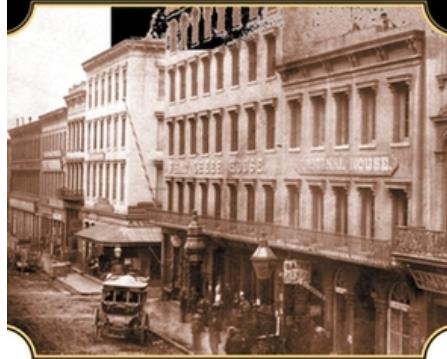


Signet Classic

FRANK NORRIS



# McTEAGUE

*With a New Introduction by Eric Solomon*

## McTeague

*Frank Norris , Eric Solomon (Introduction)*

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# McTeague

*Frank Norris , Eric Solomon (Introduction)*

## McTeague Frank Norris , Eric Solomon (Introduction)

"I never truckled. I never took off the hat to Fashion and held it out for pennies. I told them the truth. They liked it or they didn't like it. What had that to do with me? I told them the truth," declared Frank Norris, shortly before his death at the age of thirty-two. Of his novels, none have shocked the reading public more than *McTeague*, and few works since have captured the seamy side of American urban life with such graphic immediacy as does this portrayal of human degradation in turn-of-the-century San Francisco. Its protagonists, men and women alike, are shown as both products and victims of a debasing social order. Heredity and environment play the role of fate in a tale that moves toward its harrowing conclusion with the grim power and inevitability of classic tragedy.

## McTeague Details

Date : Published August 5th 2003 by Signet Classics (first published 1899)

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Author : Frank Norris , Eric Solomon (Introduction)

Format : Paperback 368 pages

Genre : Fiction, Classics, Literature, American

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## From Reader Review McTeague for online ebook

### Tammy says

This book is filled with passion, hate, greed, love, violence, and horror. The words flow across the page and you feel all the passionate emotions of all the characters. Although Trina, McTeague, and Marcus are deeply flawed, you still care for them and are horrified by the decay of their relationships and their very souls.

I never quote passages in my reviews but I cannot resist:

"The people about the house and the clerks at the provision stores often remarked that Trina's fingertips were swollen and the nails purple as though they had been shut in a door. Indeed, this was the explanation she gave. 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, always ingenious enough to remember which were the sorest. Sometimes he extorted money from her by this means, but as often as not he did it for his own satisfaction."

Yeah....like a punch in the face, isn't it?

The irony? All of this misery started with the good fortune of winning a \$5,000 lottery.

I cannot recommend this book enough -- one of the best books I've read this year. And the ending is to die for.

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### TK421 says

Frank Norris was a master at painting emotions with words. The titular character is a man few would care to dine with, but Norris gets the reader to sympathize for him. You see, much like most writers circa late 19th to early 20th century, human nature was best explored through the environment of the characters (naturalism). In McTeague's case, he was an affluent dentist from San Francisco that falls in love with the wrong girl; some would argue that the wrong girl falls in love with McTeague. Any way you slice the cake, you still have two people trapped in a marriage that is slowly burning toward becoming a firey inferno. Filled with political and social commentary, greed, sex, folly, hate, jealousy, and corruption, these all meld together to bring the novel toward an ending that is not only harrowing, but, to this reader, one that still has not been surpassed since my reading of this almost seven years ago.

Challenge: Read this book. If the ending doesn't knock your socks off I'll...I'll...well, I'll be wrong I guess. But you won't be able to say I didn't tell you about a great ending that is the perfect metaphor for what we call the rat-race of human life.

### HIGHEST POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATION

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### Jeff says

This is one of those chunky “classics” that not a lot of people have heard of. Frank Norris only wrote a few novels, with the most famous being, *The Octopus: A Story of California*, one of those books that rails against social injustice, with its target – evil, railroad barons. MUWHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA (I can do this all day) MUWAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA.

Norris was one of those turn-of-the-century writers, like Jack London, who liked to get down and dirty and live among the people he was writing about – miners, stevedores, shopkeepers, hookers – so, it’s not a surprise that he lived fast and hard and died young - leaving a pox ridden corpse.

One of the reasons this book endures is probably because Eric von Stroheim made an excessively long (around eight hours) silent movie called *Greed*, based on the book. The making of the film seems to be a terrific story unto itself, but suffice it say that von Stroheim was a tad bit over-the-top in his love of the book (gifs from the film pepper this review).

*Greed* is the name of the game and with apologies to Gordon Gekko, it’s anything but a positive trait. Norris followed the Emile Zola School of Naturalism, which was all for getting reality on paper, but it favored less than fun stuff – misery, poverty, vice, violence, racism.

Norris also studied at the School of Determinism, which said that whatever traits you were born with, there’s pretty much no escape. So if you have Swiss-German blood (the female protagonist), you’ll be predisposed to be miserly with your accumulated riches or if daddy was a drunken, idiotic ne’er-do-well (McTeague), you’re screwed.

