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The Mouth Trap

Orality and the Rabelaisian Grotesque in Norris's McTeague

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In its original review of Frank Norris's *McTeague* (1899), the *Literary World* asserted that readers should have a "vigorous mind . . . and strong stomach" (Marchand 302), a statement applicable both to the novel's violence and to its nauseous exhibitions of food. Between family picnics on the bay, an abundant wedding feast, and McTeague's ritualistic hearty lunches, Norris often presents eating as a fanatical yet essential activity. No one exemplifies this type of consumption more than McTeague himself. At various times, the titular dentist appears "stuffed to the eyes" (45), with a "mouth . . . full of pudding" (31–32) or a "mouth full of mashed potato" (140). His active mouth and full stomach underscore his achievement of a desired middle-class status. When McTeague later falls from his established place in society, however, his mouth becomes dormant and his belly empty. After losing his job and his food supply, an animalistic, even vampiric McTeague emerges. The famished dentist resorts to chewing on his wife Trina's fingers and later bludgeons her to death. McTeague's starvation eventually transforms him, in the words of critic Eric Anderson, into "a howling, maniacal werewolf" (71).

When addressing orality in *McTeague*, previous critics often prioritize the subject in terms of sexual power and deviance. Denise Cruz argues that the repeated descriptions of the mouth demonstrate "the novel's representation of sexual desire . . . as perverse" (503), while William Freedman's Freudian reading paints the orally-obsessed characters as "overgrown infants . . . at their mothers' breasts" (52). These valuable readings incisively place McTeague himself among psychoanalytic case studies roughly contemporaneous with Norris's work.¹ Yet by counting the myriad of ways that McTeague and others qualify as sexual deviants, such interpretations overlook the many positive and even joyful portrayals of the mouth early

in the novel. Mohamed Zayani reads McTeague's hunger metaphorically, remarking that "the thirst for gold manifests itself as an appetite for food and vice versa" (213). Though McTeague pursues Trina's lottery winnings as their marriage proceeds, Norris establishes McTeague's physical appetite long before (and independent from) his desires for gold. Whether citing Freud or the gold rush, scholars have yet to examine fully the literary and cultural models that may have informed Norris's focus on the mouth. Moreover, no studies track the development, and eventual reversion, of McTeague's oral activity as his fortunes change. His prosperous marriage, subsequent surrender of his dental practice, and desperate desert trek all function as turning points that are essential to understanding McTeague's overarching oral narrative.

Norris's emphasis on orality specifically resembles that of sixteenth-century satirist François Rabelais. His works *Pantagruel* (ca. 1532) and *Gargantua* (ca. 1534) represent two early and definitive examples of a literary mode that Mikhail Bakhtin names "grotesque realism" in his landmark study *Rabelais and His World* (1936) (18). Originating from medieval folklore, this mode portrays "grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable" visions of the body and comically inflated scenes of bodily functions like eating and drinking (Bakhtin 19). In so doing, grotesque realism lowers discourse to the corporeal level and affirms the body's positive capabilities. Throughout Rabelais's two books, his legendary giants demonstrate their power over ordinary humans through their overwhelming physicality and recurring oral feats.

In *McTeague's* early scenes, Norris follows Rabelais's grotesque models by celebrating the mouth as an effective source of pleasure and power. While Keith Newlin suggests that McTeague "is propelled by a single force, a latent atavism that manifests itself in instinctive, physical desires" (13), McTeague initially delays these instincts via his constant feeding. Not an instinct but rather a ritual, eating allows McTeague to operate as a Rabelaisian giant and fleetingly suppress his base impulses of violence and aggression. Yet once McTeague's income and nourishing meals vanish, he deviates from Rabelais's model and becomes susceptible to an unchecked animalism. McTeague reverts from a temperate giant to an enraged beast and then finally to an enfeebled fugitive, a descent aligned with his dwindling food supply and shrinking stature. Thus Norris finally implies that the grotesque orality which defines Rabelais's giants can only temporarily immunize McTeague from humans' most brutish instincts. Instead, Norris proposes that McTeague, and humans in general, have not evolved suf-

ficiently to contain their inner animal and thus will be unable to adapt within the modern world.

Rabelais's Grotesque and McTeague's Oral Satisfaction

Spotlighting clowns and fools, feasts and banquets, grotesque realism first emerged at carnivals and other celebrations of folk culture within the medieval period. According to Bakhtin, the signature trait of the genre is the lowering of "all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract . . . to the material level" (19). In the era's comic dialogues, for instance, clown figures maintain one primary function: to reduce highbrow conversations and chivalric customs (tournaments, knight's initiations, and so forth) to a bodily dialogue (20). In *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*, Rabelais extends grotesque realism's "material bodily principle, that is, images of the human body with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life" (18). Rabelais's "extremely exaggerated" images of the body celebrate the flesh and its capabilities (18). He magnifies and inflates the body in order to show, as did his medieval predecessors, that "the bodily element is deeply positive" (19).

Loyal to grotesque realism's origins in folk humor, *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel* feature dozens of amusing episodes surrounding the bodily functions and the physical mishaps of the two giants, especially in their childhood scenes. The young Gargantua "pissed on his shoes," "drank out of his slipper," "washed his hands with soup," and "combed his hair with a goblet," among other habits (Rabelais 30). Years later, Gargantua's son Pantagruel is chained to his cradle after his father fears that he will hurt himself during his ravenous eating fits. Upon smelling a feast in a nearby room, Pantagruel breaks out of his restraints and enters the banquet hall with the cradle chained to his back (146). In these scenes, the humor emerges from the two giants using their amusingly oversized bodies to procure food and drink. Both Gargantua and Pantagruel continually find themselves in predicaments arising from their all-consuming hungers.

In his grotesque realism, Rabelais centers several episodes on the mouth and portrays the importance of nourishment. Eating carries food to the stomach and towards the reproductive organs, a process which then triggers regeneration. Gargantua's mother Gargamelle gives birth to him during a feast of oxen, her delivery prompted by her swallowing too much fatty tripe (14). Food literally pushes him out into the world and brings him life. Thus the material bodily principle maintains a "positive, assertive character," even as grotesque realism's figures demolish much of the environment around them (Bakhtin 19). In banquet scenes, Gargantua and Pantagruel consume vegetation, animals, and even other people in or-

der to grow stronger. The enriched body and the active mouth especially reaffirm one's vitality. Chewing, swallowing, and digesting are all sacred functions that indicate health and life. Bakhtin writes, "To degrade an object" means "to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place. Grotesque realism knows no other lower level; it is the fruitful earth and the womb. It is always conceiving" (21). In Rabelais's world, eating is a sacred rite and digestion a glorious process. The mouth's annihilation of food represents the necessary first stage of recharging the grotesque body. This processing of food, from the mouth to the stomach and reproductive organs, remains crucial to the body's renewal. Whether intentional or not, Norris adapts several of these principles of grotesque realism in *McTeague*.

