



Fact into fiction in "McTeague"

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books on the shelves; and at Harvard it has been possible to achieve the desired aim — that of providing space for the growth of the Greek and Latin collections for perhaps the next twenty years — simply by removing a portion of this duplicate material. This situation, however, does not obtain in fields such as history or economics or linguistics, and in such fields the problem of deciding which books are likely and which less likely to be used is far more difficult. As the process of selective removal here described is extended to other parts of the Library, we shall undoubtedly learn that the criteria for selection are not the same in any two fields. In general, however, it can be said that such selection ought certainly to be entrusted to someone well versed in his subject, and it ought

always to be done in collaboration with those members of the faculty most concerned; but it must also be done with an eye to the needs of readers outside the field of that particular department. Whoever undertakes to do such selection must expect a certain amount of criticism and must be prepared to change his mind in particular cases. It is a work of compromise at best; no librarian likes to send books away from his library, and no faculty member likes to see them go. But when problems of space make it impossible any longer to put off some process of weeding the library's collections, every effort should be made to see that the selection is done in such a way as to cause the least inconvenience to the fewest people.

JAMES E. WALSH

Fact into Fiction in *McTeague*

FRANK NORRIS came to Harvard in the autumn of 1894 as a special student, seeking to learn under Lewis E. Gates what he had failed to find at Berkeley in four disappointing years.¹ Taking up residence in 47 Grays Hall, he enrolled in English 22, Gates's creative writing course, and turned his attention to the business of becoming a writer. The results of his one year of study, although not immediately apparent, were important,

¹ Lewis E. Gates, A.B. s.c.l. Harvard 1884, had been instructor in forensics and English since graduation. He became Assistant Professor of English in 1896, and of Comparative Literature in 1901, but ill health forced his resignation the following year, and he remained quietly in retirement until his death in 1924.

for at Harvard he wrote nineteen chapters of a work which, when it was published four years later, became a major event in the history of the American novel. In gratitude to the man who, Norris declared, taught him more about writing than anyone else, he dedicated *McTeague* to 'L. E. Gates of Harvard University.'²

²The Harvard Library possesses, appropriately enough, a portion of the autograph manuscript of *McTeague*, consisting of twelve leaves and two fragments, corresponding to pp. 137-158 of the first edition (New York, Doubleday & McClure Co., 1899). This is apparently a first or early draft, being much corrected, yet it apparently also served as printer's copy. It came to Harvard in 1920 from Randolph Edgar, of Minneapolis, together with a complete set of Norris 'firsts' from the same source.

Like his avowed master, Zola, Norris always drew heavily from the life around him in creating accurate and lifelike pictures in the realistic manner. *McTeague* recognizably depicted San Francisco and the inhabitants of its middle-class lower depths at the turn of the century, Norris incorporating into his novel actual locales and specific features of the San Francisco milieu — even to the ‘huge gilded tooth, a molar with enormous prongs, something gorgeous and attractive,’ which he transferred from ‘Dental Parlors’ on Polk Street to the office of his title character.³

Since *McTeague* was to be a dentist, it was necessary for Norris to become familiar with the technical details of dentistry. Willard E. Martin, Jr., listing the volumes Norris drew from the Harvard College Library during his year of residence, has indicated Thomas Fillebrown’s *A Text-book of Operative Dentistry* as the probable source for these technical details.⁴ However, Professor Martin did not consider the

The manuscript had been given to Mr Edgar by the writer’s brother, Charles G. Norris, in 1914, with a note stating that it and the just recently discovered manuscript of *Vandover and the Brute* were the only ones surviving; everything else had been destroyed in the San Francisco fire. However, in recent years it has become evident that certain other scattered autograph pages of *McTeague* are extant; these are now being assembled by Professor James Hart of the University of California in an effort to reconstruct the original. In addition, the Jeannette Black Collection at Berkeley contains a number of other manuscripts by Norris, such as college themes (written, incidentally, while at Harvard), notes, jottings, and a college farce, *Two Pair*.

