

The other function of this introduction phrase is to cast Buck on the edge of literacy as these words physically mark the edge of the text. That instance of literacy into which readers are about to enter becomes therefore as the denaturalized 'territory' we are about to explore. In this illusion we lose touch not only with the being of the Yukon but, more immediately, with little or no comprehension that the book before us is the only *material* before us.

An exchange has taken place. The book and words, things to which we might have referred, have given up their aspect of corporeality in order to become semiotic. This is a general attribute of the financial system into which Buck was born and which, in gold, is forcing itself upon the Yukon. Further, this commodification of space marks, despite London's socialism, the act of reading itself and the sale of literature from which he so profited. As Marx says in his *Manuscripts of 1844*, "Money is the external, universal medium and faculty...for turning an image into reality and reality into a pure image" (122). However, this flaw once again marks an opportunity for the return of the repressed material, the literal body of the book that lies below its narrative "surface." This is the edge of literacy in which we reach for grapheme itself. The object which is the word.

London, through the agency of the dog, has his paradoxical cake and eats it too. Buck is the literal representative of the illiteracy of being *per se*. He is also, through the agency of the paper, the *object* of consumption for consumption. Buck is stolen and the story initiated because he is viewed not as a dog but as an aid in the pursuits of capital, an aid in the pursuit of the signs of value.

The novel's initial linguistic liminality is matched by its end which approaches the title's referent: "...his great throat a-bellow as he sings a song of the younger world, which is the song of the pack" (87). This, the novel's last phrase, ends the last paragraphs in which Buck loses the name that particularized him and subjected him to the world of intelligible individualities demanded by formal semiotic categories and the interpellated individualism of capital.

He becomes not just the unqualified male personal pronoun, "he." He further dissolves into the collectivity of wolves, 'the pack,' and the unlimited arena of the unlettered "younger world." Finally he becomes one with the song we cannot hear, the song sung in a natural sign for which the medium of naturalism is the antithetical compliment until it surrenders its own temporary intelligibility, its own instancing of the double bind of 'telling the truth.' In the end, the book becomes an object, mute and beyond the grasp of its own signs, apart and yet mandatory to its own effects. It reaches toward a post-semiotic state in which the problems of reference and nature are unspeakable. Naturalism longs for a mute song without lyrics. It reaches for what it cannot grasp, a nature without qualification and thus logically beyond the impositions of meaning that take from being that which they had hoped to deliver back as truth. London has taken the weaknesses in the logic of the sign, which are the weaknesses of money's illusions, and returned them as the saving grace of the profound realism that literally lies beneath his words.

WORKS CITED

- Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Moscow: Progress, 1974.
 Michaels, Walter Benn. *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism*. Berkeley: U.C. Press, 1987.
 Rossi-Landi. *Linguistics and Economics*. The Hague: Mouton, 1975.
 Simmel, Georg. *The Philosophy of Money*. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby, trans. London: RKP, 1978.
 Tarski, Alfred. *Logic, Semantics, and Meta-Mathematics*. 2nd Ed. J.H. Woodger, trans. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983.
 London, Jack. *The Call of the Wild: A Casebook*. Earl J. Wilcox, ed. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1980.

Domesticating *Trilby*: Norris and the Naturalistic Art Novel

Donna M. CAMPBELL

Gonzaga University, Washington, USA

In January 1894, when *Trilby*, a new serial of bohemian life, began to run in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, few suspected that it would boost *Harper's* circulation, provoke a lawsuit by artist James Abbott McNeill Whistler, inspire a short-lived but intense craze called "Trilby-mania," and leave as a permanent icon of popular culture the character of its villainous mesmerist, Svengali. Its author and illustrator, George Du Maurier,¹ a caricaturist for the British humor journal *Punch*, clearly had entertained no such expectations of its success, for he had sold the book outright to Harper's for a modest \$10,000. An immediate bestseller, Du Maurier's tale of art students and the model who nurtures them sold "nearly 300,000 copies...by the end of 1894, its first year of publication."² *Trilby* parodies such as "Biltry," "Thrilly," and "Driibly Reversed" sold so well that Harper Brothers attempted to suppress their publication, and an eager public was treated by enterprising merchants to such artifacts of modern marketing as Trilby hats, shoes, scarf-pins, sausages, and foot-shaped ice cream.³

The sensational reception of *Trilby*, however, like its decidedly unliterary status as a popular romantic bestseller, creates a kind of interpretive smokescreen around the novel as a work more frequently discussed than actually read. Such a status obscures the significance not only of the novel's reflections on *fin-de-siècle* culture but of its reverberations in the novels of writers active during the height of its popularity. One such figure, Frank Norris, became best known as a literary naturalist in the style of Zola, yet he tried his hand at least once during his career at what may be termed a "naturalistic art novel." Given the naturalists' interest in sincerity over style, in substance over elaborate plot construction, the idea of a naturalistic art novel seems at first almost a contradiction in terms. Yet an examination of some echoes of *Trilby* in Norris's *Vandover and the Brute* reveal the author's crucial engagement in the intersecting artistic and naturalistic debates of the day. Among these are an interest in the accurate representation of sexuality, an investigation of the relationship between artistic genius and degeneracy, and above all resistance to the Aesthetic and Decadent movements.⁴

Despite its sensationalized plot elements, *Trilby* began as a serious tale that Du Maurier offered to his friend Henry James as a subject in 1889. James, who would later turn one of Du Maurier's suggestions into his story "The Real Thing," felt that he lacked the necessary musical background and suggested that Du Maurier himself write "the history of the servant girl with a wonderful rich full voice but not genius who is mesmerized and made to sing by a little foreign Jew with mesmeric power [and] infinite feeling."⁵ To the familiar Trilby-Svengali scenario that James outlined at some length, Du Maurier added the equally significant story of three British art students known primarily by their nicknames: the diminutive Little Billee, the physically imposing Taffy, and the pipe-smoking Laird of Cockpen, whose close friendship Du Maurier depicts both in the text and in illustrations that group the three in opposition to the generally isolated Svengali. The two plots intersect in the character of Trilby O' Ferrall, a half-Irish, half-French "model for the figure" and fine laundress. Trilby is "very tall and fully developed...[with]...bare white ankles and insteps, and slim, straight, rosy heels," "thirty-two British teeth as white as milk" (39) and eyes like "twin grey stars."⁶ Despite having had love affairs "like an amateur...who is too proud to sell his pictures, but willingly gives one away now and then to some...much admiring friend" (28), Trilby inspires Little Billee's love and, largely because she is influenced by his mid-Victorian mores, suffers because of it.