As Norris drafted the novel in the last years of the nineteenth century, numerous editions of Rabelais's complete books (titled *The Works of Rabelais*) circulated in the United States. In conjunction with London's Gibbings Press, Philadelphia publisher J. P. Lippincott released a four-volume version in America during the fall of 1896. Consumers had options to buy four-dollar cloth-bound sets or ten-dollar "half calf or half morocco" editions ("The Coming Book Season"; "J. P. Lippincott's Autumn Announcement"). The following year, the *Boston Daily Journal* and *Literary World* advertised Lippincott's new five-volume version of *The Works of Rabelais*, printed in the Scottish-based Urquhart-Motteaux translation ("Literary News"; "The Works of Rabelais"). By 1899, the year of *McTeague*'s release, *The Works of Rabelais* appeared on bookseller Irving Putnam's one hundred popular books based upon "the consensus of opinion of many thousand cultivated people" ("One Hundred Works"), and Macy's advertised a six-volume cloth version as a Christmas gift book ("Macy's Christmas Books"). Rabelais also drew the press's attention for a Parisian stage opera of his book *Panurge* in 1896 ("General Theatrical Notes"), and for vice controller Anthony Comstock's attempts to outlaw the selling of *The Works of Rabelais* in 1897 ("Suppressed Literature").²

The extent to which Norris was familiar with Rabelais's books remains unknown, yet he likely had some familiarity with them. Norris became an avid scholar of French history when living in Paris as a teenager, and he afterwards wrote a college paper specifically about the wandering poets and troubadours of medieval France (McElrath and Crisler 136). The multiple U.S. printings of Rabelais's texts nearly three hundred and fifty years after his death also indicate that the French author remained relevant in American literary culture. As Bakhtin explains, "The entire field of realistic literature of the last three centuries is strewn with the frag-

ments of grotesque realism," but many of the "grotesque images . . . have either weakened or entirely lost their positive pole" (24). Several American works preceding *McTeague* demonstrate this phenomenon. The facial imperfection of Aylmer's wife in Hawthorne's "The Birthmark" (1843) or the deformed, gimp-legged dwarf in Poe's "Hop-Frog" (1849), for instance, are negative variations on the exaggerated human body so central to grotesque realism.³

Whether Norris read Rabelais's works himself or unconsciously imported Rabelaisian inventions that filtered through other writers, he comprehends the central concepts of grotesque realism. In his 1896 essay for the *San Francisco Wave*, "Zola as a Romantic Writer," Norris writes that within Zola's fictional world, "Everything is extraordinary, imaginative, grotesque even, with a vague note of terror quivering throughout" (86). Norris then goes on to describe naturalism, a genre which both Zola and Norris advanced, as "a form of romanticism" (86). Naming the grotesque specifically, Norris indicates that he understood the medieval genre's basic tenets of corporeal exaggeration and monstrosity. In addition, several episodes in *McTeague* such as Marcus and McTeague's picnic competition, during which McTeague crams a billiard ball into his mouth, or Trina's little brother August urinating through his outfit at the theater reproduce Rabelais's comic valuation of the body. McTeague himself—grossly oversized and perpetually hungry—remains the figure most closely tied to Rabelais's models. Unlike the diluted or negative versions of Rabelais's figures that postdated *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua*, Norris presents McTeague as initially replicating the positive body principles that characterize Rabelais's giants. Norris portrays the Rabelaisian concept of regeneration not through lasting sexual reproduction; after all, the McTeagues' marriage is sterile, Old Grannis and Miss Baker are too old to procreate, and Zerkow and Maria Macapa can only produce a "wretched, sickly child" that lives for a mere ten days (134). Rather, Norris simulates Rabelais's concept of regeneration via the physical replenishment of one's own body. As Norris's central figure of grotesque realism, McTeague eats ceaselessly in order to renew his enormous body and sustain his dominant position.

McTeague first appears as a grotesque but innocuous giant on the streets of San Francisco. Norris introduces McTeague quite literally as a "young giant," with a "square-cut, angular" head, "enormous, red" hands, and "immense limbs, heavy with ropes of muscle" (6). He seems not so much a man as much as a legendary creature, and the street patrons tell tales of "his enormous strength" (6). Despite McTeague's violent appearance and his later brutalities, Norris specifies that the dentist resembles a

gentle giant more than a forbidding one: "Yet there was nothing vicious about the man. Altogether he suggested the draught horse, immensely strong, stupid, docile, obedient" (6). Before he marries Trina Sieppe, McTeague's dull yet temperate personality is on full display. Whether lumbering through Trina's tiny room or nearly choking to death on a billiards ball, McTeague seems akin to a domesticated animal. At one point, Norris even describes him as a "gigantic, good-natured Saint Bernard" (79). When McTeague kisses an unconscious Trina in his dental chair early in the novel, Norris suggests that a more aggressive animal lies within the character. But at least before the marriage, his gigantic stature combined with his lack of intellect reveal him more frequently as a comical behemoth. For instance, attempting to buy theater tickets in one particularly amusing scene, the "bewildered, confused" McTeague cannot find the box office and then bickers with the seller because he fails to understand the seating plan (55). During the show itself, McTeague "explode[s] in a roar of laughter" at the slapstick routines, "slapping his knee, wagging his head" when one performer repeatedly falls down (59). Sitting beside the similarly entertained toddler August, McTeague seems an amusingly overgrown child himself.

The pleasure in, and ritualistic nature of, McTeague's eating further establishes him as a Rabelaisian giant. The opening description follows McTeague on his Sunday custom of eating soup, underdone meat, vegetables, and suet pudding at a Polk Street coffee shop. Following his meal, he indulges in a long nap because it brings him "relaxation and enjoyment" (5). The food does not feed his soul, but it fills his stomach and provides him a necessary contentment. Norris characterizes McTeague's eating as an essential ritual, one likely established in childhood when his mother served as a cook for an entire mining camp. In depicting this ritual nature of eating, Norris echoes Rabelais's portrayals of his giants' youths. Gargantua, for example, spends the years from three to five "drinking, eating, and sleeping; eating, sleeping, and drinking; eating, sleeping, and drinking; sleeping, drinking, and eating" (Rabelais 30). Both McTeague and Gargantua impose a regularity and a rhythm to their eating. This constant consumption placates both Gargantua and McTeague, rendering the potentially dangerous men harmless. Throughout the early parts of *McTeague*, Norris also presents eating as a cherished ceremony during which characters can bond and share amusement. Once McTeague joins Trina's family for a picnic—a "never-to-be-forgotten day" in McTeague's opinion—he and Trina share affection, laughs, and, most importantly a filling lunch: "Trina and her mother made a clam chowder that melted