A sort-of non-spoilerish summary: McTeague is a big, slow-witted (Norris likes to often use the words like “stupid” and “idiot” to describe the big lug) dentist, who falls in love with Trina, who’s kind of cute and has a big, head of raven-colored hair.

They get engaged. She hits the lottery for \$5000. Marcus, McTeague’s bestest pal, who originally had a thing for her and set them up, gets jealous because he could have had the money (Hi there, Mr. Greed). McTeague and his pal wrestle at a picnic, it goes too far, Marcus pulls a Mike Tyson and bites McTeague’s ear and McTeague does a “brainbuster” on him in retaliation and now they’re not pals anymore, but bitter enemies.

McTeague and Trina get married, but she doesn’t want to spend any of her lottery money because she’s a Swiss-German miser (Hey, *Greed*), which works out okay until the San Fransiscan Dental board say that McTeague can’t be a dentist anymore because the Three Stooges School of Dentistry does not in fact exist.

From there, things devolve in a rather quick, bloody and ham-fisted way.

More stuff:

You can’t talk about greed without rolling out the obligatory Jewish character and the formulaic anti-Semitic

garbage.

It seems that drinking steam beer (Mmmm beer) and putting billiard balls in your mouth was the height of jackassary back in the day.

Rolling around in bed, naked, with your gold pieces is pretty smexy. Unless you're a dude...

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This is a grim book with little humor and no one comes out unscathed and I was wavering between 3 and 4 stars but the last fifth of the book solidified the rating. With some stunning literary imagery and a perfect ending, it proved that no matter where you go – from the big city to the desert – you're always alone with your conscience – your greedy, pre-determined conscience.

### **Darwin8u says**

*“I never truckled. I never took off the hat to Fashion and held it out for pennies. I told them the truth. They liked it or they didn't like it. What had that to do with me? I told them the truth.”*

? Frank Norris, McTeague

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The first part of this novel was slow. I was frustrated enough (almost) to just pull the bookmark out and walk away. But soon Norris had me by the crown. Look people, if you are going to only read one literary work on Mammon's folly, on the parsimonious middle-child of the Seven Deadly Sins, THIS should be the one. It focuses on McTeague and his wife Trina, but several other characters play almost equally important roles in examining avarice's many, obsessive faces. There are scavengers, hoarders, manipulators, thieves, etc.

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Inserted into the novel, however, is one of the most beautiful and sad love stories in literature. Miss Baker and Mister Grannis, two older boarders and neighbors of the McTeagues, live in adjoining rooms in a boarding house. Each room has the same wallpaper, suggesting that the rooms used to be just one room. Mister Grannis spends his nights binding periodicals while Miss Baker makes tea and rocks near their shared wall. Each, silently, spends the evening sharing their divided space. Barely separated, each is comforted by the others presence. It is beautiful, a modern Pyramus and Thisb?, and a nice counterweight to all the gold lust and penny pinching. I don't know if I would have been able to survive the hardcore, step-by-step, drop of the McTeagues and their ilk into Dante's fourth circle without the uplifting, kind, and selfless older couple that shoots one warm ray into this novel's cold, dead roots.

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### **Sarah Booth says**

I read this book while I was at university I think. I didn't even remember the name when it came time to list precious books read, but once I read the review of it on here it all came flooding back in a miasma of human miseries. It's a dark and dreadful tale of some the worst of human behavior; greed and avarice mixed with jealousy over comes its main characters and sets in motion acts that cannot be undone. While it is well written and insightful into the human condition, it is so bleak that you want to take a handful of Prozac as you read it. Spoiler Alert: there is no happy ending, and you'll be eyeing your dentist with suspicion next time you go.

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### **Michelle says**

I'm done. May I never have to read it again.

\*there's a movie adaptation of this novel called *Greedy*. It's aptly named.

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### **Evripidis Gousiaris says**

Σαστισμ?νος!

Ο Frank Noris στα πρ?τα 3/5 του βιβλ?ου θα προσπαθ?σει να σε κ?νει να χαμογελ?σεις μ?νο και μ?νο για να σου παγ?σει το χαμ?γελο στα 2 τελευτα?α.

Αποφε?γω να διαβ?ζω οπισθ?φυλλα και εισαγω?ς απ? τα βιβλ?α της σειρ?ς Orbis Literae(και γενικ? απ? κλασσικ? βιβλ?α) γιατ? πολλ?ς φορ?ς σου μαρτυρο?ν την πλοκ?. Για τον ΜακΤιγκ λοιπ?ν ε?χα ακο?σει μ?νο ?τι ταυτ?ζεται με την λ?ξη ΑΠΛΗΣΤ?Α. Για αυτ? και το ξεκ?νησα περιμ?νοντας μια σειρ? χαρακτ?ρων ?που θα λατρε?ει το χρ?μα.

Αντιθ?τως συστ?θηκα με ?ναν μεγαλ?σωμο κομπογιανν?τη οδοντ?ατρο, εντελ?ς ντροπαλ?, ?κακο και αμ?χανο, ?που για "κακ?" του τ?χη ερωτε?εται την γοητευτικ? παν?ξυπνη και μικροσκοπικ? Τρ?να.