As its genre demands, this romantic novel focuses on love and loss, chronicling

Little Billee's growing love for Trilby, from drawing an outline of her perfect foot on his wall to his confession of love, proposal of marriage, and illness with brain fever after her departure. The self-described "three musketeers of the brush" (19) frame and venerate the picture of Trilby's foot, fetishizing and sealing it in time (Figure 1); later, they attempt to enclose and preserve Trilby herself within the constraints of domestic tasks, a strategy that ominously echoes Svengali's more blatant attempts at control. Like the heroine of Dumas's *La Dame aux Camélias*, whom she admires, Trilby sacrifices her love for Little Billee to satisfy a class-conscious parent. This action leaves him dead to all feeling, much as Trilby herself becomes a virtual automaton under Svengali's mesmeric enslavement. Countering this unabashedly sentimental plot and undercutting its ostensible genre, the romance, is Du Maurier's light, ironic tone, which a contemporary "Editor's Study" column in *Harper's Monthly* praised for its "apparent artlessness."⁷ Du Maurier similarly employs irony in drawing characters in both words and images, as in the portrait of "Joe Sibley," a thinly disguised caricature of Whistler that was suppressed before the book version. Similarly, Du Maurier employs irony in his plot construction, as when Trilby's tone-deaf rendition of the ballad "Ben Bolt" sets the stage both for her transformation under Svengali and for Little Billee's near-engagement to a sweet nonentity named Alice after his loss of Trilby. Even stripped of its plot, the novel still reverberates with what Martha Banta has called "doting upon things,"⁸ the lovingly described atmospheric scenes and detailed descriptions of male rituals—bathing, fencing, sketching, sword-dancing, feasting, drinking, singing, and playing fox and goose—that echo in Norris's *Vandover and the Brute*.

Frank Norris's acquaintance with *Trilby* and its setting is well documented. As an art student in Paris at the Bouguereau atelier of the Julien Academy from 1887-1889, he was, as his biographer Franklin Walker wrote, "a student in the land of...Du Maurier" where he viewed "an Italian prototype for Svengali [who] hypnotized [a] model till she fell off the throne."⁹ Further, the publication and popularity of *Trilby* in 1894-95 closely coincides with the period of time in which Norris began work on his art novel, *Vandover and the Brute*. Shortly after the eighth and final segment of *Trilby* appeared in August 1894, Norris became a special student at Harvard, where he took a writing course under Professor Lewis Gates. Of the forty-four extant themes written for this course, twenty-seven, mostly evocative atmosphere studies that "dot[e] upon things" in describing rooms and restaurants,¹⁰ relate to *Vandover and the Brute*. It was during this period, according to the recollections of his brother, Charles Norris, that Norris attended the opening night of Paul Potter's dramatic version of *Trilby* in Boston on March 4, 1895 and was "thrilled" at the play, "which reminded him of his Paris days" (Walker 93). At this time, too, according to Walker, Norris nicknamed his good friend Ernest Peixotto "Billy Magee" after "Little Billee" (244).

Evidence for this connection with *Trilby* exists in Norris's writings as well as in



Figure 1.

the events of his life. As an interviewer in 1896 for the San Francisco literary weekly *The Wave*, Norris interviewed Edith Crane, an actress then portraying Trilby. After Norris noted appreciatively that Miss Crane was "as tall, in fact, as Mr. Du Maurier intended Trilby should be," the two discussed "the difficulty of preparing such a role as that of Trilby," the problems of making her "unconstrained and free-mannered yet not hoydenish and vulgar," and the concentrated effort needed to sustain Trilby's death scene if the audience is restless.¹⁰ The admiration for both play and book that Norris displays early in his career changes in his later criticism, however. In "Salt and Sincerity," Norris illustrates his point about the good judgment of the "Plain People who Read" by denigrating *Trilby*: "A million dollars' worth of advertising would not to-day sell a hundred thousand copies of Trilby. But *Ivanhoe* and *Copperfield*, without advertising, without réclames or exploitation, are as marketable this very day as a sack of flour or a bag of wheat."¹¹ Still, "impressed by Du Maurier's use of Svengali's powers in Trilby," Norris integrated a kind of mesmeric thought transference into the Vanamee-Angèle story in his late novel *The Octopus* (1901) (Walker 262). If the younger Norris was struck by the Bohemian atmosphere and male camaraderie of *Trilby*, the later Norris appreciated the dramatic possibilities of Du Maurier's more mystical ideas.

Edited by Charles Norris and posthumously published in 1914, *Vandover and the Brute* recounts its hero's struggles not only with the usual naturalistic temptations—sex, drink, gambling, and what Norris calls a "fatal passivity"—but with the "brute" he becomes when in a state of wolflike "lycanthropy pathesis." The novel retains structural echoes of *Trilby*, but Norris carefully changes the setting and characters to suit the conventions of the naturalistic novel of degeneration rather than those of conventional romance. As Du Maurier did, Norris creates as his main character an artist whose innocence, emotional sensitivity, physical frailty, and naively dualistic conception of the nature of sexuality establish his inability to prosper. Perhaps mindful of *Trilby*'s famous scenes of bohemian life in Paris, Norris first evokes and then dismisses the possibility of competing with Du Maurier by refusing to place his artist-protagonist in that setting, despite knowing it well: Although "the Latin Quarter became [Vandover's] dream," he, unlike Norris, "never got farther than Boston."¹² Like Taffy, the Laird, and Little Billee of *Trilby*, Charlie Geary, Dolliver Haight, and Vandover constitute a triumvirate of friends who share both class and experiences, in this case an upper-middle-class upbringing and a Harvard education.¹³ Locating his characters precisely in a San Francisco milieu, Norris carefully delineates their social rituals of male bonding much as Du Maurier had done, describing respectable society dances, feasts of beer and tamales, and Vandover's performance of "comical pieces [for his banjo and mandolin] that had a great success among the boys" as well as drunken parties at the Imperial Restaurant. Like the "three musketeers of the brush," Vandover's friends exemplify specifically defined traits that evolve as the novel progresses. Geary, whose practicality, like the Laird's, arises from a highly developed sense of what will sell, comes to represent an unsavory commercial opportunism and an exaggerated naturalistic philosophy as he succeeds in business by ruining others. Dolly Haight, whose feminine nickname suggests his diminutive size and sensitivity, contrasts with Taffy physically but shares his high ethical standards, his loyalty, and his dexterity at extricating Vandover from trouble.¹⁴ In this most naturalistic of novels, however, Dolly's reward for virtuous behavior is not to marry and prosper as Taffy does but ironically to die of a venereal disease contracted through a cut on his lip when Flossie, a prostitute, kisses him very much against his will.

