Nietzsche's own well-documented psychological collapse. While I do not share the reviewer's particular biographical approach to the novel, I believe his review is insightful and opens the novel to questions that I will examine in this section. For example, are Nietzsche's superman and blond beast synonymous? Does Larsen's death suggest that his primitivism also fails? Must Larsen die in order for Hump to emerge as a hero? Conversely, does Hump's survival suggest that humanism triumphs? What are the limits of Hump's reliability? In the following discussion, I will suggest that Hump's narration of events is rather dubious, and his ability to read characters is questionable. Further, Larsen's representation as a superman opens up an inconsistent critique in London's work, and Larsen's death is not, necessarily, a repudiation of his primitivism.

The question of Hump's reliability originates at the novel's beginning when one learns that he is "gentlemanly scholar" who has recently published

an essay on Poe's contributions to American literature. Throughout the novel, Hump is referred to as a Poe scholar. I suggest that Hump's position as a scholar is satirized because in the era that London writes his novel Poe's work was not considered a serious or even worthy contribution to American literature. Following his death in 1849, "Poe studies" as a subfield in American scholarship was nonexistent: Rufus Griswold's dismissive biography characterized Poe as a literary fraud; and, the Boston literati, a powerful group that controlled the production and evaluation of American literature, sentenced Poe to secondary status because of the renegade author's criticisms of the literary establishment. Not until 1923 when D.H. Lawrence published *Studies in Classic American Literature* , did he and others begin a serious reconsideration of Poe's work, particularly as it is paired with Freudian psychology. Poe's most successful comeback occurred with the rise of New Criticism and Allen Tate's study*The Forlorn Demon* (1953), which presents Poe as an important transitional author in American literature whose attention to the personality's disintegration is rendered in a language that celebrates a tradition of unity and order.

Hump's questionable critical abilities manifest themselves, rather prominently, in his (mis)readings of characters and situations, and, more specifically, in his interactions with Maud Brewster. Her entrance on board the ship suggests to Hump that she is in need of rescue, and he determines that he will deliver her from the *Ghost*. Idealizing Brewster, Hump observes that "it never seemed to me that she walked, or, at least, walked after the ordinary manner of mortals. Hers was an extreme lithesomeness, and she moved with a certain indefinable airiness, approaching one as down might float or as a bird on noiseless wings" (648). Maud's self-presentation differs, rather dramatically,

from Larsen's; according to Hump, "I likened them to the extreme ends of the human ladder of evolution--the one the culmination of all savagery, the other the finished product of the finest civilization. True, Wolf Larsen possesses intellect to an unusual degree, but it was directed solely to the exercise of his savage instincts and made him but the more formidable savage" (648). Upon closer examination, however, Brewster is revealed as neither helpless nor desirous of Hump's aid. She is the only character who openly and substantively challenges Larsen's philosophical statements. Further, once she and Hump flee to Endeavor Island, Maud devises plans for their survival. In response to her labor, Hump romanticizes Maud's actions and suggests that she has assumed the qualities of a peasant woman. In short, Maud is attractive to him only insofar as she acts as a muse for his reawakened manhood. However, Maud subtly questions Hump's romantic pronouncements and suggests that their rescue shall not only deliver them from the island but also "rescue them from themselves" (771). While Hump believes that she will be his most appropriate "mate woman" (771), he neglects to take into account that they have had to compromise their humanist philosophy in order to survive, an insight that does not escape Maud.

Hump's most notable misreading of a character occurs with his observations of Wolf Larsen. Though he labels him a monster, he is taken, nevertheless, with Larsen's majesty. Indeed, he considers Larsen to be a descendent of the great Nordic conquerors whose solemnity and melancholy underscore his deep racial memory. In a conversation with Hump, Larsen refutes Hump's hypothesis by noting that he is a Dane whose parents were impoverished and illiterate. As a result, Larsen went to sea at age ten "where kicks and blows were bed and breakfast and took the place of speech, and fear

and hatred and pain were my only soul-experiences" (559). Surprised to learn that Larsen is self-educated, Hump suggests that he should be proud that he lifted himself out of ignorance and has risen to his current status. Larsen scoffs at Hump's idealism and argues that "[his] mistake was in ever opening the books" (560). This regret deviates from his materialist philosophy in that he has spent more time analyzing his life rather than living it (560). Indeed, Larsen's reflective moment serves as an entry point for London to begin his critique of the Nietzschean superman, which depicts how a highly developed mind ignores the consequences of its actions.

A major question that dominates the novel is the role that Nietzschean philosophy plays in the depiction of Larsen. In her biography of her father's career, Joan London cites a letter written to Mary Austin in which London explains the popular misconception of his novel and what he intended to be the text's central if not most obvious point: "I have again and again written books that failed to get across. Long years ago, at the very beginning of my writing career, I attacked Nietzsche and his super-man idea. This was in *The Sea-Wolf*. Lots of people read *The Sea-Wolf*, no one discovered that it was an attack upon the super-man philosophy" (357). As readers of London, how might we understand his comment? On the one hand, we can reject London's comments because we do not want to reduce the text or our analysis to authorial intention. On the other, we might argue that London failed in his intention.

A savvy reader of Nietzsche observes that the philosopher distinguishes between the blond beast and the superman whereas London's novel conflates the two theories. According to Robert Woodward, a closer reading of Nietzsche's superman and blond beast theories reveals the ways in which Wolf Larsen is a blond beast rather than a superman. While Larsen certainly

possesses the intellect required for the superman, he lacks an element that would harmonize his brute strength with his unsurpassed intelligence. Throughout the novel, Larsen represents a "reasoning brute," a life force that while embodying the benefits of self-education remains, nevertheless, at a level that fails to rise above the depths of naturalism's crass materialism. According to Nietzsche, the blond beasts' "unconcern and scorn for safety, body, life, comfort, their shocking cheerfulness, and depth of delight in all destruction, in all the debauches of victory and cruelty. . . . Represent the decline of mankind" (25-26). While the blond beasts represent the lowly in the culture, they elicit great enthusiasm, intrigue, and attraction. That is, although the overcivilized man has established himself as culture's highest product, he longs, nevertheless, for the unrepressed life force that the blond beasts embody. In *The Sea-Wolf* , for example, Hump is attracted to Larsen's physical prowess, while at the same time he recoils from his materialist philosophy. Throughout the novel, Hump observes about Larsen that "in the masculine sense his was a beautiful face. Smooth-shaven, every line was distinct, and it was cut as clear and sharp as a cameo; while sea and sun had tanned the naturally fair skin to a dark bronze which bespoke struggle and battle and added both to his savagery and his beauty" (557).

However, as readers of Nietzsche, how do we distinguish between the barbaric acts committed by the blond beast versus those initiated by the superman? While Woodward's point is an intriguing one, one might also suggest that London's conflation of the blond beast with the superman is his entry point into a critique of Nietzschean philosophy itself and that London's socialism rejects the hyperindividualism upon which the superman theory rests. For a socialist like London, Larsen's "failure" is emblematic of capitalism's

elevation of the individual. Once the socialist revolution occurs, however, individualism will wither away, exposed as an intrinsically worthless anachronism. In *The Sea-Wolf*, then, London yokes his critique of the superman theory onto primitivism as represented by Wolf Larsen. Larsen, in this sense, is a pre-man whose attractiveness rests in his rejection of overcivilized man and society. We are to reject his attractiveness because his primitivism (or superman qualities) is a dangerous atavism that threatens the possibilities for a socialist social order. A closer reading of Nietzsche's theories of *ressentiment* and the noble man (superman) outlines the ways in which *The Sea-Wolf* addresses Nietzschean philosophy, while at the same time it also reveals the limits of its own critique. Indeed, at many moments in the novel, the critique contradicts itself and collapses.

In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche discusses his concept of *ressentiment* and how it figures in the slave's morality. He envisions *ressentiment* as the very essence of the slave's morality. That is, because a slave lacks the well-born's capability, he/she inverts conventional morality in order to compensate for those qualities he/she lacks. For example, Christianity embodies the slave's morality because it not only inverts the natural order that prizes strength and conquest, but it warps the natural order by acting as a negative power. In other words, Christianity acts only when it constructs an enemy and masks guilt and manipulation in order to subvert the noble order. Consequently, "the slaves' revolt in morality occurs when ressentiment itself turns creative and gives birth to values: the ressentiment of those beings who, being denied the proper response of action, compensate for it only with imaginary revenge" (21). Applying Nietzsche's theory of *ressentiment* to *The Sea-Wolf*, one notes Hump's complete embodiment of it, particularly in his

insistence to Larsen that the will of the few should outweigh the strength of the strong. In Chapter XIII, Hump appeals to Larsen for the return of his pilfered money, that action committed by the ship's cook. While Larsen scoffs at the plea, Hump suggests that what is at issue is not his improper storage of his one hundred and eighty dollars but the ethics that underlie the theft. Rejecting Hump's humanism, Larsen suggests that "one man cannot wrong another man. He can only wrong himself. . . . How can two particles of the yeast wrong each other by striving to devour each other? It is their inborn heritage to strive to devour, and to strive not to be devoured. When they depart from this they sin" (543). According to Larsen, morality and ethics are emblems of an inferior and unnatural order that attempt to "legislate" natural actions.

In his theories about the great, noble (super)man, Nietzsche argues that this man "has the ability to extend his will across great stretches of his life . . . . [He] is colder, harder, less hesitating, and without fear of 'opinion.'. . . [And he] wants no sympathetic heart, but servants [and] tools" (505). Nietzsche's description mirrors Larsen, particularly in his impressment of men into service, his command of a ship, and his willful disregard for others. Moreover, Nietzsche reasons that this man is emblematic of a culture's genesis, and for others to suggest more humane and humanist definitions of a society's evolution overlooks the degree to which "life itself is essentially appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker" (203). Indeed, it is Larsen's materialistic philosophy that threatens Hump, particularly as it questions his class-based value system. Larsen, in short, rejects Hump's humanism: "life is a mess. It is like yeast, a ferment, a thing that moves and may move for a minute, an hour, a year, or a hundred years, but that in the end will cease to move. The big eat the little that they may retain their strength. The lucky eat the most and

move the longest, that is all" (520). For Larsen, life is reducible to appetites, and because of these appetites, humans engage in predatory behavior.

While Hump rejects Larsen's materialism and clings, instead, to his belief in transcendent values such as justice, truth, and fairness, Larsen undermines Hump's analysis and reveals the hypocrisy that underlies Hump's value system. In doing this, however, Larsen's argument sounds less like a Nietzschean critique and more like a Marxist analysis. Here, London abandons his critique of Larsen's value system and questions Hump's aristocratic assumptions. Because Hump's needs have been satisfied by the toil of others, his sense of fairness and justice is misguided because his comfort comes as a direct result of another's misfortune. Larsen reasons that "in the past you have eaten more than I have. You have slept in soft beds, and worn fine clothes, and eaten good meals. Who made those beds? and those clothes? and those meals? Not you. You never made anything in your own sweat. . . . You are like the frigate bird swooping down upon the boobies and robbing them of the fish they have caught" (520). According to Larsen's analysis, Hump is the barbarian or primitive because he plunders the poor and profits at their expense. Further, because he is entrenched in his class, Hump cannot recognize his own hypocrisy. Even before Hump meets Larsen, he muses about the need and justification for the many to toil so that the rich may enjoy leisurely activities. While aboard the doomed *Martinez*, the ferry that sinks and leads to Hump's entry onto the *Ghost*, he recalls "how comfortable it was, this division of labor which made it unnecessary for me to study fogs, winds, tides, and navigation, in order to visit my friend who lived across an arm of the sea . . . . The peculiar knowledge of the pilot and captain sufficed for many thousands of people who knew no more of the sea and navigation than I knew" (481). Hump never

questions the parasitic life wherein he profits from others' labor, nor does he examine how his impractical body of education makes him unfit for any service. More problematically, through Larsen's exposure of Hump, London apparently abandons a consistent critique of Larsen. That is, how can Larsen represent a dangerous atavism and at the same time embody the proletariat's revolutionary consciousness?

While Larsen's analysis questions the legitimacy of the upper class's social philosophy, Larsen also questions the validity of altruism, a practice observed by many of the upper-class. For Larsen, altruism is an unnatural act because "any sacrifice that makes me lose one crawl or one squirm is foolish,--and not only foolish, for it is a wrong against myself and a wicked thing" (545). Throughout their discussions, Hump offers few, if any, reasoned responses. Rather than engage in a substantive debate with Larsen, Hump objectifies him and replies "you are a sort of monster, a Caliban who has pondered Setebos, and who acts as you act, in idle moments, by whim and fancy" (545). To label Larsen is to position him in a ready-made place so that his primitivism will not contaminate Hump's class-based philosophy. However, what is most notable about Hump's exchanges with Larsen is his numerous silences, moments in which he is unable to offer a substantive response. If Larsen is Hump's inferior, why is Hump unable to offer an effective rebuttal to Larsen's materialism? How can London offer a substantive rejection of Larsen if Hump is fundamentally unable to lead a radically different social order?

Along with London's inconsistent critique of Larsen, another question emerges from *The Sea-Wolf* that asks whether Larsen's death also suggests that his primitivism fails. For Hump, Larsen's death bespeaks the problems of Larsen's materialist philosophy that rationalizes primitivism. At best, however,

Hump's conclusion is a logical fallacy. Larsen's death does not also mean that his ideas either die with him or that they have no legitimacy. In fact, Hump does not consider the degree to which he actually adopts Larsen's primitivism. Many critics such as Lee Clark Mitchell, Kathleen Hindman, Michael Qualtiere, Mary Kay Dobson, and Abraham Rothberg question London's method for "disposing" of Larsen. Given Larsen's immense strength, these critics wonder if London would have been better served if he had had Larsen die in a terrible sea storm. To Hump, however, Larsen's death was foreshadowed by his numerous bouts with migraines that led, eventually, to his paralysis and blindness. For Hump, Larsen's death also suggests the degree to which he cannot function in a humanist universe. That is, the values that give life to the superman are at odds with the majority culture. One might ask, however, what happens to the effect of London's and Hump's critique of Larsen if his actions and words are simply those of a man who suffers from brain cancer. Because of his death, there is not the same urgency to refuting Larsen than if he is a viable force with whom London and/or Hump must reckon. Indeed, Hump's reasoning leaves something to be desired because he evaluates Larsen's life according to a humanist's definitions. As a result, he looks for longevity and value which are two qualities that Larsen summarily rejects. Moreover, Larsen, much more than Hump, remains in the reader's imagination and occupies the space Hump hopes to infuse with humanism. How, then, should the reader evaluate Larsen's death? If we have followed any of his statements, we should avoid overdramatizing it and giving it any ceremony--much like the unheralded burial at sea that Hump and Maude give him. If Larsen had survived, he would have become the most reviled life form according to his own theories about human nature. In other words, he would have become a parasitic creature who lived off

of other people's labor. His death marks a curious double-bind for Hump and London because, on the one hand, Larsen rejects humanism's limiting philosophy but, on the other hand, Larsen's death renders him helpless in the face of Hump's narration of Larsen, his philosophy, and his actions aboard *The Ghost*.

Absent from Hump's narration is the degree to which he compromises his own humanism and adopts elements of Larsen's primitivism. When Larsen impresses Hump into service, he suggests that Hump "might learn in time to stand on [his] own two legs and perhaps toddle along a bit" (500) and live from the sweat of his own labor. While many scholars note this exchange, they arrive at rather different conclusions. For example, Howard notes that Hump's service aboard *The Ghost* revitalizes and remasculinizes him, and like Weedon Scott from *White Fang*, Hump triumphantly returns to civilization. Conversely, Mitchell notes that while *The Sea-Wolf* appears to argue for Hump's newly-realized manhood, the novel actually dismantles the integrated and skilled self, a concept that Larsen and Hump had earlier attempted to defend. Although Hump scoffed at Larsen's claim that he would profit from manual labor, he does exactly as Larsen predicts. He defends himself successfully against death threats from Mugridge, learns basic nautical information, and tones his muscles. While he acknowledges an indebtedness to Larsen, he more often than not credits his survival to his philosophy's superiority. It appears as if Hump needs Larsen's primitivism if only as a foil against which to hone his self-development. Fortunately for Hump, the novel's conclusion not only signals his and Maude's rescue from Endeavor Island, but the ship that rescues them, a government ship, suggests that he will be brought back into the fold despite his momentary foray into "forbidden territory."

With his rescue, one might ask if Hump needs Larsen to die in order to secure his own survival. The answer is a complex one. In order for Hump to offer an unfettered narration of his adventures on *The Ghost*, he must eliminate all elements that question his role as a leader. While Hump dominates the book's narration and he suggests that his survival ultimately points to the survival of a humane universe, Larsen looms large as the text's most magnificent character. In many ways, Larsen's primitivism succeeds against Hump's overcivilized nature. Just as Hump's literary scholarship rests on questionable aesthetic grounds, so, too, does his ability to write the story of his high seas adventures with Wolf Larsen. As is the case with the literature he values, he attempts to give a triumphant and romantic picture of his experience and winds up undermining his very premise. One might question, of course, whether Hump is supposed to emerge triumphantly. Perhaps Hump is not the hero who will usher in a new social order. Indeed, for a novel intended to challenge the *status quo*, the social order appears to have changed very little at the novel's conclusion from the way it was organized at its beginning. As Mitchell argues, "the novel can only end by confirming what it wants to deplore: civilized behavior, class divisions, gender inequality. And what looks like a radical attack on the *status quo* turns out to be a more or less conservative confirmation of it" (333). One might suggest that Hump, when reimmersed in the ruling aristocracy, proves to be a less difficult foe than Larsen would have been if he had lived. Rather than lead the new socialist order, Hump may indeed represent the ways in which capitalism cannot be defeated. In short, *The Sea-Wolf* offers a muddied ideological framework wherein its dismissal of primitivism, as represented by the Nietzschean superman, lacks consistency, and the text as a whole offers few, if any, reasonable alternatives to the value

system it rejects.

In this chapter, I have argued that nativist philosophy informs American literary naturalism and manifests itself explicitly in several seminal works by Norris and London. While the degree of nativism may differ in these works by Norris and London, its constant pressure on the texts calls attention to the era's fears about atavism and cultural regression. As we see in these works, the debate about the primitive and the humanistic remained a violent one, fraught with contradictions, confusions, and catastrophic conclusions.

Chapter Two
The Primitive as the Brute Working Class

> All over the world two classes were forming, with an unbridged chasm between them--the capitalist class, with its enormous fortunes, and the proletariat, bound into slavery by unseen chains. The latter were a thousand to one in numbers, but they were ignorant and helpless, and they would remain at the mercy of their exploiters until they were organized--until they had become class conscious. (Sinclair, *The Jungle*, 313)

Upton Sinclair's description of the working class's disenfranchisement underscores that class's profound differences from the ruling class. In Chapter One, I argued that nativism's pressure on Norris's and London's fiction called attention to the era's fears about atavism and cultural regression. In this chapter, I will suggest that the nativist primitivism that dominated the novels in the previous chapter gives way to a different form of the primitive that now takes on new resonance by virtue of its connection to the working class. In his play *The Hairy Ape* (1922), Eugene O'Neill evokes the primitive by constantly associating Yank with simian imagery, suggesting his social inferiority as a laborer in the stokehole of a luxury ocean liner and his seemingly evolutionary inferiority in the eyes of his social superiors. In some of the era's novels, however, this primitive figure seems to lose its connection to a purely Darwinian retrogression toward a pre-human world. In Frank Norris' novel *The Octopus* (1901), for instance, the once prosperous and racially pure ranchers must learn to become primitives so that they might save their properties. In contrast to Yank, these ranchers are not actually working-class persons; the degradations they suffer appear to be in keeping with the text's anti-Semitism rather than with a sympathetic portrait of laborers. In contrast to Norris, London reveals that the primitive seems to be a liability for his main character in *Martin Eden* (1909), and his title character spends much of his time attempting to purge himself of his

primitive markers. While London focuses on an actual working-class character, his definition of the primitive appears to be more tenuous than O'Neill's because it is connected more directly to Martin's poverty. In other words, Martin is lower within a vertical class system, not lower within an evolutionary scheme; he is beneath, not before, in a temporal sense, to the figures with whom he contrasts himself.

In *The Hairy Ape* (1922), O'Neill exploits the primitive in his depiction of Yank as one who is socially and evolutionarily inferior. Yank is an impoverished sailor who is unaware of his primitivism until an affluent woman, Mildred Douglas, labels him a "hairy ape." From the moment of his encounter with Mildred, and despite his attempts to the contrary, Yank runs toward a persistant identification with the "hairy ape." Whether Yank is confined in a prison cell or is in a heated argument with an I.W. W. representative, he is branded a "brainless ape" (302). Commenting about *The Hairy Ape* in his letter to Kenneth MacGowan, O'Neill argues in his own words that "I have tried to dig deep of it, to probe the shadows of the soul of man bewildered by the disharmony of his primitive pride and individualism at war with the mechanistic development of society" (32). O'Neill underscores Yank's and the other sailors' primitivism in the opening scene's stage directions:

> The lines of bunks, the uprights supporting them, cross each other like the steel framework of a cage. The ceiling crushes down upon the men's heads. They cannot stand upright. This accentuates the natural stooping posture which shoveling coal and the resultant over-development of back and shoulder muscles have given them. The men themselves should resemble those pictures in which the appearance of Neanderthal Man is guessed at. All are hairy-chested, with long arms of tremendous power, and low, receding brows above their fierce, resentful eyes (251).

Here, primitivism evokes a Darwinian scale of human development in that the

sailors seem to represent pre-men whose inferiority is dictated by biological and social conditions. In this passage, primitivism comes to the fore in the description of the men's quarters as a "steel cage" and in the Lombrosian-like connection between the men's bodies and their likely inferior intellects. It is in this menagerie that Yank emerges as one who "seems broader, fiercer, more truculent, more powerful, more sure of himself than the rest" (252). As a result, "[the sailors] respect his superior strength--the grudging respect of fear. Then, too, he represents to them a self-expression, the very last word in what they are, their most highly developed individual" (252). One might well ask how Yank comes to represent to the sailors a "self-expression" and also "their most highly developed individual." As the play unfolds, we see that Yank lacks the intelligence and restraint that might mark him as either civilized or as "highly developed." Perhaps this early stage description is meant to foreground O'Neill's engagement with the primitive, in Darwinian terms, and sets up how Yank's "superiority" will come to be satirized in those moments when he assumes the posture of Rodin's "The Thinker" and bellows "can't youse see I'm tryin' to t'ink?" (254). In the play's constant pairing of Yank and "The Thinker," Yank falls quite short of the Hellenic ideal represented by the sculpture, and, as Patrick Bowles argues, "O'Neill wishes us to think of Yank as an embodiment of something prior to the social, and therefore as a comment upon mankind's most fundamental condition" (2). In *The Hairy Ape*, the primitive is represented by Yank's inhuman or, more precisely, simian nature. While this is the dominant form that the primitive takes in the play, the primitive will also be coded in racial imagery, and while this coding is less developed than that using simian imagery, there will be times when Yank's primitivism reveals itself in those moments that he "becomes" non-white.

O'Neill's evocation of the primitive is something that many critics have yet to explore fully. James Robinson examines *The Hairy Ape* in terms of the masculine primitive. His argument rests on two points: first, the turn of the twentieth-century American culture witnesses a masculine backlash against an intruding proto-feminism that threatens to invade the political and business worlds; second, in order to counter this feminist threat, American culture comes to idealize virility, especially as it is embodied in the lower classes, as a remedy for this invading feminine force: "an increasing number of men responded to the much-feared feminization of American culture by admiring hard-drinking, hard-fighting, muscular, 'manly' men. Not surprisingly, this period also witnessed the rise of naturalism in American literature and often seemed to endorse models of malehood whose authenticity depended on their brutality" (98). Consequently, Robinson considers *The Hairy Ape* in this cultural context and suggests that while O'Neill greatly admires Yank's bravado, the character "is actually trapped in a model of masculinity that denies the possibility of revolt" (105).

While Robinson is one of the first to consider the play in terms of primitivism, his argument's foundation reveals some unresolved tensions. For instance, his argument imports Ann Douglas's conception of nineteenth-century America as a culture beseiged by domestic feminism and applies this theory to the early twentieth century. As a result, his argument classifies all physical or non-traditional activities performed by men as "primitive" and includes, among others, Theodore Roosevelt's excessive masculine exploits and Eugene O'Neill's fondness for Bohemian pleasures. While Roosevelt's and O'Neill's acts might be extreme, I question whether either would have considered themselves to be markers of "primitivism" or "hairy apes." By associating all physical activities with the primitive, Robinson runs the risk of overlooking

specific class markers that mark particular men as "primitives." More specifically, his argument suggests that *The Hairy Ape* celebrates an unbridled masculinity even though it is Yank's primitivism that points to his unfittedness in the twentieth century.

Indeed, twentieth-century American culture may not have been as welcoming to Yank's primitivism as Robinson suggests. Lothrup Stoddard's *The Revolt Against Civilization: The Menace of the Under Man* (1922) chronicles his fears about modern-day "primitives" who threaten civilization's stability. As civilization advances, Stoddard reasons,

> it leaves behind multitudes of human beings who have not the capacity to keep pace. The laggards, of course, vary greatly among themselves. Some are congenital savages or barbarians; men who could not fit into any civilization, and who consequently fall behind from the start. These are not 'degenerates'; they are 'primitives,' carried over into a social environment in which they do not belong (22).