in one's mouth. . . . There were huge loaves of rye bread full of grains of chickweed. There were wienerwurst and frankfurter sausages. There was unsalted butter. There were pretzels . . . and, last of all, a crowning achievement, a marvellous Gotha truffle" (45). Following the lunch and many bottles of beer, the "stuffed to his eyes" McTeague smokes his pipe and lies "prone on his back in the sun" (45). As in Rabelais's accounts of feasting, food satiates McTeague and induces a pleased passivity in him. Whether McTeague naps after his coffee-joint lunch or lies prostrate in the sun after the picnic meal, his full stomach renders him immobile and benign. His eating rituals keep at bay the violent "brute" that periodically threatens to take over his calm, albeit dim-witted, disposition (21). Hence, Norris celebrates the nourishment of the body just as much as Rabelais does. As Bakhtin writes, eating is an uncompromisingly positive activity among Rabelais's giants, and, indeed, the advantages of regular sustenance are likewise evident in the always ingesting McTeague.

Rabelais and Norris both convey not only the good-natured and pleasurable associations with eating, but also the working mouth's capabilities of dominance and destruction. Beyond Rabelais's many comic incidents related to the mouth, Bakhtin cites constant eating as critical to understanding how man rules over the earth: "Eating and drinking are one of the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body"; the body "swallows, devours, rends the world apart, is enriched and grows at the world's expense" (281). In Rabelais's story, Gargantua requires 17,913 cows from two French counties "to give him his ordinary milk" (Rabelais 21). When he is an older child studying in Paris, he takes a meal of a "few dozen hams, smoked ox tongues, salt mullets, [and] chitterlings" while "four of his men threw into his mouth, one after the other, continuously, mustard by the pailful" (50). As illustrated by Gustav Doré for a Paris publication of *Oeuvres de Rabelais* (ca. 1873), this scene exhibits the pleasurable feasting that partly defines Rabelais's grotesque realism (fig. 1).⁴ The men laboriously spoon-feeding Gargantua mustard, the giant's baby-like exposed tongue, and the forked ham and hanging animal parts awaiting his mouth all magnify the enrichments of eating. Drawing a tumbled food basket on the tabletop's left side and plates of scattered food on the right, Doré depicts a cornucopia of food stretching beyond the scene's margins. Moreover, he highlights the sheer amount, and variety, of sustenance necessary to sate a giant in Rabelais's world. Only stopping "when his belly was dilated," Gargantua eats in order to expand and grow; his eating represents the central process of regeneration within the grotesque tradition (50). Gargantua's son Pantagruel drinks the milk of 4,600 cows, and, impatient with one,

he takes the "cow under the hams and [eats] her two udders and half her belly, with the liver and kidneys" (145). Rabelais's constant displays of sacrificed cows and dismembered animals highlight the necessity of renewing the body. Both Gargantua and Pantagruel eat in order to expand physically and maintain their superiority over common humans.

Norris similarly portrays eating itself as a critical act of dominance and self-preservation. His characters attack and dismantle food with relentless physicality. During the wedding dinner, guests hardly come up for air in their focused obliteration of their meals: "For two hours the guests ate; their faces red, their elbows wide, the perspiration beading their foreheads. All around the table one saw the same incessant movement of jaws and heard the same uninterrupted sound of chewing" (97). Norris draws attention to eating as a grueling activity, the feasters laboring diligently to break down their food and absorb it. Trina's father even devours an oiled calf's head "with long breaths of contentment" until it is "reduced . . . to a mere skull" (97, 99). This close picture of the animal's carcass reminds readers of the supper's stakes. Compared to the earlier picnic scene, the wedding banquet emphasizes the violence of eating, the merciless conquering of earth's resources. Norris likens the meal to a ruthless war. It commences with a "report like a pistol" (96), and it ends with animal skeletons and fleshy leftovers approximating "a devastation, a pillage . . . an abandoned battlefield" (99). McTeague and the Sieppes demonstrate the primal fight that man endures, era after era, with other creatures roaming the earth. Ironically, Norris suggests that grotesque eating—even when it involves the gruesome dismemberment of animal corpses—functions as a peacemaking ceremony. Any warring or violent proclivities are smothered by the characters' joyful indulgences at the dinner table. Norris proposes that, like Rabelais's giants, turn-of-the-century humans can temper and even postpone their worst aggressions through determined eating.

In this scene highlighting both the terror and the ritual of eating, McTeague becomes the consumer most reminiscent of Rabelais's grotesque giants. Like Pantagruel and preceding medieval giants, whose principal "feats are related to sucking, devouring, swallowing, tearing to pieces," McTeague's main skills involve his oral abilities (Bakhtin 331).⁵ During the wedding feast, "McTeague ate for the sake of eating, without choice; everything within reach of his hands found its way into his enormous mouth" (97). McTeague eats both because it is his regular custom and because it brings him an unrivaled satisfaction. Towards the end of the meal, all the men, "gorged with food," unbutton their vests (97). The silent McTeague draws short breaths and sits with his "cheeks . . . distended, his

Fig. 1. Gargantua feeding. Drawing by Gustave Doré. From François Rabelais, *Ouvres de Rabelais* (Paris: Garnier Frères, ca. 1873).

eyes wide, his huge salient jaw mov[ing] with a machine-like regularity” (98). Docile and immovable, McTeague poses no threat while masticating his food. The ceremonial act of eating neutralizes him just as it does in the earlier picnic scene. Though McTeague is only vaguely cognizant of partaking in a self-beneficial rite, his active orality allows him to function as

a jolly Rabelaisian giant expanding his body. Despite sometimes requiring destructive means to obtain a meal, eating serves a unreservedly positive function in Rabelais's world. In one instance, when his father's black bear escapes, Pantagruel breaks the cables restraining him from the nearby livestock and tears the bear "in pieces like a chicken, and made himself a fine tidbit of him for that meal" (145). Pantagruel exhibits both the desperation and the strength characteristic of a growing giant trying to nourish himself. McTeague mimics Pantagruel's process, persistently reloading his gigantic body to become someone, or something, greater than man.