In addition to its surface parallels, Norris's novel, like Du Maurier's, investigates deeper thematic intersections of sexuality and social mores. Little Billee and Vandover share a naively dualistic view of female sexuality, one that Du Maurier expresses by Trilby's gradual assumption of a domestic ideal until she is literally silenced by Svengali,

Little Billee's growing love for Trilby, from drawing an outline of her perfect foot on his wall to his confession of love, proposal of marriage, and illness with brain fever after her departure. The self-described "three musketeers of the brush" (19) frame and venerate the picture of Trilby's foot, fetishizing and sealing it in time (Figure 1); later, they attempt to enclose and preserve Trilby herself within the constraints of domestic tasks, a strategy that ominously echoes Svengali's more blatant attempts at control. Like the heroine of Dumas's *La Dame aux Camélias*, whom she admires, Trilby sacrifices her love for Little Billee to satisfy a class-conscious parent. This action leaves him dead to all feeling, much as Trilby herself becomes a virtual automaton under Svengali's mesmeric enslavement. Countering this un-



Figure 1.

abashedly sentimental plot and undercutting its ostensible genre, the romance, is Du Maurier's light, ironic tone, which a contemporary "Editor's Study" column in *Harper's Monthly* praised for its "apparent artlessness."⁷ Du Maurier similarly employs irony in drawing characters in both words and images, as in the portrait of "Joe Sibley," a thinly disguised caricature of Whistler that was suppressed before the book version. Similarly, Du Maurier employs irony in his plot construction, as when Trilby's tone-deaf rendition of the ballad "Ben Bolt" sets the stage both for her transformation under Svengali and for Little Billee's near-engagement to a sweet nonentity named Alice after his loss of Trilby. Even stripped of its plot, the novel still reverberates with what Martha Banta has called "doting upon things,"⁸ the lovingly described atmospheric scenes and detailed descriptions of male rituals—bathing, fencing, sketching, sword-dancing, feasting, drinking, singing, and playing fox and goose—that echo in Norris's *Vandover and the Brute*.

Frank Norris's acquaintance with *Trilby* and its setting is well documented. As an art student in Paris at the Bouguereau atelier of the Julien Academy from 1887-1889, he was, as his biographer Franklin Walker wrote, "a student in the land of...Du Maurier" where he viewed "an Italian prototype for Svengali [who] hypnotized [a] model till she fell off the throne."⁹ Further, the publication and popularity of *Trilby* in 1894-95 closely coincides with the period of time in which Norris began work on his art novel, *Vandover and the Brute*. Shortly after the eighth and final segment of *Trilby* appeared in August 1894, Norris became a special student at Harvard, where he took a writing course under Professor Lewis Gates. Of the forty-four extant themes written for this course, twenty-seven, mostly evocative atmosphere studies that "dot[e] upon things" in describing rooms and restaurants,¹⁰ relate to *Vandover and the Brute*. It was during this period, according to the recollections of his brother, Charles Norris, that Norris attended the opening night of Paul Potter's dramatic version of *Trilby* in Boston on March 4, 1895 and was "thrilled" at the play, "which reminded him of his Paris days" (Walker 93). At this time, too, according to Walker, Norris nicknamed his good friend Ernest Peixotto "Billy Magee" after "Little Billee" (244).

Evidence for this connection with *Trilby* exists in Norris's writings as well as in

the events of his life. As an interviewer in 1896 for the San Francisco literary weekly *The Wave*, Norris interviewed Edith Crane, an actress then portraying Trilby. After Norris noted appreciatively that Miss Crane was "as tall, in fact, as Mr. Du Maurier intended Trilby should be," the two discussed "the difficulty of preparing such a role as that of Trilby," the problems of making her "unconstrained and free-mannered yet not hoydenish and vulgar," and the concentrated effort needed to sustain Trilby's death scene if the audience is restless.¹⁰ The admiration for both play and book that Norris displays early in his career changes in his later criticism, however. In "Salt and Sincerity," Norris illustrates his point about the good judgment of the "Plain People who Read" by denigrating *Trilby*: "A million dollars' worth of advertising would not to-day sell a hundred thousand copies of *Trilby*. But *Ivanhoe* and *Copperfield*, without advertising, without réclames or exploitation, are as marketable this very day as a sack of flour or a bag of wheat."¹¹ Still, "impressed by Du Maurier's use of Svengali's powers in *Trilby*," Norris integrated a kind of mesmeric thought transference into the Vanamee-Angéle story in his late novel *The Octopus* (1901) (Walker 262). If the younger Norris was struck by the Bohemian atmosphere and male camaraderie of *Trilby*, the later Norris appreciated the dramatic possibilities of Du Maurier's more mystical ideas.

Edited by Charles Norris and posthumously published in 1914, *Vandover and the Brute* recounts its hero's struggles not only with the usual naturalistic temptations—sex, drink, gambling, and what Norris calls a "fatal passivity"—but with the "brute" he becomes when in a state of wolflike "lycanthropy pathesis." The novel retains structural echoes of *Trilby*, but Norris carefully changes the setting and characters to suit the conventions of the naturalistic novel of degeneration rather than those of conventional romance. As Du Maurier did, Norris creates as his main character an artist whose innocence, emotional sensitivity, physical frailty, and naively dualistic conception of the nature of sexuality establish his inability to prosper. Perhaps mindful of *Trilby*'s famous scenes of bohemian life in Paris, Norris first evokes and then dismisses the possibility of competing with Du Maurier by refusing to place his artist-protagonist in that setting, despite knowing it well: Although "the Latin Quarter became [Vandover's] dream," he, unlike Norris, "never got farther than Boston."¹² Like Taffy, the Laird, and Little Billee of *Trilby*, Charlie Geary, Dolliver Haight, and Vandover constitute a triumvirate of friends who share both class and experiences, in this case an upper-middle-class upbringing and a Harvard education.¹³ Locating his characters precisely in a San Francisco milieu, Norris carefully delineates their social rituals of male bonding much as Du Maurier had done, describing respectable society dances, feasts of beer and tamales, and Vandover's performance of "comical pieces [for his banjo and mandolin] that had a great success among the boys" as well as drunken parties at the Imperial Restaurant. Like the "three musketeers of the brush," Vandover's friends exemplify specifically defined traits that evolve as the novel progresses. Geary, whose practicality, like the Laird's, arises from a highly developed sense of what will sell, comes to represent an unsavory commercial opportunism and an exaggerated naturalistic philosophy as he succeeds in business by ruining others. Dolly Haight, whose feminine nickname suggests his diminutive size and sensitivity, contrasts with Taffy physically but shares his high ethical standards, his loyalty, and his dexterity at extricating Vandover from trouble.¹⁴ In this most naturalistic of novels, however, Dolly's reward for virtuous behavior is not to marry and prosper as Taffy does but ironically to die of a venereal disease contracted through a cut on his lip when Flossie, a prostitute, kisses him very much against his will.