Stoddard's comment resonates with *The Hairy Ape*, and, in particular, Senator Queen's fears about primitive men who threaten to destroy civilization and bring it back to its simian roots. In his speech about the I.W.W.'s menacing presence and its push to what he believes is anarchy, Senator Queen claims "they would tear down society, put the lowest scum in the seats of the mighty, turn Almighty God's revealed plan for the world topsy-turvy, and make of our sweet and lovely civilization a shambles, a desolation where man, God's masterpiece, would soon degenerate back to the ape!" (295). Like Stoddard, Queen relies on the language of the primitive in order to show how these individuals are incongruous with civilized society. Stoddard classifies the primitive as the "Under-Man" and imagines how this group might come to understand themselves. According to Stoddard, civilization "affords [the Under-Man] little beyond a meagre subsistence. And, sooner or later, he instinctively senses that

he is a failure; that civilization's prizes are not for him" (23). Further, Stoddard suggests that "civilization, which withholds benefits, does not hesitate to impose burdens. The very discipline of the social order oppresses the Under-Man; it thwarts and chastises him at every turn. To wild natures society is a torment, while the congenital cavemen, placed in civilization, is always in trouble and usually in jail" (23). Stoddard's observations open up possibilities for considering the primitive in *The Hairy Ape* because they help to contextualize why this culture came to fear Yank's primitivism. Stoddard's comments also clarify Yank's difficulties in finding a place in American culture. For example, in his attempt to convince Yank that they have been made into "primitives," Paddy recalls that while at one time men belonged to the ships and worked in the open air, this was no longer true. Instead, one finds below deck "the bloody engines pounding and throbbing and shaking--choking our lungs wid coal dust--breaking our backs and hearts in the hell of the stokehole [because we are] caged in by steel from a sight of the sky like bloody apes in the Zoo" (259). Primitivism underwrites Paddy's speech because it focuses attention on the link between the primitive and the ape imagery. That is, the sailors' incarceration in the stokehole's "steel cage" confirms that they are primitive simians who because of the threat they pose to civilization must be confined and controlled.

While Paddy's claim is persuasive, he fails to convince Yank. In fact, Yank scoffs at his primitivism and his exploitation at the hands of the upper class. Rejecting Long's and Paddy's rhetoric as "Salvation Army socialist bull" and informing them that "yuh ain't got no noive. Yuh're yellow" (256), Yank proclaims:

> I'm de end! I'm de start! I start somep'n and de woild moves! I'm de ting in coal dat makes it boin; I'm steam and oil for de engines; I'm de ting in noise dat makes yuh hear it; I'm smoke and express trains and steamers

> and factory whistles; I'm de ting in gold dat makes it money! And I'm what makes iron into steel! And I'm de muscles in steel, de punch behind it (261).

Yank's argument reveals some important tensions in the play's focus on primitivism: for Yank, the primitive represents a vital life force. It is his strength, Yank reasons, that powers the luxury liner: "what's dem slobs in de foist cabin got to do wit us? We're better men dan dey are, ain't we. One of us guys could clean up de whole mob wit one mit." Further, Yank observes that "put one of 'em down here for one watch in the stokehole, what'd happen? Dey'd carry him off on a stretcher. Dem boids don't amount to nothin'. Dey're just baggage" (256-257). On one level, Yank's conclusion seems valid in that the upper class enjoys a parasitic existence at the expense of the lower classes. Indeed, O'Neill appears to challenge Darwinian logic by investing strength and power in the primitive Yank, suggesting that these attributes will ensure his long life in a survival of the fittest.

Indeed, it is Yank's constant labor that is held in sharp contrast to Mildred Douglas's complete inertia. While her grandfather was a sailor in the stokehole who "kept the home fires burning," Mildred is, in her own words, "afraid I have neither vitality nor integrity. All that was burnt out in our stock before I was born. . . . I'm a waste product in the Bessemer process" (265). Here, primitivism becomes quite complicated in that while it is something that Yank and Mildred's grandfather possess by virtue of their working class status, the latter's primitivism seems to have ended with his generation and has not been passed onto his progeny. Tellingly, Mildred's languid temperament trumps Yank's primitivism and adds a complicating layer to O'Neill's Darwinian argument. That is, Yank's primitivism proves futile in an environment in which he is, as Paddy and Long warn, a wage-slave. By investing Yank with brute strength but

also with a lack of intelligence, O'Neill reveals how society has made Yank a primitive and the degree to which his primitivism becomes a rationale for his exclusion and isolation.

Curiously, it is primitivism that attracts Mildred to visit the ship's stokehole. Despite her aunt's criticism, Mildred arranges for a tour of the stokehole in order to "discover how the other half lives" (265). Mildred's compulsion to "see" this other half and to categorize their primitive conditions is, as David Roediger argues, emblematic of her privileged gaze. More precisely, Roediger claims that in this scene "Douglas displays the desire to categorize and classify that is characteristic of imperialist gazers, to 'investigate everything' in London's slum as she had done in New York." Further, Roediger notes that her "commanding position of surveying from above, which is typical of imperialist gazes, appears in Douglas's obsession with going below and, negatively, in her collapse when she looks at the workers from their level" (38). Roediger deftly argues that Mildred communicates her privilege with a single glance--one that serves as a reflecting glass that tells its object (the lower class) about its primitivism. Or, as Mildred's aunt observes about her, "how they must have hated you, by the way, the poor that you made so much poorer in their own eyes" (264).

Brought into the stokehole, Mildred sees the sailors who "are outlined in silhouette in the crouching, inhuman attitudes of chained gorillas" (269). Once again, O'Neill draws attention to the men's simian primitivism as it is held in contrast to Mildred's privileged status. In this environment, Yank is the most ferocious, and "he brandishes his shovel murderously over his head in one hand, pounding on his chest, gorilla-like, with the other" (272). In fact, all of Yank's actions are described as bestial and include his "snarling, murderous

growl," his "lips drawn back over his teeth," and "his small eyes gleaming ferociously" (272). Gazing upon Yank, Mildred becomes "paralyzed with horror . . . by the terrific impact of this unknown, abysmal brutality, naked and shameless." Further, as Mildred "looks at his gorilla face, as his eyes bore into hers, she utters a low choking cry and shrinks away from him, putting both hands up before her eyes to shut out the sight of his face, to protect her own" (273). Mildred is overcome both by Yank's primitivism and the return of his gaze into her eyes. That is, by staring into Mildred's eyes, Yank shatters her romantic conceptions of poverty, and she, rather instinctively, covers her eyes in a futile attempt both to block out his image and protect her own privileged gaze. While Yank believes that it is at this moment that she calls him a "hairy ape," he is corrected by Paddy who tells him "she look it at you if she didn't say the word itself" (278). In this moment, O'Neill demonstrates, as John Nickel argues, "how even a glance or look can reinforce hierarchical social relations" (36). Mildred's gaze communicates to Yank his primitive and simian qualities without her having to utter any actual words, and, as Long concludes, by bringing Mildred into the stokehole, the ship's officers confirm the laborers' status as apes: "she gives 'er orders as 'ow she wants to see the bloody animals below decks and down they takes 'er!" (276).

Of course, the most dramatic scene is the final one wherein Yank travels to the zoo and visits the monkey house. In many ways, the last scene appears to be a rather logical conclusion to Yank's dilemmas. For example, when Yank is imprisoned for disorderly behavior, he "reaches out and shakes the bars--aloud to himself, wonderingly 'steel. Dis is de Zoo, huh?'" (290). In his own words he acknowledges that "I was a fireman--stokin' on de liners. (then with a sudden rage, rattling his cell bars) I'm a hairy ape" (291). Here, Yank achieves

a critical self-recognition that confirms that he is the primitive simian that all have considered him to be and that his eventual relocation to the zoo serves as an apt conclusion to his story. Examining Yank's soliloquy in Scene Eight, Patrick Bowles argues that it "explains this self-conscious simian's symbolic character and it remains, even in its rude articulation, one of the most elegantly concise definitions of man in modern literature" (2). Extending Bowles's anaylsis, Peter Egri comments that "Yank's final call at the monkey house strikes the audience as necessary. The necessity of Yank's last and desperate move is visually enhanced by the scenic picture showing how Yank leans over the railing and stares at the gorilla, who stares back at him, silent and motionless. They appear as one another's mirror image doubles" (94). Indeed, the scene's stage directions note that like Yank the gorilla also assumes the "The Thinker's" pose: "the gigantic animal himself is seen squatting on his haunches on a bench in much the same attitude as Rodin's 'Thinker'" (304). Here, the gorilla represents another stage in the primitive's evolution as he, like Yank, mimics the Hellenic ideal represented by the sculpture. In this scene, there is much evidence to suggest that Yank and the gorilla are each other's mirror image. For instance, while Yank stares at the gorilla, he realizes that "yuh're what she seen when she looked at me" (305). At this moment, Yank becomes aware of his primitive image and will come to learn the horror that it spells. Hoping for some kind of kinship, Yank comes to wonder if the gorilla is in a better position than he because "yuh don't belong wit 'em and yuh know it" (306). Yank finds some kind of power in the gorilla's position because it "can sit and dope dream in de past, green woods, de jungle and de rest of it. Den yuh belong and dey don't. Den yuh can laugh at 'em, see? Yuh're de champ of de woild. But me--I ain't got no past to tink in, nor nothin' dat's comin', on'y what's

now--and dat don't belong" (306). At every point in his speech, Yank believes he sees in the gorilla signs that it is both listening to and agreeing with his sentiments. For instance, when Yank lashes out at the upper class, the gorilla "rattles the bars of his cage and snarls" (305). For Yank, the gorilla's pounding and snarling signal to him a correspondence, one that suggests to him an affinity for breaking out of the cages that Mildred's family, and, by implication the upper class, fashions for them: "he made dis--dis cage! Steel! *It* don't belong, dat's what! Cages, cells, locks, bolts, bars--holdin' me down wit him at de top! . . . . Dey'll have to make de cages stronger after we're trou!" (295, 307). In a final and desperate move against those who imprison the ape, Yank, who believes he will strike a blow against Mildred, releases the gorilla only for it to crush him in its arms. In this shocking moment, attempts at solidarity between Yank and the gorilla end, and, when he comes to occupy the vacated monkey cage, one might well wonder if Yank represents something that is far more primitive than the gorilla. If he has found a home at the monkey house, it is an ironic one as the play's final stage directions qualify the security of his new place: "and, perhaps, the Hairy Ape at last belongs" (308). The "perhaps" seems to suggest that rather than his becoming simply a human ape, Yank's primitivism might come to represent something that is even more alienated than what the gorilla embodied.

While simian imagery is central to Yank's characterization as a primitive, there is a complementary, though far less fully developed, racial imagery that links Yank to another level of primitivism. In the initial description of the sailors, our attention is drawn to race: "all the civilized white races are represented, but except for the slight differentiation in color of hair, skin, eyes, all these men are alike" (251-252). While black men appear to be excluded from the stokehole,

our attention focuses on how the white men "become" black. For instance, Yank's refusal to bathe and remove the coal dust from his skin prompts the other sailors to warn that he will look "like a piebald nigger" (274). In this same scene, Long attempts to explain to the men, but most especially Yank, the degree to which they have become degraded and why the upper classes consider them to be primitives. Focusing on the humiliation they suffer from Mildred's visit, Long argues that " 'er old man's a bleedin' millionaire, a bloody Capitalist! 'E owns this bloody boat! And you and me, Comrades, we're 'is slaves!" (276). While Long's speech certainly resonates with a marxist critique in that capitalism makes all individuals into wage-slaves, his observation also reveals a racial connotation to the "slavery" that exists on the ship. In their separate analyses, John Nickel and David Roediger argue that while O'Neill relies on racial markers, he uses them in order to satirize early twentieth-century American racism. For instance, Nickel claims that *The Hairy Ape* is an an example of O'Neill's "attack on the widely-held belief, affirmed by scientists, in the racial degeneration of the African American race" (33). On the other hand, I would suggest that O'Neill relies on common assumptions about primitivism and race in order to accentuate the degree to which Yank is unfit. In addition to coding the vessel as a slave ship and labeling Yank a "piebald nigger," O'Neill also repeatedly invokes references to the "leopard's spots" and represents the conflict between black bestiality and white privilege in Yank's encounter with Mildred Douglas.

Prior to the stokehole scene, Mildred addresses herself to her aunt's criticisms that her attacks on her privileged status are ludicrous: "when a leopard complains of its spots, it must sound rather grotesque. Purr, little leopard. Purr, scratch, tear, kill, gorge yourself and be happy--only stay in the

jungle where your spots are camouflage. In a cage they make you conspicuous (265). In the scene's context, she is most likely addressing her aunt's complaints that her ennui is self-serving. However, there is also a racial element to Mildred's use of the term "leopard's spots." Originally, the phrase comes from the biblical prophet Jeremiah who asks "can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" In later years, this biblical question will be repeatedly invoked, as John Nickel argues, "in the early twentieth-century American culture, as O'Neill's audience would know, and was often used to support the claim that individuals of African heritage could not possibly adapt to their 'new' environment in North America" (34). One of the more notable uses of this phrase is in Thomas Dixon's racist novel *The Leopard's Spots* (1902) in which he argues, as Nickel notes, that "African Americans came from the savagery of the African jungle and cannot progress in the U.S. and should be suppressed to prevent miscegenation" (34).

In the context of *The Hairy Ape*, then, the leopard's spots come to be identified with Yank rather than Mildred. On a more literal level, because Yank refuses to wash the coal dust from his body, the sentiment makes, as the other sailors caution, "spots on you--like a leopard" (274). If Yank has the leopard's spots, then this characterization complicates the question as to where his place will be in the text. If African Americans, who are identified as also having leopard's spots, cannot live in civilized society, where will Yank find his home? One might consider Yank's endless searches for a home to be emblematic of the racializing of his "leopard's spots." When he arrives at the zoo's monkey house, this becomes for Yank both a literal and metaphorical return home. As a "hairy ape," Yank comes home to where his leopard's spots won't make him conspicuous. At the same moment, because he has also been racialized, Yank

makes a metaphorical journey "back to Africa." In the monkey house, O'Neill shows how the American-born, white male Yank can become non-white and simian. David Roediger notes that at the time that O'Neill writes *The Hairy Ape*, the director of the Bronx Zoo placed a Congolese pygmy, Ota Benga, in the monkey house. By putting Ota Benga in the monkey cage, Roediger argues that, "the Bronx Zoo presented [Benga] as the missing evolutionary link between human beings and apes" (38). In O'Neill's play, Yank becomes Benga both in terms of an evolutionary "missing link" and as a racialized primitive.

Even before Yank comes to rest in the monkey house, the link between race and primitivism reveals itself in his encounter with Mildred Douglas. In a scene charged with racial imagery, the confrontation between Mildred and Yank becomes one of white civilization and black bestiality. In contrast to Yank's "blackened, brooding figure" (274), Mildred, clothed in a white dress, appears "like a white apparition in the full light from the open furnace doors" (272). When she looks upon Yank, Mildred sees before her, as Paddy later imagines, "a queerer kind of baboon than ever you'd find in darkest Africy. [Roasting] in their own sweat--and be damned if you won't hear some of thim saying they like it!" (277). Momentarily frozen by Mildred's horrified gaze, Yank becomes anxiously self-aware of being both non-white and inhuman. When he responds to her unspoken insult, Yank brands himself an enemy of "de white-faced, skinny tarts and de bobs what marry 'em" (305). Indeed, Yank spends the remainder of the play confirming his primitivism as a racialized and "hairy ape."

In sum, O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* encodes Yank's primitivism in simian and racial terms. Commenting about his characterization of Yank, O'Neill remarks that "the man in the case is not an Irishman, as I first intended, but, more fittingly, an American--a New York tough of the toughs, a product of the waterfront turned

stoker" (32). By representing Yank in this fashion, O'Neill compels his readers to consider how the working class comes to be marked as primitives.

In many ways, Norris's *The Octopus* (1901) seems to defend the brute working class. Specifically, the text offers a sympathetic portrait of Dyke's wrongful treatment by the railroad, presents Presley's socialist poem "The Toilers" as a realistic depiction of the valley's labor problems, and portrays the railroad agent S. Behrman's death as apt retribution for the harm he has caused. Critical responses to *The Octopus* confirm the novel's reflection of a populist polemic. For example, Jack London praised Norris's realism because it illuminated the struggles between two identifiable forces: "The farmer against the fiancier [sic], the tiller of the soil against the captain of industry" (508). In his analysis, John Chamberlain classified Norris as a muckraker in the tradition of Hamlin Garland and Upton Sinclair and suggested that "in the vast drama of the growing of the wheat the novelist becomes, definitely, the moralist" (108). However, upon closer examination, the novel's political stance is far more muddied and inconsistent than the critics above suggest. Clare Eby notes that "capitalism can be made into Norris' unmitigated villain only by a highly selective reading of the novel which ignores many competing ideological messages" (33). Norris's biographer Franklin Walker commented that the classification of *The Octopus* as a defense of the working class was by all accounts "a misreading of the novel on the part of a public which asked for an attack on the railroads" (257). Concurring with Walker and questioning the reasoning that labels *The Octopus* as a proletarian novel, Donald Pizer observes that "the victims of oppression in *The Octopus* are not comparable to the mill workers or fruit pickers in the proletarian novel of the 1930s. Norris included a few tenant farmers and railroad workers among these victims, but for

the most part they are capitalists who have large investments in land and equipment and who are competing with the railroad for the riches of the land" (120). Indeed, as one takes a closer look at the novel, ones sees that the ranchers whom Norris defends are clearly not the actual brute working class. Instead, the "primitive" assumes multiple forms at different points in the novel for a variety of reasons. The true working class consists of unnamed Mexicans and marginalized European immigrants whom the novel's central consciousness Presley abhors. Rather than champion the working conditions of the "actual" laborers, *The Octopus* laments the lost Anglo-Saxon dream for the West, embodied in the ranchers. The novel chronicles not only these ranchers' defeat at the hands of a vast railroad industry controlled by Jewish agents but the degree to which their adoption of ruthless business methods causes them to devolve into "primitives." In doing so, Norris relies on the anti-Semitism that grew out of some populist rhetoric. Yet, at the moment that it appears as if the Jewish railroad executives are the source of the problem, the novel's argument changes; the novel's conclusion reifies the wheat as a natural and uncontrollable force of its own. By reifying the wheat, Norris seems to abandon his focus on what has driven the ranchers to become primitives.

For many critics, the novel's favorable view of labor rests on Presley's responses to the wheat crisis as they manifest themselves in his socialist poem "The Toilers." London and Chamberlain argued that Presley was a positive character whose actions mirrored Norris' life and theories about literature. Similarly, June Howard identifies a parallel between Presley and Norris insofar as the former "creates the same synthesis of romance and realism to which Norris aspires. He makes his art out of the same materials Norris uses, taking as the topic of his successful 'socialist poem' 'The Toilers' the very conflict

between the farmers and the railroad that once wearied him and that is the central action of *The Octopus* itself" (118). While London's, Chamberlain's, and Howard's readings are compelling, I would suggest that the opposite obtains. Presley is an overly impressionable dilettante whose belief system reflects other characters' opinions. In his nonfiction, Norris unequivocally states his rejection of false artists. For example, his "Western Types: An Art Student," which appeared in the May, 1896 edition of *The Wave*, lampoons the artist's devotion to still life projects and his aestheticization of a counter-culture ideology: "He believes himself a Bohemian, but by Bohemianism he understands merely the wearing of large soft felt hats and large bow scarfs and the drinking of beer in German 'resorts.' His Bohemianism is not dangerous" (48). The essay foregrounds, then, the false artist's inability to render effective social critique.

In *The Octopus*, even though as Don Graham cautions "Presley is never capable of achieving the status of the natural artist, because Norris limits his capacities from the start" (99), Presley's ideological blindspots paradoxically mirror the text's refusal to depict the lives of the Mexican and European immigrants who labor in the San Joaquin Valley. From the beginning, Presley is a poet and a romantic, one who "was in search of a subject; something magnificent, he did not know exactly what; some vast, tremendous theme, heroic, terrible, to be unrolled in all the thundering progression of hexameters" (584). He dreams about writing an epic poem about the West, "the great song that should embrace in itself a whole epoch, a complete era, the voice of an entire people, wherein all people should be included" (584). While his proposed poem sounds Whitmanesque in its scope, Presley is far more selective and is not one who is open to all people. Indeed, while he claims he will capture in his poem the real individuals of the West who continue to settle it

and frame the frontier, he is revolted by the individuals who actually work the land, in this case the farm-hands and the immigrants. In fact, "these uncouth brutes of farm-hands and petty ranchers, grimed with the soil they worked upon, were odious to him beyond words. Never could he feel in sympathy with them, nor with their lives, their ways, their marriages, deaths, bickerings, and all the monotonous round of their sordid existence" (581). For Presley and for much of the novel's argument, true sympathy lies with the large ranch owners, descendants of an Anglo-Saxon heritage, in their fight against the railroad controlled by Jewish agents and owners. Just as the immigrants and poor farm-hands prove to be unworthy subjects for Presley's poem, the novel also silences their representation and limits them to the text's margins. According to Presley, the marginalized laborers are ones in whom the "hot, degenerated blood of Portuguese, Mexican, and mixed Spaniard[s] flowed" (978). His "socialist poem" depicts, then, not the field hands' abject conditions but an idealized portrait of the ranchers whom he believed "were of good stock. Of such was the backbone of the nation--sturdy Americans everyone of them" (979-980). Abandoning his earlier plans for a romantic yarn about the American West, Presley writes a "proletarian poem" that describes the follies of the railroad's monopoly and its degradation of the white ranchers. The degree to which Presley supports socialism is rendered suspect, however, by his dilettante nature. For instance, Presley is moved by a painting to write "The Toilers." Inspired by the romantic rendering of the ideal worker, Presley uses the poem as "a comment upon the social fabric" (871-872). Presley's poem does not, however, actually focus on any real toilers. While the ranchers have settled the land and are injured by the railroad's practices, they are not the ones whose hands literally till the land. Indeed, upon closer examination, one notes that

Presley finds socialism revolting, especially as it is espoused by the novel's only socialist character Caraher. In short, Presley aestheticizes revolution and in so doing misrepresents the proletarian consciousness.

Given what will become the novel's eventual espousal of anti-Semitic rhetoric, the "degraded worker" becomes not the actual farm-hand but the Anglo-Saxon ranch owner who must resort to brutish behavior in order to defeat a Jewish-controlled railroad. Realizing the railroad's political and economic power and cognizant of their growing disenfranchisement, the ranchers form a league and through bribery hope to influence the railroad's shipping rates. In order to counter the railroad's trickery, the ranchers reason, they must abandon ethical behavior because "standards have changed; everybody plays the game now as we are playing it--the most honorable men. You can't play it any other way, and if the right wins out in the end, that's the main thing" (723). When their plans fail and the railroad emerges victoriously, the ranchers are described in bestial terms as "human animal[s] hounded to [their] corner[s], exploited . . . . It was the hideous squealing of tormented brute[s]; [their] backs to the wall, defending [their] lair, ready to bite, to rend, to trample, to batter out the life of The Enemy in a primeval, bestial welter of blood and fury" (795). The description of the ranchers as primitives underscores two points: on the one hand, they become, according to Presley's perspective, "the uprising of The People; the thunder of the outbreak of revolt; the mob demanding to be led, aroused at last, imperious, resistless, overwhelming" (800); on the other hand, the league's anger serves as the "blind fury of the brute, many-tongued, red-eyed, bellowing for guidance, baring its teeth, unsheathing its claws, imposing its will with the abrupt, resistless pressure of the relaxed piston, inexorable, knowing no pity" (800). In other words, the men lose their humanity when they challenge an

equally inhumane railroad.

While the text undermines Presley's aesthetic judgments, it upholds his ideological conclusion that the ranch owners are brutalized and turned into "primitives" by the railroad's power and greed. As one considers the depiction of the railroad, one observes its characterization as a reviled and alien Other whose presence threatens the natural inhabitants and landscape. At the end of the first chapter, for example, the railroad destroys a flock of untended sheep. As if willing this destructive end, the railroad is described as an "iron monster [that] had charged full into the midst. . . . Backs were snapped against the fence posts; brains knocked out. Caught in the barbs of the wire, wedged in, the bodies hung suspended. . . .The black blood, winking in the starlight, seeped down into the clinkers between the ties with a prolonged sucking murmur" (616). The depiction of the railroad as a "soulless Force, the iron-hearted Power, the monster, the Colossus, the Octopus" suggests an inhuman enemy against whom the ranchers must battle and distracts attention from the plight of the workers. Moreover, the description fits into the era's populist rhetoric that envisioned a "war against all" between the downtrodden farmers and the impersonal forces of capitalist greed.

In her analysis of the populist era, Anna Rochester argues that in the post-Civil War era, "farmers faced new capitalist forces which increasingly hindered their own free enterprise. These new forces preyed upon the farmer in relation to land and transportation. They took possession of his markets and his need for credit. They fixed the import tariffs and developed monopolies which held up prices for much that the farmer needed to buy" (10). As the railroads' lines increased, and their power, influence, and profits grew, they triggered insecurity among the farmers because of the latter's subsequent dependence

upon the railroad for the shipping of their goods. According to Rochester, farmers became convinced that the monopolists and bankers who controlled the railroads were deliberately robbing them. As a result, increasing numbers of farmers were seeking to defend their way of life against the gigantic new forces of industry and banking.