³Ernest Peixotto, ‘Romanticist under the Skin,’ *Saturday Review of Literature*, IX (27 May 1933), 614.

⁴Willard E. Martin, Jr., ‘Frank Norris’ Reading at Harvard College,’ *American Literature*, VII (May 1935), 203-204.

nature and extent of Norris’ use of this source. The following quotations are intended to show that Norris leaned very heavily on Fillebrown, ranging widely through the 275-page textbook, and even going so far as to incorporate technical matter almost verbatim.⁵

Most of the details of dentistry, aside from scattered references to *McTeague*’s tools — his hoc-excavators, hard bits, burrs, and so forth — are given in the second chapter, which shows the dentist at work. One of the minor characters, a resident in the rooming house, comes to him for treatment:

... In examining Miss Baker’s teeth at the preliminary sitting he had found a cavity in one of the incisors. Miss Baker had decided to have it filled with gold. *McTeague* remembered now that it was what is called a “proximate case,” where there is not sufficient room to fill with large pieces of gold. He told himself that he should have to use “mats” in the filling. He made some dozen of these “mats” from his tape of non-cohesive gold, cutting it transversely into small pieces that could be inserted edgewise between the teeth and consolidated by packing. After he had made his “mats” he continued with the other kind of gold

⁵Thomas Fillebrown (1836-1908), nationally recognized as a leader in his profession at the turn of the century, was one of six to receive the D.M.D. degree at the first commencement of the Harvard Dental School, 1869. Fillebrown was Professor of Operative Dentistry at Harvard 1883-97 and in addition of Oral Surgery 1897-1904. His textbook, undertaken at the invitation of the National Association of Dental Faculties, was long standard in the field, and Norris could not have turned to a more authoritative source. The copy used by Norris was transferred in 1914 from the Harvard College Library to the Library of the Harvard Dental School, where it is still available for consultation.

fillings, such as he would have occasion to use during the week; "blocks" to be used in large proximal cavities, made by folding the tape on itself a number of times and then shaping it with the soldering pliers; "cylinders" for commencing fillings, which he formed by rolling the tape around a needle called a "broach," cutting it afterwards into different lengths. . . .

After he had finished his fillings, he made a hook broach from a bit of piano wire . . .⁶

This lump of technical information is to be compared with Fillebrown's enumeration of the types of gold fillings:

. . . If it is desirable for any reason to use small portions of the tape, it is cut transversely in small pieces, which are called mats. These, when of non-cohesive gold, are of considerable use in very small cavities. . . . The mat is of most service in proximate cases where there may not be sufficient room to introduce larger and thicker pieces of gold. These can be inserted edgewise between the teeth, and afterward be carried into place and consolidated according to the method of packing employed . . .

. . . The compact block is formed by folding a tape on itself a number of times, which is done by seizing it in the pliers and making turns of any desired size . . . These blocks are useful in commencing large proximate cavities . . .

. . . This form [the compact cylinder] is made by rolling a tape of non-cohesive gold on a fine brooch . . .

. . . When the brooch is removed, they are cut into definite lengths . . .

They are employed in the commencement of fillings . . .⁷

⁶ *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* (New York, Doubleday & McClure Co., 1899), pp. 17-18. All quotations from *McTeague* are from a copy of the first edition, first issue, in the Harvard Library.

⁷ Thomas Fillebrown, *A Text-Book of*

Fine hook broaches are also made of fine piano-wire . . .⁸

When Trina, McTeague's future wife, is first brought to his office to have a broken tooth repaired, the dentist offers the following diagnosis:

"Well," answered McTeague . . . "the roots of the broken tooth are still in the gum; they'll have to come out, and I guess I'll have to pull that other bicuspid. . . ." The tooth was loose, discolored, and evidently dead. "It's a curious case," McTeague went on. "I don't know as I ever had a tooth like that before. It's what's called necrosis. It don't often happen. It'll have to come out sure."