With every meal, the ravenous McTeague more closely approaches Rabelais's model of a giant, and, in so doing, prevents a deeper animalism from emerging. As Bakhtin writes, "Man's encounter with the world in the act of eating is joyful, triumphant; he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself. The limits between man and the world are erased, to man's advantage" (281). The mouth and teeth act as the gateway between the external world and the internal bodily one, the space in which McTeague can convert external matter into his own lifeblood. McTeague may surrender his Sunday lunch habits upon marriage, but he soon acquires a new eating ritual that equally nurtures him. On each weekday, Trina provides him with coffee, bacon, Vienna bread, and eggs for breakfast; hours later, she prepares sausages, mashed potatoes, chocolate, and side dishes of salted herring and artichokes for lunch. During these meals and others in the McTeagues' prosperous times, McTeague talks while eating "huge chunks of butterless bread" or a "mouth full of codfish" (77, 126). By consuming the excesses of food which so consistently appear before him, McTeague can function as a dominant giant in the mold of Rabelais's heroes. As long as he continues eating and operating as a folk giant, he can override his most brutal instincts. In essence, he circumvents the untamed animalism that Norris considers the worst plague of being human.

An Oral Reversal

Yet McTeague cannot sustain his oral dominance and soon deviates from the grotesque model; ultimately, he succumbs to the atavism that, Norris suggests, threatens to overtake men. In his 1901 essay "A Plea for Romantic Fiction," Norris endorses a literature which explores "the unplumbed depths of the human heart" and the "black, unsearched penetralia of the soul of man" (78). Initially, McTeague seems a poor test case for such exploration. His eating habits mark him as a monstrous giant distinct from ordinary men. However, Norris demotes McTeague socially in order to

show the character's susceptibility to humankind's primal instincts of aggression and survival. When he is stripped of his profession and the surfeits of food attending it, he transitions from a life as a giant into that of a man. As a man, he becomes subject to, and representative of, the biological flaws of humans. In "Zola as a Romantic Writer," Norris writes that naturalistic characters "must be twisted from the ordinary . . . and flung into the throes of a vast and terrible drama that works itself out in unleashed passions, in blood, and in sudden death" (86). Norris consigns McTeague to the lower status of an "ordinary" man to show how unordinary, and even perverse, many men can be in their harboring of secret desires and violent proclivities. In the absence of social and gastronomic prosperity, these instincts threaten to take over.

Norris implies that McTeague always possesses an inclination toward primitive brutality, but he initially refrains from acting on it. In the beginning scenes, Norris previews the darker shades of McTeague when the dentist observes Trina unconscious in his dental chair: "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" (21). Norris directly associates McTeague's animalistic sexual desires with a decidedly "evil" quality and therefore suggests a universal underpinning to the character. McTeague's sexual arousal represents an insidious, and inescapable, human biology that reaches back long before he existed. As Norris continues describing McTeague, he specifies that "Below the fine fabric of all that was good in him ran the foul stream of hereditary evil, like a sewer. The vices and sins of his father and of 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" (22). McTeague's brutish desires are not specific to him but rather represent a primitivism that traces back to man's simian ancestors. Modern-day humans have concealed this animalism beneath respectable professions and manners, to the extent that McTeague is not aware of his inner beast until encountering temptation in adulthood. His healthy and habitual eating habits have further tamped down his vicious qualities. But as McTeague's vision of Trina in the chair demonstrates, the right trigger can activate the primal self that otherwise lies dormant. Proposing McTeague as a universal figure, Norris affirms that the animal instincts within can be masked for only so long.

Norris highlights McTeague's devolution through the dentist's loss in middle-class status and his unforeseen starvation. The city orders the never-licensed McTeague to stop practicing dentistry, a critical plot reversal affecting not only McTeague's economic comfort but also his oral

necessities. Forced to sell his furniture and take a job crafting surgical instruments, the now working-class McTeague surrenders the eating rituals that pacified him before. He resumes his Sunday lunch habit at the coffee shop, but the other eating customs at home have ceased. He “missed the cabbage soups and steaming chocolate” that Trina previously prepared for him, as he is relegated to eating plainer lunches at a sailor’s boarding house (158). Now Trina cooks only a “very meagre meal on an oil stove” for their breakfast (159). After he loses his new job and struggles to find any income, even his more complete meals do not carry the same satisfaction that they once did. As Norris writes, McTeague “could look forward to nothing better than a badly-cooked supper at the coffee-joint—hot meat on a cold plate, half done suet pudding, muddy coffee, and bad bread” (162). The meal mirrors the coffee-joint lunch that McTeague enjoyed in the novel’s opening scene, which highlighted each of these same dishes. Yet the earlier meal also included a “thick gray soup” and “two kinds of vegetables,” and the suet pudding was “full of strong butter and sugar” (5), all of which led to a gratifying afternoon nap. McTeague’s new culinary life is a pale copy of his previous one. Trina’s spare meals mean that Mac no longer engages the grotesque eating tradition that he formerly did. Conversely, Rabelais describes the overabundance of animals and crops continually available to his giants and the resulting joy of consumption. *Gargantua* begins with a feast of slaughtered cattle, and war victories throughout are celebrated with copious banquets. Of Rabelais’s brand of the grotesque, Bakhtin writes, “No meal can be sad. Sadness and food are incompatible” (283). Yet Norris explores this precise link. In contrast to Rabelais’s examples of joyous feasts, McTeague’s increasingly scant meals demonstrate the character’s emotional dissatisfaction. Here Norris reverses the Rabelaisian model of the well-fed, gigantic body to show the hungry McTeague’s inability to adapt. Without his middle-class position and the plentiful amounts of food that sustained him in the past, McTeague faces the necessity of surrendering the oral activity so central to his existence.

While McTeague maintains some orally dominant habits, they take on a different character once his body is no longer nourished. Norris still constructs scenes of consumption that resemble those in Rabelais’s works; however, McTeague’s desperate situation renders him a shadow of both the literary giants and his former self. At one point in *Pantagruel*, the titular giant and his companions gather rabbits, boars, and deer and roast them over a turnspit, much to the narrator’s amazement: “And afterward, great feasting with vinegar aplenty. The devil to anyone who held back. It was a triumph just to see them guzzle” (216). The act of eating itself

becomes a spectacle for the narrator and another victory of man over the earth. Even in the later stages of Norris's novel, McTeague achieves some miniature conquests of his own. In one particularly graphic scene, McTeague catches a fish and takes his time consuming it: "He thrust a pointed stick down the mouth of the perch, and turned it slowly over the blaze. When the grease stopped dripping, he knew that it was done, and would devour it slowly and with tremendous relish, picking the bones clean, eating even the head" (183). Though it might appear that Norris is continuing the Rabelaisian parallel, the scene represents a regression for McTeague and a preview of the character's descent into primitivism in the final act. While Trina used to prepare him stewed codfish for lunches, now McTeague must retreat to nature directly to extract its resources. At one point, he even recalls fishing for cod in the bay before he had the comforts of home-cooked meals. Moreover, unlike Rabelais's hero and his friends, McTeague does not share the meal with anyone nor does anybody witness his successful catch. Compared to the earlier scenes of joyful, communal eating with the Sieppes, McTeague's capture of the codfish proves an inconsequential victory.