The farmers' defense comes to the fore in the era's populist agenda. According to Richard Hofstadter, while "populism was the first modern political movement of practical importance in the United States to insist that the federal government has some responsibility for the common weal," (61) its continued demonization of "moneyed interests" gave rise to an intense anti-Semitic rhetoric. According to Hofstadter, "the problems that faced the populists assumed a delusive simplicity: the victory over injustice, the solution for all social ills, was concentrated in the crusade against a single, relatively small but immensely strong interest, the money power" (70). For some of the populists, the "money power" was embodied in Jews whose connections to the nation's financial institutions threatened white, Anglo-Saxon Christians. In his staunch defense of the coinage of silver, a debate which was also considered as a war between the Jews (gold coinage) and Christians (silver coinage farmers), William Harvey's *Coin's Financial School* (1896) features a cartoon that shows a map of the world dominated by the tentacles of an octopus labeled "the Rothschilds own $ 1,600,000,000 in gold" (215). The Rothchild octopus ensnares Christian farmers insofar as its manipulation of the financial market spells ruin for the farmers' attempts at economic self-sufficiency.

In Norris's novel, the anti-Semitism that underscores some populist rhetoric also reveals itself in the recitation of the ranchers' problems. The blame for these rests on the two hated individuals associated with the railroad, S.

Behrman, the chief agent, and Shelgrim, the owner. Behrman and Shelgrim are depicted through stereotypically anti-Semitic descriptions with the former as greedy, corpulent, and conniving and the latter as old, stooped, and wearing a skull cap. During a discussion among the ranchers, the nature of the railroad's control and power is revealed. According to Annixter, who is one of the ranchers, "S. Behrman did you up. Shelgrim owns the courts. . . . He's got the Railroad Commission in his pocket. He's got the Governor of the state in his pocket. He keeps a million dollar lobby at Sacramento every minute of the time the legislature is in session; he's got his own men on the floor of the United States Senate. He has the whole thing organized like an army corps. What are you going to do? He sits in his office in San Francisco and pulls the strings and we've got to dance" (659).

The novel's crisis moment in which the railroad forcefully evicts the ranchers is one that parallels the slaughter of the sheep at the end of the first chapter. Prior to the armed conflict, the ranchers are described in diminutive terms. More precisely, in relation to the wheat, the ranchers are "Lilliputians, gnats in the sunshine . . . . Were born, lived through their little day, died, and were forgotten; while the Wheat, wrapped in Nirvanic calm, grew steadily under the night, alone with the stars and with God" (934). The following scene is described as a frenzied blood bath, and as Norris biographer Franklin Walker notes, it invokes the memory of the Mussel Slough Tragedy of May 1880 in which California ranchers, who had tilled and irrigated the once arid valley, fell victim to the railroad's avarice and, like the men in *The Octopus*, were prevented from buying the land at the original rate at which the railroad promised. As a result, an armed confrontation occured, and the majority of the ranchers were killed. Walker observes that "the people held the railroad

entirely to blame, and, as time went on, the event was magnified into a massacre of innocents, victims to the greed of the corporation" (247).

Despite the novel's apparent documentation of the evils of a Jewish-controlled railroad trust that crushes the Anglo-Saxon ranchers and turns them into primitives, the text's argument nevertheless turns and suggests, at its conclusion, that there is no human responsibility for the actions committed in the novel. Presley's encounter with the railroad owner Shelgrim underscores the degree to which his earlier thoughts about the injustices committed against the ranchers change as he considers the owner's application of an evolutionary argument. Initially, Presley lays the blame for the standoff between the ranchers and the railroad firmly at Shelgrim's feet. Eschewing blame, Shelgrim argues that "railroads build themselves. Where there is a demand sooner or later there will be a supply" (1036). Describing the wheat in terms of a natural process of evolution, Shelgrim implores Presley, saying to him that "I cannot control [the Wheat]. It is a force born out of certain conditions, and I--no man--can stop it or control it" (1037). Bewildered by Shelgrim's analysis, "Presley regained the street stupefied, his brain in a whirl. This new idea, this new conception dumbfounded him. Somehow he could not deny it. It rang with the clear reverberation of truth" (1037).

The reification of the wheat poses a disturbing twist to Presley's and the novel's central argument. In a defense of Norris, James Folsom suggests that perhaps Presley lies at the center of Norris's critique despite the fact that "no one has suggested that the conclusion of *The Octopus* might be highly ironic, that Presley might just possibly not have the slightest idea of what he is talking about" (393-394). Folsom raises an important point insofar as Presley's analyses of the labor conditions in the novel are rendered suspect by his

fanciful imaginings. While Presley's analyses are questionable, his naivete does not vitiate Norris's reification. As Charles Child Walcutt suggests, Norris's optimistic conclusion wherein the wheat endures and "greed, cruelty, selfishness, and inhumanity are short-lived"(1098) reveals a disturbing answer to the novel's original question. In his *American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream* (1956), Walcutt argues that "the conclusion does not satisfactorily answer the problem as posed in the novel. [The problem] is whether the railroads must and will continue to swindle and oppress the less powerful American citizens whom, if the will of our democracy is to find expression, it is supposed to serve in a free market. . . . This problem is not solved. It is simply evaded, while a vaguely religious affirmation of ultimate good is offered to appease the emotions aroused by the action" (149-150). Norris's blameless solution is one that also angered some of his contemporary critics as they found his attempt at resolving the conclusion in that way unethical. For example, according to Walter Rice's April, 1901 review in the *Chicago American Literary and Art Review* , Norris's "hideous doctrine would justify a Nero and damn an Antigone. . . . It is a doctrine of personal irresponsibility, of a conscienceless world, of a godless universe. It is a plea of organized greed and unrestrained lust in all ages" (27). To reify the wheat, to glorify all actions as natural and inevitable, calls into question rather seriously Norris's purpose in undertaking this novel.

Indeed, Norris's *The Octopus* provides few revolutionary answers for those facing an unjust economic system; it also vitiates the link between the primitive figure and the working class by investing all sympathies with the wealthier Anglo-Saxon ranchers. Yet, even though the novel apparently defends the ranchers and laments their devolution into primitivism, the text

eventually explains away as natural and inevitable the economic conditions that produce such primitiveness in the first place. Meanwhile, the "actual primitives," the Mexican and European laborers, are relegated to silence at the text's margins.

Even though London's novel *Martin Eden* (1909) focuses on a working-class character, it also brings to the fore a rather problematic use of the primitive figure. While the primitive in *The Hairy Ape* reveals Yank's social and evolutionary inferiority, its evocation in *Martin Eden* becomes associated with the character's unrelenting poverty and fruitless aspirations for social mobility. Invited to the home of the wealthy Morse family for his act of bravery toward Arthur Morse, Martin becomes increasingly aware of his own poverty and undesirability. When Martin enters the Morse home, his social status is quite obvious, and he is "manifestly out of place in the spacious hall in which he found himself" (31). Specifically, "the wide rooms seemed too narrow for his rolling gait" (31), and "in his eyes there was an expression such as wild animals betray when they fear the trap. [Eden] was surrounded by the unknown, apprehensive of what might happen, ignorant of what he should do, [and] aware that he walked and bore himself awkwardly"(32). Martin's awkwardness intensifies when his host's sister, Ruth Morse, addresses him as "Mister Eden." Prior to this moment Martin has never been addressed as Mr. Eden, and this gentlemanly title stands in marked contrast to his working-class environment which consists of "stokeholes and forecastles, camps and beaches, jails and boozing-kens, fever hospitals and slum streets" (35). Once hailed as Mr. Eden, Martin begins to long for a higher class standing. However, despite his wish for upward mobility, Eden's clothes, dialect, and demeanor indelibly mark his lower-class status.

Rather than desiring wealth, Martin longs for the bourgeoisie's cultural capital, specifically the class's access to education. After learning that Ruth is a university student, Eden romanticizes her education, and after his conversation with her, Eden vows that he will also become an educated man and that this will bridge the gap between his class and Ruth's. Eden's plan fails, however, to account for the degree to which the educational system is an instrument of the ruling class's ideology. As noted by Althusser, students learn to acquiesce to "rules of the established order" (103) as much as they learn about the basics of a refined education. Althusser also argues that "the reproduction of labor power . . . requires a reproduction of its submission to the rules of established order and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression; so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class 'in words'" (104). For Martin, Ruth becomes the standard against which he measures not only womanhood but civilized behavior itself. By using her as a middle-class reflecting glass, Eden becomes ever more aware of his primitiveness and his exclusion from Ruth's social class. In other words, primitivism becomes synonymous with poverty rather than with a Darwinian retrogression. In taking up middle-class standards, Eden internalizes a self-hatred for the working class. Indeed, Martin's encounters with the elite cause him to become "appalled at the problem confronting him, weighed down by the incubus of his working-class station. Everything reached out to hold him down--his sister, his sister's house and family, everybody he knew, every tie of life. Existence did not taste good in his mouth. Up to then he had accepted existence . . . as a good thing. He had never questioned it" (76-77). As a result, Martin resolves to cast aside the limitations of his class and to rise out of poverty.

From these opening moments, *Martin Eden* appears to foreground, then, the Horatio Alger myth. By focusing on Martin's blind pursuit of ambition and recognition by the elite, however, London exposes the follies of this rags-to-riches myth. One might consider Jonathan Spinner's argument that *Martin Eden* is one of the "first novels that documents the disintegration of the American success story . . . yet it also marks one of the first scenes in a new American drama, that of the existential dilemma of the modern anti-hero" (43). In fact, London's original title was *Success*, drawing attention to the novel's focus on the self-made man. In the novel, Eden is unaware of his own blindness; on the contrary, in his pursuit of the Morses's cultural capital, Eden swallows the myth whole. His inability to rise above manual labor, as well as his adherence to a scattered and contradictory belief system, exposes the problems inherent in his goal of social mobility. At the same time that the novel critiques bourgeois culture and its myths, it also criticizes other transcendent value systems, including socialism, as inadequate in a new social universe and in the face of an emergent existentialist ethics. In this new universe, Eden's inability to emerge as a hero marks the difficulties faced by what will later be termed as existentialist man. In other words, once Eden realizes that there are no humanistic or romantic universal systems of order that govern the universe, and his unfettered individualism is rendered impotent, he is left with a fruitless pursuit of an antediluvian paradise that in this novel is resolved in his suicide. In contrast to my pessimistic reading of Martin, June Howard argues that "the masculine ideal embodied in Martin Eden and in London's other heroes combines the strength and vitality of the wild man with the self-discipline and sensitivity of the civilized man. The novel is in part a celebration of Martin Eden's ability to remain in contact with a primitive potency and yet develop his

will" (61). Tellingly, while Martin is a classic "wild man," as Howard reasons, he spends much of his time eliminating habits and tendencies that mark him as lower class, and, as a result, he rejects his "primitive potency." While Howard eschews any discussion of Martin's suicide, Howard's focus allows readers to consider the limits of Martin's individualist bravado. Joan Hedrick, in turn, offers a compelling insight into the novel and argues that "what makes the Ben Franklin/Horatio Alger model anachronistic are the class relationships that complicate every step of the hero's rise to success" (202).

The Horatio Alger success myth persists in American culture because it continues the culture's worship of the self-made man. John Cawelti's *Apostles of the Self-Made Man* focuses on the genesis of the self-made man myth and its various reinterpretations. According to Cawelti, there were many factors that contributed to the propagation of the self-made man myth. Specifically, Cawelti argues that "the manifest opportunities of a large and relatively empty continent and the openness of a rapidly growing and changing society impressed the idea of self-improvement on the public imagination. Immigration, too, helped make America a country of devotees of success by sending to their shores men who believed in their right and their need to better their condition" (3). The self-made man myth persisted in American culture, Cawelti argues, "because Americans were able to synthesize under his aegis many conflicting strands of belief and aspiration" (4). For example, Cawelti identified three strands of thought that were a part of the self-made man myth: the Protestant, middle-class work ethic that emphasized piety, frugality, and diligence; second, the secular impulse that stressed initiative, aggressiveness, competitiveness, and forcefulness; finally, and to a much lesser extent, a definition of success that was tied to individual fulfillment and social progress rather than to wealth or

status (5).

In this context of the self-made man myth, Cawelti discusses the popularity of the Horatio Alger novels. Alger's novels fit into the self-made man myth because they focused on poor boys who, because of their inner virtues and connection to a wealthy and kind benefactor, are able to rise out of poverty. According to Cawelti, if Alger's hero "has the daring and self-assurance to seize one of his many opportunities to come to the attention of a benevolent patron, and is also blessed with the virtues of industry, fidelity, and good manners, he is certain to get ahead" (116). Rather than attribute their rise to themselves, "Alger's heroes were aware of their indebtedness to these patrons, and modestly make no pretense of success through their own efforts, although Alger assures his readers that they deserve their advancement" (109).

The self-made man myth and the Alger novels offer simple formulas for success. The young boy who is equipped with a determined attitude and a patron's guidance achieves upward mobility and leaves the ranks of the lower-classes. Cawelti's study focuses not only on the reasons for the Alger hero's rise out of poverty, but he also concentrates on those characters who do not succeed. In contrast to the hero, Cawelti identifies in Alger's novels "the poor boy who lacks the intelligence and ability of the hero and is more susceptible to the corruption of his environment. Although sometimes reformed through the hero's efforts, the Micky McGuire type is doomed to remain in a subordinate but respectable position by his lack of intelligence and enterprise. In addition, they [the Micky McGuire types] frequently represent immigrant groups--Irish, Italians, Germans--who, not all bad, play a distinctly inferior role in Alger's version of America" (113). I quote Cawelti at length in order to show how an understanding of the Alger myth plays a significant part in London's *Martin*

Eden. The novel criticizes the self-made man/Alger model by continually re-evoking London's redefinition of the "primitive." That is, Martin's attempts to follow the Alger model fail because he believes this formula will simply erase his lower-class habits, values, and practices. It is not until Martin sees himself through middle-class standards that he comes to label his habits as inferior. At the same time, there is an undeveloped socialist critique, offered by Martin's friend Brissenden, that embraces the primitive as an alternative to a class-based society. That is, the primitive comes to represent to Brissenden a natural and idyllic pre-world that seemingly rejects Martin's quest for social mobility.

As part of his upward mobility, Eden's interpellation at the Morse's dinner party leads him first to identify himself as inferior and a primitive and then to construct a false identity, one that later reveals itself in his repeated addresses to himself in mirrors. In the mirror scenes, Eden questions his originary identity and galvanizes himself for his new educational pursuits that will elevate his class standing and "win" Ruth Morse. In one such scene, he tells himself, "Martin Eden, the first thing tomorrow you go to the free library an' read up on etiquette. Understand!" (71) In another scene wherein Eden struggles to come to terms with his desire for upward mobility even as he must continue to earn a living wage, he asks pleadingly, "who are you, Martin Eden?. . . he gazed at himself long and curiously. What are you? Where do you belong" (145-146). The mirror scenes thus underscore an Althusserian construction of a false self and Eden's inability to achieve true self-recognition.

Indeed, Martin's "blindness" comes to the fore, once again, in his response to Ruth's "call" to him as Mr. Eden. In his response, Martin measures himself according to the standards established by Ruth's social class that cause him to engage in rituals of self-hatred whereby he identifies sordidness and

ignorance with his lower socio-economic class. One example is Eden's desire to change his class status through personal hygienic reform and in his courtship of Ruth Morse. For Eden, social status is malleable. Evaluating himself in relation to the university students, Martin believes that the only difference that exists between him and the students is their liberal arts education. If he begins a self-improvement regimen, Eden reasons, the barriers that exist between his class and Ruth's will disappear. Indeed, Eden formulates his plan for improvement based on the degree to which he is a primitive or working-class person and therefore differs from Ruth's class. Eden observes, for instance, that "the very thought of her ennobled and purified him"(67). At first, this thought comes to the fore in his desire to improve his hygiene because "her cleanness and purity had reacted upon him, and he felt in his being a crying need to be clean. He must be that if he were ever to be worthy of breathing the same air with her" (81). Here, cleanliness becomes a class marker, and Martin's hygienic reform causes him not only to evaluate his behavior more critically, but he also begins to identify fellow workers as inferior because of their dirtiness. For example, Martin discerns that working class men's pants are baggy and fall straight from the knee to the foot. On the other hand, middle-class men's pants are noticeably creased. However, despite all of his attempts at hygienic and educational reform, Eden cannot easily erase what marks him as a working-class individual. In one scene in which he borrows some etiquette books that will aid him in his make-over, he is surprised by the librarian's guess that he is a sailor. Unbeknownst to Eden, his rolling gait gives away his social status, a trait that is not easy to reverse or tame. In her analysis of this scene, Joan Hedrick argues that "Martin's rolling gait, developed on the sea, is not in itself uncouth or ungraceful. It becomes so only when he, seeing himself through

middle-class eyes, tries to adapt his natural walk to an imitation of the walk of a man like Ruth Morse's brother" (204). His attempt to rise above his class dramatically underscores his entrapment within ideology and the nature of his false consciousness.

London also yokes his criticism of upward mobility onto the doomed love affair between Ruth and Martin. The effect is two-fold: on the one hand, London documents that despite the era's popular tenement fiction sub-genre wherein poor girls elevate their social standing through marriages to upper-class men, male characters, in this case Martin Eden, cannot earn a higher class status through marriage. Indeed, *Martin Eden* reveals courtship and marriage to a rich woman as false or impossible reconciliations of sharp ideological conflicts.

Ironically, while Eden struggles with his newfound desire to move up in social class, his position as a laborer is what both attracts and repulses Ruth Morse. For Ruth, Martin possesses an unchained masculine virility that is embodied in his primitive working-class status. At the same time she desires him, she realizes that in his present state Martin is far too unsuitable as a potential suitor. Indeed, Martin's poverty repulses Ruth, and when she visits his home, she "for the first time gazed upon the sordid face of poverty" (274). Revolted by his poverty, Ruth actively participates in Martin's personal reformation insofar as she holds him up to the Horatio Alger myth. For instance, she tells Martin, rather incessantly, about her father's associate Mr. Butler, who, despite his birth into the lower class, was able to "pull himself up by his bootstraps" because "he wanted a career, not a livelihood, and he was content to make immediate sacrifices for his ultimate gain" (108). Ruth's formula for success poses a vexing problem for Martin. While Eden longs for the class mobility Butler has achieved, he takes umbrage at Ruth's tale of hardship and

sacrifice. For Martin, his life experience has already been one of ceaseless labor and sacrifice. Ruth's endless recitation of the need for sacrifice and hard work compels Martin to criticize the bourgeoisie's ability ever to understand the working class.

Despite his attempts to challenge the Alger myth, Eden fails to realize that he has already bought into it. His recollection of his childhood fight with Cheese Face, for example, reveals his belief that the downtrodden can defeat the powerful. Specifically, Martin recalls his eleven-year grudge match against the more powerful and older Cheese Face. Prominent in his memory is that despite Cheese Face's strength, Martin "had never run away. He felt strengthened by the memory of that. He had always stayed and taken his medicine" (175). And, despite his many beatings, Martin eventually defeated Cheese Face. Focusing on this memory, Martin tells himself, "you licked Cheese Face, and you'll lick the editors if it takes thrice eleven years to do it in. You can't stop here. You've got to go on" (183). The text appears here to support Martin's rags-to-riches dream. However, Martin's recollection of the Cheese Face incident is juxtaposed to his degrading work at the laundry. While Martin aspires toward a higher social class, he must return to physical labor in order to support himself. Unlike the bourgeoisie, Martin lacks the leisure time and the wealth to devote to his fledgling writing career. Consequently, he later returns to the working-class world and becomes a dishwasher. Rather than find companionship among his brethren, Martin discovers that the opposite obtains because their "small mental caliber was depressing to him, and he was anxious to get away from them" (188). For Martin, initially, the laundry is a brief venture whereby he will earn some money that will enable him to continue his autodidactic pursuits. He believes that in his time off from work he will read

philosophy books and write his short stories. His unending labor, however, makes him "too dazed to think" (198), and "all that was god-like in him was blotted out. The spur of ambition was blunted; he had no vitality with which to feel the prod of it. He was dead. His soul seemed dead. He was a beast, a work-beast" (198). This scene stands in marked contrast to the Cheese Face incident as well as the overarching Horatio Alger myth. In the laundry chapters, Eden's claims that perseverance will see him through to success are seriously undermined. For many of the working-class characters in the novel, endless toil results only in more labor, sickness, and eventual death. For Martin, his ties to manual labor cast doubts on his ability to move into a new and higher social class.

In their analysis of these scenes, N.E. Dunn and Pamela Wilson establish a parallel between the fictional experiences of Martin Eden and the actual life experiences of Jack London. As a result, they argue that "what happened to Jack London equates with the thesis of *Martin Eden*, a point with which the novel could prophesy the author's own tragic end" (2). While one might consider the autobiographical impulses that may emerge in the novel, one might well consider London's non-fiction essays about the commodification of the working class's labor as another lens for the text. In his "What Life Means to Me," London, like his fictional character, emerges out of the working class that he characterizes as "sordid and wretched" (392) and evaluates his worth in terms of the values he imagines the upper classes embody. Unlike Martin, London observes that social climbing is not easy, particularly if one is blinded by illusions and myths. In order to survive and leave one's class, the workingman sells his only valuable asset: his muscle. While manufactured products such as shoes may be replenished, "there was no way of replenishing

the laborer's stock of muscle. The more he sold of his muscle, the less of it remained to him. It was his one commodity, and each day his stock of it diminished" (395). This endless cycle of toil degrades the working class, and so London reasons that his best method for achieving a new social status is to become an author: "I resolved to sell no more muscle, and to become a vendor of brains" (395). Here, London foregrounds what he later develops in his novel: Martin's turn toward authorship represents his desire to purge fully his primitivism and reveals, rather tellingly, the degree to which he is willing to commodify himself. Further, his writings which address his belief in an unfettered individualism render boldly the degree to which he possesses a false consciousness.

Despite Martin's constant quest for publication and middle-class acceptance, he rejects the wealthy's lack of spirited engagement with philosophy. In his fiction and in his politics, we are told, "what [Eden] sought was an impassioned realism, shot through with human aspiration and faith. What he wanted was life as it was, with all its spirit-groping and soul-reaching left in" (283). The romantic realism he desires is found at socialist meetings, labeled as "the real dirt." Indeed, Martin's romantic realism recalls Norris's theories about naturalism insofar as both envision it as a tool to plumb the depths of human experience. At the same time, Martin objects to socialist philosophy in large part because it is articulated by impoverished ethnic minorities. At one meeting, for example, Martin enjoys the main speaker's speech; however, he dismisses him because he is a Jew and is, accordingly, inferior and unfit. His response to ethnic and religious minorities reminds one of Norris's marginalization of the Mexican laborers in *The Octopus*; there the ethnic minorities are deemed as unsuitable standard bearers for the text's

sympathies. In terms of London's philosophy, Joan Hedrick's biography notes that while at one point in his life he was an avowed socialist, London publicly abandoned the party when it actively recruited ethnic and religious minorities. In terms of London's other works, there is an inconsistent treatment of socialist philosophy. *The Iron Heel* and "The Apostate" discuss, for example, capitalism's excesses and document the abuses that the workers suffer. On the other hand, "The Dream of Debs" renders in startling detail the damaging effects of unionized labor as a national strike imperils the country's interstate commerce, telecommunication, and food supply. Even though the strike is resolved and strikers are protected from termination, the narrator warns at the story's conclusion that "the tyranny of organized labor is getting beyond human endurance. Something must be done" (257). In *Martin Eden*, then, while the evening spent with the socialists enlivens Martin's imagination, the promise of socialist theory is never fully developed. Indeed, the novel offers no productive and meaningful socialist characters, and the meeting itself is described in terms of the Tower of Babel. Richard Morgan argues that "the lack of a socialist 'model' casts further doubt on the existence, at least on an effective level, of an anti-individualist basis to the book. There is no figure or system of morality which is brought into play in opposition to the general nature and activities of Martin" (19). In noting the undeveloped socialist critique, Morgan asks readers to consider the absence of any transcendent value system in the text.

Since Martin enjoys the socialist gathering, one might well wonder why he does not consider socialism a viable option. In his essay "What Life Means to Me," London uses his writing, much as Martin Eden does, to ascend to a higher social class. Unlike Eden, London discovers that there are very few engaging intellectuals among the upper class. Rather, his most promising

experiences occur in the working classes among the revolutionaries, labor leaders, and socialists. As a result, London commented, "I went back to the working-class in which I had been born and where I belonged. I care no longer to climb" (399). No longer interested in changing his class status, London resolved to act with working-class intellectuals, and together they would "cleanse the cellar and build a new parlor floor, in which all the rooms will be bright and airy, and where the air that is breathed will be clean, noble, and alive" (399). Interestingly, London's novel does not mirror his own actions, and his hero uses his forays into socialist gatherings primarily as occasions to engage in self-loathing behavior. In other words, Martin condemns the socialists for their inferiority and their dirtiness in much the same way that Ruth Morse and the middle class denigrate Martin for his primitivism. And once he returns from the socialist meeting, Martin views other working-class individuals with even greater hostility. When he comes into money through his publishing, Martin wishes to remove himself completely from the working-class his friends without ever realizing the alienating effect this will create.