. . . McTeague reasoned with her, tried in vain to make her understand that there was no vascular connection between the root and the gum. . . .⁹

This passage is a reconstruction from Fillebrown's definition and discussion of necrosis:

Necrosis, as applied to a tooth, means death of the entire organ, both pulp and pericementum. It rarely occurs.

It is caused by dead pulp, violence, long use of mercury, calcular deposit, exhausting diseases, or impaired nutrition.

Signs.—Tooth much discolored, loose, with little or no vascular connection.

Treatment.—Removal.¹⁰

McTeague decides to attempt his most difficult operation, in response to Trina's wishes, and proceeds as follows:

It was the first bicuspid that was missing, and though part of the root of the second (the loose one) would remain after its extraction, he was sure it would not be strong enough to sustain a crown.

Operative Dentistry (Philadelphia, 1889), pp. 70-71.

⁸ Fillebrown, *Text-Book*, p. 34.

⁹ *McTeague*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁰ Fillebrown, *Text-Book*, p. 110.

... He turned over in his mind the technicalities of the case. No, evidently the root was not strong enough to sustain a crown; besides that, it was placed a little irregularly in the arch. But, fortunately, there were cavities in the two teeth on either side of the gap—one in the first molar and one in the palatine surface of the cuspid; might he not drill a socket in the remaining root and sockets in the molar and cuspid, and, partly by bridging, partly by crowning, fill in the gap? ...

... He extracted the loose tooth with his bayonet forceps and prepared the roots of the broken one as if for filling, fitting into them a flattened piece of platinum wire to serve as a dowel. ...¹¹

By degrees the operation progressed. One day ... [he] put in the temporary gutta-percha fillings ...¹²

The source for this account is found in Fillebrown's case history of a similar unusual operation:

... In the mouth of a student at the Philadelphia Dental College, where the first right superior bicuspid was missing, and there remained a portion of the root of the second bicuspid not strong enough to sustain a crown, and likewise irregular as to position in the arch ... the following operation was performed: There was a cavity on the disto-palatine surface of the cuspid and a mesial and crown cavity in the first molar. The above mentioned root was treated and prepared as for filling. ... A piece of slightly flattened platinum wire was fitted into the root for a dowel. ... The fillings can be temporarily made of oxychloride of zinc or gutta percha ...¹³

In filling another cavity, McTeague decides to use an anaesthetic so that he will not hurt Trina:

¹¹ *McTeague*, pp. 25-26.

¹² *McTeague*, p. 29.

¹³ Fillebrown, *Text-Book*, pp. 253-254.

... He had a notion that the nitrous oxide gas was dangerous, so on this occasion, as on all others, used ether.

He put the sponge a half dozen times to Trina's face, more nervous than he had ever been before, watching the symptoms closely. Her breathing became short and irregular; there was a slight twitching of the muscles. When her thumbs turned inward toward the palms, he took the sponge away. She passed off very quickly, and, with a long sigh, sank back into the chair.¹⁴

When Trina awakens, the crude but childlike dentist frightens her by blurt-ing out a proposal of marriage:

... "No, no," she cried, terrified. Then, as she exclaimed, "Oh, I am sick," was suddenly taken with a fit of vomiting. It was the not unusual after effect of the ether ... He poured some bromide of potassium into a graduated glass and held it to her lips.¹⁵

In using the following data from his textbook source, Norris seems either to have made a mistake or to have deliberately but unaccountably reversed the sense of the original:

Nitrous Oxide. — Relaxation of the muscles is not constant nor common in anaesthesia produced by nitrous oxide gas. Contraction instead of relaxation is likely to follow, and a spasmodic twitching of the muscles takes place, an interrupted, jerky inspiration, and a turning inward of the thumbs toward the palm of the hand. ...¹⁶

Nausea and vomiting are sometimes persistent and distressing [as the after-effects of ether]. Bromide of potassium in doses of fifteen to thirty grains, repeated if necessary, is a good remedy.¹⁷

¹⁴ *McTeague*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁵ *McTeague*, p. 33.