In addition to its surface parallels, Norris's novel, like Du Maurier's, investigates deeper thematic intersections of sexuality and social mores. Little Billee and Vandover share a naively dualistic view of female sexuality, one that Du Maurier expresses by Trilby's gradual assumption of a domestic ideal until she is literally silenced by Svengali,

who finishes the process that her love for Little Billee had begun. As Joseph McElrath and Barbara Hochman, among others, have shown, Vandover's fall results less from a *pro forma* determinism than from his inability to see that the "paradoxes, incongruities, and absurdities that characterize reality...invalidate his naive dual vision."¹⁵ In *Vandover and the Brute*, Norris shows this in several ways, among them giving Flossie, the prostitute, the diminutive name of "Flora," an "ideal head" of feminine beauty and fertility that Vandover sketches;¹⁶ for Vandover, sexuality that exists beyond the ideal announces its own corruption, and he can see no middle ground. Flossie somewhat resembles Trilby on first appearance: "quite six feet tall, broad and well-made in proportion," with "white, well-set" teeth and showy footwear, both women radiate health and sexuality. Because of one's essential innocence and the other's corruption, however, Trilby, posing naked, feels unabashed until her love for Little Billee makes her conscious of shame; Flossie, clothed from neck to foot, nonetheless gives the appearance of being partially nude. As Trilby's essential innocence calls forth the best in Little Billee whereas the conventional "good girl," Alice, elicits a long meditation on Darwin and loss of faith, Flossie's corruption brings out the worst in Vandover as Turner Ravis, the "good girl," brings out the best. Confirming their essentially complementary roles, Flossie and Turner Ravis disappear from the novel at about the same time, leaving Vandover to confront his inner "brute" of passivity and sensual indulgence. It is Flossie's, not Turner's, shoe however, that Vandover keeps on his mantelpiece much as Little Billee keeps the sketch of Trilby's foot, a literally and symbolically empty talisman for Vandover of sexual degeneration as Little Billee's is the embodiment of artistic and sexual idealism. In short, the innocence, or perhaps willful naivete, that cannot tolerate the spectacle of Victorian morality at odds with reality ultimately wounds Little Billee when the romantic convention of a "brain fever" symbolically destroys his capacity for feeling. Given the requirements of naturalism, the same naivete destroys Vandover.

The most significant parallel between the two works resides in their status as complex and covert responses to the Aesthetic and Decadent movements. As the caricature of Whistler suggests, *Trilby* undercuts its own ostensible time frame and reveals its true subject with such authorial asides as this one:

Trilby's type would be infinitely more admired now than in the fifties. Her photograph would be in the shopwindows [like those of professional beauties, or "P.B.'s," like Lillie Langtry]. Sir Edward Burne-Jones...would perhaps have marked her for his own.... Rossetti might have evolved another new formula from her; Sir John Millais another old one.... She was about as tall as Miss Ellen Terry—and that is a charming height, I think. (69)

The contemporary reference to Ellen Terry, who had posed for these Aesthetic movement painters, functions allusively to construct Du Maurier's reader much as his more direct references to "the *fin-de-siècle* reader, disgusted at the thought of such an orgy as I have been trying to describe" function ironically (93). Jonathan H. Grossman points out an even more significant contemporary relevance in his article "The Mythic Svengali: Anti-Aestheticism in *Trilby*." Reading Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a gloss on the culturally laden *fin-de-siècle* concepts of "influence" and "posing," Grossman argues that *Trilby*, by "[i]magining influence as the corrupting power of a villainous artist...tacitly constructs the anti-aesthetic assumptions that will produce Wilde in the trial narrative as a Svengali of homosexuality," thus "reformulating anti-aesthetic credos as invisible and seemingly a priori positions" (537).¹⁷ *Trilby* at once trades on Wilde's characteristic use of allusion, irony, and deceptive surfaces, his questioning of sexual propriety, at the same time that it naturalizes the 1890s assumptions and prejudices (among them the blatant anti-Semitism inherent in the

portrait of Svengali) figured as normative by an appreciative audience of *Harper's Monthly* readers.

The anti-aestheticism of *Trilby* finds a ready champion in Norris, who inveighed against those who believed art was "a sort of velvet-jacket affair, a studio hocus-pocus, a thing loved of women and of aesthetes" and called instead for a true muse to "lead you far from the studios and the aesthetes, the velvet jackets and the uncut hair, far from the sexless creatures who cultivate their little art of writing as the fancier cultivates his orchid."¹⁸ (The suppressed picture of a jaunty, idle Joe Sibley/Whistler passing a hard-working apprentice painter exemplifies this type [Figure 2].) Although lilies, sunflowers, and green carnations, not parasitic flowers such as orchids,¹⁹ were the flowers associated with the Aesthetic movement, Norris's castigation of aestheticism is as clear as was his earlier denunciation of the San Francisco aesthetes known as Les Jeunes: "Yes, there are Les Jeunes, and



Figure 2.

the *Lark* was delightful-delightful fooling, but there's a graver note and a more virile to be sounded. Les Jeunes can do better than the *Lark*."²⁰ As is clear from his excessive sensitivity to physical stimuli, delight in sensuous indolence, transgressive sexuality, and effeminate dependency, Vandover himself owes something to *The Yellow Book*, Joris-Karl Huysmans's novel *A Rebours* (1884), and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Norris uses the image of the brute that Vandover becomes—always behind closed doors—as Wilde had used the hidden portrait: as a figure for a horrifying and unacknowledged degenerative identity separated by a thin surface (representing Norris's "vener of civilization") from its persona until the two merge. Not "decadent" in the Aesthetic sense, Vandover's art is nonetheless in decay: as Don Graham has shown, it is derivative of conventional models. It is also sentimentally and self-consciously "aesthetic" rather than the picture of "real life" that Norris promoted. Du Maurier displaces the threat of decadence and all that it implies onto Svengali, a figure who threatens from without; for example, the Aesthetic movement's creed of "art for art's sake" is exemplified in the audience's delight in style over substance as they marvel over Trilby's rendition of the simple nursery rhyme "Au claire de la lune." By contrast, Norris replaces Svengali with the equally mesmeric "brute within," whose power for the sake of his artistic expression Vandover must, yet cannot, control.