Αναπτ?σσεται λοιπ?ν αν?μεσα τους μια ιστορ?α αστε?α και ρομαντικ? καθ?ς ο μπουνταλ?ς ΜακΤιγκ προσπαθε? να διεκδικ?σει αυτ?ν την ?μορφη κοπ?λα.

Με τρυφερ? χιο?μορ ο Noris παρουσι?ζει τις προσπ?θειες του οδοντογιατρο? να καταφ?ρει αυτ? το τ?σο δ?σκολο εγχε?ρημα καθ?ς ?ρχεται αντιμ?τωπος συνεχ?ς με την αμηχαν?α του και την ντροπαλ? του φ?ση.

Φιλικο? περ?πατοι, ?μορφα πικν?κ και εκδρομ?ς, αμ?χανοι και αστε?οι δι?λογοι αλλ? και ευχ?ριστες εκπλ?ξεις ε?ναι σκην?ς ?που επικρατο?ν στο "πρ?το" μ?ρος του βιβλ?ου.

...Και ξαφνικ? ?λα αλλ?ζουν. Με αφετηρ?α ?να συμβ?ν το οπο?ο θα ?πρεπε να φ?ρει παραπ?νω ευτυχ?α και χαμ?γελα ?λα πα?ρνουν την κατιο?σα. Η ΑΠΛΗΣΤ?Α ξαφνικ? ε?ναι παντο?!. Υπ?ρχαν σκην?ς ?που με ?φησαν ?ναυδο και εντελ?ς σαστισμ?νο. Προσωπικ? δ?σκολα μπορο?σα να πιστ?ψω την σκληρ? εξ?λιξη/κατ?ληξη του βιβλ?ου.

Και ?λα αυτ? σε ?να βιβλ? ?που διαδραματ?ζεται παρ?λληλα μια μικρ? ιστορ?α αγ?πης μεταξ? δ?ο ηλικιωμ?νων ?που δ?σκολα δεν θα σε αγγ?ξει. (?πρεπε οπωσδ?ποτε να αναφ?ρω αυτ? το περ?εργο ζευγ?ρι καθ?ς ?δωσε ?λλη χροι? σε ?λο το ?ργο.)

?να βιβλ?ο ?που μεταφ?ρει ?λες τις σκληρ?ς επιπτ?σεις της Απληστ?ας χωρ?ς καν?ναν ενδοιασμ?. Οι ?ρωες του κυριε?ονται απ? αυτ? χωρ?ς να το καταλ?βουν. Το χρ?μα πα?ει να ?χει μ?νο ?ναν διαμεσολαβητικ? ρ?λο και πλ?ον ε?ναι αυτ? ο πρωταγωνιστ?ς ?που θ?τει σε κ?νηση τα γεγον?τα.

Διαβ?στε το!

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### Sandy says

An interesting cast of characters; some surprising plot twists; superb descriptions of rural and urban landscapes; the recurring conflict between the socially-acceptable and the bestial instincts in human behaviour; and a shocking conclusion. What more can a reader want? All in all, an exciting story!

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### Matthew says

Damn this was bad. Excruciatingly boring and stridently racist. Sometimes racism in older novels can be explained by the common prejudices of the times, but the racist descriptions in 'McTeague' are repeated again and again and are so voluminous that its clear that Norris savored his racism and delighted in it. Also, this was meant to be a dirty, realistic portrayal of common folk, as evidenced by Norris' statement "I never truckled. I never took off the hat to Fashion and held it out for pennies. I told them the truth." What garbage. He might have believed that, but other nineteenth century authors such as Mark Twain, Jack London, and Herman Melville all did a far better job of portraying rough hewn characters with authenticity, probably because they lived among and were friends with and sometimes even were the inspirations for their tales. Norris is just guessing here and guessing badly.

Also, I resent attempts to portray characters as stupid and mean by constantly (CONSTANTLY) calling them "beasts", as Mark Twain rightly pointed out in 'The Mysterious Stranger' the beasts of the field have never been as creatively cruel and malicious as man. But this is part of a greater problem with the novel, Norris repeatedly tells us how filthy and dumb these characters are while seldom demonstrating it with their actions. Sure, most of the characters are greedy or sadists or both, but the stuff in 'McTeague' is like a rice crispy treat compared to the writing of Dostoyevsky or Twain (or many others). Maybe I was just let down because the cover declared it to be so scandalous and dirty and real, and I don't revel in that type of thing, but I can really be thrilled by it when it is presented in an interesting, insightful, or at the VERY LEAST, authentic way (LIKE IN DOSTOYEVSKY AND OTHERS I'VE MENTIONED).

The problem is that Norris was clearly trying to make some sort of statement about the American character (just like Dreiser was always doing, but even that redundant scribbler of behemoth American morality tales is FAR MORE ENTERTAINING THAN THIS FUCKING GARBAGE) and those types of statement novels ALWAYS sacrifice authenticity for their message.