¹⁶ Fillebrown, *Text-Book*, pp. 143-144.

¹⁷ Fillebrown, *Text-Book*, p. 148.

Because Norris in other instances was known to have personally consulted and interviewed people in order to get the jargon of their special professions and crafts, it has been assumed that a similar practice obtained in the writing of *McTeague*. Marius Biencourt, for example, says that 'pour les termes d'odontologie, il consulta sans doute le dentiste dont le cabinet, situé dans Polk Street, est décrit dans *Mc-*

Teague.'¹⁸ Although Norris did draw many of his details from real life, 'les termes d'odontologie' were not among them, being rather the fruit of the simplest kind of research in the Harvard College Library.

CHARLES KAPLAN

¹⁸ Marius Biencourt, *Une influence du naturalisme français en Amérique: Frank Norris* (Paris, 1933), p. 133.

News of the Libraries

LIBRARY COMMITTEE

THE Library Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, as appointed for one year from 1 July 1954, consists of the following members of the Faculty: Keyes D. Metcalf (Library), chairman, Stuart P. Atkins (German), Douglas W. Bryant (Library), Sterling Dow (Archaeology), Merle Fainsod (Government), Edwin B. Newman (Psychology), Reed C. Rollins (Botany), Alfred S. Romer (Zoology), Taylor Starck (German), Bartlett J. Whiting (English), and Donald C. Williams (Philosophy). Edwin E. Williams acts as Secretary to the Committee.

VISITING COMMITTEE

THE following Committee to Visit the University Library has been appointed by the Board of Overseers for one year from 1 July 1954: Arthur W. Page, chairman, Carleton R. Richmond, vice chairman, F. Gregg Bemis, John Mason Brown, John Nicholas Brown, William A. M. Burden, Ward M. Canaday, Carl P. Dennett, Imrie de Vegh,

Lee M. Friedman, Francis W. Hatch, Harrison D. Horblit, Arthur A. Houghton, Jr, Parkman D. Howe, M. A. DeWolfe Howe, Donald F. Hyde, Carl T. Keller, Bayard L. Kilgour, Jr, Roy E. Larsen, Gilbert H. Montague, Franklin E. Parker, Jr, Boies Penrose, Joseph V. Reed, Curt H. Reisinger, A. Hamilton Rice, David P. Wheatland, and Harold T. White.

PERSONNEL

LIBRARY appointments voted by the President and Fellows of Harvard College, with the consent of the Board of Overseers, effective 1 July 1954, were as follows:

Earl C. Borgeson, Librarian of the Law Library

John J. Gallen, Senior Assistant in the Lamont Library and Supervisor of the House Libraries

Charles R. Gredler, Assistant in Charge of the Slavic Collection in the Harvard College Library

Katherine McNamara, Librarian of the Department of City Planning and Landscape Architecture

Linnaean books from the Arboretum and the Gray Herbarium continue on deposit in the stacks of the Houghton Library, whence they may be drawn for consultation in the new Herbarium.

Mrs Lazella Schwarten, formerly Librarian of the Arnold Arboretum, is now Librarian of both the Arnold

Arboretum and the Gray Herbarium and is in charge of both libraries in the new building. She is assisted by Mrs Patricia Lewicki and Mrs Yvonne Meigs. Dr Richard Schultes has recently been appointed Curator of the Orchid Herbarium of Oakes Ames and is in charge of the Orchid Library.

List of Contributors

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KEYES D. METCALF, Professor of Bibliography, Director of the Harvard University Library, and Librarian of Harvard College

PHILIP HOFER, Lecturer on Fine Arts, Curator of Printing and Graphic Arts in the Harvard College Library, and Secretary of the William Hayes Fogg Art Museum

G. W. COTTRELL, JR, Editor in the Harvard University Library

RUTH MULHAUSER, Associate Professor of Romance Languages, Western Reserve University

WILLIAM A. JACKSON, Professor of Bibliography and Assistant Librarian of the College Library in charge of the Houghton Library, Harvard University

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