Only his companion Brissenden questions Eden's quest for success and recognition. Brissenden cautions Martin about measuring himself according to bourgeois standards, and his plea to Martin to return to his days as a sailor figures his socialism as an embracing of primitive man who is unfettered by class strictures. Indeed, Brissenden hopes that Eden will become a socialist because "it will give [him] sanction for [his] existence. It is the one thing that will save [him] in the time of disappointment that is coming to [him]" (389). Here, Brissenden's socialism also takes on a more pessimistic tone. Questioned about his allegiance to socialism, Brissenden acknowledges that that system's success "is inevitable; because the present rotten and irrational system cannot

endure; because the day is past for your man on horseback. The slaves won't stand for it. They are too many, and they'll drag down the would-be equestrian before ever he gets astride" (389). However, this is as developed as the socialist critique ever becomes in the novel, perhaps because Brissenden never emerges as a central character. In fact, even when he later commits suicide, his death passes without much emotion or fanfare. Further, it is not surprising that his inchoate and pessimistic socialist sentiment leads to a sort of emergent existentialist stance in the novel's concluding sections. In her analysis, Hedrick comments that "in the end [Martin's] self is still locked behind those prison bars. The public who buy his books do so for the wrong reasons. The real Martin Eden they do not know. Art founders on the very class divisions it promised to overcome" (206). For James McClintock, Martin's consequent disillusionment represents a "recurring pattern that emerges from all of London's fiction: [the main character] experienced an initial enthusiasm at having discovered a scientifically justifiable rationale for believing in humanly sustaining values; then a sober realization of human limitations coming from an awareness that death can be understood but not conquered; and, finally, a bitter sense of futility to which he submitted" (200). In sum, London's use of the primitive figure in *Martin Eden* is far less explicit and perhaps less effective than what one later encounters in *The Hairy Ape* because there seems to be a conflation between Martin's alleged primitivism and his rather startling poverty.

In conclusion, an examination of American literature at the turn of the twentieth century reveals an interest in the primitive as figured in the brute working class. In O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*, Yank represents a rather extreme example of the primitive in that he becomes a simian-like character who cannot live in civilized society. In Norris' *The Octopus* and London's *Martin Eden*,

however, the primitive figure becomes estranged from its Darwinian context and functions as a pawn in each author's socio-political agendas. In many ways, this focus on the link between the primitive working class not only enriches the study of these texts, but it also foregrounds more radical discussions of the working class that will be found later in other fiction and drama.

Chapter Three
The Primitive as the Immigrant

Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
'Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!' cries she
With silent lips. 'Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!' (Lazarus, "The New Colossus")

In her famous poem, Emma Lazarus depicts the immigrant's arrival romantically and suggests that this new country will hospitably welcome its newest citizens. Beginning with J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur's eighteenth-century text *Letters from an American Farmer*, American identity was most often defined in terms of the melting-pot. For Crevecoeur, in the United States "individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world" (643). The success of the melting-pot myth rests, of course, on its assumption that all foreign-born individuals are assimilable. In the late nineteenth century, however, immigration patterns changed, and the new arrivals were, for the most part, impoverished and uneducated, and many were dark-skinned. As a result, the nature of the melting-pot myth changed. For some writers, such as Lazarus, the assimilation myth intensified in importance insofar as American security and freedom were deemed contingent upon the immigrant's renunciation of foreign customs. For others, however, the immigrant's "foreignness" came to threaten American culture's stability because he or she was deemed a radical departure from the nation's Anglo-Saxon heritage. In the period's literature, then, there is

a strong compulsion to delineate the limits of American culture and identity. Recalling Eugene O'Neill's play *The Hairy Ape* (1922), for example, there is a clear link between the immigrant characters and their primitivism. More specifically, O'Neill draws constant attention to the immigrant characters' primitivism by encoding it in terms of an evolutionary retrogression. For instance, the play opens with a description of one of the ship's sailors Paddy who is "an old wizened Irishman. His face is extremely monkey-like with all the sad, patient pathos of that animal in his eyes" (254). While immigrants are not in and of themselves primitives, in this context, however, the immigrants become associated with primitivism, thus linking them to markers of a pre-human and/or developmentally regressive existence. In this chapter, I will examine Norris's *McTeague* (1899) and selected magazine short stories and Dreiser's *The Hand of the Potter* (1918) and argue that the primitive takes on new resonances when it is figured as the immigrant. That is, by evoking the primitive as immigrant, Norris and Dreiser offer, in varying degrees, ways of conceptualizing immigrant characters as sites of disease, simplicity, or even criminal behavior--all, in other words, as regressive types.

The turn of the twentieth century marked a precarious time in American culture. The massive numbers of immigrants triggered great anxiety for individuals who envisioned American culture as besieged by these foreign persons. In his study of Ellis Island, Thomas Pitkin cites a 1902 edition of *Leslie's Weekly* which underscored the fears about the new immigrants. The anonymous author wrote that "those of the poorer classes are often grimy and strangely and shabbily dressed. . . . These include Italians, Russian Jews, and several other nationalities. They appear generally to be of a low order of knowledge, if not intelligence, as well as of physical development" (43). This

concern about hordes of unassimilable immigrants comes to the fore not only in this example, but more specifically in Norris's early magazine stories and articles. In these, Norris stresses an immigrant's strangeness and his or her potential threat to a stable and pure national identity. One clear example is his "Cosmopolitan San Francisco: The Remarkable Confusion of Races in the City's 'Quarter,'" published in the December 1897 edition of *The Wave*. The article chronicles the habits of Irish, German, Japanese, and Chinese immigrants in respect to the city's Anglo cultural heritage. Norris comments incessantly about the immigrants' inabilities to assimilate and/or defer to a superior Anglo-Saxon culture: "there is no suggestion of the Anglo Saxon; neither in the speech of the sidewalk strollers, nor in the shop windows, nor in the wording of signs and advertisements; nor in the general demeanor and behavior of the people" (4). For Norris, the Anglo-Saxon is lost among the newly arrived peoples, and his presence in the city's ethnic quarters is met without any notice. In fact, Norris compares San Francisco's earlier and more glories days to the present where it is overrun by immigrants and is now "a confusion of nations" (4). Further, to each of the immigrant groups Norris attributes lawlessness, penury, and promiscuity. In sum, the article concludes that the overabundance of new races will eventually outnumber the Anglo-Saxon and so imperil the native culture. This aversion toward immigrant populations, I would argue, takes on more resonance and greater scope in Norris's novel *McTeague* (1899), which underscores the immigrant's unsuitability by relying on and invoking the primitive figure.

As I discussed in Chapter One, there is a strong link between Norris's nativist philosophy and his depiction of the primitive in his fiction. *Vandover and the Brute* reveals, for example, Norris's fears about porous social boundaries.

Tellingly, the novel's concluding scene, wherein a defeated Vandover crouches in the filth in a factory worker's cottage, rationalizes Vandover's devolution, legitimizes the innate and degraded state of the primitive or lower class, and posits as inevitable the destruction of the upper class by its unmediated contact with the primitive. Following the ideological tenor of *Vandover and the Brute*, *McTeague* chronicles the title character's innate primitivism as explained in terms of the racist underpinnings of Lombrosian criminology. That is, McTeague's gargantuan features and Irish heritage signal his proclivity to crime. Indeed, McTeague's necessary degeneracy is an example of classic naturalism in terms of its emphasis on heredity in that "below the fine fabric of all that was good in him" (285) lurks "the foul stream of hereditary evil" (285). Moreover, "the vices and sins of his father and his father's father, to the third and fourth and five hundredth generation, tainted him. The evil of an entire race flowed in his veins" (285). According to Donald Pizer, McTeague's flaws "stress man's atavistic nature, that he is frequently controlled by unanalyzable instincts which derive from his family and racial past" (62). Further, Norris's repeated physical descriptions of McTeague's huge and protruding jaw and his hulking stature also indicate McTeague's inborn criminality. As we will recall from an earlier discussion of his theories, Lombroso believed that the criminal was the manifestation of an atavistic race. Focusing on skull, brow, and jaw sizes, Lombroso used these physical differences as natural predictors of criminal activity among the urban and immigrant poor. To classify these individuals as "atavisms," of course, marginalizes them as moral degenerates whose natural proclivity toward crime poses a serious danger to the culture.

Norris combines his criticism of McTeague's immigrant inheritance with his condemnation of him as a pseudoprofessional. Two years before he

published *McTeague*, Norris wrote two brief sketches in the March 13, 1897, edition of *The Wave* wherein he described the habits of a brutish pseudo-dentist in San Francisco. In his first sketch, entitled "The Brute," Norris depicts the unnamed character's hulking and gargantuan nature as profoundly influenced by biological and environmental stimuli. Surrounded by colossal machinery, the "brute" has become like these objects-- "huge, hard, brutal, strong with a crude, blind strength, stupid, [and] unreasoning" (3). The "brute" is not only an unreasoning man, but his understanding of the world, Norris explains, is grounded in his appetites. When stumbling across a white violet, for instance, the "brute" looks at it without any comprehension until he puts it in his mouth, grinds it with his teeth, and then consumes it because, after all, "it was the only way he knew" (3). Tellingly, then, the sketch introduces a crude and atavistic main character whose encounters with his environment underscore his primitivism. The "brute's" actions continue in Norris's second sketch, "The Dental Parlors," wherein the character's base living quarters are also the setting for his professionally suspect "practice" of dentistry. The two sketches are clearly preliminary outlines for the actions depicted in the way the "brute's" primitivism is not only revealed in terms of his inferior heredity but in his mimicry of a middle-class professional status.

McTeague is the most written character in most discussions of the novel and the issues of concern to critics include McTeague's ethnicity and, more recently, his professional status. For example, Norris frightens middle-class readers' sensibilities when he reveals that McTeague's base ethnic qualities emerge in his care of his patients. While practicing dentistry, McTeague struggles against his lower self's impulses that suddenly and without warning rise up to conquer his better self:

> suddenly the animal in the man stirred and woke; the evil instincts that in him were so close to the surface leaped to life, shouting and clamoring. It was a crisis. . . . There in the cheap and shabby "Dental Parlor" a dreaded struggle began. It was the old battle, old as the world--the sudden panther leap of the animal, lips drawn, fangs aflash, hideous, monstrous, not to be resisted, and the simultaneous arousing of the other man, the better self that cries, 'down, down,' without knowing why; that grips the monster; that fights to strangle it, to thrust it down and back (284).

Examining these early scenes Hugh Dawson comments that McTeague is a stereotypical Irish-American and his depiction reflects "the sociological mind-set of those like Norris who found in caricature a means of preserving his highly qualified sense of Americanness" (42). In terms of McTeague's professional status, Norris satirizes McTeague's mother's desire for her son to become a "professional." Rather than enter college and later dental school, McTeague works in service to a traveling dentist, who is described repeatedly as a charlatan. After studying with this dentist and reading the "core texts," McTeague is no more knowledgeable because "he was too hopelessly stupid to get much benefit from them" (264). McTeague's reputation nevertheless flourishes among the immigrant residents of Polk Street, not because he is a superb dentist but because he foregoes dental forceps and uses his enormous fingers to extract teeth. This account of McTeague's professionalism as brutal force is, of course, unnerving. David Heddendorf, in turn, comments that "professionalism" is a middle-class construct that manifests itself in the late nineteenth century as a means of reifying knowledge, training, and habits. In his analysis of *McTeague*, Heddendorf argues that the text's focus on the grimy "Dental Parlors" represents "the nightmare side of professionalism, [specifically] the lay person's fear of being preyed upon by someone with irresistible

authority and powers" (679). Indeed, the novel's opening chapter underscores McTeague's ethnic or primitive depravity and his pseudo-professionalism.

In many respects, McTeague is a classic primitive in whom "the evil of an entire race flowed in his veins" (285). Norris clearly shows a link between McTeague's Irish heritage and his primitivism: "long dormant, [the brute] was at last alive, awake. From now on he would feel its presence continually; would feel it tugging at its chain, watching its opportunity. What was this perverse, vicious thing that lived within him, knitted to his flesh?" (285). McTeague's primitivism defines his actions and attitudes; in a fight with Marcus Schouler, for instance, McTeague "sprang to his feet with a shrill and meaningless clamor, totally unlike the ordinary bass of his speaking tones. It was the hideous yelling of a hurt beast, the squealing of a wounded elephant. He framed no words; in the rush of high-pitched sound that issued from his wide open mouth there was nothing articulate. It was something no longer human; it was rather an echo from the jungle" (428). McTeague's primitivism is synonymous with an evolutionary return to the jungle. Rather than concentrate more of my analysis on McTeague, a character that has already received much critical attention, I wish to use McTeague's story merely as an introduction to my larger concern: the panorama of ethnic and lower-class individuals who reside on Polk Street. That is, Norris presents McTeague as the quintessential primitive whose presence looms large over the city's other immigrant inhabitants. In turning critical attention to the other immigrant characters who comprise the novel, one discovers that while Norris relies on the primitive figure in his depiction of Maria, Zerkow, and Trina, the degree to which he encodes their primitivism is far less dramatic than what one finds in McTeague. For these characters, Norris attributes their primitivism more directly to their squalor and ethnic and

biological inferiority rather than to a purely Darwinian assessment of pre-human behavior. In focusing on the novel's other characters, one identifies more clearly those who constitute Norris's kaleidoscope of ethnic and primitive inhabitants.

In examining Norris's response to the Polk Street residents, John Conder comments that by situating the novel among the lower-class inhabitants and by detailing the residents' and the street's changing nature, Norris denies them a stable social identity. Donald Pizer comments that Norris's original book title was *The People of Polk Street*, suggesting an emphasis on the street's ethnic and social milieu. Before publishing *McTeague*, Norris's preoccupation with Polk Street's primitives revealed itself in many of his writings for *The Wave*. Two examples include "Types of Western Men: The Plumber's Apprentice" and "The Heroism of Jonesee," which appeared in two May 1896 issues of the San Francisco periodical. In the first story, Jonesee is a loafing apprentice whose grimy Polk Street workshop is paradoxically his haven from actual labor. His chief occupation, the narrator comments, is his "Sunday afternoon posing, trying to be tough, showing himself off in his chief finery" (6). His days are spent frequenting the low-brow culture of Polk Street, and at the conclusion of his "work day," he ventures to a cheap theater and later becomes drunk and disorderly. In the second story, Norris reintroduces Jonesee and parodies his quest for stature and social position among his Polk Street comrades. In the story, Jonesee initiates a brawl aboard a streetcar and is arrested for public drunkenness. Mimicking bravery, however, Jonesee invents a tale of his own heroism wherein he saved a young woman from the lecherous clutches of one of San Francisco's noted boxers. His story has its desired effect, and by supposedly defeating the noted prizefighter, Jonesee "[becomes] the cock of

Polk Street now, and, even beyond it, [is] occasionally spoken of as being hard" (6). The two stories offer a derisive portrait of the primitive lower-class workers who comprise Polk Street, critical of their work ethics and their pursuit of a kind of middle-class acceptability or superior status.

The representation of the primitive comes to the fore more completely in *McTeague*. The novel opens with a panoramic view of Polk Street complete with its dirty plumber's offices, seedy barber shops, and cheap restaurants whose windows display perishable foods weighed down in piles of ice. Polk Street residents and their occupations announce themselves with each passing hour as the early morning signals the arrival of newspaper boys and common day laborers followed by clerks and shop girls who appear in the late morning. In this setting, there is a heightened sensitivity to one's social status: "the shop girls, the plumbers' apprentices, the small tradespeople, and their like, whose social position was not clearly defined, could never be sure how far they could go and yet preserve their 'respectability.' When they wished to be 'proper,' they invariably overdid the thing" (328). Hence, the Polk Street residents stand not only in relation to the markers of upper-class society but also in marked contrast to each other. That is, the stratifications that divide the lower class from the upper class also appear within the lower class itself. Beginning with Old Grannis and Miss Baker, one observes the degree to which they represent a lost and refined Anglo-Saxon tradition amidst the growing squalor of Polk Street. In marked contrast to them, Maria Macapa and Zerkow underscore the natural depravity of the primitive immigrant class. Finally, Trina McTeague reveals the degree to which she succumbs to her biology and environment and sinks to the lowest level among all of the primitive immigrants.

Unlike Polk Street's primitive immigrants, Old Grannis and Miss Baker

represent a supposedly innocent, perhaps noble Anglo-Saxon influence. Their presence and function in the novel has intrigued and at times bemused Norris scholars. Critics such as Ernest Marchand, George Spangler, and William Dillingham consider Old Grannis and Miss Baker as crucial counterpoints to the lowly actions the novel depicts. Grant Knight suggests that the two characters are Dickensian and their presence provides the novel with a crucial comic escape. On the other hand, William Dean Howells, Richard Chase, and Donald Pizer argue that the characters represent the text's greatest weakness insofar as their subplot is irrelevant to the novel's treatment of avarice. Recently, Donna Campbell has written persuasively about the two characters as representatives of the local color tradition, a genteel literary movement that precedes naturalism. Indeed, the Old Grannis--Miss Baker plot provides many moments that underscore their indebtedness to a literary genre marked by averted glances and arrested passion. Old Grannis and Miss Baker not only represent an older literary tradition, as Campbell suggests, but they are also the last of the "old guard" in terms of the city's and Polk Street's burgeoning ethnic populations. I would suggest that the two characters represent, therefore, a kind of civility and gentility that are out of place among urban primitives. While the text offers many moments wherein Old Grannis's and Miss Baker's actions are ironically undermined and at times ridiculed, the text also posits the elderly couple as adrift and vulnerable among the city's immigrant population. For instance, Marcus Schouler, a German immigrant character, recounts for McTeague his violent argument with a bicyclist: "Marcus quivered with rage. 'Say that again, says I to um. Just say that once more, and'--here a rolling explosion of oaths--'you'll go back to the city in the Morgue wagon. I'd a knifed him in another minute'" (269). This example clearly illustrates that Polk Street is

besieged by dangerous individuals who settle matters violently rather than through reason and patience. Ironically, this constant violence causes Polk Street's immigrant residents to become immune to the neighborhood's violence; for instance, after discovering Maria's dead body, Trina observes that no one stops to notice or care about the recent murder: "people were laughing and living, buying and selling, walking about out there on the sunny sidewalks, while behind her in there--in there--in there [was Maria's corpse]" (484).

To suggest that the Old Grannis--Miss Baker subplot embodies and glorifies Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage, however, goes against Norris's derisive comments about realism published earlier in his career. In his "A Plea for Romantic Fiction," an essay from his *The Responsibilities of the Novelist*, Norris criticizes realism's privileging of a middle-class aesthetic. By limiting the text to the commonplace, Norris reasons, realism fails to plumb the depths of human motivations. Realism's aesthetic, in other words, limits itself because it confines itself to representing quaint manners and remote regions. In *McTeague*, then, Grannis and Baker represent not only the outworn manners of a long-past era, but they also suggest the degree to which the Anglo-Saxon heritage may have become lost amidst the swarming chaos of the city's immigrant primitives. There is an intense interiority to Grannis's and Baker's actions; their detailed knowledge of each other's habits suggests that while there are certainly moments when each one leaves the apartment building, a great many more of their actions occur at home and away from the influence of Polk Street. For Barbara Hochman, the "old folks's structure of habit protects them from the instabilities of the surrounding world and from their own wish for and fear of contact with one another" (67). Indeed, Grannis' penchant for book binding and Miss Baker's daily "tea time" are attempts to shield themselves from Polk

Street's primitive influences.

While Grannis and Baker retreat into their respective apartments, shielding themselves from San Francisco's immigrant population, their inner sanctums are nevertheless invaded by Polk Street, specifically by two of the novel's immigrant characters, Maria Macapa and Trina McTeague, who attempt to draw out the couple into the very environment Grannis and Baker wish to avoid. Maria's and Trina's matchmaking efforts allow Grannis and Baker eventually to consummate their relationship. As Norris writes, almost in a parody of such happy endings, joined in this union, Grannis and Baker "walked hand in hand in a delicious garden where it was always autumn. Far from the world and together they entered upon the long retarded romance of their commonplace and uneventful lives" (493). After this point, Old Grannis and Miss Baker are shut out from the actions of the last remaining four chapters and are never heard from again. Norris preserves them in the sanctity of Grannis's room from the events of Polk Street. While the couple may represent a past innocence and racial purity that are lost on the characters who are ultimately destroyed in the novel, according to Campbell, "neither the old couple, the story, nor local color fiction has anywhere else to go." Further, "with the local color story effectively packed away, the naturalistic story opens out in all its force, complete with sordid elements of setting and action" (47).

While Grannis and Baker represent Polk Street's days prior to immigration, they are increasingly outnumbered by the plethora of urban primitives. Envisioning the immigrants as threats to the natural order, Norris encodes Maria's, Zerkow's, and Trina's primitivism in terms of their ethnicity. At this point, Norris appears to alter his representation of the primitive from one who is an evolutionary "thowback" to the pre-human era (McTeague) to one

whose poverty, ethnicity, and foreignness come to the fore as threats to Anglo-Saxon identity. Even though Norris expands his definition of the primitive, he continues to invoke the primitive figure to denote regressive types. Beginning first with the Mexican-born Maria Macapa, Norris presents her as a strange woman whose storytelling and peddling of junk marginalize her. Prior to publishing his novel, Norris wrote a magazine short story wherein the title character's ethnicity and actions mirror those of Maria Macapa. Published in the October 1897 issue of *The Wave*, "Judy's Service of Gold Plate" chronicles the title character's peddling of a fanciful story about her aristocratic origins and previous ownership of a gold service plate that entices the imagination of Knubel, a Jewish junk collector, who closely resembles Zerkow in *McTeague*. Briefly summarized, Judy's income depends, at first, upon the liver oil she extracts from cod fish and then peddles to Knubel, who, in turn, bottles it and sells it to San Francisco's residents. As is the case with Maria, Judy discovers a far more lucrative object for exchange in her story about her one-time ownership of a gold service plate. Originally entitled "Cod Liver Oil on Troubled Waters," Norris's title change suggests his refocusing on the value attributed to Judy's invented and fanciful story about gold rather than her role as a "middle man" in the cod liver oil business. Mesmerized by Judy's stories, Knubel marries Judy in order to find the gold service plate. After losing her child, Judy forgets her story about the gold, an action that enrages Knubel, who proceeds to murder his wife. In the final scene, Knubel has fallen into the San Francisco Bay, clutching worthless tin pots, pans, and trinkets in the desperate hope that they are the gold about which Judy had spoken. Explicit in its belittling of Judy's and Knubel's responses to the imagined gold, the text suggests that Judy's life, like the story she peddles, lacks authentic value.

In the novel, Maria's belief in her mythic and storied background propels her forward and gives her a notion of a purpose--she is a peddler of valuable wares. However, by pairing her with the miser Zerkow, Norris satirizes her quest for social status through her actions. For example, armed with the money Zerkow pays her for her junk collection, Maria spends it on cheap shirt waists and neckties that she sees the girls who work at the candy store's soda water fountain wear: "she was sick with envy of these young women. They were in the world, they were elegant, they were debonair, they had their 'young men'" (287). Satirizing Maria's attempt at conspicuous consumption, Norris reveals her precarious social position through her mimicry of the fashion habits of those women who do more genteel labor than she does. For Maria, the only "young man" who appears is the much older junk dealer Zerkow.

In his analysis of the miser's function in *McTeague*, Walter Benn Michaels argues that "if junk becomes junk by outliving its 'usefulness,' then in the hands of the miser, gold becomes junk, outliving its value in use by being deprived of its value in exchange" (153). In other words, Zerkow's hoarding of Maria's story robs it of its purported value because the gold he seeks never enters into any exchange which would give it value. Zerkow's pursuit of the non-existent gold underscores not only the text's theme of avarice, as Donald Pizer suggests, but links this theme to a racial source for this problem. Norris frames Zerkow in anti-Semitic descriptions such as those noting his cat-like eyes and his claw-like fingers that grope continuously at the ground for hidden treasures. More specifically, Zerkow "lived in a filthy den in the alley . . . . He was the Man with the Rake, groping hourly in the muck-heap of the city for gold. The glint of it was constantly in his eyes; the jangle of it sang forever in his ears as the jangling of cymbals" (287; 293). According to Trina McTeague, Zerkow "is a

horror" (414), and his proposed marriage to Maria is particularly alarming because "he's a Jew, isn't he?" (414). Further, Trina reflects about the strangeness of Maria's and Zerkow's imminent marriage:

> he's made Maria tell him the story of that [gold] plate over and over and over again, and Maria does it and is glad to because he's the only one that believes it. Now he's going to marry her just so he can hear that story every day, every hour. He's pretty near as crazy on the subject as Maria is. They're a pair for you, aren't they? Both crazy over a lot of gold dishes that never existed. . . . It's a queer match anyway you put it (414-415).

While fabricating stories about an imagined past is not in and of itself primitive, in this context, however, the story's resonance and the pairing of Maria and Zerkow seems to equate an insatiable lust for gold with their primitive ethnic heritages.