Norris depicts McTeague as increasingly aggressive with his mouth, but the character's newfound ferociousness does not replenish him as did his earlier meals. In one of the novel's more infamous segments, Norris describes the source of Trina's perpetually swollen fingers: "The fact of the matter was that McTeague, when he had been drinking, used to bite them, crunching and grinding them with his immense teeth" (171). Norris portrays McTeague's progressive torture as symbolic of the character's misguided oral activity and his further differentiation from Rabelais's giants. Specifying that "the gaping mouth is related to the image of swallowing, this most ancient symbol of death and destruction," Bakhtin stresses that within Rabelais's works, the mouth acts as the tool for demolition that ultimately leads to digestion and bodily renewal (325). McTeague's biting of Trina's fingers offers him this possibility in the absence of actual food, but Norris denies McTeague the fulfillment of ingestion. Unlike Gargantua and Pantagruel, McTeague can no longer reach the important stage of swallowing or receive the nourishment from chewing her fingers as he does from eating actual food. He may bite her "for his own satisfaction" (171), but an early draft of the novel from 1895—in which Norris specifies that "often these brutalities inflamed [McTeague's] sensual passions" (qtd. in Hart 79)—indicates that McTeague achieves a pleasure of sexual sadism entirely different from the sensation of a full mouth or stomach. Unlike Rabelais's cheerful, gluttonous giants who effortlessly consume the earth's

crops and game, McTeague runs out of resources. In his desperate condition, he conflates his cravings for food with his primitive instincts of carnal aggression. Yet even if he derives some type of sexual release from biting Trina's fingers, he cannot achieve an attendant relief from his hunger. Nor can this oral expression of sexuality lead to any of the positive reproduction associated with Rabelais's giants.

The otherwise dense McTeague at least comprehends that he must keep his stomach and mouth full of food in order to survive. After he steals Trina's money for the first time, he uses it to satisfy his physical appetites: "He had spent her money here and there about the city in royal fashion, absolutely reckless of the morrow, feasting and drinking for the most part with companions he picked up heaven knows where" (200). Though seemingly irresponsible, McTeague in fact contains his animalistic self by replaying his days of indulgent eating. He tries to re-live his previous existence as a giant in the mold of Gargantua or Pantagruel. As long as McTeague is fed, he poses no danger to himself or to Trina who, despite her now-missing fingers, has found paying work as a cleaning woman. But Norris reminds readers that McTeague's benders of food and drink are only quick fixes. When McTeague returns to Trina and begs for change, he can only repeat the mantra that he no longer has money for food. He exclaims, "I'm regularly starving, and I haven't slept in a Christian bed for two weeks" (198); then repeats, "I am starving, regularly" (198); then again "But you *can't* see me starve Trina" (198); then finally, "Trina, I ain't had a thing to eat since yesterday morning . . . you *can't* see me starve, can you?" (199). McTeague's repetitive statements illustrate not only his limited vocabulary but also his belief that nothing threatens his existence more than an empty mouth and stomach. McTeague understands that he must continually enrich his body with food in order to survive. Yet Norris implies that McTeague's greatest danger remains not the physical starvation itself but rather the desperate beast that emerges in the absence of food.

As McTeague metamorphoses into the orally sadistic predator that has always lain within, Norris suggests that humans can only temporarily stave off the bestial instincts that so often destroy them. Withholding both sex and food, Trina restricts McTeague from achieving any oral gratification. In his absence, Trina withdraws all of her saved money and converts it into gold pieces. Then she begins a habit of rolling in bed with the coins and sucking them. She accepts her gold as an alternative lover and simultaneously renders McTeague's own mouth useless. In a sexual relationship instigated by McTeague's aggressive kisses of Trina and solidified by their mutual kiss "grossly, full in the mouth," Trina effectively castrates

McTeague by refusing him further access to her mouth (50). When Trina refuses to surrender her lottery winnings for further feasts and shows no sympathy for his starvation, she prolongs McTeague's oral impotence. His dominant orality suspended, McTeague resorts to brute physicality to extract the money that can restore him to his former position. Utilizing his "ape-like agility" as he bludgeons Trina to death (205), he leaves "her body twitching with an occasional hiccough that stirred the pool of blood in which she lay face downward" (207). His latent animal finally unleashed, McTeague steals Trina's money and leaves her to taste only air and blood. But because he has killed Trina, he cannot spend the money on new meals as he anticipated. His murder of her necessitates that he devote his funds to securing his escape from the city and all its culinary possibilities. Norris conveys that McTeague has begun his degeneration from a Rabelaisian giant of epicurean excess to a vulnerable human of primal aggression. As Norris promises, shortly after McTeague assumes the role of a representative human, he is "twisted from the ordinary" and plunged into a bloody drama of his own making. McTeague's dark turn into spousal abuse and murder, of course, does not necessarily represent the trajectory of all men. Yet his many losses—of his middle-class position, of his satiating eating habits, of his mythical status as a giant—permanently activate his violent instincts. Norris casts McTeague as a universal figure, not because he resembles other men but rather because he represents the potential for deadly animalism in everyone.

Size Matters: The Dentist's Diminution

While Norris attributes McTeague's atavism to his oral powerlessness, he also tracks this regression according to the character's shrinking stature. Trina's birthday present to McTeague of his long-desired Parlors sign—in the shape of a monstrous tooth—marks the beginning of McTeague's end, despite the character's jubilation upon first seeing it:

How immense it looked in that little room! The thing was tremendous, overpowering—the tooth of a gigantic fossil, golden and dazzling. Beside it everything seemed dwarfed. Even McTeague himself, big boned and enormous as he was, shrank and dwindled in the presence of the monster. As for an instant he bore it in his hands, it was like a puny Gulliver struggling with the molar of some vast Brobdingnag. (86)

"Bright as a mirror" (86), the tooth becomes a means for self-reflection of professional accomplishment and "represents the masculine ideal for McTeague" (Long 72). Despite this ostensibly positive development, the

tooth's arrival also marks a reversal of McTeague's physical dominance. The giant McTeague, always towering above those around him, finally meets his match in the gargantuan tooth. Instead of appearing as a small sign relative to a backdrop of larger buildings outside, the massive tooth minimizes both McTeague's belongings and McTeague himself within the interior space. The "tremendous, overpowering" tooth resets the physical scale of McTeague's life and undercuts his status as a giant (86). After he surrenders his dental practice, his insecurities about status begin to multiply. He attempts to deny his new diminution, remarking on separate occasions that City Hall and a rival dentist "can't make small of me" (155), and then telling Trina "you can't make small of me *always*" (165). Though McTeague uses the phrase earlier in the novel, the words become his mantra once his misfortunes begin. With both his dominant mouth and his giant physicality failing him, McTeague feebly attempts to reject his diminishing stature. But his repetition only signals his increasing ineffectuality.