Norris thus "domesticates" *Trilby* in several senses. He tames the story by transposing its setting and characters to San Francisco. Less obviously, Norris also reworks the issues of artistic creativity and control at the heart of Du Maurier's novel. Although Trilby's eccentricities and "hoydenish" ways proclaim her independence, the real conflict at the heart of *Trilby* is, in effect, the struggle to control her as a piece of raw material, the stuff of art: the art students want to preserve her as a model, at once as the basis for and as the muse from which their art derives, just as Svengali seizes on her voice and transmutes it into his own form of artistic expression, one that he

who finishes the process that her love for Little Billee had begun. As Joseph McElrath and Barbara Hochman, among others, have shown, Vandover's fall results less from a *pro forma* determinism than from his inability to see that the "paradoxes, incongruities, and absurdities that characterize reality...invalidate his naive dual vision."¹⁵ In *Vandover and the Brute*, Norris shows this in several ways, among them giving Flossie, the prostitute, the diminutive name of "Flora," an "ideal head" of feminine beauty and fertility that Vandover sketches;¹⁶ for Vandover, sexuality that exists beyond the ideal announces its own corruption, and he can see no middle ground. Flossie somewhat resembles Trilby on first appearance: "quite six feet tall, broad and well-made in proportion," with "white, well-set" teeth and showy footwear, both women radiate health and sexuality. Because of one's essential innocence and the other's corruption, however, Trilby, posing naked, feels unabashed until her love for Little Billee makes her conscious of shame; Flossie, clothed from neck to foot, nonetheless gives the appearance of being partially nude. As Trilby's essential innocence calls forth the best in Little Billee whereas the conventional "good girl," Alice, elicits a long meditation on Darwin and loss of faith, Flossie's corruption brings out the worst in Vandover as Turner Ravis, the "good girl," brings out the best. Confirming their essentially complementary roles, Flossie and Turner Ravis disappear from the novel at about the same time, leaving Vandover to confront his inner "brute" of passivity and sensual indulgence. It is Flossie's, not Turner's, shoe however, that Vandover keeps on his mantelpiece much as Little Billee keeps the sketch of Trilby's foot, a literally and symbolically empty talisman for Vandover of sexual degeneration as Little Billee's is the embodiment of artistic and sexual idealism. In short, the innocence, or perhaps willful naivete, that cannot tolerate the spectacle of Victorian morality at odds with reality ultimately wounds Little Billee when the romantic convention of a "brain fever" symbolically destroys his capacity for feeling. Given the requirements of naturalism, the same naivete destroys Vandover.

The most significant parallel between the two works resides in their status as complex and covert responses to the Aesthetic and Decadent movements. As the caricature of Whistler suggests, *Trilby* undercuts its own ostensible time frame and reveals its true subject with such authorial asides as this one:

Trilby's type would be infinitely more admired now than in the fifties. Her photograph would be in the shopwindows [like those of professional beauties, or "P.B.'s," like Lillie Langtry]. Sir Edward Burne-Jones...would perhaps have marked her for his own.... Rossetti might have evolved another new formula from her; Sir John Millais another old one.... She was about as tall as Miss Ellen Terry—and that is a charming height, I think. (69)

The contemporary reference to Ellen Terry, who had posed for these Aesthetic movement painters, functions allusively to construct Du Maurier's reader much as his more direct references to "the *fin-de-siècle* reader, disgusted at the thought of such an orgy as I have been trying to describe" function ironically (93). Jonathan H. Grossman points out an even more significant contemporary relevance in his article "The Mythic Svengali: Anti-Aestheticism in *Trilby*." Reading Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a gloss on the culturally laden *fin-de-siècle* concepts of "influence" and "posing," Grossman argues that *Trilby*, by "[i]magining influence as the corrupting power of a villainous artist...tacitly constructs the anti-aesthetic assumptions that will produce Wilde in the trial narrative as a Svengali of homosexuality," thus "reformulating anti-aesthetic credos as invisible and seemingly a priori positions" (537).¹⁷ *Trilby* at once trades on Wilde's characteristic use of allusion, irony, and deceptive surfaces, his questioning of sexual propriety, at the same time that it naturalizes the 1890s assumptions and prejudices (among them the blatant anti-Semitism inherent in the

portrait of Svengali) figured as normative by an appreciative audience of *Harper's Monthly* readers.

The anti-aestheticism of *Trilby* finds a ready champion in Norris, who inveighed against those who believed art was "a sort of velvet-jacket affair, a studio hocus-pocus, a thing loved of women and of aesthetes" and called instead for a true muse to "lead you far from the studios and the aesthetes, the velvet jackets and the uncut hair, far from the sexless creatures who cultivate their little art of writing as the fancier cultivates his orchid."¹⁸ (The suppressed picture of a jaunty, idle Joe Sibley/Whistler passing a hard-working apprentice painter exemplifies this type [Figure 2].) Although lilies, sunflowers, and green carnations, not parasitic flowers such as orchids,¹⁹ were the flowers associated with the Aesthetic movement, Norris's castigation of aestheticism is as clear as was his earlier denunciation of the San Francisco aesthetes known as Les Jeunes: "Yes, there are Les Jeunes, and the *Lark* was delightful-delightful fooling, but there's a graver note and a more virile to be sounded. Les Jeunes can do better than the *Lark*."²⁰ As is clear from his excessive sensitivity to physical stimuli, delight in sensuous indolence, transgressive sexuality, and effeminate dependency, Vandover himself owes something to *The Yellow Book*, Joris-Karl Huysmans's novel *A Rebours* (1884), and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Norris uses the image of the brute that Vandover becomes—always behind closed doors—as Wilde had used the hidden portrait: as a figure for a horrifying and unacknowledged degenerative identity separated by a thin surface (representing Norris's "veneer of civilization") from its persona until the two merge. Not "decadent" in the Aesthetic sense, Vandover's art is nonetheless in decay: as Don Graham has shown, it is derivative of conventional models. It is also sentimentally and self-consciously "aesthetic" rather than the picture of "real life" that Norris promoted. Du Maurier displaces the threat of decadence and all that it implies onto Svengali, a figure who threatens from without; for example, the Aesthetic movement's creed of "art for art's sake" is exemplified in the audience's delight in style over substance as they marvel over Trilby's rendition of the simple nursery rhyme "Au claire de la lune." By contrast, Norris replaces Svengali with the equally mesmeric "brute within," whose power for the sake of his artistic expression Vandover must, yet cannot, control.