Zerkow's and Maria's unsuitability and ethnic impurity appears, once again, in the example of the death of their underweight and undervalued baby, who dies without a name and is "a strange, hybrid little being, . . . combining in its puny little body the blood of the Hebrew, the Pole, and the Spaniard" (431). When Maria loses her child, one who is repeatedly rendered in terms of valuelessness, she also loses any memory of her gold service plate story, her one possession that is endowed with any potential value. According to Barbara Hochman, "the loss of her 'real' child may be seen to displace her need for the story of loss, whether real or imaginary" (65). As is the case with Knubel in Norris's short story, Zerkow then murders Maria and is discovered drowned in San Francisco Bay, clutching valueless objects. Zerkow's final moment suggests his pathetic attempt to "take his gold with him." The text thus emphasizes both Maria's and Zerkow's loss of imaginary status insofar as they attribute value to items that never existed. The Maria--Zerkow subplot also

foregrounds the link between avarice and the primitive that comes into play in greater detail in Trina McTeague's actions.

While Norris depicts Maria's and Zerkow's behaviors as an inevitable consequence of their respective heredities, he offers a far more complex portrait in his depiction of Trina Sieppe McTeague. Indeed, Norris's treatment of Trina's devolution has angered contemporary critics; Edward and Madeline Vaughn note, for example, that the novel's sordidness is exceeded only by "Trina's wretched life, for she had something to start with in mind and spirit, and the slatternly figure, maimed already through her husband's cruelty--was once as neat and trim a little woman as you could find" (11). Interestingly, Norris's preoccupation with women's moral behavior is the subject of two earlier magazine short stories published in 1897 issues of *The Wave*. The "Passing of 'Little Pete': The Funeral Rites Held Over a Famous Chinaman" suggests, by its title, an examination of Chinese funeral rituals. However, the story is less about Pete's funeral and more about the way in which vulgar women lead others to act uncivilized. From the beginning of the story, Norris offers a spectrum of women's sordid behavior and notes that a few women recognize their vulgarity and are ashamed; however, more women celebrate their lack of femininity and consider their actions a form of liberation. In the case of the latter, Norris cautions, the effect on the community is disastrous, as it is women's behavior that shows others, principally men, how to act. In the short story, Norris describes the collected mob of two thousand people, most of whom are women, as vile looters who disrupt the funeral and plunder the funeral platform of its "China bowls, pink tissue paper ornaments, and the cooked chickens and bottles of gin" (7). Because of the vulgar Chinese women's activities, the Americans who attend the funeral also engage in the criminal acts.

Norris continues this focus on women's primitive and vulgar behavior in "Fantaisie Printaniere" in the November 1897 edition of *The Wave* , wherein the principal actions occur on Polk Street and the text chronicles an absurd conversation between Trina McTeague and Missis Ryer. Each woman compares her bruises to the other's as evidence of her husband's superior strength and brutality. The story emphasizes the degree to which the main characters are unclean and unfeminine, thus ironizing the women's mimicry of leisure activities such as taking afternoon tea, during which ceremony the women compete for the title of most injured marital victim. Norris's short stories thus foreground the issues he develops more completely in *McTeague*: women's purity, specifically the woman's engagement with the Cult of True Womanhood ideal, and the degree to which women may become primitives is based on their failure to live up to this ethereal femininity.

Women's purity is a topic that has generated much cultural and critical discussion. In her ground-breaking work, Barbara Welter examined mid-nineteenth century American women's magazines, gift annuals, and religious literature and discovered a unified cultural pattern about women's behavior that she termed the Cult of True Womanhood. True Womanhood, Welter suggests, is the standard against which women judged and were judged by others. The four acceptable qualities were piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. As long as women followed the precepts, domestic happiness and power were ensured. If women strayed from the prescribed behavior, however, their marginalization was expected, and they were no longer defined as women. The True Womanhood ideal clearly manifests itself in Norris's representation of Trina McTeague. Using Trina as his example, Norris reveals how she will ultimately fail to live up to this almost impossible standard, and her failure will

only serve to accentuate her primitivism. Initially, however, Trina appears to fit this feminine ideal in that her physical description underscores true womanhood: "her face was round and rather pale; her eyes long and narrow and blue like the half-open eyes of a little baby" (278). Further, Trina's hair "was so heavy that it tipped her head backward, and the position thrust her chin out a little. It was a charming poise, innocent, confiding, almost infantile" (278). These descriptions seem to suggest that unlike Polk Street's other immigrant residents, Trina is not a primitive. However, Trina's initial submission to McTeague while as his etherized patient and her eventual marriage to him help to reveal the vulgarity of their union and her "hidden primitivism" in that "the very act of submission that bound the woman to him forever had made her seem less desirable in his eyes" (326). Or, rather, in her marriage to McTeague, "something had leaped to life in her--something that had hitherto lain dormant, something strong and overpowering. It frightened her now as she thought of it, this second self that had wakened within her, and that shouted and clamored for recognition" (325-326). Unlike the sentiments expressed by cultural critic Catherine Beecher, who envisioned a wife's submission to her husband as a "sort of pride to the voluntary surrender of their own will and make it their boast to bend themselves to the yoke" (6), Trina's marriage to McTeague shows the degree to which she submits to an inferior man and how her imaginings of her status as a dentist's wife are absurd.

At the beginning of her marriage, Trina takes pride in McTeague's professional status as a dentist. She keeps the suite of rooms clean and also employs a maid. For three years, they proceed without incident. In fact, Trina spends much of her time socializing with Miss Baker and criticizing Maria, thus establishing a place for herself in middle-class culture: "unconsciously [Trina

and McTeague] adapted their modes of life to suit each other. Instead of sinking to McTeague's level as she had feared, Trina found that she could make McTeague rise to hers, and in this saw a solution of many a difficult and gloomy complication" (395). Once McTeague is exposed as practicing dentistry without a license, however, his loss of professional status triggers financial anxiety for Trina. Indeed, as their status changes, so too do their dwellings. Trina convinces McTeague that they must sell their possessions and move into cheaper accommodations: "the room was whitewashed. It contained a bed, three cane-seated chairs, and a wooden washstand with its washbowl and pitcher. From its single uncurtained window one looked down into the flat's dirty back yard and upon the roofs of the hovels that bordered the alley in the rear. . . . There was a smell of cheap soap and of ancient hair-oil in the air" (453). Trina's anxiety about McTeague's lost professional status also leads her to abandon her refined qualities, and their succession of cheaper homes illustrates her gradual fall into greater degrees of uncleanliness: "Trina lost her pretty ways and her good looks. Her charming little figure grew coarse, stunted, and dumpy. She who had once been of cat-like neatness, now slovened all day about the room in a dirty flannel wrapper, her slippers clap-clapping after her as she walked. . . . What odds was it if she was slatternly, dirty, and coarse" (497). In their analyses, Donna Campbell, Barbara Hochman, and Mary Beth Werner offer compelling readings of Trina's declining social position. Focusing on Trina's extreme penury, Campbell argues that "as Trina slips further into her obsessive miserliness, for example, she visits Miss Baker less and Maria Macapa more, signifying her descent from the restraint and middle-class respectability of realism to the lower-class excess and squalor that characterize Zolaesque naturalism" (44). In her analysis, Hochman draws a parallel

between Trina's miserliness and her sexuality. Specifically, "after her first kiss, Trina feels she has been robbed. She thus begins to save another treasure, soon to be stored (appropriately enough) in a locked trunk beneath her bridal dress" (70). For Hochman, Trina's sexuality represents an internal chaos whereas her "greed appears to promise control and self-sufficiency" (70). Werner notes, in turn, that at the outset of Trina's miserliness, "she ceases to adhere to the Cult of True Womanhood and becomes not a helpmate but a slattern and a shrew. Once Trina no longer represents the ideal woman, she becomes an anomaly, an aberration whom McTeague feels he must punish" (2). Campbell, Hochman, and Werner raise very important points insofar as they consider Trina's treatment in terms of the Cult of True Womanhood. The feminist approach to the text might actually limit itself, however, if it overlooks the racial argument that underlies Trina's depiction. Trina's "actual" loathsomeness comes to the fore in her adoption of Zerkow's manners. By becoming a miser, Trina, in effect, also becomes a Jew, thus signifying an even more startling primitivism than that of the slattern.

The depiction of Jews is a complicated issue in literature. British literature, for example, is replete with many examples of anti-Semitism--for instance, the representation of Jewish characters as Shylocks, Fagins, and Svengalis. On the contrary, Puritan American literature often draws parallels between the Hebrews and the religious pilgrims. In his *Plymouth Plantation*, for instance, William Bradford associates the Mayflower travelers with the Old Testament Hebrews because both are God's chosen people who have been delivered out of bondage into the promised land. Not until an increase in Jewish immigration in the mid-nineteenth century, along with a precarious economic climate, did American authors and cultural critics begin to depict

Judaism in pejorative terms. In his *Send These to Me: Jews and Other Immigrants in Urban America*, John Higham comments that there are two sides to the Jewish stereotype. On the "positive" side, Jews supposedly possessed a cunning and keen business sense that effected their financial successes. On the "negative" side, however, their business savvy was also evidence of an inborn treachery. Indeed, by the 1840s the verb "to jew" had entered American slang idiom, and it meant to cheat someone by sharp practice, signifying a semantic anti-Semitism. According to Higham, the era's precarious economic situation and the increased numbers of impoverished Jews arriving in urban centers exacerbated the feelings against them. In his more recent examination of American anti-Semitism, Sander Gilman argues that in the nineteenth-century's medical and evolutionary discourses, Jews were considered pernicious atavisms. Specifically, "the Jew was seen as the incarnation of those instincts that individuals and societies alike needed to outgrow; childish, primitive, thoroughly inbred, the Jew embodied a stage of sexual development which was understood as primitive and perverse and therefore degenerate" (214-215).

In terms of Norris's fiction, one observes, as Louis Harap does, that "racism had a deeper hold on Frank Norris and penetrated into his creative work so deeply that he projected in *McTeague* one of the most anti-Semitic portrayals in American fiction" (391). While Harap primarily addresses Norris's depiction of Zerkow, his insights compel one to consider Norris's other representations of Jewish characters. In *Vandover and the Brute*, for example, the unnamed Jewish character drowns tragically after a ship sinking because the frightened passengers believe that he will overturn their lifeboat. Described repeatedly as a "dirty Jew," the man is left to die because ethnicity precludes

him from humane treatment. In *The Octopus*, the ranchers' financial problems are attributed to the vast railroad monopoly and its chief agent S. Behrman. In *McTeague*, then, it is not surprising that Trina's devolution is marked in terms of how she moves away from her German-Swiss heritage and becomes marked as a "Jew." Walter Benn Michaels argues that Trina embodies the qualities of a miser and a masochist: "if the masochist's desire to be owned is perverse, it is nevertheless made possible only by the bourgeois identification of the self as property. . . . Hence, an increased investment in the values of autonomy will naturally be accompanied by an increased insecurity about the status of that autonomy; a self that can be owned can also be sold or stolen or gambled away" (124). Curiously, Michaels seems to overlook the link between miserliness and the text's racial atavistic argument. Trina's move into Zerkow's house and her exchange of her paper money lottery winnings for gold coins establish in rather bold terms the degree to which she sheds her gentile status: "she even put the smaller gold pieces in her mouth, and jingled them there. She would plunge her small fingers into the pile with little murmurs of affection, her long, narrow eyes half closed and shining, her breath coming in long sighs" (478). This moment harkens back to Zerkow's sensual identification with his imagined gold, reinforcing, as Donald Pizer argues, "the theme of the atavistic, racial source of their avarice. When Trina fondles her gold coins, or when Zerkow's fingers twitch at the sight of gold, Norris is uniting avarice and atavism in one symbol" (75). Indeed, Norris not only draws a parallel between Maria's and Zerkow's compulsion toward gold, but he also seems to ground it in terms of a biological imperative: "economy was her strong point. A good deal of peasant blood still ran undiluted in her veins, and she had all the instinct of a hardy and penurious mountain race--the instinct which saves without any

thought, without idea of consequence--saving for the sake of saving, hoarding without knowing why. Even McTeague did not know how closely Trina held to her new-found wealth" (358). Norris vulgarizes Trina's economic habits by equating them with those of a Jewish miser. Once Trina withholds money from McTeague, she becomes far less sympathetic, and our empathy turns to McTeague. In his frustration, McTeague bellows "miser! You're worse than old Zerkow" (408-409) and he bites her fingers leaving her with only a few digits that rather appropriately form a claw that Zerkow had similarly possessed that aided him in his search for gold. While much of the novel chronicles McTeague's undesirable qualities, it also posits that he is far less loathsome than Trina's transmogrification into an atavistic Jewish type. Reflecting about her transmogrification into Zerkow, Trina comments in her own words that "[ever] since I won in the lottery I've become a regular little miser. It's growing on me. . . . I can't help it" (411).

In sum, *McTeague* relies on primitivism to reveal the unfit qualities of the urban immigrants who reside on Polk Street. While Old Grannis and Miss Baker remain out of reach of the text's naturalist dilemmas, they also represent the degree to which racial purity is a hostage to the panoply of immigrant residents. In his biography of Frank Norris, Franklin Walker comments that in *McTeague* "the reader is immersed in a world of bald and brutal realism from beginning to end, and is brought into association with none whose vulgarity and brutality is relieved by any higher qualities" (223). Maria's, Zerkow's, and Trina's violent deaths suggest their necessary radical removal from the gene pool in a desperate attempt to purify San Francisco's native environs.

In the years following *McTeague*'s publication, American culture experienced continued difficulties regarding its identity in light of the constant

stream of newly arriving immigrants. Prior to World War I, political leaders such as Henry Cabot Lodge launched anti-immigration leagues and lobbied for literacy tests that would curtail the influx of uneducated immigrants. Thomas Pitkin notes that in the wake of World War I, the First Quota Act passed and ended the United States' open door policy for southern and eastern European immigrants. Specifically, the immigration law "imposed absolute numerical limits on European immigration. . . . It insured that the new immigration from southern and eastern Europe could not reach more than a small fraction of its pre-war level, while not affecting what had long been the normal migration from Northern Europe" (136). The upper classes' fears about unchecked immigration undergird Lothrup Stoddard's nativist rhetoric in his *The Rising Tide of Color Against White-World Supremacy* (1920), wherein he suggests that the white man's natural inclinations toward cultural dominance are threatened by the increased birth rate among inferior classes and the white man's inability to recognize that "the basic factor in human affairs is not politics, but race" (6). For Stoddard, the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries represented the pinnacle of white imperial domination because "the white peoples felt that the expansion of one white nation buttressed the expansion of all" (198). This solidarity was threatened, however, by the onset of World War I because the white nations were waging war against each other and depleting their forces when they should have banded together and moved toward the continued global colonization of so-called inferior nations and peoples. Further, the war's aftermath left many white nations economically and militarily weakened, thus jeopardizing their imperial land claims.

Stoddard's fears about a severely weakened white race also appear in his ruminations about American culture. Disturbed as Madison Grant was in his

The Passing of a Great Race, Stoddard worries about the white race's declining birth rate at a time while "conversely the lower types were gaining ground" (162). While writers such as Emma Lazarus and Mary Antin believed American culture benefited from assimilated immigrants, Stoddard rejected their optimism. Rather, he argues that "there is no more absurd fallacy than the shibboleth of the 'melting-pot.' As a matter of fact, the melting-pot may mix but does not melt. . . . The offspring is a mongrel--a walking chaos, so consumed by his jarring heredities that he is quite worthless" (166). Here, Stoddard's claims closely resemble Norris's fears of unassimilable immigrants, ones he depicts as primitives in *McTeague*, and they reveal both authors' hostilities toward the de-stabilizing of fixed Anglo-Saxon culture. In *McTeague*, for instance, Maria's and Zerkow's baby dies because it combines two radically different ethnic inheritances which render the child "a walking chaos."

McTeague's representation of the primitive constantly suggests the character's complete inferiority and his or her potential for radically altering American identity. In the novel, the primitive comes to represent a threat to American identity. More specifically, San Francisco's native-born inhabitants are at the mercy of an invading horde of inferior immigrants. This focus on the primitive as immigrant continues in Theodore Dreiser's play *The Hand of the Potter* (1918) insofar as he relies on the primitive as his central figure. Like Norris, Dreiser relies on Lombrosian theories to give shape to his main character's primitivism. In his play, Dreiser presents a very strange account of Isadore Berchansky, a Jewish immigrant, who suffers from epilepsy. In keeping with the work of Lombroso and others who believed that epilepsy contributed to congenital criminals, Isadore is presented as a classic primitive: "he is so strangely composed mentally and physically that he is bizarre" (27). As a

primitive, Isadore preys on the weak and is presented as a pedophile who lures, molests, and murders eleven-year-old Kitty Neafie. Given his crime's depravity, the newspapers warn citizens about the streets being "full of demons in the shape of men" (197). Unable to reconcile his actions, Isadore commits suicide. Much of *The Hand of the Potter* concentrates on Isadore's primitivism. Dreiser encodes Isadore's primitivism in terms of the Lombrosian links among epilepsy, crime, and idleness. While this is the dominant form that the primitive takes in the play, the primitive will also be coded in terms of Isadore's Jewishness. Though far less developed than the invocation of Lombrosian theories, the use of anti-Semitic characterizations philosophically links this play to Norris's use of it in *McTeague*. At the same time, however, Dreiser employs an awkward, undeveloped, and forced attempt to explain Isadore's actions in terms of Freudian psychology, signaling an interesting departure from Norris's practices. This strategy proves unsuccessful in that this "counter theory" never fully develops and its only articulation comes from some of the play's least educated characters. Despite attempts to the contrary, in *The Hand of the Potter* the primitive becomes a means for attributing disease and atavism to the immigrant character.

Compared to Dreiser's key works, *The Hand of the Potter* has received scant attention. H.L. Mencken warned Dreiser to abandon his play because "it is not art, or drama, or literature, or even good theater, it is pure muck, cheap and revolting. The play, if produced or published, will ruin you" (356). Echoing Mencken's sentiments, the play's contemporary reviewers were equally critical. An anonymous reviewer from *The New York Tribune* focused on Dreiser's use of the primitive and warned readers that "Dreiser has reverted to the showmanship of the Grand Guignol, the medical museum, and the freak show"

(349). The same reviewer also cautioned that "the sight of a human being helpless in his disintegration is really too monstrous and terrible a thing to stir the imagination. It is because there is nothing here of universal experience in which it may strike root" (348). Another reviewer from the *Indianapolis News* was also revolted by Isadore's primitivism and commented that "the play is a dramatization of the most abominable sexual perversion. Several scenes in it are so revolting that if presented with the vividness of stage projection they would horrify and physically sicken any audience" (349). The reviewer clearly suggests that Isadore's actions speak a primitivism that is revolting, sickening, and menacing to civilized people. Another reviewer from *The Morning News* observed that "it is one thing to tell the story of a girl who triumphs over her surroundings at the expense of what the world likes to call the moral self," but it is quite another "to go into the dark and fearsome depths of abnormal psychology and bring forth to view on the printed page the tragedy of an ill-born youth who commits the most unspeakable of human offenses" (362). These reviewers share, then, a common revulsion against Isadore and question whether his primitivism should be spotlighted in Dreiser's play. As for modern critics, few even mention *The Hand of the Potter*, and if they do, it is usually in a fleeting comment that addresses Dreiser's growing fondness for Freudian psychology. In her biography of Dreiser, for instance, Ellen Moers offers only a cursory mention of *The Hand of the Potter* and contends that the play represents Dreiser's initial and failed engagement with Freudianism. Like Moers, June Howard also treats the play without much development, even though she contends that Isadore represents a classic example of the brute commonly found in American naturalist literature.

Isadore's initial appearance underscores his primitivism and, more

specifically, his estrangement from civilized behavior: "he is so badly composed chemically that he seems never to be of one mood, and has a restless, jerky, fidgety gait and manner. From moment to moment his facial expression changes. He has an odd receding forehead, black hair, large brown eyes and pale skin" (27). Isadore's primitivism calls attention to the link between physiology and crime in the way that scientists such as Cesare Lombroso used the body to predict an individual's proclivity toward crime. According to Lombrosian science, Isadore's fidgety movements, while caused by epilepsy, also suggest that he is unable to control his impulses, thus signaling his primitive and criminal nature. Further, at each point Isadore fantasizes about young girls or their manners, he is described in primitive and bestial terms: "a strange, fierce, animal light comes into his eyes. He breathes heavily and clenches his hands" (34).

Isadore's representation as a primitive corresponds with Lombroso's theories about epilepsy and atavistic criminal behavior. Recalling Lombroso's arguments from the Introduction and Chapter One, the criminal is an atavism whose behaviors harken back to an earlier and savage era. In his studies, Lombroso linked epilepsy with criminal behavior because, as he reasoned, "the extreme excitability manifested by born criminals is shared by epileptics. Distrustful, intolerant, and incapable of sincere attachment, a gesture or look is sufficient to infuriate them and incite them to the most atrocious deeds" (162). Indeed, in *The Hand of the Potter*'s first act, Isadore's primitivism comes to the fore as his sister Rae approaches him and is "powdered and painted--a picture of gauche tenement-house finery" (34). Rae's appearance mirrors those of the young girls who "entice" Isadore, and he, in return, "surveys her and as he does his mood changes. 'Gee, but you look good, kid. Come over here. Give us a

kiss, will you" (35). Isadore reverts to primitive behavior and "jumping after her and reaching the door he seizes her by the arm all the while his face becomes livid and his shoulder jerks. 'What's the matter with you? You ain't like a sister to me. You never was'" (35). In this scene, Isadore's primitivism reveals itself not only in his association of his sister with all of the young girls who attract his interests but more importantly in his complete disregard for cultural prohibitions against incest.

Another breech of the incest taboo occurs soon after when Isadore attempts to molest his niece. While he is unsuccessful, his fantasies about his niece continue to depict him in primitive and bestial language: "he continues to stare at her. That same look of uncontrolled and unnatural animal sex-interest begins to show in his eyes. He pushes the child out at arm's length and begins to stare fixedly. His shoulder jerks" (42). Isadore's primitivism might be explained by examining Lombroso's studies in which he argued that "epilepsy has a disastrous effect on the character. It destroys the moral sense, causes irritability, alters the sensations through constant hallucinations and delusions, deadens the natural feelings or leads them into morbid channels" (62). The "morbid channel" Isadore travels is to his new victim Katie Neafie. As she plays in the apartment, she is unaware of his impending actions. At this point, Isadore's primitivism becomes even more savage as he imagines his coming "success": "as she looks, he stands and stares at her in a greedy, savage, half-insane way, his face coloring. [As she reaches out], his expression flares to one of fierce, demoniac hunger. He snatches the glasses away and laughs a playful, semi-idiotic laugh" (49). As Isadore continues with the molestation, "he is hot, disheveled, plainly insane, and yet with a shrewd, canny, cautious look in his eyes" (52). Primitivism underwrites the actions in this scene in that Isadore's

offense comes to be described in bestial terms. Or, as Lombroso argued,

> the criminal is only a diseased person, an epileptic, in whom the cerebral malady, begun in some cases during the prenatal existence together with certain signs of physical degeneration in the skull, face, teeth, and brain, a return to the early brutal egotism natural to the primitive races, which manifests itself in homicide, theft, and other crimes (73).

Isadore's primitivism also reveals itself in terms of the link that Lombroso draws between the criminal and idleness. In the play, Isadore cannot secure permanent employment and one might consider this problem in terms of a Lombrosian context that argues that the congenital criminal disdains labor. According to Lombroso,

> what is repugnant to the criminal is the regularity of the mechanism of modern society, that gigantic system of cog-wheels by which each human being, assigned to his place in the clock-work, must execute at any given instant the prescribed movement. Criminals, being incapable of resisting the intermittent caprices of a character at once inert and impulsive, declare war upon a society which is not in harmony with their inclinations. His character is entirely like that of the savage, who, though habitually inert, bestirs himself from time to time and gives himself up to the most fatiguing labors of hunting and war (208).

In this lengthy passage, Lombroso draws a clear connection between the criminal's idleness and an earlier era's savagery. In the play, Isadore only returns to his family in the vain hope of proving to them he is looking for employment. He comes to the apartment and in a show of bravado boasts to his family that "I'm goin' to get a good job soon. I like to work. I just got some newspapers, an' I'm goin' to answer the ads" (32). For the rest of the play, however, Isadore never responds to any of the ads, and his attention to this task disappears as soon as he turns his attention to the young women and children

who enter his parents' apartment. At this moment the savagery that Lombroso identifies comes to the surface in Isadore's character as he attempts to fulfill his primitive and depraved sexual desires.

In addition to these extreme examples, Dreiser also encodes Isadore's primitivism in terms of his Jewishness. Dreiser's reliance on anti-Semitism draws his play closer, once again, to Norris's work in that both rely on the Jewish character's inferiority as an explanation for his/her primitivism. At the beginning of Act One, the Berchansky apartment, which is in "the crowded Jewish section of the East Side" (15), is constantly described in terms of its shabbiness: "back of the door a little way, and against the wall, a cheap yellow bookcase filled with more or less shabby books, old magazines and papers. In the center of the room a general dining and work table of the same quality as the bookcase. At right center and against the wall, is an old sewing machine, severely battered, with a cheap velour cover on it" (15-16). This description conveys, of course, not only the family's overwhelming poverty but also their cheapness and dirtiness, which seem to be attributable to their Jewishness. In other words, the play appears to consider the Berchansky family as an extension of the soiled and cheap objects that fill the family's apartment. In fact, Isadore's apartment is described in similar language:

> The windows are broken, patched, and dirty. The wall-paper is a faded yellowish-grey, showing patches of paper of another color underneath. The bedstead of white iron enamel is slimy, has peeled, and is creaky. It is unmade and tousled, with soiled sheets, a dirty pillow case, and a soiled and torn bedspread. A soiled and torn cover of some kind graces the bureau (163-164).