At least it inspired some of the more memorable scenes in film history: the closing desert scene in 'Greed' (which is also dreadfully long and boring, but inventive and visually captivating at moments).

Anyway, at least the novels of the era sometimes have unintentionally hilarious passages such as this:

The younger women of Polk Street - the shopgirls, the young women of the soda fountains, the waitresses in the cheap restaurants - preferred another dentist, a young fellow just graduated from the college, a poser, a rider of bicycles, a man about town, who wore astonishing waistcoats and bet money on greyhound coursing.

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### **Tfitoby says**

19th Century American realism shouldn't feel this fresh and contemporary. Erich von Stroheim, the fabled silent film maker, once made a 10 hour epic costing half a million dollars from this novel such was his passion for it and his determination to do Norris's authentic portrait of the evils of avarice in San Francisco's working classes justice. It's said he filmed it page by page, hand tinting every hint of gold in every frame of film before screening all ten hours of it to a handful of guests and studio executives, the latter of which promptly cut it to a more reasonable two and a half hours. Von Stroheim's *Greed* is now sadly lost but happily generations of readers have been allowed to marvel at this complete and untainted publication of what has become known as Frank Norris's finest hour. Although once upon a time a scene featuring the familial abuse of a young boy in a theatre causing the poor kid to micturate freely in his seat was required to be excised due to its shocking nature on 19th century audiences.

McTeague is a larger than life man, painted so vividly that he verges on the grotesque, his ill-educated and oafish ways leave him open to mockery from the author and revulsion from the reader, he feels very much the forerunner to such classic characters from American fiction as Ignatius J. Reilley and to a lesser extent Nathanael West's Homer Simpson. To put it another way, there's no romance to be found in this protagonist. But it's not just the character that deserves to be mentioned in the same breathe as those two novels, this is 450 pages that the majority of the time holds its own against those other much lauded works.

Chronicling the declining fortunes of a self-taught dentist and his avaricious wife (although everyone is touched by greed in some way,) McTeague involves three murders, a torture scene, two fights - one of them to the death - and in the last third of the book an ambience of brutality, including sexual dominance and psychological terror. It's pretty powerful stuff, told with an eye for detail that had apparently passed American fiction by up until this point, McTeague's boarding house and fellow boarders a microcosm for the working classes of San Francisco, the milieu represented with accuracy of day to day living and dialects, and most importantly the brutality of the human animal.

In many ways this is a novel about addiction and obsession, following the same formula we still see in books and movies today; normal happy people led down a path of destruction by a sickness that you were there to witness the birth of - the first taste of alcohol, the playful line of cocaine, a pile of beautiful books the lure of gold, it's all the same and all leads to the same way if left unchecked - death, possibly one that will go unmourned or unnoted too. And yes, once a local bibliophile did die under a stack of books that got out of hand.

A little too on the nose with its observations of humanity, and fittingly for the subject matter a little too preoccupied with the one main idea - Greed - his characters lack any real internal drive beyond their avarice for example, to be a truly exceptional work, I'd still recommend this to anyone interested in a damned good read, and that is all Norris wanted when all was said and done.

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### **Jordan says**

Holy Crap! Look I'm writing a review, that rarely happens. I'll never catch up with my friend Manny, Lord knows I wouldn't want to. Ok, enough ranting and it's only the start of the review!

I read this book for an American Lit class that focused on the Realism and Naturalism movements, and *McTeague* was one of the first TRUE Naturalism novels that I have read. While I worked at an independent bookstore for three years I had always heard people talking about *McTeague* so I confess I was interested and excited to see why people loved this novel so much. So I went into the reading with an open mind, which doesn't happen that often, and let me tell you it would have been better not to have read it at all! Wait . . . that's being a little harsh. It wasn't as bad as that, but it was pretty painful, and I have had to read some extremely painful book in my life, and let me tell you this is right at the top of my list.

Either all the people that liked this book were smoking something I wasn't aware of or perhaps this book just **really** was not for me. I found that while I am a fan of Realism with Wharton and the rest of the gang, I just couldn't do the Naturalism thing. I am not a fan of reading about characters that on every other page are referred to by their animal tendencies and how in the end we are just all animals and we will always revert back to our originally form, the form as the BEAST! I swear to God in *McTeague* Norris usually the insane word over and over again, when referring to ALL of the main characters. Oh . . . I am sorry I shouldn't say Norris, I should say the narrator, (my Professor and I had an hour long conversation about that small detail). Also speaking of narrators, I can't remember reading a novel where the narrator speaks in such negative terms about the main character from the **VERY** first line of the novel. The characters in *McTeague* are extremely dark, ugly, and unattractive as characters to read about. When I realized I had to read more pages for class the night before I would cringe, which is NEVER GOOD! It has been a very long time since a book has made me cringe, however I can loudly state that this is one of those rare book that achieved my internal and physical cringe status.