Norris thus "domesticates" *Trilby* in several senses. He tames the story by transposing its setting and characters to San Francisco. Less obviously, Norris also reworks the issues of artistic creativity and control at the heart of Du Maurier's novel. Although Trilby's eccentricities and "hoydenish" ways proclaim her independence, the real conflict at the heart of *Trilby* is, in effect, the struggle to control her as a piece of raw material, the stuff of art: the art students want to preserve her as a model, at once as the basis for and as the muse from which their art derives, just as Svengali seizes on her voice and transmutes it into his own form of artistic expression, one that he



Figure 2.



Figure 3.

"plays" with far more effect than the "flexible flageolet" with which he had previously made music. In *Trilby*, it is Trilby O' Ferrall's latent and undisciplined musical gift that is tamed. As the "feral" connotations of her name suggest, she is a type of noble savage in whom the creative powers of imagination and performance remain dormant until someone with the will of a Svengali taps them and uses them, albeit for his own selfish purposes. The illustrations depict this transformation as Trilby's initial appearance in a hodgepodge of clothing that transcends gender lines gives way to her idealized representation as a classical female figure with a crown of stars (Figure 3). Through Svengali's machinations, Trilby's art, like her clothing, gains in purity and consistency what it loses in individuality and fidelity to life.

Yet the domestication of Trilby suggests one positive possibility for Norris in his creation of *Vandover and the Brute*. When Gecko, Svengali's assistant, relates the tale of Trilby's missing years to Taffy twenty years after her death, he explains that "we both taught her together—for three years—morning, noon, and night—six-eight hours a day.... We took her voice note by note...that is how we taught her to make the sounds—and then how to use them" (237-8). Svengali's inspirational mesmeric powers allow Trilby to perform, but training, not inspiration, allows her talent to emerge, just as Little Billee's fame as an artist grows from a dogged application of his natural abilities. By contrast, Vandover relies on inspiration for his art, with the result that his talent for drawing, neglected and abandoned until he attempts to recapture it in a single abortive flurry of activity lasting only a few hours, deserts him in a crisis of nerves: "Grotesque and meaningless shapes, the mocking caricatures of those he saw in his fancy, grew under his charcoal, while slowly, slowly, a queer, numb feeling came in his head, like a rising fog, and the touch of that unreasoning terror returned, this time stronger, more persistent, more tenacious than before" (167). Left untamed,

Norris suggests, an individual's artistic power does not become transmuted into art but degenerates into physical debility.

In short, for art to exist in these novels of Norris and Du Maurier, it must be disciplined or domesticated because otherwise the artistic sensibility remains just that—a sensibility, a state of potential, instead of a product, a performance. Clearly, Svengali steals Trilby's voice as he steals consciousness and sexual favors from her with his "dors, ma mignonette." Yet in taming Trilby's artistry by turning her into La Svengali, an extension of himself, Svengali seemingly differs little from the "three musketeers" who transmute her capacity for nurturance into the conventional activities of a productive housekeeper. Svengali's mesmerism is almost a parody of the male gaze: here, it controls her unconscious mind as Svengali has already tamed her conscious behavior through rigorous training. Paradoxically, however, through this theft of Trilby's soul Svengali also imposes discipline of the sort that Norris believed was necessary for art. Despite the high price that she pays—a loss of self as well as of consciousness—Svengali's discipline does enable Trilby to perform. It is this step that Vandover cannot take. He cannot tap into the sources of his artistic power because he fails to domesticate his brute, the primal self that might well be the source of artistic expression if he could control it. In failing to tame his brute, to call forth from it the artistic powers of expression and performance, Vandover exemplifies not only the logical and excessive ends of decadent art but the belief in "studio hocus-pocus"—such as inspiration or mesmerism—that Norris scorned in the consciously conceived, antiaesthetic art based on disciplined virility at the heart of his naturalistic method.

NOTES

¹ "George Du Maurier" is the pseudonym for Louis Palmella Busson (1834-1896).

² Richard Kelly, *George Du Maurier* (Boston: Twayne, 1983), 87. See also L. Edward Purcell's "Trilby and Trilby-Mania: The Beginning of the Bestseller System" (*Journal of Popular Culture* 11 [1977]: 62-76). Purcell's figures differ; he reports sales figures as "200,000 copies [sold] in book form by February 1895" (64).

³ Purcell, 71-74.

⁴ In part, this question responds to Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, which was published in March 1895 and, according to Donald Pizer, "by June had become the most discussed book of the year. Nordau's study was dedicated to Lombroso and was an attempt to use the idea of the stigmata of degeneracy in an attack on the major artists and art movements of the day" (58).

⁵ Henry James, *Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers (New York: Oxford U P, 1987), 50.

⁶ George Du Maurier, *Trilby* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1995), 8, 69. Unless otherwise noted, subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited in the text.

⁷ "Editor's Study," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 89 (September 1894). In *A History of American Magazines, 1850-1865*, vol. II (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1957), Frank Luther Mott notes that Charles Dudley Warner took over this department from William Dean Howells in 1894, but he does not specify the month when this transfer took place (399).

⁸ Martha Banta, "Artists, Models, Real Things, and Types," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 16.2 (1983), 20.

⁹ Franklin Walker, *Frank Norris: A Biography* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1932), 27, 31.

¹⁰ Frank Norris, "Trilby and Princess Flavia: An Interviewer, Two Actresses, and Several Confidences," *The Wave*, 15 (10 October 1896), 8, rpt. in *Apprenticeship Writings of Frank Norris*, ed. Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., and Douglas K. Burgess (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1996), 117, 118.

¹¹ "Salt and Sincerity," *Critic* 41 (July 1902), 77-81; rpt. in *Literary Criticism of Frank Norris*, ed. Donald Pizer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964) 211.