Isadore's soiled furnishings also reflect his own dishevelment: "he is haggard and shabby. His suit is worn and soiled, his shoes dusty, and his hair is tousled

and frowzy. He looks pale, hungry, and half-wild" (164). Here, Isadore's primitivism is directly linked to his soiled apartment. Of course, while cheap furnishings are not in and of themselves primitive, their distance from acceptability in this play's context casts them as markers of primitive immigrant behavior.

Dreiser continues to underscore Isadore's primitivism by evoking Lombrosian theories about insanity and Jewishness. While Lombroso identified an ethnic predisposition for Jews for specific economic crimes such as usury and counterfeit money production, he also argued that "even though the criminality of the Jews can be proved to be less than that of other races, a very different situation appears when we turn to the question of insanity, in which they have an unfortunate leadership" (39). In Dreiser's play, Isadore's insanity and its link to his Jewishness becomes another method by which to understand his primitivism. For example, Isadore draws a connection between his mental instability and his Jewishness: "I'm not right. I know that. I ought never 'a' been brought in the world. They ought never to 'a' had so many children. Think of ten children in one kike family, an' one crazy, an' one lame [his sister Masha], an' four dead" (45). By calling attention to the Berchanskys as a "kike family," the scene seems to suggest that Judaism might be a source for Isadore's eventual insanity, his sister's physical disability, and the deaths of his other siblings. Believing that his Jewishness is the source of his primitivism and undesirability, Isadore reasons that his inability to hold a job is the result not of his public criminal record or mental instability but because of anti-Semitic hiring practices. As a result, Isadore resolves to change his name: "I'm not goin' to use that name Isadore any more. It's a kike name. People laugh at it. I'm Irving from now on. Whoever picked out [Isadore] must 'a' wanted to hoodoo me" (29).

In this passage, Dreiser appears to deride Isadore's conclusions. While anti-Semitism surely existed in early twentieth-century American culture, it might not necessarily be the reason why Isadore loses jobs. Moreover, Isadore does not successfully escape from anti-Semitic practices by simply changing his first name, thus revealing a moment where Dreiser might be satirizing Isadore's logic.

Since the play's central actions occur in the first act, the remainder of the play attempts to analyze Isadore's primitivism. The family's responses vary from trying to protect Isadore, despite his guilt, to expressing an angry contempt for his primitivism and, as Rae argues, "he's dips, I tell ya. Put 'im away, an' then you can breathe easy" (91). At the same time that they try to understand Isadore's actions, three yellow journalists vie for Isadore's story. The competition among the reporters leads to a rather clumsily conceived debate about Isadore's primitivism. In his revulsion, Leach argues that Isadore and others like him should not receive any sympathy, insisting instead that "they ought to be watched, and at the first sign shut up for good--that's what I say. It's just as well they hounded him in this way. It has to be so" (195). Leach's comments support traditional theories about abnormal human behavior as congenital defects that should be stopped from spreading to uncontaminated persons. On the other hand, Quinn challenges Leach's assumptions about "human tigers lurkin' on the East Side an' everywhere else, men without a spark ave anything but evil in 'em," and notes that "aal men are naht balanced or normal by their own free will an' say-so, any more than they're free an' equal in life. Some are so constituted mentally an' physically that they can't do otherwise than as they do, an' that's what ye never can get through the average felly's brain" (198-199). Quinn eventually argues that in order to understand

Isadore one must first consider Freudian psychology and the internal drives that compel individuals toward particular actions: "if ye'd ever made a study ave the passion ave love in the sense that Freud an' some others have ye'd understand it well enough. It's a great force about which we know naathing as yet an' which we're just beginnin' to look into--what it means, how it affects people" (200).

Quinn's invocation of Freudian psychology might very well reflect Dreiser's own fascination with those theories. For a dinner celebrating Freud's seventy-fifth birthday, Dreiser spoke about the influence of Freudianism on his own work:

> I shall never forget my first encounter with his *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, his *Totem and Taboo*, and his *Interpretation of Dreams*. At that time and even now quite every paragraph came as a revelation to me--a strong, revealing light thrown on some of the darkest problems that haunted and troubled me and my work. And reading him has helped me in my studies of life and men (263).

Isadore also attempts to understand his predilections in terms of a Freudian framework. Reflecting about his compulsion to commit pedophilia, Isadore claims

> it's their faces an' their nice make-ups an' the way they do their hair. That's what's the matter with me. It's their stockin's an' their open shirtwaists an' their shoulders an' arms. I can't stand it no more. I can't seem to think of nothin' else. It's the way they walk up an' talk an' laugh--their teeth always showin'; an' their red lips. It's gettin' worse all the time (34).

In his extensive passage, Isadore appears to suggest that a young girl's potential sexuality, and not his primitive nature, drives him toward sexual molestation. These sexual markers, combined with Isadore's uncontrollable chemical neurological disorder, are potent contributors to his criminal behavior. However, despite this gesture toward modern psychology, the Freudian

argument never develops beyond this point; nor is it articulated by a character who might reasonably seem to have actually studied it. The introduction of Freudianism thus seems quite forced and does not redirect the play's original focus on Isadore's primitivism.

Despite the undeveloped Freudian analysis, Dreiser offers some attempt at a mitigating counter-discourse that might challenge the predominance of the primitive figure in the play. For example, Isadore's brother-in-law George Greenbaum, Quinn, and Isadore seem to find reasons to explain the primitive in sympathetic terms. Even though Greenbaum acknowledges that Isadore "doesn't look right [and] the best thing to do would be to put him in a home somewhere," he seems to soften his observation by claiming that "he can't help it--the way the girls dress now, with their short skirts and open shirtwaists. It seems to have a bad effect on him" (85). For Greenbaum, Isadore's actions reveal his congenital predisposition to crime and his mental insufficiency to cope with an American culture that encourages women to dress provocatively. Like Greenbaum, Quinn also searches for a more reasonable understanding of Isadore's problem and places great emphasis on the character's apparent chemical imbalances: "sometimes I think we're naht unlike those formulae they give ye in a chemical laboratory--if ye're made up right, ye work right; if ye're naht, ye don't, an' that's aal there is to it" (199). By emphasizing Isadore's condition as a reflection of an improper chemical imbalance, Quinn hopes to encourage a less dismissive interpretation of Isadore's actions. In fact, the play's title and opening epigraph might also allude to this more compassionate reading: "What! Did the Hand then of the Potter shake? (i)." Quoting from Edward Fitzgerald's "Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam," Dreiser draws attention to the external forces that have contributed to Isadore's horrible condition rather than

to Isadore's innate depravity. That is, by associating Isadore with the "broken urn" on the potter's wheel, Dreiser seems to suggest that Isadore's primitivism might be understood not in terms of Lombroso's theories but in the context of chemical and psychological forces. Indeed, Isadore appears to internalize this sympathy as he explains that he is not the primitive the other characters have come to fear: "I wanted to live just like other people, an' be happy. I wanted a girl an' a home too, an' now look at me" (168).

Even though there is some attempt to assuage Isadore's primitivism, this counter-argument never fully develops. Perhaps this apparent failure occurs because there is not sufficient language available to develop a competing discourse that would question and challenge the primitive figure's embedded place in the play's actions. On the other hand, this aborted attempt to empathize with Isadore might reflect what will become a more fully developed counter-discourse in twentieth-century American literature about immigrants in the 1920s and 1930s in that there will be moments where as soon as one tries to explain the primitive as immigrant in sympathetic terms, the type loses its force. That is, as this form of the primitive as immigrant moves further away from the determinism that marks naturalist and Lombrosian tenets, it might begin to lose some of its original potency. In *The Hand of the Potter*, however, the play's emphasis on the actions of an immigrant pedophile and murderer, coupled with Dreiser's clumsy and incomplete application of Freudian psychology, makes a successful challenge to the primitive's dominance unlikely. In fact, the play concludes with several men confronting Isadore's father and demanding "vy shouldn't you bring your children up right? If you should bring him up right--if you should keep him off de streets, den he vouldn't do such a t'ing" (209). In this concluding moment, the play's focus returns to the source of Isadore's

primitivism. In sum, the primitive represents in *The Hand of the Potter* Lombroso's theories about immigrant criminals, and while Dreiser might have intended a more sympathetic account of Isadore's actions, the evocation of the primitive appears to limit this attempt.

In conclusion, the primitive as immigrant serves as a central figure in this chapter's selected texts. In *McTeague*, the primitive serves as a vehicle for chronicling the dangerous influx of immigrants who imperil San Francisco's native-born inhabitants. Despite attempts to the contrary, in *The Hand of the Potter* the primitive reinforces Lombrosian theories about criminality and disease. These works reveal that there is a continued emphasis on the actions, manners, and styles that mark characters as primitives. In this form of the primitive, the immigrant becomes a tool for delineating the limits of American culture. In doing so, this link between the primitive and the immigrant not only adds a new dimension to these texts, but it might also become a way for understanding the era's unsympathetic discussions of immigrants.

Chapter Four
The Primitive as the Racial Exotic

> The squalor of Negro life, the vice of Negro life, offer a wealth of novel, exotic, picturesque material to the artist. The question is: Are Negro writers going to write about this exotic material while it is fresh or will they continue to make a free gift of it to white authors who will exploit it until not a drop of vitality remains? (Van Vechten, "The Negro in Art," 65)

As one of the leading architects of the Harlem Renaissance and a leader in the push toward representing African Americans as "natural" primitives, Carl Van Vechten poses a question that strikes at the heart of early twentieth-century American literature: To what extent do white and African American authors rely on, and sometimes challenge, the literary use of black primitivism as a means to suggest both the African Americans' important separation from a deadening modern culture and their intellectual and emotional unsuitableness in this fast-paced culture? In this chapter, I will first contextualize the racial primitive in terms of selected art and literature, and, second, I will consider Stein's "Melanctha" (1909) and Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928) in terms of this aesthetic locus. That is, I will focus on the twentieth-century's opening decades in order to show American culture's emerging fascination with racial primitivism. By spotlighting the culture's simultaneous fears of and attractions to racial primitives, I hope to place Stein's and Larsen's works in a much larger literary and cultural context.

One might well ask what the primitive represented to artists at the beginning of the twentieth century. In many instances, the primitive was a "noble savage" who embodied an unqualified simplicity and whose presence marked a rebellion from stultifying Western culture and form at a time when modernist artists were attempting to break away from middle-class values. At the same time, the primitive was also linked to race because in the white

European artists's collective imaginations, African masks and statues, for instance, "dislocated all conventional artistic strategies" (59). In his analysis of these white aesthetic rebels, Nathan Huggins contends that they appropriated these forms and subjects and, in effect, "they became Negroes [in order] to complete their defection from bourgeois society" (93). Concurring with Huggins, Michael North argues that for these avant-garde artists, "the black role promises another home . . . ; the avant-garde rejects European society, and thus enjoys the freedom of living outside the law, while simultaneously savoring a connection to something more authentic found in Africa" (67). As such, the primitive became assimilated with art and other forms of expression at the beginning of the twentieth century, while it still retained for its audiences and adoring artists its embodiment of darkness and mystery.

One artist who was profoundly affected by the racial primitive was Paul Gauguin. While his work begins before the start of the twentieth century, his paintings of Tahitian subjects depicted, for example, his fascinations with this culture and its potential to revitalize an overcivilized Western culture. Daniel Guerin cites an interview conducted by Octave Mirbeau with Gauguin that chronicles the painter's plans to reside in Tahiti. In his own words, Gauguin explains that "I am leaving in order to have peace and quiet, to be rid of the influence of civilization. I only want to do simple, very simple art, and to be able to do that, I have to immerse myself in virgin nature, see no one but savages, live their life, with no other thought in mind but to render, the way a child would, the concepts formed in my brain and to do this with the aid of nothing but the primitive means of art, the only means that are good and true" (48). Here, Gauguin envisions the racial primitive as simple and savage, as a respite from civilization. For Gauguin, the racial primitive becomes, as Robert Rosenblum

and H.W. Janson argue, "synonymous with his search for remote, unspoiled art that might revitalize the moribound traditions of the West" (421). Gauguin's evocation of the racial primitive suggests that art and humanity will be rejuvenated by returning to so-called "savage" sources. In *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* (1897), for instance, Gauguin offers, according to Rosenblum and Janson, a "flowing composition divided into three main figure groupings set in a jungle clearing with the sea in the background. In the center, a Polynesian Eve reaches up to pick a fruit from a tree branch; at either side are groups of native women and children. In the background presiding mysteriously over the scene is, at the left, a Maori idol who, with both arms mysteriously and rhythmically raised, seems to indicate the hereafter" (428). According to Rosenblum and Janson, "the general sense of the painting is clearly of a sweeping life cycle which, nurtured by women and the fertility of nature, moves from right to left under the awesome surveillance of a primitive deity" (428).

The artist's emerging fascination with the racial primitive also reveals itself in Pablo Picasso's work and his interest in African sculpture. According to Sam Hunter and John Jacobus, "out of the tension between the elements of classical humanism and primitivism evolved the rich iconography of Picasso's art and its formal diversity" (135). In *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907), for instance, Picasso's two figures at the right are quite different from the rest of the painting. According to Hunter and Jacobus, "on purely visual grounds the right hand visages seem almost irrefutably inspired by African art of the French Congo" (136). Hunter and Jacobus cite a conversation between Andre Malraux and Picasso in which the latter explains in his own words how the Congolese masks stirred him to a new artistic sensibility: "the masks weren't just like any

other pieces of sculpture. They were magic things. The Negro pieces were *intercesseurs*, mediators. They were against everything--against unknown, threatening spirits. I understood what Negroes use their sculptures for. They were weapons. To help people avoid coming under the influence of spirits again, to help them become independent. All alone in that awful museum, with masks, dolls, made by the redskins, dusty mannekins. *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* must have come to me that day" (136). In *Demoiselles*, then, the racial primitivism that is evoked by these Congolese masks moves Picasso to "liberate an utterly original artistic style of compelling, even savage force" (136).

Like *Where Do We Come From*? and *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* (1913) registers the artist's fascination with primitivism. The debut of Stravinsky's work in Paris triggered the largest riot in musical history with fist fights breaking out in the theater and spilling out onto the streets. According to Michael Raeburn and Alan Kendall, "Stravinsky's ritual of the awakening energies of spring, culminating in a sacrificial dance, had become a harbinger of the tumult of war" (167). In the piece, the music is highly chaotic, and combined with this was Stravinsky's use of a ballet which stages a ring of elders of a pagan tribe watching a young girl dance herself to death as a propitiatory sacrifice to the God of Spring. Here, the primitive reveals itself in the music's unresolved tensions and the ballet company's depiction of pagan peoples whose connections to the earth will revitalize humankind. By evoking the primitive in this manner "it appears Stravinsky associated regularity with constriction and negativity, and irregularity with nature, abundance, and the force of life" (169).

Gauguin's, Picasso's, and Stravinsky's deployment of racial primitivism shows how they considered it to be a break from Western culture's deadening

forces, and their interpretations of the racial primitive help to contextualize the era's coming to terms with this aesthetic locus. While they posit the racial primitive positively, other artists such as Joseph Conrad and his *Heart of Darkness* (1899) render it as a frightening projection of white cultural fears and obsessions. For Marlow, the novel's central consciousness, the white man's foray into Africa makes him "feel the savagery [that] had closed round him--all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men. There's no initiation either into such mysteries. He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable. And it has a fascination, too, that goes to work upon him" (140). According to Marlow, the racial primitive is located in the Africans: while "they had faces like grotesque masks," they also possessed "a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast" (151). This natural, exuberant, and wild vitality is not the only way in which Conrad deploys the racial primitive since through Marlow he also suggests that "what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity--like yours--the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar" (186). By associating the restorative powers of the primitive with race, Conrad argues that their secret is one that might benefit, thrill, and at times imperil white men.

The racial primitivist discourse evoked by Gauguin, Picasso, Stravinsky, and Conrad establishes two key points: first, it redeploys eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophy to posit the non-Westerner as a "noble savage" whose distance from industrialized society represents both his/her simplicity and the means by which he/she will rescue Western culture; second, by identifying these primitives as Black persons, it links primitivism with race and shows how its presence limns out the boundaries of white culture. These

responses to the racial primitive casts him or her, according to North, "as either a part of nature, utterly literal and therefore soothingly simple, or menacingly unreadable, mysterious, and suggestive of some vast unknown. European reactions to other cultures tend to oscillate between these two poles, and thus the same culture can seem simple, authentic, concrete, or, on the other hand, odd, uncanny, and arbitrary" (65).

This focus on European responses to the racial primitive helps to contextualize early twentieth-century American culture's engagement with this same figure. For example, one might consider Albert Barnes's "Negro Art and America," published in Alain Locke's *The New Negro* (1925), in which he explains that African American art's strength is its unmediated encounter with innate primitive behavior. As a result, "the Negro has kept nearer to the ideal of man's harmony with nature and that, his blessing, has made him a vagrant in our arid practical American life" (21). Further, Barnes claims that the greatest testimony to the African American's survival has been his or her ability to turn adverse conditions into beautiful utterances: "Adversity has always been his lot but he converted it into a thing of beauty in his songs. When he was the abject, down-trodden slave, he burst forth into songs which constitute America's only great music--the spirituals. These wild chants are the natural, naive, untutored, spontaneous utterance of the suffering, yearning, prayerful soul" (21). Barnes's praise for African Americans rests on a rather problematic foundation because he not only identifies them as modern-day "noble savages," but he also suggests that social inequality has served a wonderful aesthetic purpose, one that he hopes white people may eventually recognize and use to sustain themselves. For example, Barnes notes that "the white man in the mass cannot compete with the Negro in spiritual endowment. Many centuries of civilization

have attenuated his original gifts and have made his mind dominate his spirit . . . ; his art and his life are no longer one and the same as they were in primitive man" (20). By recognizing the African American's innate poetry, white people will renew their vitalities and strengthen the American character. For instance, "the mystic [the African American] whom we have treated as a vagrant has proved his possession of a power to create out of his own soul and our own America, moving beauty of an individual character whose existence we never knew" (25). However, Barnes also points out that African Americans have been excluded from this new American identity: "what our prosaic civilization needs most is precisely the poetry which the average Negro actually lives. It is incredible that we should not offer the consideration which we have consistently denied to him" (25).

This intense focus on African Americans as primitives leads David Levering Lewis to describe this impulse as the "vogue of the Negro" whereby white authors fetishized African Americans as primitives and in doing so emphasized the African Americans' capacities and appetites for pleasure. Concurring with Lewis, Nathan Huggins points out that the bond between white artists and African American subjects, created by the white authors' borrowing of cultural markers, did not grow out of a recognition of cultural interdependence or commonality. Rather, "white Americans have identified with blacks because blacks have done and been what whites have only secretly wished to do and be" (174). Further, Huggins claims that white interest in Harlem "was a means of soft rebellion for those who rejected the Babbitry and sterility of their lives, yet could not find within their familiar culture the genius to redefine themselves in more human and vital terms. The Negro was their subversive agent" (91). Associated with this is the era's fascination with the "performance of blackness";

in his study, Lewis Erenberg examines the shift from the nation's attraction to nineteenth-century minstrel shows to the widespread popularity of Harlem clubs in the 1920s. The Harlem clubs succeeded, Erenberg argues, because they presented images of African Americans that "conformed to a white vision: [they] represented joy in life unfettered by civilization" (255). In publicizing this bastion of black primitivism, "guidebooks advised visitors to go to Harlem late. . . . The lateness of the hour added to the sense that one was venturing to the heart of darkness, the city of night where all things forbidden during the day were available. . . . From the mid-1920s to the early 1930s, Harlem represented the apotheosis of slumming" (256).

When examining the first three decades of the twentieth-century American literature, one notes the degree to which there is a fetishization of the primitive by both white and African American authors as attempts to open up a space that is outside of mainstream culture. For many white authors, African Americans are racial primitives, and black culture provides a counterhegemonic ideological tool by which modernists were able to distance themselves from the dominant culture. The focus on primitivism allowed some African American authors to engage in a kind of celebration of black sensuality. Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1928), for instance, spotlights Jake Brown's actions in post-World War I Harlem and chronicles his adventures in the seedy underworld of saloons, pool halls, prostitution houses, and gambling dens. One of the novel's primary tensions occurs between the African Americans who regularly engage in pleasure-seeking activities and other African Americans who distance themselves from these activities because they believe that the actions and those who engage in them are uncivilized. While these characters condemn this uncivilized or primitive behavior, they also recognize that they, too, possess

this natural inclination toward wild pleasure. For example, Jake's friend Ray initially considers himself a learned man whose education removes him from the illicit activities in which Jake normally engages. As Ray's story unfolds, he becomes increasingly aware that his emphasis on racial uplift politics is stifling his naturally wild disposition. At one point Ray admits that, "all men have the disease of pimps in their hearts" (243). In fact, Ray comes to condemn his educated background and suggests that it has served only to distance himself from identifying with other African Americans, and, more specifically, it has caused him to sublimate his own desires: "modern education is planned to make you a sharp, snouty, rooting hog. A Negro getting it is an anachronism. We ought to get something new, we Negroes. But we get our education like--like our houses. When the whites move out, we move in and take possession of the old dead stuff. Dead stuff that this age has no use for" (243). As a tool of Western culture, education entraps and tames individuals and, in terms of African Americans, it controls them and the restorative nature of their primitivism. As Ray observes, "no wonder [whites] hated them, when out of their melancholy environment the blacks could create mad, contagious music and high laughter" (267). *Home to Harlem* establishes the racial primitive as embodied in Harlem's "brutality, gang rowdyism, promiscuous thickness, [and] its hot desires," as well as "the warm accent of its composite voice, the fruitiness of its laughter, the trailing rhythm of its 'blues' and the improvised surprises of its jazz" (267).

McKay's celebration of primitivism angered W.E. B. Du Bois who noted that the novel catered to white fantasies of African Americans' sexual lives and habits. The novel, as Du Bois explained, "nauseated me, and after the dirtier parts of its filth I felt distinctly like taking a bath" (202). For Du Bois, primitivism

perpetuated a literary voyeurism whereby white readers could enjoy secret pleasures about "African American life." In his "Criteria of Negro Art," published in the October 1926 edition of the *Crisis*, Du Bois called into question many of the premises that undergirded primitivism and asked "is not the continual portrayal of the sordid, foolish, and criminal among Negroes convincing the world that this and this alone is really and essentially Negroid, and preventing white artists from knowing any other types and preventing black artists from daring to paint them?" (10).

Despite Du Bois's warning, various authors, and particularly Alain Locke and his his ground-breaking essay and anthology *The New Negro* (1925), praise the emergence of the "New Negro" who embodies and celebrates all traditions that are distinctly "black." Part of this celebration includes the bringing forth of ancient African traditions, African American folk traditions, and African Americans' connections to a rejuvenating primitive identity. In *Cane* (1923), for example, Jean Toomer romanticizes impoverished rural black folk identity; the representation of this in literature, New Negro Renaissance architects reasoned, would convey a beauty to alienated readers in our modern chaotic universe. By placing *Cane* primarily in the rural South and utilizing blues and spiritual traditions, Toomer posited the black folk traditions as healing agents for its readers. His depiction of King Barlo is a primary example of this blues call and response tradition that initiates the continual affirmation of the collective voice and teaches the audience to hear a response to their own calls. Described as a "clean-muscled, magnificent, black-skinned Negro" (22), Barlo implores the audience to "open [their] eyes an see th' dawnin of th' mornin light. Open [their] ears" (23). His "call" excites the audience; "white folks are touched and curiously awed" (23), and in the case of a young African American girl

named Esther, "he left his image indelibly upon [her] mind" (23). Because his connection with his rural folk identity is unmediated, King Barlo offers his audience a respite from modern chaos. In fact, Toomer wrote *Cane* because he believed the Negro spirituals were losing ground in a more modern and urban culture. Toomer claimed in Darwin Turner's edition of *Cane* that, "with Negroes also the trend was towards the small town and then towards the city--and industry and commerce and machines. The folk spirit was walking in to die on the modern desert. That spirit was so beautiful. This seemed to sum up life for me. And this was the feeling I put into *Cane*"(xxii).