I just have a had time when as a reader you don't like any of the characters, the narrator is extremely manipulative from the very start of the book, and there is no one that you can connect with or want to cheer on throughout the novel. Also the whole thing about the "elements" being indifferent to humans and their plight to live in this world is beyond annoying and downright tiresome to read.

Ok enough ranting and raving. As you can see I only can it one star, but I know many people who love Norris, and are slightly obsessed with both *McTeague* and *The Octopus*. One of my fellow students is doing his senior thesis entirely on Norris, I shuddered when he told me that. I am sure though he would shudder at some of the classics that I have enjoyed. Everyone's boat rocks to a different tune, and I love that! Let's just say that *McTeague* did not rock my boat, in fact my boat never even left the dock.

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### Chrissie says

This book did not fit **ME!** My rating is not a judgment of the book; it shows only how I personally reacted to the author's lines. The majority of the book I did not like, thus I can only give it one star.

I **did** appreciate the author's description of places - sites on the fringe of San Francisco and the desert environs of Death Valley, California. The setting is predominantly Polk Street, San Francisco, at the turn of the 20th century.

Am I glad I read the book? Actually, I would say yes. Why? To have experienced those descriptive lines. To test another author of the naturalist school of writing. One clearly sees similarities with Theodore Dreiser, another author of this school.

*Naturalism is a literary movement that emphasizes observation and the scientific method in the fictional*

portrayal of reality. Novelists writing in the naturalist mode include Émile Zola (its founder), Thomas Hardy, Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane, and Frank Norris. (Source: Wiki)

So what gave me trouble? The dialogs. While they may accurately depict how people speak to each other, reading such can be extremely tedious and boring. Phrases are repeated over and over again, first as a question, then an answer followed by a person's confirmation, another's reconfirmation and then maybe the question gets posed all over again! On and on and on with the exact same words! A lengthy paragraph may be devoted to two people saying goodbye! This may be accurate, but it is pushed too far in the dialogs of this book. Not once and not by just one character, but by all of the characters over and over again. This drove me bonkers. Writing in this manner makes the characters sound stupid, but are all of them stupid?! That is what went through my head. Well, perhaps; the author is clearly critical of how people behave.... which leads to the next problem I had with the book.

The central theme of this novel is avarice, but don't all of us see avarice with distaste? And don't we all know this even before picking up the book? Norris' message is loud and clear. Too loud and too pushed to the extreme. Money is hoarded. Money is gloated over, killed for and what people do to collect it, pile upon pile, is drawn to an extreme. The story loses touch with reality. What the author wants to say with the book becomes a rant, a lesson pounded into our heads. What unrolls is absurd. In reading the book we obligingly let ourselves be bashed over the head with the author's message concerning the evils of greed. The climax at the end is metaphorically a clash of cymbals.\*

The characters did **NOT** pull me in. They become too absurd to be taken seriously. There is a love affair that sours. The characters are merely the means by which the author delivers his message, his resounding warning against avarice and greed.

There is an anti-Semitic sentiment to be found in the author's lines.

I downloaded this free of cost at Librivox. It is accessible here:

<https://librivox.org/author/842?prima...>

It is fantastic that the site does exist! I recommend using the Librivox app. Without the app maneuvering within the audiobook becomes difficult.

This Librivox recording is read by Jeff Robinson. The speed varies. The reading is uneven. Parts are fantastic, other portions less so. The end was very well read, but I cannot disregard some of the earlier sections. I disliked the cinematically rendered intonations for the immigrants of Swiss / German origin that speak in this book. These immigrants do have a dialect and they do use incorrect words. I am fine with added dialect touches as long as I can decipher the author's words. In parts I couldn't. I will rate the narration with three stars and I will in the future choose other Librivox recordings performed by him. Overall he does a good job.

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\*So you wonder why I call the ending a clash of cymbals? Here is why, but it is a BIG spoiler: (view spoiler)My God what an ending. See what I mean about a clash of cymbals?

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## Olivia says

this is book that left the strongest impression on me of ones i've recently read. i loved it. it's about mcteague,

a dim-witted dentist whose ambition in life is to display a giant gold tooth in front of his dental parlours on polk street (awesome! there actually was one in front of some sf dentist around then. check out this photo: <http://americahurrah.com/SanFrancisco....>) anyway, the main plotline is that trina, mcteague's wife, wins the lottery, and marcus, his best friend, becomes insanely jealous of mcteague because he oh so nobly gave up trina for his pal mac. they all spiral downward into an abyss of greed and resentment.

mcteague's written and set in sf around 1900, and begins with this description of a day in the life of polk street. one of my favorite things about reading it was the desctiption of this city i live in 100 years ago. the main and minor characters live in the polk st apartment that mcteague initially occupies.

the characters are really blunt. the book deals with such subjects as rape fantasies and domestic violence. none of the characters are romanticized in any way (possibly romanticized in their crudeness?); none are particularly smart or admirable. with only a few exceptions, they all slowly destroy themselves and those surrounding them. the description of mcteague fleeing from the law through death valley is awesome.

there's a nasty undercurrent of anti-semitism, which made my hold my nose. but it was written at the turn of the century, and prone to that time's prejudices. zerkow the jew us portrayed awfully as a miserly subhuman almost. but then again, most of the characters are consumed by greed.