In the Placer County and Death Valley scenes, Norris exhibits the catastrophic results of McTeague losing his status as a giant. Escaping San Francisco, a city where the pedestrians marvel at his gigantic frame, McTeague flees to Placer County, a wasteland too immense to notice him. In the novel's city section, McTeague stands a "blond giant" (52), a "huge, stolid fellow with [an] immense, crude strength" (52), and with a jaw "like that of the carnivora" (6). But the desert overwhelms the physical forces of *all* men, regardless of their previous lives. In this new expanse, such men become mere "lice on mammoths' hides" (209), microscopic parasites attempting to extract rewards from the land. McTeague was able to avoid this misfortune, at least provisionally, when he functioned as a giant in the mold of Rabelais's heroes. However, the indiscriminating desert exposes McTeague to be just as vulnerable and biologically flawed as any man. Norris writes that in Placer County, nature "is a vast, unconquered brute of the Pliocene epoch, savage, sullen, and magnificently indifferent to man" (208–09). The earth itself has overtaken McTeague as the resident giant. The land's dismissal of all men proves how common McTeague has become among his peers. By setting up the earth and man as oppositional forces, Norris reveals McTeague to be an ordinary man, and he thereby becomes a symbol for humans' inability to escape their evolutionary past.

Wandering through the desert valleys, McTeague struggles to adapt to his new environment and his newly miniscule stature within it. He recognizes a correlation between his previous dental excavations and his new mining work, but the scale has changed: "In the Burly drill he saw a queer counterpart of his old-time dental engine; and what were the drills and

chucks but enormous hoe excavators, hard bits, and burrs? It was the same work he had so often performed in his 'Parlors,' only magnified, made monstrous, distorted, and grotesqued" (213). McTeague once extracted teeth with his bare fingers and bored into cavities with a handheld drill, but now the instrument nearly matches him in size. With the drill now an enormous and quite literally "grotesqued" tool often requiring the use of two men, McTeague's sense of his own physical size is entirely upended. Viewing himself as smaller than ever, McTeague cannot exert his physical supremacy as he once did. Nor has he acquired any other adaptive skills that would allow him to thrive. The newly stunted McTeague simply shrivels in the oppressive Western landscape.

In addition to his shrinking stature, McTeague loses the oral dominance that sustained him in the city. After McTeague's escape from San Francisco, only scant passages appear about food and eating. The desert protracts McTeague's starvation. The unfamiliar topography defines new rules and produces a different breed of carnivore. Just as he opened the novel by detailing McTeague's voracious chewing, Norris begins the desert section by introducing a new gobbling hero:

On near approach one heard the prolonged thunder of the stamp-mill, the crusher, the insatiable monster, gnashing the rocks to powder with its long iron teeth . . . grinding the rocks between its jaws, glutted, as it were, with the very entrails of the earth, and growling over its endless meal, like some savage animal, some legendary dragon, some fabulous beast, symbol of inordinate and monstrous gluttony. (209)

In this landscape, only stamp-mills can break and consume the raw earth. They usurp the previously gnawing McTeague as the foremost being of beastly strength and destructive eating. The scene highlights that McTeague—no matter how much he may appear to be an intimidating giant at earlier points—is merely a man like any other, at least in this setting. Unlike McTeague whose dominant orality ultimately expires, the "insatiable" machines can continue to consume without fail. In portraying these metallic monsters, Norris prophesies that McTeague is changing from a predatory beast to helpless prey.

Despite his previous dominance as a giant in the city, McTeague surrenders almost instantaneously to nature's rule in the desert. At first, McTeague succumbs to the "colossal mountains" seemingly for narcissistic reasons: "He yielded to their influence—their immensity, their enormous power, crude and blind, reflecting themselves in his own nature, huge, strong, brutal in its simplicity" (213). As he does with the giant tooth,

McTeague sees an ideal version of himself in the image of the mountain peaks. He respects their sheer power to subdue humans, as he once subdued the Polk Street locals in San Francisco. However, the mountains' appearance marks yet another stage in McTeague's own diminution. Norris presents McTeague not as an analogous figure to the mountains but rather as an anonymous miner scurrying in their shadows. With their "black peaks crowding together . . . looking now less like beasts than like a company of cowed giants," McTeague has been replaced yet again in his previous role as a Rabelaisian giant (213). Depicting the mountains as a group of shrouded monks, Norris suggests a spiritual reign within the desert as well. The faithless and now diminutive Mac can hardly endure in such a setting. As the mountains eclipse the human inhabitants, McTeague's work leaves him sleeping all day, "crushed and overpowered" (214). At once sublime and holy, this natural world holds no place for an unrepentant sinner like Mac. The dwarfed and defeated McTeague has no answer for the all-consuming landscape except to cower under its majesty. Portraying nature's wonders as a metaphorical hell upon earth, Norris casts McTeague no longer as a mythical giant but as a mere man approaching his doomed destiny.

As McTeague treks further into the desert, Norris affirms that even the character's basic survival instincts harm him more than they help. In the novel's beginning, the "animal in the man" appears to be a sexually predatory beast that McTeague counters with "a certain second self, another better McTeague" (21). His starvation unleashes this violent monster, culminating with his murder of Trina. Upon McTeague's entrance into a desert that immediately diminishes him, these previously aggressive animal qualities convert into a primal fight-or-flight instinct. From his first days in the desert, McTeague senses that someone is trailing him: "What strange sixth sense stirred in McTeague at this time? What animal cunning, what brute instinct clamored for recognition and obedience? What lower faculty was it that roused his suspicion, that drove him out into the night a score of times between dark and dawn . . . ?" (215). This new animality, distinct from the brutishness that arose when he murdered Trina, is ostensibly positive. McTeague stays days ahead of a pursuant sheriff's force and his vengeful former friend Marcus Schouler. Yet his fear never shuts off, as he is cursed over and again with his "obscure brute instinct" and his "strange impelling instinct" (226, 229). While McTeague's continual eating in the city afforded him a temporarily invincible position, his desert instincts reflect his inferior, hunted status. He becomes cursed with perpetual mobility in an unforgiving landscape. Downgrading McTeague

from a giant into a mere human, Norris proposes that McTeague is just as subject to his defective genetics as every other man. The character, then, becomes a case study of man's continual maladaptation and placelessness. Trapped in a middle evolutionary state, he cannot thrive either in the modern urban world or the ancient natural one.