Some white artists also felt this desire to tap into the primitive. In his 1923 letter to Jean Toomer, for instance, Sherwood Anderson wrote about his experience of listening to some singing African American dock workers and his reticence to speak to them, a response that surprised him. Tellingly, Anderson wrote "perhaps I did not know how much I wanted a voice from them" (9). For Anderson, African Americans enjoy an unmediated contact with the "primitive," and, in another letter to Toomer, he offers praise for the latter's "Negro" art: "a man like yourself can escape. You have a direct and glowing genius that is, I am sure, a part of your body, a part of the way you walk, look at things, make love, sleep, and eat. Such a man goes rather directly from feeling to expression" (8). Here, Anderson envisions a connection between Toomer's artistry and his body or, more precisely, a bond between art and primitivism. At the same time, Anderson also wondered if Caucasians could partake of primitivism's restorative powers. His novel *Dark Laughter* (1925) chronicles this quest. The novel deploys primitivist discourse more complicatedly than other texts: While African Americans might be said to possess qualities that evoke primitivism, they do not, however, have a monopoly on these values. In

fact, the primitivism that might be attributed to African Americans can also be attached to anyone who appears to be outside of the mainstream. In the novel, John Stockton attempts to throw over his upper-class status by leaving his author wife and adopting the new identity of Bruce Dudley, factory worker. As Stockton, Dudley was staid and rigid. Once he becomes Dudley and is immersed in the working-class world of earthy white laborers and primitive, always-singing African Americans, Dudley is transformed into a rejuvenated human being. At the same time, the bored wife of a factory owner, Aline Grey, who apparently takes her cues from Lawrence's heroine in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, believes her sexual fantasies about virile working-class men will be fulfilled if she engages in a tryst with Dudley. Ironically, of course, Dudley is not actually working-class, but this point is never revealed to Aline. As Dudley and Aline pursue their quests, they are mesmerized by the songs of African Americans and believe that if they could only learn their words and mimic their actions they could rid themselves of mainstream conventions. In sum, the novel raises some disturbing points: first, "primitive" black life exists at the margins of civilized actions, and its purpose seems to be to purge white culture of the damaging effects of modern life. Second, the primitive is both culturally specific--embodied in African Americans--and translatable to those who require its restorative powers.

Like *Dark Laughter*, DuBose Heyward's *Porgy* (1925) offers a mixed treatment of the racial primitive. At first, the racial primitive is represented as alien to civilized, white Charleston society. The novel opens with a poem that mentions the main characters and residents of Catfish Row as having been "brought from the woods to town" (i) and that the title character "lives in a Golden Age" (11). In both examples, Heyward observes that there is a free and

natural life for African Americans that is untouched and unfettered by society. In the journey from the "woods to the town," the African Americans bring with them their own particular codes of behavior that flourish in a "Golden Age" that is somehow outside of white reach. Heyward's observations are, of course, a bit skewed and, further, smack of condescension. Because Porgy, Bess, and Crown are African Americans, Heyward reasons that they are naturally primitives. He describes Porgy as "black with the almost purple blackness of unadulterated Congo blood" and as one who possesses "a sense of infinite patience, and beneath it the vibration of unrealized, but terrific, energy" (13). In turn, he characterizes Bess as unwomanly with "the acid of utter degradation had etched hard lines about her mouth" (53). As for Crown, he is described as bestial; for example, in a fight against Robbins, "Crown broke his adversary's weakening hold, and held him the length of one mighty arm. The other swung the cotton-hook downward. Then he dropped his victim, and swaggered drunkenly toward the street" (20). While Heyward's narrator spends much time chronicling these actions as primitive, uncivilized, and even bestial, there is the equal tendency to look upon other evocations of the racial primitive as ones that reflect a culture and rhythm of life that he admires and would not see disappear in this adjustment from the "woods to the town." For example, the narrator's (and Heyward's) fascination with the pageantry of one of Catfish Row's parades illustrates that there is a kind of racial primitivism that is exciting and rejuvenating: "out of the fetters of civilization this people had risen, suddenly, amazingly. Exotic as the Congo, and still able to abandon themselves utterly to the wild joy of fantastic play, they had taken the reticent, old Anglo-Saxon town and stamped their mood swiftly and indelibly into its heart. Then they passed, leaving behind them a wistful envy among those who had watched them go,--

those whom the ages had rendered old and wise" (115). While Heyward identified such primitive traits as savagery and the strange rhythms as relics of a heritage quite unlike that of Caucasians, he also saw them as expressions of the elemental life Southern African Americans experienced. In writing *Porgy*, Heyward claimed, in his own words, that "I saw the primitive Negro as the inheritor of a source of delight that I would have given much to possess" (189).

The literary depiction of the primitive intensifies in Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven* (1926). The novel concentrates on the actions of two mulatto characters--Mary Love and Byron Kasson--as their interaction is set against Harlem's culture that includes prostitutes, numbers runners, and con artists. In the novel, Mary is a prudish librarian whose adherence to racial uplift politics prevents her from unlocking her natural primitivism. By the same token, Byron's inability to authentically represent the lives of naturally primitive African Americans keeps him from becoming a successful author. In one scene where Byron meets with magazine editor Russett Durwood, who bears a striking resemblance to Van Vechten, he learns that his story was rejected because it did not chronicle Harlem's primitivism. Durwood explains, "I happen to be acquainted with Harlem life. . . ; the whole place, contrary to the general impression, is overrun with fresh, unused material" (222). Further, Durwood observes, "if you young Negro intellectuals don't get busy, a new crop of Nordics is going to spring up who will take the trouble to become better informed and will exploit this material before the Negro gets around to it" (223). Durwood's "solution" for Byron is for him to "go home, tear up everything you've written, and begin afresh. Pray and get drunk. Send me something else some time when you've decided to become a regular author and not a pseudo-literary fake" (227). In short, Mary and Byron "fail" in Van Vechten's scheme because

they have drifted away from the primitive, natural, and intuitive springs of the race. On the other hand, two of the novel's sexual artists, the Scarlet Creeper and Lasca Sartoris, succeed because they have accepted without reservation their primitive and predatory natures.

In his play *The Emperor Jones* (1920), Eugene O'Neill situates the racial primitive in the Caribbean and in the actions of a one-time African American con artist whose corrupt stint as an emperor is about to come to a rather abrupt and violent end. Throughout the play, the islanders and Brutus Jones are represented as primitives. First, the islanders' simplistic belief systems are attributed to their primitive backgrounds. In fact, Jones rebukes them for their seemingly "backwards" behavior: "dese ign'rent bush niggers dat ain't got brains enuff to make deir own names even can catch Brutus Jones" (124)? Here, Jones uses the islanders' primitivism as a means to assert his own superiority. That is, Jones spends much of the play illustrating why he is not a primitive. However, according to O'Neill's characterization, Brutus is a primitive, and he differs little from the islanders he mocks. While he laughs at the myth he creates about himself as indestructible to lead bullets, he actually buys into the story he tells. As he tries to escape from the islanders, he moves inexorably backward into the jungle. His hallucinations, triggered by the islanders' hunting ceremony, strip him of his last ties to civilization, as represented metaphorically in the shredding of his clothing: "his pants are in tatters, his shoes are cut and misshapen, flapping about his feet" (141). While at one time Jones had criticized the islanders as "fool, back woods niggers" (118), his demise comes because of their unmediated contact with primitive rituals. As Lem notes, "my mens dey got um silver bullets. Lead bullet no kill him. He got um strong charm. I cook um money, make um silver bullet, make um strong charm, too"

(152).

These selected examples from the works of McKay, Toomer, Anderson, DuBose, Van Vechten, and O'Neill posit the racial primitive as naturally wild, exotic, and Other. The racial primitive is both someone to fear and one through whom others might take voyeuristic pleasure. The racial primitive's influence on authors and in particular white artists is critically examined by Toni Morrison. In her study, Morrison terms the racial primitive "American Africanism," and she chronicles its presence in canonical American literature. Morrison defines American Africanism as literature's coming to terms with a black presence in American culture. This presence may be either overt or oblique, and "through significant and understood omissions, startling contradictions, heavily nuanced conflicts, through the way writers peopled their work with the signs and bodies of this presence--one can see that a real or fabricated Africanist presence was crucial to this sense of Americanness" (7). In short, "American Africanism provides a way of contemplating chaos and civilization, desire and fear, a mechanism for testing the problems and blessings of freedom" (7). Here, one notes the similarities between Morrison's term and racial primitivism. In both cases, this presence is used to limn out the boundaries of white identity, and a thorough understanding of it will lead to a better grasp of what constitutes "literary blackness and literary whiteness" (7). American literature should, then, be examined or questioned in terms of how the racial primitive is a touchstone for white characters. Or, as Morrison asks, "in what ways does the imaginative encounter with Africanism enable white writers to think about themselves [and at the same time] define the goals and enhance the qualities of white characters" (51, 53)? These critiques must reveal, Morrison argues, "how the representation and appropriation of the [Africanist narrative] provides

opportunities to contemplate limitation, suffering, rebellion, and to speculate on fate and destiny" (53). Morrison's final point raises an important question: if African Americans as primitives are appropriated by white authors to delineate both the degree to which modern culture produces ennui and alienation and posits the primitive as a restorative space outside of modern culture, to what degree is black culture robbed of its particular history, context, and materiality if it is simply a convenient literary metaphor for disenchanted white authors? By representing black culture as a romanticized primitivism, white authors use and appropriate lived experiences as vehicles for their own escapism and expatriation. Moreover, they also suggest that African Americans *are* primitives, and this locks them in a racist-based aesthetic.

It is in this context that one must consider Stein's representation of the racial primitive in "Melanctha." Examining Stein's response to primitivism, Michael North observes that "the role of the racial alien is a very flexible one for this branch of the avant-garde. Insofar as its expatriation is willed in revolt against the social constraints and falsehoods of Europe and America, this role completes the process of exile" (67). Like Picasso, Stein was, despite her claims to the contrary, influenced by African sculpture. According to North, while she insisted in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* that "she was not at any time interested in African sculpture" (60), the original illustration on the title page reveals "Stein ensconced behind her writing desk, awaiting Alice, with a piece of African sculpture prominently displayed before her" (61). Further, North contends that the sculpture piece "is perhaps one of a group of objects Stein purchased for Picasso at Nimes in 1918. Her acting as Picasso's agent in this case is emblematic, despite the disclaimers, of their collaborative use of African models in inventing modernism" (61). Stein's interest in black models actually

originates earlier: while she was an undergraduate at Radcliffe, Stein wrote at least three short stories in which her protagonist was an African American woman named Hortense Sanger whose extreme moods mirror the era's stereotypical melodramatic characterizations of African Americans. Stein's appreciation of African art and her appropriation of a racial character for her Radcliffe stories seem to set the stage for her eventual characterization of Melanctha. In his bibliography of Stein's texts, Robert Wilson includes a copy of *Three Lives*'s original dust wrapper that touted "Melanctha's" intrinsic worth to be the author's ability to adopt a "racial mask." In an excerpt that appears on the dust cover, Georgiana Goddard King claims that *Three Lives* presents "the simple, rudimentary processes of dumb, bewildered creatures; only half-conscious, in two cases, and very touching. The third case is strange, emerging in the life of a young coloured girl. And in what reality! Everyone in the story is coloured, the whole world, with all its preoccupations and potentialities; the reader himself, for a time, is a coloured person too!" Further, King stresses that Stein's talent emerges in her ability to "pull herself into the very skin, inside the very brain, of an alien personality" (5). Stein evokes the racial primitive in at least two primary ways: first, she focuses on the mulatto which, while a reformulation of the primitive, allows her to stand simultaneously in two cultures; second, her exclusive focus on Melanctha's sexuality is made possible by accessing "ready-made" assumptions about black sensuality. That is, Melanctha's sexuality is immediately recognizable to a white audience because they only see her in terms of her body, a body they presume already to know.

Briefly summarized, "Melanctha" focuses on the emotional conflicts of the mulatto title character and her problematic relationship with another mulatto, Dr. Jeff Campbell. Throughout much of the text, Melanctha's strengths and

weaknesses are attributed to her mixed racial inheritance. If she is beautiful and smart, it is because she possesses white blood: "Melanctha Herbert was a graceful, pale yellow, intelligent, attractive negress. She had not been raised like Rose by white folks but then she had been half made with real white blood" (60). On the other hand, if she is strange and undesirable, it is because of her black blood: "the real power in Melanctha's nature came through her robust and unpleasant and very unendurable black father. . . . James Herbert was brutal and rough to his one daughter, but then she was a most disturbing child" (63). Ultimately, Melanctha cannot conform to Campbell's demands for strict moral behavior on the part of all African Americans. Described repeatedly as a wanderer, a label which carries with it sexual connotations, Melanctha "falls" out of Campbell's mulatto social set and associates with Jem Richards, a white gambler. Rejecting a possible marriage to Melanctha because of her racial status, Richards severs his ties with her, and Melanctha then drifts into self-consuming thoughts about suicide. At the end, however, the narrator notes that Melanctha does not have the will to commit suicide, and she dies, ultimately, from consumption.

Recent critical inquiry into "Melanctha" focuses on the text's link to Jamesian psychology, a rather fitting critical move given that Stein was James's student. In separate analyses, Mark Niemeyer and Lisa Ruddick argue that Melanctha's indecisiveness is reminiscent of James's theory of habits of attention. When studying children, James observed that they were unable to filter stimuli according to their particular needs. On the other hand, adults "were more likely than children to approach the world with inflexible patterns of appreciation that exclude the majority of impressions" (547). Relying on James's insight, Ruddick suggests that Melanctha's wanderings and

indecisiveness are attributable to her childlike mind that renders it impossible for her to focus on any single stimulus for a prolonged period. According to Ruddick, Stein invokes James's term "mind-wandering" to describe Melanctha's frequent wanderings in the text. Extending Ruddick's argument, Niemeyer suggests that Melanctha illustrates James's theories about hysterical women. According to James, "a hysterical woman abandons part of her consciousness because she is too weak to hold it together. The abandoned part meanwhile may solidify into a secondary or subconscious self" (78-79). Niemeyer concurs with Jeff Campbell's claim that Melanctha is two different people, and he concludes that "her hysteria has rendered her discouragingly incomprehensible" (82). While Ruddick and Niemeyer offer insightful readings, their psychological study would be enhanced by a consideration of how she fits into the era's conventional and racist stereotypes reflecting theories about the mulatto's impaired psychological state.

In The *Marginal Man: A Study in Personality and Culture Conflict* (1937), Everett Stonequist argues that "pure blood" individuals enjoy psychological harmony because they "have but one tribal or national tradition to acquire, one language to learn, one political loyalty to develop, one moral code to which to conform, one religion to follow" (2). In biracial people, however, the cultural conflicts are internalized: "the external conflict of the groups finds an echo in the mind of the individual[s] concerned" (4). In other words, the biracial person becomes in effect a dual personality who is at war with two contentious cultural sides. In his analysis of mulattoes, Stonequist concludes that they "are more likely to be restless and race-conscious, aggressive and radical, ambitious and creative. The lower status to which [they] are assigned naturally creates discontented and rebellious feelings" (25). Here, Stonequist alludes to the

mulatto's earlier economic and cultural identification with white Americans. Given the political and cultural responses to miscegenation, however, the mulatto could no longer enjoy his or her association with white people and was grouped along with dark-skinned African Americans. As a result of this cultural marking, Stonequist reasons, "[the mulatto] suffers a profound inner conflict. After all, does not the blood of the white man flow in his veins? Does he not share the higher culture in common with the white American? Is he not legally and morally an American citizen? And yet he finds himself condemned to a lower caste in the American system! Living in two such social worlds, between which there is antagonism and prejudice, he experiences in himself the same conflict" (25). In much the same way, Edward Reuter argues in his *The Mulatto in the United States* (1918) that mulattoes "endeavor to escape [their degrading association with the lower race] and to conceal and forget their relationship to it. They are uncertain of their own worth; conscious of their superiority to the native they are nowhere sure of their equality with the superior group. They envy the white, aspire to equality with them, and are embittered when the realization of such ambition is denied them. They are a dissatisfied and unhappy group" (103).

These theories about the mulatto's pathological psychological state serve as the background, then, for Melanctha's depiction in the short story. For instance, throughout the text, one observes the constant description of Melanctha as two completely different people who lacks a central focus. This problem appears primarily in Melanctha's "wanderings" which are linked to her sexual promiscuity: "from the time that Melanctha was twelve until she was sixteen she wandered, always seeking but never more than very dimly seeing wisdom . . . [in] Melanctha's wanderings after wisdom she always had to do in

secret and by snatches" (68). In her analysis, Ruddick takes issue with "those readers who have seen in Melanctha's 'wanderings' a prolonged euphemism for sex [because] they have missed the subtlety of Stein's intent." Ruddick further contends that "Melanctha's promiscuity is part of an experiential promiscuity, an inability to approach the world selectively. Her sexual wanderings are emblematic of that indiscriminate 'wandering attention' that refuses to impose a pattern upon experience and that takes life unmediated" (548). Here, Ruddick's link between Melanctha and Jamesian psychology overlooks the explicit racial explanation for Melanctha's behaviors. The text is replete with Melanctha's desire to gain sexual knowledge and the fears other characters demonstrate once they learn that this is what she wants: "it was a strange experience of ignorance and power and desire. Melanctha did not know what it was that she so badly wanted. She was afraid, and yet she did not understand that here she really was a coward" (67). In fact, Melanctha's sexual desires are put in sharp contrast to those of the dark-skinned Rose Johnson. While Rose knows many men sexually, she "always made sure she was engaged" because she is, in her own words, "no common nigger for I was raised by white folks" (61). Here, Stein suggests that wanton sexuality is natural to African Americans, and, at the same time, she belittles Rose's claim of superior sexual *mores* by showing that her access to whiteness is not in her blood but in her environment.

This emphasis on sexuality consumes much of Stein's text. From the beginning of the story, Melanctha's sexuality comes directly from her father who "was a big black virile negro" (63). While "Melanctha Herbert almost always hated her black father, she loved very well the power in herself that came through him. And so her feeling was really closer to her black coarse father,

than her feeling had ever been toward her pale yellow, sweet-appearing mother" (63). Thus, Melanctha inherits her sexual drive from her virile and, by extension, more primitive father because of the link to dark skin. Because of her precocious sexuality, virtually all her actions, as they are interpreted by her father, have libidinous ends. At one point, for instance, Melanctha becomes friendly with the Bishop family because the husband is a coachman and she enjoys visiting the horses. James Herbert suspects that Melanctha and John Bishop are engaged in a sexual relationship because his daughter "knew so well how to be nasty" (64). One evening, Bishop tells Herbert about Melanctha's virtues, and, as the narrator notes, "perhaps there was a gleam of something softer than the feeling of a friendly elder in the way John spoke of Melanctha" (65). In response, Herbert "looked very black and evil" and "suddenly between them there came a moment filled full with strong black curses, and then sharp razors flashed in the black hands, that held them flung backward in negro fashion, and then for some minutes there was fierce slashing" (65-66). Racial primitive discourse underwrites this scene in that its language abounds with savage images and it then links these images to the African American characters, concluding that the only resolution to problems is through violent means. Second, Melanctha's actions are defined in terms of her black body and blood, and, more specifically, her sexual desires; in turn, her sexuality, whether imagined or not, gives birth to violence.

In another of the text's scenes, Stein links savagery, darkness, and sexuality and again attributes these to Melanctha and her desires. Melanctha's wanderings bring her to the unseemly side of town because "[she] loved to see these dark and smelly places" (71). In fact, it is the shipping docks "that Melanctha loved best when she wandered. Often she was alone . . . ; she

would listen with full feeling to the yowling of the free swinging negroes, as they ran, with their powerful loose jointed bodies and their childish savage yelling, pushing, carrying, pulling great loads from ships to the warehouses" (71). This scene suggests that Melanctha's desires are as dark and savage as are the men she encounters. Melanctha's behavior is thus established as physical, sexual, passionate, and mysterious--all of which link her to an existent racial primitivist discourse. By establishing her in these terms, Stein draws a sharper contrast between Melanctha and Jeff Campbell. Campbell abhors Melanctha's wanderings; as he informs her, "I don't believe much in this running around business and I don't want to see the colored people do it. I am a colored man and I ain't sorry, and I want to see colored people like what is good" (82). Rather than act positively, African Americans, Campbell claims, "just keep running around drinking and doing everything bad they can ever think of, and not just because they like all those bad things that they are always doing, but only just because they want to get excited" (85). Using Campbell as her vehicle, Stein establishes that all African Americans have a proclivity toward sordid behavior.

As a racial primitive, then, Melanctha is defined solely in terms of her sexuality and her natural inclination toward wildness and passion. In sum, "Melanctha" chronicles the burgeoning fascination with the sexual lives and habits of mulattoes, and the title character's struggles are in keeping with the era's claims that mulattoes are a psychologically divided people whose bodily desires link them to a savage and primitive culture.

Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928) is similar to Stein's "Melanctha" in that both texts chronicle the psychological struggles and seemingly endless wanderings of two mulatto characters. But whereas "Melanctha" reflects the

culture's and Stein's notions of the racial primitive, this model comes under some scrutiny in *Quicksand*. Larsen's depiction of Helga Crane not only questions the early twentieth-century literature's fascination with primitivism but also criticizes the rhetoric of black uplift politics and exposes its equally limiting social formula. That is, the black uplift rhetoric imposes a middle-class value system on large numbers of African Americans assuming that they lack order, decorum, and taste. In short, black uplift rhetoric unwittingly classifies African Americans as primitives. In the novel, Larsen reveals the difficulties of finding a representative discourse that is outside of either the culture's fetishization of the primitive or the call for racial uplift. *Quicksand* traces Helga Crane's actions as she moves from the stultifying atmospheres of Naxos, the African American college, and the racial uplift movement. In her relocation to Denmark, Helga is once again unable to move beyond the racialized discourse. Finally, her marriage to a rural Southern preacher underscores her entrapment in a primitive folk identity.

While this era's literature, art, and music often embraces a link between primitivism and race, this particular aesthetic locus also met with resistance. George Schuyler's "Negro-Art Hokum" (1926) criticizes and exposes, for instance, the racist essentialism that undergirds the emphasis on primitive black art. For Schuyler, the label "black art" or "New Negro literature" suggests that there is an inherent and identifiable quality in black people and their artistic products. This categorization is not liberatory, as the New Negro Movement architects imply; rather, the push toward black art, Schuyler reasons, further entrenches the racist philosophies of nativists such as Madison Grant and Lothrup Stoddard. Schuyler argues that "on this baseless premise, so flattering to the white mob, that the blackamoor is inferior and fundamentally different, is

erected the postulate that his needs must be particular; and when he attempts to portray life through the medium of art, it must of necessity be a peculiar art. While such reasoning may seem conclusive to the majority of Americans, it must be rejected with a loud guffaw by intelligent people" (16). Accordingly, Schuyler implores readers to recognize that the art, literature, and music produced by African Americans is "identical in kind with the [work] of white Americans" (14). Central to Schuyler's argument is the notion that American identity and influence are stronger and greater than what one might label as "black" identity. Explaining his theory, Schuyler reasons that "if the European immigrant after two or three generations of exposure to our schools, politics, advertising, moral crusades, and restaurants becomes indistinguishable from the mass of Americans of the older stock, how much truer must it be of the sons of Ham who have been subjected to what the uplifters call Americanism for the last three hundred years" (14). In short, Schuyler rejects the so-called natural primitivism of African Americans; on the contrary, he argues that, "the Aframerican is merely a lampblacked Anglo-Saxon" (14). While Schuyler's "rhetoric of sameness" exposes the difficulties with labeling artistic practices in terms of racial categories, his theory also risks conflating all persons under the large umbrella of Americanism, particularly when he notes that "Negroes and whites from the same localities in this country talk, think, and act the same" (14). In his effort to dismiss the claims that African Americans are natural primitives, Schuyler erases any possibility of historicizing people, actions, and events.

One might, even so, use Schuyler's critique of the assumptions that inform racial primitivism to foreground a key issue Larsen develops in *Quicksand*. From the beginning of the novel when Helga struggles as a faculty member at Naxos, Larsen challenges middle-class black uplift rhetoric's

constant search for any behavior that might suggest primitivism. Ideally, the African American college, as Kelly Miller argues in "Howard: The National Negro University," an essay published in Alain Locke's *The New Negro*, "incorporates most readily the progressive spirit of the new generation, best focuses the racial mind, and becomes the center radiating the special influence of leadership and enlightenment which a culturally organized people need" (317). According to Miller, the African American college must "shed the light of reason on the particular issues of Negro life . . . ; a body of intellectual, moral, and spiritual elite, consecrated to these ideals and cooperating in this aim, is calculated to put a new front on the whole scheme of racial life and aspiration" (320). Miller builds on his idealistic dream and notes that "under the stimulus of such a conception of its mission, the college will become the Mecca of ambitious Negro youth from all parts of the land and from all lands" (320).