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### **Ken Smith says**

Written at the turn of the twentieth century, this book by Frank Norris is written completely in the form of literary naturalism. As such, Norris' novel is a well-executed demonstration of the features of literary naturalism. Any weaknesses in the novel itself are a reflection of the entire genre.

The pace of the storytelling at the beginning of the novel is very slow by design. Descriptions of the characters' personal appearances, traits, and daily routines may seem overly drawn out to modern readers. The characters possess a thin veneer of social graces which mask their underlying inability to master the forces of nature, both internal and external.

McTeague is a powerfully built, brute of a man with a very dull intellect and a terrible capacity for cruelty and violence under the right circumstances. Trina, his petite and pretty wife sets out initially to civilize her awkward and simple-minded husband. Soon it becomes apparent that she has a tendency toward severe avarice and greed, which she tries unsuccessfully to conceal from her husband through habitual deceit. The highly deterministic worldview that reflects the nature of literary naturalism creates a claustrophobic atmosphere to the story. The author's highly negative and pessimistic tone toward his characters results in a group of caricatures rather than a believable ensemble of complex and interesting characters.

Given the part that literary naturalism plays in the development of the modern novel, McTeague is a worthwhile. The somewhat contrived climax of the novel is violent and pessimistic. Any reader who finds Norris' view of human nature believable will be left with little reason for hope when they come to the end of this novel.

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### **Mary says**

This story charts the demise of a San Francisco couple at the end of the nineteenth century.

It was inspired by an actual crime that was sensationalised in the local papers.

Mc Teague is a charlatan and with his wife Trina is soon brought into a spiralling descent of corruption.

Very gripping story which turns into a dark brutal ending.  
It was also made into a film Greed for the silent screen!

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### **Alexis says**

This book has always amazed me because its content is dark but its descriptions are clear, rather than over-dramatized or gothic, like so much of late nineteenth century American and Victorian writing can be. It reminds me of the pared-down thrillers of today - like *American Psycho*. Norris normalizes anger and fear so that the reader sympathizes with McTeague, even as he/she is horrified by him. Pretty awesome for a text from 1899.

Interestingly, the film *Greed* (1924) was based on Norris' novel and he was one of the writers on the script. Originally Erich von Stroheim, the director, wanted to do the film scene by scene, much like today's *No Country For Old Men*. The original cut of this is rumored to be over 14 or more hours long, but there definitely is a cut out there that is at least 10 hours. I saw part of it in the class I took that required this novel. It was 19th Cent American Lit, with William Morsberger, at Cal Poly Pomona.

Below I have cut and pasted an explanation and review of the text *McTeague*. The review is from Janice Albert, [http://www.cateweb.org/CA\\_Authors/Nor...](http://www.cateweb.org/CA_Authors/Nor...), found on March 17, 2008.

"Besides being a ripping good story with well-drawn characters and plenty of atmosphere, the novel *McTeague* was a well-received expression of the school of Naturalism, a literary development exemplified in the work of writers such as de Maupassant and Zola. Naturalists, along with Realists, share a belief that the lives of ordinary people are worthy of serious literary treatment. Naturalism goes a step further, according to Margaret Drabble, in calling for scrupulous attention to authenticity and accuracy of detail, "thus investing the novel with the value of social history." Naturalist writers counted physical and hereditary factors in the formation of character and temperament, and they considered both wealth and poverty to have a great influence on character. Thus, as *McTeague* is denied the further practice of his profession, dentistry, (he had the strength for extraction), he becomes more and more brutal, while, in a parallel development, poverty brings his wife Trina to pathological depths of secrecy and hoarding.

"Norris was writing a trilogy of San Francisco, of which *McTeague* was the middle piece, *Blix* the starting point, and *Vandover the Brute*, published posthumously in 1914, the conclusion.

"He is believed to have chosen San Francisco for these tales of moral ruin because of the violent and depraved reputation of the city after the Gold Rush."