¹² Frank Norris, *Vandover and the Brute*, in the Library of America volume *Frank Norris: Novels and Essays*, ed. Donald Pizer (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1986), 11. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited in the text.

¹³ Walker notes a similar "triumvirate" when Norris was a student at Berkeley. In his first year, Norris and his friends Myron Wolf and Maurice V. Samuels became known as "The Three Guardsmen" (49).

¹⁴ The Laird sells romantic "Spanish bull-fighting scenes, in which the bull never appeared, and which he sent to his native Dundee and sold there" (71) and throughout the novel paints best when he considers what the public wants rather than painting what he sees. Taffy, whose paintings suggest realism—"tragic little dramas of life in the stums of Paris—starvings, drownings—suicides by charcoal



Figure 3.

"IT WAS TRILBY."

"plays" with far more effect than the "flexible flageolet" with which he had previously made music. In *Trilby*, it is Trilby O' Ferrall's latent and undisciplined musical gift that is tamed. As the "feral" connotations of her name suggest, she is a type of noble savage in whom the creative powers of imagination and performance remain dormant until someone with the will of a Svengali taps them and uses them, albeit for his own selfish purposes. The illustrations depict this transformation as Trilby's initial appearance in a hodgepodge of clothing that transcends gender lines gives way to her idealized representation as a classical female figure with a crown of stars (Figure 3). Through Svengali's machinations, Trilby's art, like her clothing, gains in purity and consistency what it loses in individuality and fidelity to life.

Yet the domestication of Trilby suggests one positive possibility for Norris in his creation of *Vandover and the Brute*. When Gecko, Svengali's assistant, relates the tale of Trilby's missing years to Taffy twenty years after her death, he explains that "we both taught her together—for three years—morning, noon, and night—six-eight hours a day.... We took her voice note by note...that is how we taught her to make the sounds—and then how to use them" (237-8). Svengali's inspirational mesmeric powers allow Trilby to perform, but training, not inspiration, allows her talent to emerge, just as Little Billee's fame as an artist grows from a dogged application of his natural abilities. By contrast, Vandover relies on inspiration for his art, with the result that his talent for drawing, neglected and abandoned until he attempts to recapture it in a single abortive flurry of activity lasting only a few hours, deserts him in a crisis of nerves: "Grotesque and meaningless shapes, the mocking caricatures of those he saw in his fancy, grew under his charcoal, while slowly, slowly, a queer, numb feeling came in his head, like a rising fog, and the touch of that unreasoning terror returned, this time stronger, more persistent, more tenacious than before" (167). Left untamed,

Norris suggests, an individual's artistic power does not become transmuted into art but degenerates into physical debility.

In short, for art to exist in these novels of Norris and Du Maurier, it must be disciplined or domesticated because otherwise the artistic sensibility remains just that—a sensibility, a state of potential, instead of a product, a performance. Clearly, Svengali steals Trilby's voice as he steals consciousness and sexual favors from her with his "dors, ma mignonette." Yet in taming Trilby's artistry by turning her into La Svengali, an extension of himself, Svengali seemingly differs little from the "three musketeers" who transmute her capacity for nurturance into the conventional activities of a productive housekeeper. Svengali's mesmerism is almost a parody of the male gaze: here, it controls her unconscious mind as Svengali has already tamed her conscious behavior through rigorous training. Paradoxically, however, through this theft of Trilby's soul Svengali also imposes discipline of the sort that Norris believed was necessary for art. Despite the high price that she pays—a loss of self as well as of consciousness—Svengali's discipline does enable Trilby to perform. It is this step that Vandover cannot take. He cannot tap into the sources of his artistic power because he fails to domesticate his brute, the primal self that might well be the source of artistic expression if he could control it. In failing to tame his brute, to call forth from it the artistic powers of expression and performance, Vandover exemplifies not only the logical and excessive ends of decadent art but the belief in "studio hocus-pocus"—such as inspiration or mesmerism—that Norris scorned in the consciously conceived, antiaesthetic art based on disciplined virility at the heart of his naturalistic method.

NOTES

¹ "George Du Maurier" is the pseudonym for Louis Palmella Busson (1834-1896).

² Richard Kelly, *George Du Maurier* (Boston: Twayne, 1983), 87. See also L. Edward Purcell's "Trilby and Trilby-Mania: The Beginning of the Bestseller System" (*Journal of Popular Culture* 11 [1977]: 62-76). Purcell's figures differ; he reports sales figures as "200,000 copies [sold] in book form by February 1895" (64).

³ Purcell, 71-74.

⁴ In part, this question responds to Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, which was published in March 1895 and, according to Donald Pizer, "by June had become the most discussed book of the year. Nordau's study was dedicated to Lombroso and was an attempt to use the idea of the stigmata of degeneracy in an attack on the major artists and art movements of the day" (58).

⁵ Henry James, *Complete Notebooks of Henry James*, ed. Leon Edel and Lyall H. Powers (New York: Oxford U P, 1987), 50.

⁶ George Du Maurier, *Trilby* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1995), 8, 69. Unless otherwise noted, subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited in the text.

⁷ "Editor's Study," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 89 (September 1894). In *A History of American Magazines, 1850-1865*, vol. II (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1957), Frank Luther Mott notes that Charles Dudley Warner took over this department from William Dean Howells in 1894, but he does not specify the month when this transfer took place (399).

⁸ Martha Banta, "Artists, Models, Real Things, and Types," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 16.2 (1983), 20.

⁹ Franklin Walker, *Frank Norris: A Biography* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1932), 27, 31.

¹⁰ Frank Norris, "Trilby and Princess Flavia: An Interviewer, Two Actresses, and Several Confidences," *The Wave*, 15 (10 October 1896), 8, rpt. in *Apprenticeship Writings of Frank Norris*, ed. Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., and Douglas K. Burgess (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1996), 117, 118.

¹¹ "Salt and Sincerity," *Critic* 41 (July 1902), 77-81; rpt. in *Literary Criticism of Frank Norris*, ed. Donald Pizer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964) 211.

¹² Frank Norris, *Vandover and the Brute*, in the Library of America volume *Frank Norris: Novels and Essays*, ed. Donald Pizer (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1986), 11. Subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited in the text.

¹³ Walker notes a similar "triumvirate" when Norris was a student at Berkeley. In his first year, Norris and his friends Myron Wolf and Maurice V. Samuels became known as "The Three Guardsmen" (49).