Norris ultimately suggests that the character's flight exposes the flaws of human biology. Before he abandons his mining partner Cribbens and their newfound gold, McTeague tries to resist the animal nature that defines him in the desert. As the "mysterious intuition of approaching danger" infects McTeague, he "set his great jaws together and held his ground" (227). Clenching his jaws as he did so often with mouthfuls of food, McTeague tries to regain his position as an orally dominant giant. Yet his now-impotent mouth cannot prevent his inner animal from surfacing. Despite his insistence on staying put in camp, he flees the very next morning. While on the run, the dentist continues to be dogged by his gut impulses: "For never had that mysterious instinct in him been more insistent than now; never had the impulse toward precipitate flight been stronger" (232). McTeague never understands this base nature that arises within him and thus can never harness it in his favor. No longer satiated by food and having surrendered his status as giant to the land's mountains and machines, McTeague flees out of a primal fear. Anderson reads McTeague's Death Valley excursion as progress: "When [McTeague] plunges into the desert, he is in some ways at his sharpest and most alert. . . . His 'bestial' instincts point toward self-preservation" (72). Yet Norris claims that these instincts of survival are inherently faulty. Instead of providing McTeague any tactical advantage, they merely amplify his nervousness and drive him deeper into the merciless desert. These same instincts cause the increasingly anxious McTeague to mistakenly shoot his rifle. Afraid that he has revealed himself, he follows his instincts again by changing course and crossing the treacherous Death Valley even after Cribbens warns him against it. Yet even there, Marcus finds him and they engage in a fatal fight. McTeague's regressive instincts have not led him away from death but closer to it. Norris entirely abandons any comparisons between McTeague and Rabelais's giants in order to show that, when he operates as a mere human instead of a well-nourished giant, McTeague unknowingly maps his own destruction.

Norris proposes that in a desert that has effectively diminished McTeague and stripped him of any oral dominance, the dentist becomes a fatal victim of the land. McTeague's climactic fight with Marcus over a sack of gold lacks the stakes of their previous city grapples because the

two men have squandered their last water and are, in effect, dead already. Fighting only out of their “ancient hate” for each other, McTeague and Marcus represent the eternal susceptibility of humans to their base instincts (243). In the final moments, McTeague finds himself handcuffed to Marcus’s corpse as “All about him, vast, interminable, stretched the measureless leagues of Death Valley” (243). In the end, he is no greater or lesser a man than Marcus, for they are equally irrelevant within the infinite landscape. The newly diminutive McTeague relinquishes his San Francisco role as a traditionally grotesque hero and dies as anonymous Death Valley game. He resembles not Gargantua or Pantagruel so much as the giants’ culinary victims akin to, in one of Rabelais’s famous scenes, pilgrims hiding in Gargantua’s salad (Rabelais 88). In this context, Norris finally finds Rabelais’s grotesque model of dominant orality as a fleeting and unsatisfactory state of being. McTeague might temporarily stave off his inner animal instincts—both those that prompt his killing of Trina and those that trigger his doomed flight into the desert—by eating his way through life. Yet once his resources run out, he can no longer adapt to the modern world and simply follows his flawed instincts to a desert death. In this, McTeague’s ill-fated return to the earth, Norris suggests that man can consume only so much before becoming devoured himself.

Other Oral Worlds

Medieval pictorial and theatrical iconography, which Bakhtin maintains was a significant influence on Rabelais, indicates that the Death Valley scene may represent McTeague’s eternal damnation. Soon after the monastic reform of the tenth century, illustrations of an entrance to hell, pictured as a colossal open mouth, began emerging throughout Great Britain and France. Woven into tapestries and illustrated in various New Testament editions, the “hell mouth” could contain any combination of snakes, toads, demons, fire, pitchforks, and lost souls. It might appear as part of a disembodied monster skull, a dragon’s head, or in more advanced forms, as multiple rows of outstretched demon lips (Schmidt 18; Sheingorn 7–8). As a student fond of the Middle Ages and its artistic influences, Norris likely encountered numerous versions of this image when studying in France.⁶ Early twentieth-century art historian Emile Mâle affirms that “almost all thirteenth-century representations of the Last Judgment show an enormous mouth vomiting flames, into which the damned are thrown” and cites carvings in the tympanum at Bourges and in an arch at Paris’s Notre Dame cathedral (379–80). Other scholars confirm that the image was “ubiquitous in late medieval art” and point to French prints of The

Last Judgment by an anonymous printmaker (ca. 1445) and the Master of the Orléans Triptych (ca. 1500) (Koeppe, et al. 9–14).

Regardless of the hell mouth's incarnation, both medieval and modern onlookers clearly understood its symbolic significance. As Gary Schmidt writes, the hell mouth "was meant to illustrate vividly the real potentiality and terror of damnation" (25), a "spiritual destination" but also "a place of physical torment" (14). Many insisted such an entrance existed somewhere on earth. According to art historian Pamela Sheingorn, Pope Gregory I (ca. 540–604) believed that hell was located underneath the earth, and others thought that the mouth-like craters of Sicilian volcanoes were a portal to the underworld (2). As visual spectacle, the hell mouth appeared most famously as a towering piece of stage machinery within the medieval mystery plays. These productions played in England from the fourteenth century through part of the English Renaissance in the sixteenth century and dramatized different biblical episodes. In many stagings, an oversized hell mouth figure sat lowered on one side of a moveable pageant wagon while heaven floated slightly above on the other.⁷ Extending several feet in the air and resembling the "head of a monster" with jaws agape, the hell mouth emitted "fire, smoke, noise, and the cries of the damned" and swallowed representative sinners whole (Brockett and Hildy 105).⁸

Norris retraces this medieval iconography via McTeague's journey through Placer County and Death Valley, which simulates a march into hell on earth. In "A Plea for Romantic Fiction," when Norris states that the romance can expose the dark truths of men, he also claims that the romantic novel echoes John the Baptist's cry, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight his path" (78). Though Norris largely avoids specific religion in the novel, the end of *McTeague* (and of McTeague) represents a definitive spiritual reckoning.⁹ The dentist encounters a demonic force almost immediately upon entering Placer County, as Norris describes mountain crests letting out an "incessant and muffled roar . . . like the breathing of an infinitely great monster, alive, palpitating" (213–14). Nature transforms into a gargantuan god, projecting unearthly sounds and exhalations like the open-mouthed pageant wagon beasts. At times, McTeague appears to stare down the face of hell itself. If Placer's "motionless air was like the mouth of a furnace," then the "red-hot alkali" of Death Valley only extends this oral geography (220, 229). By combining images of orality and suffocating heat, Norris presents the Western landscape as a medieval hell mouth. Whereas the oral iconography in the early city scenes involved McTeague's dominant mouth, these later oral images signal the dentist's impending damnation within the land's infernal orifice.