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### **Henry Avila says**

In the 1890's, in San Francisco, (now finally at peace ) on busy Polk Street, with cable cars, continuously moving up and down the thoroughfare , not the most fashionable lane, though, McTeague, an unlicensed dentist, too dumb to know he needs it, practices his profession, learned from a quack in a filthy mining camp, pulling teeth with his bare hands, big and strong as an ox, and as smart as one too, his clients are clerks, shop girls and vendors, the working poor, of the area, the rich people who live a couple of blocks away, go to another , more able, and with a certificate...McTeague, no other name is given, has just one friend, Marcus

Schouler, an ambitious , young man, like the dentist, employed by a veterinarian, with a little clinic, nearby, ( he does have a license) shy, old Grannis, who loves the retired dressmaker, Miss Baker, (these people all live in the same apartment building) the aged sweethearts, have adjoining rooms, in fact, but will not speak to each other, only like to listen to the sounds, coming through the walls and opened doors, she's even more bashful than he. When Marcus brings his cousin, small , charming, almost beautiful , but with pretty hair, Trina Sieppe, from an immigrant German family, to fix her teeth, the quack falls in love, complications, though, so does his only friend. McTeague proposes to Trina, 20, in his tiny room, also used as an dental office, and the frightened girl runs away, but does come back. Later telling his friend , the amazed Mr. Shouler, who magnanimously lets him take the woman he wanted to marry, a real pal, but will regret always his hasty decision...Trina, wins \$5,000, in an illegal lottery, that she reluctantly bought a ticket , from the pushy seller, for a dollar, to the chagrin of Marcus. After the odd couple's marriage, her family moves to Los Angeles, alone, she invest her money with a rich uncle, becomes a miser, taking out the gold coins, to adore, and feel, that she has left, or saved, every day, just to look at. This causes great irritation , you can imagine, to her husband, they live so cheaply, almost like beggars. Domestic violence, ensues, McTeague, leaves and steals the hidden money...This not quite respectful novel, was condemned by contemporary reviewers for its coarseness, vulgarity and killings, in 1899, very unsettling, even by modern standards, if there are any, it is not a pleasant read, a minor American classic, that shows the evils ways some people act, in the face of dire poverty...Yet a gripping story, with a terrific finale, of a man who will not be stopped, his feeble mind, tells him what to pursue, anything he wants, is his ...all he has to do is grasp it, in his powerful hands.

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### **Donna says**

The tale is a bracing immersion in the language and material culture of turn of the 20th C. San Francisco. I would normally have trouble understanding how much of a windfall Trina Sieppe's 5,000\$ would be in current dollars, but Norris' close attention to the acquisition and selling off of possessions kept me well up on the value of a dollar at the time.

The whole thing is sort of Zola in America, and maybe a touch of Hermann Broch in mood. Heck--it's a weird little book, and Jack London always seems just out of frame, only to come into full view at the end. Setting is as much foreground as the characters and story that begins in a world of melodeons, steel portraits and lace curtains, only to end in Landscape (there's Jack!), the kind that is itself and crushes people, which I guess is a relief after watching people crush people.

In America, there was a lot of landscape between a melodeon on the west coast and a melodeon on the east coast. I alway enjoy that distance in American literature and love best those books which brood as this distance moves west and gets filled up.

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### **Zhara says**

I understand why people in this day and age would hesitate to read McTeague this given the attitudes about immigrants and Frank Norris's Jewish character is a gross, obscene, cartoon and his image of people lower income is harsh which still holds today sadly. In spite of these shortcomings this book is worth reading because it does away with Victorian romantic style instead, like Emile Zola, Theodore Dreiser, Richard Wright later on, wrote in the school of naturalism in which humans despite some progress are still at heart no better than animals and their true baser, natures shows up when at times of selfish self preservation, and things beyond your control that make a person choose the selfish choice in order to survive and always can't always make the right and moral choice, of course human natural stupidity and paranoid thinking. Sorry

going off subject but I hope you read this book a chance.

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## George K. says

Το βιβλ?ο κυκλοφ?ρησε στα ελληνικ? τον Οκτ?βριο του 2014 και απ? την πρ?τη στιγμ? μου ε?χε κιν?σει το ενδιαφ?ρον. ?μως η τιμ? του μου φ?νηκε κ?πως τσιμπημ?νη για το μ?γεθος του και ?τσι το ?φησα στην ?κρη, μ?χρι να το βρω φθην?τερα. Πριν λ?γες μ?ρες το τσ?μπησα επιτ?λους -σε κ?πως πιο λογικ? τιμ?- και ουσιαστικ? δεν ?ργησα ο?τε στιγμ? να το πι?σω στα χ?ρια μου. Απ? τις κριτικ?ς που δι?βαζα ?βγαλα το συμπ?ρασμα ?τι θα ?ταν μια ιστορ?α πολ? κοντ? στα γο?στα μου και, τ?ρα που τελε?ωσα το βιβλ?ο, μπορ? να πω ?τι η ιστορ?α ?ταν ακριβ?ς του γο?στου μου. Και, συν τοις ?λλοις, πραγματικ? καλογραμμ?νη.