Miller's theory and Larsen's depiction of Naxos bear absolutely no similarities; instead, Larsen's description of life at an exclusively African American college begins her critique of limiting racial discourse. The college's rigidity and its rules, regulations, and codes of behavior are put into effect in order to control the students' "eruptions of primitivism." For example, the college's Dean of Women, "was a woman from one of the 'first families'--a great 'race' woman," who declares that "bright colors are vulgar--black, grey, brown, and navy blue are the most becoming colors for colored people. Dark people shouldn't wear yellow, or green, or red" (17-18). Here, primitivism "erupts" in the selection of bright colors which marks the wearers as uncouth. Additionally, Naxos students are also inculcated in the ways of effectively dealing with white society: "it was their duty to be satisfied in the estate to which they had been called [as] hewers of wood and drawers of water" (3). At Naxos, there is not the

"aroused sense of the highest human values" (317), as Miller imagines exists at African-American colleges, but an "air of self-righteousness and an intolerant dislike of difference" (5). Reflecting on Naxos's stifling atmosphere, Helga imagines that "this great community was no longer a school. It had grown into a machine. Life had died out of it . . . ; enthusiasm, spontaneity, if not actually suppressed, were at least openly regarded as unladylike or ungentlemanly qualities. The place was smug and fat with self-satisfaction" (4). This passage calls attention not only to Naxos's stifling atmosphere, but it also reminds the reader of McKay's evocation of the racial primitive in *Home to Harlem*. Ray turns his back on middle-class black uplift rhetoric because it causes him to deny his individuality and verve for life. In *Quicksand*, Larsen invokes McKay's formula and changes it at the same time: while she does not imply that African Americans are naturally primitive, she suggests that instruments of black middle-class morality are constantly monitoring for any signs of outrageous behavior that might be labeled as primitive. By narrowly defining what constitutes proper black life, such practices unwittingly perpetuate the notion of African Americans as primitives because they give the impression that if these individuals are not properly "trained" then chaos will reign. Whereas Miller argues that "the Negro college must furnish stimulus to hesitant Negro scholarship, garner, treasure, and nourish group tradition, enlighten both races with a sense of the cultural worth and achievement of the constituency it represents, and supply the cultural guidance of the race" (321), life at Naxos centers on the formulation of and adherence to strict behavioral codes that inculcate repression. For example, Miss MacGooden, one of the dormitory matrons, rebukes her students for their "slamming of doors [and] clatter of unnamable articles" (12), and warns them "please try to act like ladies and not

like savages from the backwoods" (12). Larsen undermines MacGooden by describing her as "humorless, prim, [and] ugly, with a face like dried leather, who prided herself on being a 'lady' from one of the best families" (12). MacGooden lacks vitality, and her denial of pleasure for fear that it vitiates her femininity is exposed as pathology: "and thinking on Miss MacGooden's 'ladyness,' Helga grinned a little as she remembered that one's expressed reason for never having married, or intending to marry. There were, so she had been given to understand, things in the matrimonial state that were of necessity entirely too repulsive for a lady of delicate and sensitive nature to submit to" (12). This denial of spontaneous feelings, which the Naxos officials appear to classify as "primitive," reveals itself also in the college's rigid structure that is followed in the Naxos's morning exercises: "the massed phalanxes increased in size and number and about it all was a depressing silence, a sullenness almost, until with a horrible abruptness the waiting band blared into 'The Star Spangled Banner.' The goosestep began. Left, right. Left, right. Forward! March! The automatons moved" (12).

This call for controlled behavior as a necessary step in race building may be found as well in the theories advanced by Alexander Crummell and W. E. B. Du Bois. In his *Africa and America: Addresses and Discourses* (1891), Alexander Crummell, an African American Christian missionary, raises questions central to the project of black uplift. Specifically, Crummell asks, "*who* are to be the agents to raise and elevate this people to a higher plane of being? The answer will at once flash upon your intelligence. It is to be affected [sic] by the scholars and philanthropists which come forth in these days from the schools. *They* are to be the scholars; for to transform, stimulate, and uplift a people is a work of intelligence. It is a work which demands the clear induction

of historic facts and their application to new circumstances,--a work which will require the most skillful resources and the wise practicality of superior men" (35-36, emphasis Crummell). Crummell reasoned, then, that the uplift of African Americans was dependent upon character building and morality. Consequently, this program was to be carried out through the work of an educated elite. This plan imposes a supposedly superior and middle-class value system on a group of people who are deemed as undesirable. This elite group of educated men are the ones W.E.B. Du Bois will later term the "Talented Tenth" in his ground-breaking racial uplift text *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Ravaged by slavery and the lack of equal opportunities for education, African Americans, according to Du Bois, need the guidance of a special racial avant-garde that will lead the entire community forward toward the goal of an equal society. Crummell and Du Bois offer radically different theories than the plan Booker T. Washington offered that called for thrift and industry among African Americans, encouraged industrial and technical educations, and abandoned attempts at political and civic equality. In Du Bois's and Crummell's calls for racial uplift, however, one detects an embedded classism especially when one considers that this Talented Tenth often consisted of Northern, light-skinned African Americans. Further, neither Du Bois nor Crummell explains how this Talented Tenth will report to the "masses" or why the "masses" need to be instructed in the rules of proper behavior.

In terms of *Quicksand*, while the college's faculty should represent Du Bois's Talented Tenth, they do not offer any moments that provide uplift to the students they educate. Yet, the faculty envision themselves as the race's vanguard, and in a dramatic exchange James Vayle, Helga's colleague and one-time fiance, implores, " 'don't you see that if we--I mean people like us--

don't have children, the others will still have. That's one of the things that's the matter with us. The race is sterile at the top. Few, very few Negroes of the better class have children, and each generation has to wrestle again with the obstacles of the preceding ones, lack of money, education, and background. We're the ones who must have the children if the race is to get anywhere" (103). Vayle's conclusion shows an arrogant disregard for the African American "masses" and identifies them as natural primitives whose contagions must be controlled. Ultimately, Helga rejects Vayle's and Naxos's theories, and she does this not only by resigning from Naxos but by observing that "these people yapped loudly of race, of race consciousness, of race pride, and yet suppressed its most delightful manifestations, love of color, joy of rhythmic motion, naive, spontaneous laughter. Harmony, radiance, and simplicity, all the essentials of spiritual beauty in the race they had marked for destruction. Why, she wondered, didn't someone write *A Plea for Color* " (18)?

Helga's desire to move beyond these limitations is difficult to fulfill, however; indeed, there is virtually nowhere in the text that is beyond this stultifying language. Her tenure as a "girl Friday" to "race woman" Mrs. Hoynes-Rore exposes, once again, the primitive/racial uplift binary. In examining the African American's women's uplift movement, one must take note of the contributions of both Anna Julia Cooper and the formation of women's clubs in the late nineteenth century. In her *A Voice from the South* (1895), Cooper argues that racial uplift will occur through the actions of African American women. Cooper suggests that feudalism and Christianity elevate women's positions. In the United States because of its practice of slavery, however, African American women were never objects of chivalric devotion. Rather, slave women were unwilling concubines in the slave master's mad grasp for

more property. In order to rectify the damaging effects plantation rape has had on African American families, Cooper suggests that "the fundamental agency under God in the regeneration, the retraining of the race, as well as the ground work and starting point of its progress upward, must be the black woman" (28). Accordingly, Cooper implores African-American women to realize that their "responsibility is one that might make angels tremble and fear to take hold! To trifle with, to ignore or misuse it, is to treat lightly the most sacred and solemn trust ever confided by God to humankind. The training of children is a task on which an infinity of weal or woe depends" (22). On the one hand, Cooper's work suggests the needed elevation of African American women in a culture that for so long has considered them as inhuman. If one considers Hazel Carby's discussion of the slave society's demonization of black women in her *Reconstructing Womanhood* (1987), for example, one notes that the tenets of True Womanhood did not apply to African American women because their perceived brute strength and raw sexuality were beyond the scope of refined behavior. On the other hand, one might suggest, rather reasonably, that the Victorian principles that once excluded African Americans are reinscribed in racial uplift rhetoric and imposed on that community in order to elevate them to a more refined and middle-class status. Rather than challenge Victorian standards, the prominent race women use these markers as their means for evaluating and elevating African-American womanhood.

In his *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (1978), Wilson Moses comments that African American women's clubs such as the National Federation of Afro-American Women used "race consciousness and a rather conservative feminism as the dominant ideological features of the organization. The work of the middle-class colored woman was to be carried out among the

women of her own race; it would consist of establishing firmly the middle-class bourgeois morality of Victorian America" (118-119). According to Moses, the women's clubs consisted of "the best women in the communities where these clubs were organized," and they resolved "to introduce standards of genteel Victorian domesticity into the cabins of Georgia and Alabama peasant women. Domestic feminism among black women involved work of the settlement house variety, albeit carried on in a rural, rather than an urban environment" (104-105). This emphasis on the internalization of Victorian *mores* certainly occurs in *Quicksand*, and Larsen seems to criticize its chief adherent Mrs. Hayes-Rore and her prudishness. In her hiring of Helga for her New York lecture circuit, Mrs. Hayes-Rore asks "how is it that a nice girl like you can rush off on a wild goose chase like this at a moment's notice. I should think that your people would object, or make inquiries, or something" (38). Reluctantly, Helga tells her about her biracial status, and Mrs. Hayes-Rore "felt that the story, dealing as it did with race intermingling and possible adultery, was beyond definite discussion. For among black people, as among white people, it is tacitly understood that these things are not mentioned--and therefore do not exist" (39). As a result, the prominent "race woman" cautions Helga "I wouldn't mention that my people are white, if I were you. Colored people won't understand it" (41). Hayes-Rore's formula thus brands Helga's story of her biracialness as vulgar and primitive and attempts to silence it.

At first, Helga's resistance to racial uplift discourse is evident in her perception of its elitist qualities and its stifling *mores*. In her attempt to break out of this particular discourse, Helga leaves the United States for Denmark hoping to move from being the object of discourse to its subject. Her time in Copenhagen is not successful because Helga is defined there in terms of her

exotic race and what is believed to be her sexually-wild primitiveness. According to Debra Silverman, "because Helga is not in a place where she can let go on her own terms, she is labeled, dressed, and misunderstood as other people's image of a black woman" (611). For the Danes, Helga "was a curiosity, a stunt, at which people came and gazed" (71). Indeed, Helga's Danish aunt and uncle effectively put her on display in their insistence that she wear "bright things to set off the color of [her] lovely brown skin. Striking things, exotic things. [As her aunt tells her] You must make an impression" (68). The fetishization of Helga's primitive exoticism underscores her aunt's, uncle's, and the others' actions toward her, and this, in turn, raises disturbing questions about the mulatto woman's body in this new environment. bell hooks comments that white people's intense sexualizing of black women's bodies is "a sign of a displaced longing for a racist past when the bodies of black women were commodity, available to anyone white who could pay the price" (61-62). hooks's conclusion coincides with Sander Gilman's earlier analysis of the sexualizing of black women's bodies in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Considering art, medicine, and literature, Gilman argues that "by the eighteenth century, the sexuality of the black, both male and female, becomes an icon for deviant sexuality in general; and, the black figure appears almost always paired with a white figure of the opposite sex" (228). This pairing not only draws upon the perceived sexual primitiveness of the black figure but comments critically about the way in which the black figure's differences from the white subject causes him or her to be marginalized as the Other. Gilman examines nineteenth-century scientific and medical discourses and notes that with the French scientist Buffon there is an emphasis on the "lascivious, apelike sexual appetite of the black. He stated that this animal-like sexual appetite went

so far as to lead black women to copulate with apes. The black female thus comes to serve as an icon for black sexuality in general" (231). According to Gilman, Buffon draws his conclusion from his belief in the great chain of being as an instrument that indicates the innate differences among races. Accordingly, "the antithesis of European sexual *mores* and beauty is embodied in the black, and the essential black, the lowest rung on the great chain of being, is the Hottentot. The physical appearance of the Hottentot is, indeed, the central nineteenth-century icon for sexual difference between the European and the black" (231). Supporting Buffon's analysis, Gilman cites French scientist J. J. Vivey and his *Dictionnaire des Sciences Medicales* (1819), which theorized that black women's "voluptuousness is developed to a degree of lascivity unknown in our climate, for their sexual organs are much more developed than those of whites" (232). As was the case with Buffon, Vivey observed that the Hottentot woman was the epitome of this perceived sexual lasciviousness and offered as evidence the unique structure of the Hottentot woman's genitalia. This identification of primitive sexuality in the Hottentot woman gained much public enthusiasm in nineteenth-century Europe. For example, Sarah Bartmann, who was both a Hottentot woman and a slave, was the popular "display item" for many exhibitions in Europe because of her unusual and enormous genitalia and buttocks. After she died in 1815, an account of Bartmann's autopsy was published and distributed widely. In fact, the report, complete with pictures, was published three separate times in the span of ten years. In the report, the autopsy's physician Georges Cuvier "reflected on the comparison of a female of the 'lowest' human species with the highest ape and the description of the anomalies of the Hottentot's 'organ of generation'" (232). Here, Bartmann was reduced once again to her sexual parts. Gilman

concludes that "the audience which once had paid to see her buttocks and had fantasized about the uniqueness of her genitalia when she was alive could, after her death and dissection, examine both" (232). Bartmann's genitalia and buttocks not only served as the nineteenth century's icon of black female sexuality but, according to Gilman, also served as such for "the twentieth century as her sexual parts are still on display at the *Musee de l'homme* in Paris" (235).

It is in this context, then, that Helga's experiences in Denmark as a primitive sexual object come into sharper focus, and her association with the portrait artist Axel Olsen emphasizes further the reduction of Helga to her sexual parts. For instance, in a conversation during one of their portrait sessions, Olsen informs Helga that "you are a contradiction. You have the warm impulsive nature of the women of Africa, but, my lovely, you have, I fear, the soul of a prostitute. You sell yourself to the highest buyer. I should of course be happy that it is I. And I am" (87). As is the case with the Hottentot woman, there is an immediate association between Helga's blackness and her sexual availability. Moreover, one observes Olsen's fetishization of what he believes blackness represents: It is both a primitive sexuality and a commodity to be purchased by white men. At the same time that Olsen renders his vision of Helga's sexuality, her aunt and uncle hope that their niece will marry the artist and they, in turn, will ascend into the avant-garde social circle: "They had not so much expected as hoped that she would bring down Olsen [as her husband], and so secure the link between the merely fashionable set to which they belonged and the artistic one after which they hankered" (90). In his analysis of the Denmark chapters, George Hutchinson comments that "Larsen foregrounds the snobbishness of the Scandinavian bourgeoisie, their obsession with class

status, and the role of the exchange of women in cementing class ties" (559). For Olsen, Aunt Katrina, and Uncle Dahl, Helga is both the commodity and the capital used to purchase higher class standings in a culture that fetishizes the black woman's body. This particular practice leads cultural critics such as bell hooks to ask, "how and when will black females assert sexual agency in ways that liberate us from the confines of colonized desire, of racist/sexist imagery and practice?" (75) The dearth of possible answers in *Quicksand* to hooks' question suggests the degree to which Helga Crane is caught within limiting aesthetics.

This compulsion to classify the black body as primitive comes to the fore, once again, in Helga's visit to a Danish vaudeville house. At first, the acts are dull until two African American singers and dancers take the stage "pounding their thighs, slapping their hands together, twisting their legs, waving their abnormally long arms, throwing their bodies about with a loose ease!" (83). While "the enchanted spectators clapped and howled and shouted for more, Helga Crane was not amused" (83). More specifically, "she was filled with a fierce hatred for the cavorting Negroes on the stage. She felt shamed, betrayed, as if these pink and white people among whom she lived had suddenly been invited to look upon something which she had hidden away and wanted to forget" (83). Helga objects to the performance because it classifies all African Americans as spectacles who perform for the enjoyment of white people. In her disgust, Helga equates this performance with her aunt and uncle's insistence on her wearing of outrageous outfits:

> it became clear to her that all along they had divined its presence, had known that in her was something, some characteristic, different from any that they themselves possessed. Else why had they decked her out as they had? Why subtly indicated that she was different? And they

> hadn't despised it? No, they had admired it, rated it as a precious thing, a thing to be enhanced, preserved. (83)

The "its presence" is primitivism, and this passage clearly implies that primitivism is a white construct imposed on African Americans in order to arouse the "white" imagination. By themselves, bright colors are not "primitive" markers. However, in the context of a black vaudeville act or an African American woman in a predominantly white country where both are encouraged to be outrageous, these colors come to emblematize an exotic Otherness. Despite her objections, Helga "returned again and again to the Circus, always alone, gazing intently and solemnly at the gesticulating black figures, an ironical and silently speculative spectator" (83). While she cringes at the classification of African Americans as primitives whose *outre* behavior titillates white audiences, Helga is also held spellbound by this dark presence, a reaction which appears to question her assumption that primitivism arouses only the white imagination.

Helga Crane's dilemmas suggest, then, the limiting primitive/racial uplift binary, and her eventual marriage to a Southern evangelical minister shows how she cannot turn to the southern black folk as a means for revitalization. For critics such as Jeffrey Gray, Helga's marriage to Reverend Pleasant Green is a difficult conclusion, and such critics point to the improbability of her authentic conversion to an evangelical Christianity. Gray insists that "the transformation of Helga from strong, independent, and charismatic world-traveler to born-again, rural, baby-making drudge is abrupt if not incredible" (267). At the same time, however, Gray overlooks Larsen's larger concern: a questioning of black folk identity which Toomer's *Cane* romanticizes and puts forward as a respite from a modern chaotic universe. On the contrary, Helga's move to rural Alabama and her incessant production of children suggest the

limits of this so-called beauty. Her surrender to the evangelical message is made easier once Helga abandons reason. As Larsen's narrator comments, "faith was really quite easy. The more weary, the more weak, she became, the easier it was. Her religion was to her a kind of protective coloring, shielding her from the cruel light of an unbearable reality" (126). In her marriage to Green, Helga leaves New York to " 'labor in the vineyard of the Lord' in the tiny Alabama town where he was pastor to a scattered and primitive flock. And where, as the wife of the preacher, she was a person of relative importance. Only relative" (118). As the concluding chapters suggest, Helga never thrives in rural Alabama. Instead, the rural folk identity is described in ugly terms that reveal this region's overwhelming poverty and despair. For instance, Helga questions "what did it matter that, though [her husband] did no work with his hands, not even in the garden, his finger-nails were always rimmed with black? What did it matter that he failed to wash his fat body? . . . Helga somehow overcame her first disgust at the odor of sweat and stale garments" (121). Or, in terms of their church, she learns to endure "the dreary structure which had once been a stable belonging to the estate of a wealthy horse-racing man and about which the odor of manure still clung" (121). In both examples, Larsen represents the primitive folk identity as repulsive and underscores that deprivation is a constant and unenviable way of life. As Helga gives birth to each child and continues to live in abject poverty, she comes to realize "an astonished anger at the quagmire in which she had engulfed herself. She had ruined her life" (133). Thus, the novel's concluding chapters suggest that there is no discourse in the text available to Helga that does not entrap her in a prepackaged message. In sum, *Quicksand* dramatizes Helga Crane's inability to break out of the primitive versus racial uplift binary; neither is she able to find

solace in a romanticization of black rural poverty.

In conclusion, various products of the early decades of twentieth-century American literature suggest a preoccupation with the perceived primitive and exotic natures of African Americans. In Stein's "Melanctha," for example, the title character represents not only the culture's misguided notions about mulattoes, but, at the same time, her simplicity and racial status are reduced to metaphors that are appropriated by a white avant-garde artist as her "challenge" to mainstream culture. On the other hand, Larsen's *Quicksand* examines the culture's need for, and perpetuation of, a racial primitive who gives body and shape to a dominant American identity and to African American identity as well. As one examines the early decades of twentieth-century American literature, one notes that the literary use of the racial primitive is constant and powerful, including such works as Waldo Frank's *Holiday* (1923), Claude McKay's *Banjo* (1929), Ernest Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not* (1937), William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1939), and Willa Cather's *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940). Future studies in twentieth-century American literature might well consider this popular and problematic literary representation of racial primitivism, for such an analysis might offer great insight into the cultural wars that still obtain in twenty-first century America.

Conclusion

> They exist for us in a cherished series of dichotomies: By turns gentle, in tune with nature, paradisal, ideal--or violent, in need of control; what we should emulate or, alternately, what we should fear; noble savages or cannibals (Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive*, 3).

In my study, I have examined selected works of six American authors whose texts engage with four different forms of the primitive that I have identified as central to an understanding of naturalism and modernism. In each chapter, I have chronicled how authors have responded to, challenged, and, at times, perpetuated the era's representations of the primitive. While my dissertation suggests how scholars might re-imagine their critical approaches to these two literary periods, it also raises some rather critical questions: What is the primitive? How and why does an understanding of the primitive allow us to re-think the boundaries we have imposed that separate naturalism from modernism?

In her *Gone Primitive* (1990), Marianna Torgovnick studies the selected works of British imperialist authors whose adherence to a limiting Western perspective casts those figures they encounter in the "Third World" as primitives. In her approach to twentieth-century British literature, Torgovnick claims that "the real secret of the primitive has often been the same secret as always: The primitive can be--has been, will be--whatever Euro-Americans want it to be. It tells us what we want it to tell us. We decide whether what we have heard is a golden confidence or a nasty bit of scandalmongering" (9). For Torgovnick, then, the primitive resides in the collective Western imagination, and its use, purpose, and invocation is dependent upon that dominant culture's particular needs and interests. At the same time, however, Torgovnick's study remains silent as to whether the "primitive" ever responds to its "hailing" by the dominant

culture or whether the dominant culture's power over the primitive is ever challenged.

Despite the questions that her book raises, I find Torgovnick's approach to the primitive an intriguing one insofar as it offers possibilities for defining the primitive in terms of the dissertation I have undertaken. I also define the primitive as the dominant culture's projection of its internal fears, anxieties, and attractions. While my project does not focus on Third World indigenous peoples, its emphasis on the working-class and ethnic and racial minorities shows how they come to occupy the position of "primitives" and the degree to which more privileged individuals imagine themselves through the lens of this sometimes denigrated and, at other times, romanticized Other. By demarcating the working-class and ethnic and racial minorities as primitives, privileged persons deploy a nuanced set of markers that perpetuates the marginality of the disenfranchised. For instance, Norris's *McTeague* relies on identifying San Francisco's immigrant population with primitives so that he might render more convincingly his nativist fear that these newly arrived persons are the "threatening horde" who will imperil Anglo-Saxon identity.

Like Norris, London also fears the threat that the primitively unfit pose to Anglo-Saxon identity. Despite the racism that is prevalent in much of his fiction and non-fiction, London's deployment of the primitive is varied, uneven, and, at times, contradictory. In fact, the difficulty in categorizing London's use of the primitive reflects the multiple forms that the primitive takes on in the transformations my project identifies. In *Call of the Wild*, for example, London uses primitivism to connect his beliefs in a socialist utopia to the promise of an enduring Anglo-Saxon legacy. *The Sea-Wolf* and *Martin Eden* , in turn, seem to pair primitivism with the failures of an unbridled individualism that if left

unchecked will destroy the principal characters and those they encounter. On the other hand, O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* returns the primitive to a Darwinian context and focuses on Yank's social and evolutionary inferiority. Presenting an even more startling portrait of the primitive, Dreiser's *The Hand of the Potter* links Isadore to Lombroso's theories about criminality and a return to savagery.

As twentieth-century American literature unfolds, the primitive becomes linked with theories about race. For example, Stein's "Melanctha" evokes the racial primitive by focusing exclusively on Melanctha's sexuality and accessing "ready-made" assumptions about black sensuality. This reliance on the racial primitive comes under greater critique in Larsen's *Quicksand*, examining the culture's need for, and perpetuation of, a racial primitive who gives body and shape to African American identity as well.

Whether the primitive is invoked positively or negatively, it delineates the limits of American identity. In early American literature, for example, the primitive denoted both a romantic escape from an overindustrialized society and the perilous limit of civilized society that threatened to undermine white culture and identity. In the period covered by my study, then, the primitive invokes a double-edged response; the primitive's marginality suggests the degree to which authors, privileged or otherwise, rely on its enduring and embedded presence in our national literature to limn out the qualities of American identity.

As for the second question that my study raises, there has been much critical attention drawn to the differences that distinguish naturalism from modernism. For example, modernists argue that naturalism's crude focus and style, its spectacle of suffering, and its provincialism prove to be "inferior" in light of an emerging modernism that is far more stylistically sophisticated and

cosmopolitan in its outlook. While a keen and enduring interpretation, this traditional approach overlooks possibilities whereby naturalism and modernism may be seen to share similar fears, preoccupations, and attractions. In my project, I claim that the primitive is one linchpin between the periods, and its continuous presence suggests the arbitrariness of periodization. In other words, my dissertation argues that naturalism and modernism rely on the primitive in order to flesh out subject versus Other, American versus alien, and artist versus conformist. The primitive allows for an erasure of the line that separates naturalism from modernism because it foregrounds the alienation and nativism that inform both literary projects. Of course, the primitive is not the only focus one might use to challenge periodization. However, its intrinsic nature in American literature invites scholars to raise many questions about how we theorize about this body of texts, and periodization is only one of many issues that might benefit from renewed critical examination.

In terms of traditional dissertations, my selection of authors and chapter organizations may seem unusual and, at times, even problematic. Future readers might pose questions such as the following: To what extent is genre minimized, perhaps even "lost," if the dividing line between naturalism and modernism is erased? How does a focus on the primitive and its elaboration by a group of highly selective authors ensure a more historically specific discussion of naturalism and modernism? In response to these questions, I hope that my dissertation will encourage readers to consider the limits of American culture, the (in)stability of the bourgeois subject, and the materiality of oppression. These issues are as important, I think, as the texts and literary genres that are the focus of this study. That is, in examining Norris's, London's, O'Neill's, Dreiser's, Stein's, and Larsen's selected works in terms of their larger

cultural milieus, I point out the ways in which their texts deploy various images of the primitive so that one might understand the complex social, cultural, and historical forces that are at work in naturalist and modernist literature. It is my hope that future studies will continue the focus I have outlined and pursue such projects as how primitivism affects our understanding of literary whiteness and blackness; how primitivism "crosses the Atlantic" and reveals itself in the fiction of Kipling, Forster, and Conrad; and how those authors who are ethnic or racial minorities challenge and engage with their own responses to the primitive. In conclusion, my project encourages, I hope, the continued probing of the fears, fascinations, and preoccupations that gave rise to naturalism and modernism.

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