As he proceeds across the land, he walks only deeper into the earth's monstrous opening. In the final sequence, McTeague struggles through "this hideous sink of alkali, this bed of some primeval lake lying so far below the level of the ocean" (234). The concavity of the valley below sea level simulates the hell mouth's sunken position on the medieval mystery stage. Describing the "prehistoric" and "primeval" nature of the land, Norris confirms early beliefs that hell could exist on earth, and he submits Death Valley as the site of perdition (229, 234).

In the last scene, an imperceptible force finally sentences McTeague to burn in this desert hell. Cribbens states, albeit metaphorically, that the Gold Mountain country is "all hell to get into" because travelers must first cross Death Valley (222). Upon his turn into the valley's alkali fields, McTeague discovers the accuracy of his mining partner's words. Norris again describes Death Valley's "oven-hot" alkali and specifies that "the earth was like the surface of a furnace" (235, 231). Though the pulsating sun has been present since McTeague's time in Placer County, the heat intensifies to otherworldly levels in Death Valley. McTeague can barely breathe as "every inch and pore of his skin was tingling and pricking under the merciless lash of the sun's rays" (230). Sun-whipped and staggering through the desert, McTeague is at the mercy of an invisible, demonic being (234). As an "unseen hand" directs Mac and he soon finds himself "scorched" and "flayed" in these final chapters, Norris implies that a higher source has finally condemned McTeague to hell (232, 234). In crafting the last image of the dentist, isolated and immobile in the middle of Death Valley, Norris eliminates any possibility that the character will escape this unholy inferno. The religious iconography and McTeague's final punishment also impart an evolutionary lesson. Norris suggests that unless humans can somehow eliminate, or at least harness their crude animalism, then they will not be able to survive.

Whether McTeague reaches a biblical hell or an earthly one, his hopeless existence comes to an end amidst the Death Valley alkali. He ultimately perishes because he cannot adapt in any effective way, either in the city or in the desert. In this respect, McTeague again represents a rather universal figure. Norris presents McTeague's final trek as a twist upon the medieval morality play, another dramatic genre contemporaneous with the emergence of hell mouth iconography. Represented by works such as *Mankind* (ca. 1464) and *Everyman* (ca. 1510), this secular medieval form features a protagonist who is allegorically "a figure of all men" and a plot that follows "a coming of Death, or 'Summoning' of man to his final hour, and the Judgment to follow" (King 240; Gassner 205). Forfeiting

his life as a giant in the final chapters, the disempowered McTeague represents an archetypal man, doomed by his own nature. Yet as he does with Rabelais's giants, Norris imitates an earlier model only to turn away from it in the end. Whereas morality plays' protagonists usually find salvation before death, McTeague experiences no redemption and seems to be already suffering a torment of the afterlife. In Norris's estimation, such is the fate of the modern man as well. The inclination to fall back on animal nature, to follow those sixth senses and brutish instincts that lie just beneath the surface, repeatedly fells humankind. Norris prompts readers to contemplate McTeague's repeated surrender to his most violent impulses and man's consequent failure to adapt within a changing world. Formerly a heroic giant, McTeague suffers an ignominious death far from the eyes of the Polk Street passersby who once looked upon him with wonder. If, as Bakhtin writes of Rabelais's world, grotesque realism is defined by "a people who are continually growing and renewed," then the once-mighty McTeague finally falters both as a giant and as a man (19).

NOTES

1. See Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), and, in particular the essay, "Infantile Sexuality," which outlines the perverse kissing habits of adults with oral fixations.

2. According to an 1897 *Omaha World Herald* article (which summarizes a *New York Sun* report), Comstock placed *The Works of Rabelais*, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and Balzac's *Droll Stories* on a list of forbidden books. He then arrested one bookseller for keeping the books on his shelf ("Suppressed Literature").

3. "Hop-Frog" is especially relevant to Rabelais's work. The story features the "fat, round, and unwieldy" dwarf seeking vengeance on the king enslaving him. With legs so distorted that he can only move with a "sort of interjectional gait," the crippled dwarf is an inversion of the dominant giants from Rabelais's works (Poe 216). Performing for a crass king who, the narrator specifies, "would have preferred Rabelais's 'Gargantua' to the 'Zadig' of Voltaire," Hop-Frog epitomizes the type of bastardized Rabelaisian descendant that endured in literature (215).

4. Doré's illustrations of Rabelais's books were first issued in France, circa 1873. In 1896, the *Los Angeles Times* asserted that Doré's drawings of the works of Rabelais, Dante, and Milton "will probably never be surpassed" ("A Green Chicken"). The American Lippincott editions were not illustrated. But in 1887, Boston publisher Ticknor and Company released a book entitled *Three Good Giants*, a children's version of Rabelais's books that included Doré's drawings ("Rabelais in Pantelettes").

5. Bakhtin writes that Rabelais cited several legendary giants—including Haptemousche, Engolevent, and Maschefain—whose stories have not survived (343).

6. Norris attended the Académie Julian, a prestigious preparatory art school in

Paris, from 1887 to 1889. Though none of Norris's student paintings survive, he was particularly fond of the art of the Middle Ages and the medieval influence within the Romantic movement; see McElrath and Crisler 92–94, 99–100.

7. Sheingorn explains that there may have been numerous variations of hell mouth stagings. One Dutch book (ca. 1450) implies that the profile of a hell mouth was merely painted on to a two-dimensional board obscuring a side-doorway to the stage. Yet numerous accounts and stage records suggest three-dimensional hell mouths with “working jaws” were more common (8–9). Productions including these contraptions include a 1547 Valenciennes Passion, and a 1437 Passion play performed in Metz in which the hell mouth “opened and closed of its own accord” and “had two great steel eyes which glittered wonderfully” (qtd. in Sheingorn 9).

8. Bakhtin relates that the topography of the medieval mystery stage and especially the hell mouth, which he locates at the center of the stage (as opposed to one side), “proves the influence of the popular theatrical forms on Rabelais’ initial work as well as on the entire character of his artistic and ideological vision and thought” (349). Thus Norris’s importation of Rabelais’s works draws in many fragments from medieval entertainment, including the mystery plays.

9. Norris himself was a non-Orthodox Episcopalian. But as suggested by an interview with his wife, Jeannette Norris, he also attended Catholic church for the “beauty of the services.” His mother was more devout and read the Bible aloud twice a day in Norris’s childhood home (Crisler and McElrath 137, 71).

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