Στο οπισθ?φυλλο του βιβλ?ου διαβ?ζει κανε?ς: "Το ζευγ?ρι του κομπογιανν?τη οδοντογιατρο? ΜακΤ?γκ και της συζ?γου του Τρ?νας δι?ρχεται ?λα τα στ?δια της προσ?γγισης και της ρ?ξης, στο επ?κεντρο εν?ς κ?σμου δηλητηριασμ?νου απ? τοπειν?ς "αξ?ες", με πρ?τη την αδυναμ?α για το χρ?μα. Η μεσα?α τ?ξη χωρ?ς ψευδαισθ?σεις στην "καρδι?" του σ?μερα". Πολ? λιτ? η περ?ληψη, ε; Κατ? την γν?μη μου δεν χρει?ζεται να ξ?ρεις κ?τι παραπ?νω για την ιστορ?α. ?σα λιγ?τερα ξ?ρει κανε?ς, τ?σο μεγαλ?τερη θα ε?ναι η ?κπληξη στο τ?λος. Η ?λη ιστορ?α αρχ?ζει απλ? και κλασικ? και για αρκετ?ς σελ?δες "κοιμ?ζει" τον αναγν?στη με την μ?λλον βαρετ? και συνηθισμ?νη καθημεριν?τητα των απλο?κ?ν ηρ?ων, με την γραφ? να ε?ναι γενικ? ευχ?ριστη, με τρυφερ? χιο?μορ και ?σως λεπτ? ειρωνε?α. ?μως, με αφετηρ?α ?να γεγον?ς, τα πρ?γματα αλλ?ζουν. Γ?νονται πιο σκοτειν?, πιο τρομακτικ?. Αρχ?ζει η κατ?πτωση αρκετ?ν χαρακτ?ρων, βγα?νουν στην επιφ?νεια η κακ?α, η φιλαργυρ?α, η απληστ?α, π?θη που κ?νουν τον ?νθρωπο ?να σωστ? αγρ?μι.

Μπορε? να πει κανε?ς ?τι το βιβλ?ο χωρ?ζεται σε δυο μ?ρη, με το πρ?το μ?ρος να μην προμην?ει με τ?ποτα το σκοτ?δι που επικρατε? στο δε?τερο. Θα πει κανε?ς: "Ε?ναι αν?γκη να υποστ? την βαρετ? καθημεριν?τητα απλο?κ?ν ανθρ?πων που επικρατε? σε μεγ?λο μ?ρος του βιβλ?ου, για να αρχ?σουν τα πρ?γματα να αποκτο?ν περισσ?τερο ενδιαφ?ρον, να ε?ναι τ?λος π?ντων πιο σκοτειν? και επικ?νδυνα?". Κατ? την γν?μη μου ?λο το βιβλ?ο ε?ναι φοβερ? και ενδιαφ?ρον, ?χι μ?νο απ? ?να σημε?ο και μετ? μ?χρι το τρομερ? φιν?λε, ?που πολλ? ?σχημα γεγον?τα διαδραματ?ζονται. Πρ?τα-π?τα οι περιγραφ?ς του ΜακΤ?γκ ε?ναι εξαιρετικ?ς, καταφ?ρνουν να μεταφ?ρουν τον αναγν?στη σε μια ?λη εποχ?, αρκετ? διαφορετικ? απ? την σημεριν??. Και, φυσικ? τι πιο ενδιαφ?ρον απ? το να δο?με ?λη την πορε?α του ανθρ?που απ? την κορυφ? (λ?με τ?ρα!) μ?χρι την τελικ? του πτ?ση στον π?το της ανθρ?πινης κοινων?ας; Τι πιο ενδιαφ?ρον απ? τον τρ?πο που ?νας ?νθρωπος μπορε? να αλλ?ζει τελε?ως; Και, β?βαια, ο συγγραφ?ας δεν χ?νει την ευκαιρ?α μ?σω της πλοκ?ς και των χαρακτ?ρων να θ?ζει τα κακ?ς κε?μενα της κοινων?ας της εποχ?ς του.

?πως μπορε? να καταλ?βει κανε?ς απ? το μ?νι σεντ?νι που ?γραψα, το βιβλ?ο με ικανοπο?ησε στον μ?γιστο βαθμ?. Μπορε? και να μην ε?ναι ?ριστο ? αψεγ?διαστο, για ?λα τα γο?στα και ?λες τις... ορ?ξεις. ?μως δ?σκολα δεν θα βρει κ?ποιος κ?τι που να τον κρατ?σει, που να μην του με?νει στο τ?λος. Προσωπικ? μου ?ρεσε ?λη αυτ? η πορε?α απ? το φως στο σκοτ?δι, απ? την χαρ? στην στενοχ?ρια και την μοχθηρ?α. Και η γραφ? του Ν?ρις φοβερ?, με ολοζ?ντανες περιγραφ?ς και λεπτ? ειρωνε?α. Ε?ναι σ?γουρα απ? τα καλ?τερα βιβλ?α που ?χω διαβ?σει - ?χι μ?νο φ?τος, αλλ? γενικ?!

Υ.Γ. 1. ?μαθα ?τι υπ?ρχει ταιν?α βασισμ?νη στο βιβλ?ο αυτ?: Greed (1924), σε σκηνοθεσ?α ?ριχ Φον Στροχ?ιμ. Σ?γουρα θα ψ?ξω να την βρω!

Υ.Γ. 2. Υψογή η ελληνική κδοση, αξιζει τα λεφτα της.

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