¹⁴ The Laird sells romantic "Spanish bull-fighting scenes, in which the bull never appeared, and which he sent to his native Dundee and sold there" (71) and throughout the novel paints best when he considers what the public wants rather than painting what he sees. Taffy, whose paintings suggest realism—"tragic little dramas of life in the stums of Paris—starvings, drownings—suicides by charcoal

and poison—" (71), can sell nothing.

¹⁵ Joseph McElrath, Jr., "Frank Norris's *Vandover and the Brute*: Narrative Technique and the Socio-Critical Viewpoint," *Studies in American Fiction* 4 (Spring 1976): 27-43; rpt. in Graham, *Critical Essays on Frank Norris, 177-193*, 184-185. Charles Child Walcott argues this viewpoint in *American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream* (Minneapolis: University Minnesota Press, 1956), and Donald Pizer comes to nearly the same conclusion when he finds fault with the naturalistic "constant analysis of the struggle in *Vandover* between his better and his brute nature" (*The Novels of Frank Norris*, 48).

¹⁶ Doni Graham, *The Fiction of Frank Norris: The Aesthetic Context* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978), 24.

¹⁷ Jonathan H. Grossman, "The Mythic Svengali: Anti-Aestheticism in *Trilby*," *Studies in the Novel* 28.4 (1996): 525-541.

¹⁸ "Novelists of the Future," *Boston Evening Transcript*, 27 November 1901, p. 14; rpt. in *Frank Norris: Novels and Essays*, 1155-1156.

¹⁹ Sherwood Williams, in "The Rise of a New Degeneration: Decadence and Atavism in *Vandover and the Brute*" (ELH 57 [1990]: 709-736), quotes Max Nordau as suggesting that the aesthete was "a parasite of the lowest grade of atavism, a short of human succulus" (725). Norris had read Nordau, and his substitution of flowers seems deliberate.

²⁰ In the May 1897 issue of *The Wave*, he uses the *Boston Evening Transcript's* glowing remarks against them, castigating the group for ignoring their responsibility as writers. The *Boston Evening Transcript's* remarks are as follows: "And *The Lark*! You will wonder how you lived without it. It's the most excellent fooling for many years. And it's better than fooling, as all truly excellent fooling must be." Cited in the promotional insert "A Transcontinental Criticism: The Geography of Appreciation" included with *The Lark* (no date, no page). "They would 'do better,' Norris goes on to say, to 'grip fast' upon the real life happening around them. 'It's the Life that we want, the vigorous, real thing,' he concludes, 'not the curious weaving of words and the polish of literary finish' ('An Opening for Novelists,' 30). In *Frank Norris Revisited* (New York: Twayne, 1992), Joseph R. McElrath, Jr. suggests that "Norris is likely to have suffered something akin to a nervous breakdown during the early spring of 1897" just before this attack on Les Jeunes (15).

FEKS, *New Babylon*, and Zola

Tony WILLIAMS

University of Illinois at Carbondale, USA

During 1929, the FEKS Collective Group produced one of the last major classics from the experimental period of twenties Soviet Cinema—*The New Babylon*, co-directed by Grigori Kosintsev and Leonid Trauberg. It was not only the last silent film made by the two directors in their "Eccentric Cinema" (or Factory of the Eccentric Actor), based on their theatrical experiments involving the excessive world of grotesque realism, but also the final swan song of an exciting avant-garde era of Russian cinema soon demonized by encroaching "politically correct" tenets of Socialist Realism. The first appearance of *New Babylon* produced angry condemnation both on grounds of visually "formalist" techniques as well as reaction against a non-harmonic musical score specially written by young composer Dmitri Shostakovich. As J. Hoberman noticed in his *Village Voice* review written at the time of *New Babylon's* New York Film Festival reissue, the film became attacked for "frivolity and aestheticism and perhaps regarded with suspicion for the inspired enthusiasm with which it portrayed anarchy, decadence, and heroic martyrdom." Hoberman described the film as a "mixture of elliptical melodrama, contrapuntal eloquence, and canny, jolting spectacle." Kosintsev and Trauberg operate as "engineers of the spectacle" in a film which "eschews the intellectual montage of *October* and the manic invention of Vertov's *Man with A Movie Camera* for a once-in-a-lifetime synthesis of Eisenstein and Sennett, Lenin and Zola, Jacques Offenbach and Jelly Roll Morton."¹ Rather than wishing to match visual imagery, Shostakovich aimed at a radical disjunctive approach between sound and image as if conscious of the 1928 statement on sound cinema by S. M. Eisenstein, V. I. Pudovkin, and G. V. Alexandrov welcoming the new technique's contribution to cinema in terms of its "contrapuntal use" leading to "a new potentiality of montage development and perfection."²

Eisenstein had actually worked with the FEKS group in 1922 during their second theatrical season in the Proletkult Hall when they attempted to effect "the electrification of Gogol, Vaudeville, Americanism, and Grand Guignol." The group were not only interested in reproducing Gogol's grotesque realism in theatre and film but also wished to appropriate the radical montage style of their former collaborator's first film, *Strike* (1924). Actors and technicians expressed their indebtedness to the works of Zola during pre-production. As actress Elena Kuzima later wrote, "I loved and cherished Louise as one can only love and cherish one's own child. I played the role on 'naked nerves'—each new filming day bringing the joy of work as well as such a horror from the consciousness of her reality that I can't face it now... Louise is not to be found in the literature of the time. We sought her in the whole epoch. This was a synthetic image of a communist girl at the time of the Paris Commune, and to create it we had to know all we could about the history and events of the commune, to transport us there and communicate its sights and aroma. While working on *The New Babylon* it was Zola who gave us the most. All of us read his works."³

The Ladies Paradise (*Au Bonheur des Dames*) is a key influence on *The New Babylon*. But the FEKS group never aimed at a faithful approach. Their artistic strategy aimed at disrupting automatic perceptions and cognitive mechanisms of traditional art and reconstructing them in terms of a critical, innovative, populist, and anti-naturalistic form of revolutionary art.⁴ Nothing was sacred, certainly not the works of Emile Zola. But rather than distorting the literary original, they aimed to push the Zola text into new directions suggesting the possibility for a revolutionary reading within the artistic and political terms of their new artistic and social conceptions. As Vladimir Nedobrovo stated, the FEKS Group attempted to convey the sense of an object "through vision and not through consciousness" and aimed at the concept of an "impeded

