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Greed and Disposability in The Octopus and The Pit

by

Richard P. Sisson III

A thesis submitted to the Department of English of the State University of New York

College at Brockport, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Abstract

This thesis deals with greed and the disposability of the individual in Frank Norris's literary portrayal of capitalism in The Octopus and The Pit. Even though McTeague is Norris's most notable naturalistic work, the first two volumes of his intended wheat trilogy are also significant contributions to American naturalism because of Norris's portrayal of the omnipotence of capitalism on the individual.

This thesis focuses on The Octopus and The Pit. In both novels, Norris portrays capitalism as a powerful force on the individual. He shows that capitalism draws out and nourishes people's greed. He also shows that people are expendable under capitalism because there is an endless supply of human replacements.

Chapter One: Introduction

At the end of the nineteenth century, Frank Norris emerged as a notable American writer, and although he died prematurely in 1902 at the age of thirty-two, his literary contribution to American naturalism was profound. While most scholars agree that McTeague is Norris's finest narrative and his best naturalistic work, Norris wrote other important novels that reflect his naturalistic view of the world. Shortly before his death, he completed two volumes of his intended trilogy The Epic of the Wheat. In both The Octopus (1901) and The Pit (1902), greed drives naturalism: greed is an intrinsic constituent of the naturalistic world Norris portrays in both works. In each novel, Norris portrays capitalism as a powerful force on the individual: it draws out people's innate greed, it then nourishes people's greed, and as a result, the system is sustained by people's greed. Under the system, people are expendable because there is an endless supply of human replacements; capitalism perpetually wins, and the individual usually loses.

In a naturalistic narrative, characters exist in a world in which their fate is pre-determined. Characters are incapable of controlling their destinies, and they lack free will. According to Malcolm Cowley, "The Naturalistic writers were all determinists in that they believed in the omnipotence of abstract forces. They were pessimists so far as they believed that men and women were absolutely incapable of shaping their own destinies" (226). Cowley further states, "For the Naturalists...men are 'human insects' whose brief lives are completely determined by society or nature. The individual is crushed in a moment if he resists; and his struggle, instead of being

tragic, is merely pitiful or ironic” (237). According to Richard Chase, “Naturalistic doctrine...assumes that fate is something imposed on the individual from the outside. The protagonist of a naturalistic novel is therefore at the mercy of circumstances rather than of himself” (297). These scholars’ perspectives on naturalism shed light on Norris’s uncompleted wheat trilogy. Norris had cynical feelings about the world in which he lived. In both novels, his literary portrayal of capitalism shows that characters are acted on by capitalism and rarely have any agency in determining their destinies. Characters who are capable of controlling their actions are eventually overcome by the forces of the man-made economic system, and their agency is inevitably crushed by capitalism. While death is not always a certainty for Norris’s characters, it does occur frequently. Ruination in some form, though, is a necessary process for many of his characters: most of Norris’s characters must be destroyed by the naturalistic world in which they live. These characteristics of naturalism are evident in characters’ experiences in both novels.

Norris perceived the world in which he lived as a machine that brutally destroyed humans who were trapped and who were incapable of controlling their destinies. Above all, he felt humans were powerless against the innate forces of his world. These qualities of Norris’s perceptions of naturalism are widely acknowledged by literary scholars. According to Malcolm Cowley, “Norris was sometimes more extreme in his magnification of forces and minification of persons” (226). Morton Rothstein observes that Norris wrote with “a sense of the limits on man’s free will” (52). According to George Wilbur Meyer, Norris believed that, “Until men do so co-

operate and gear their socioeconomic system to the inflexible cogs of nature's vast machine, they must expect to suffer a thousand unnatural shocks that human flesh is not necessarily heir to" (Meyer 356). Meyer emphasizes Norris's belief that people will continuously be destroyed by the forces of nature until they reach a point at which they begin to respect nature and work together with one another to benefit the human race. In order to end their suffering, people must learn that there are limits to individual power within the natural world. Humans will only survive if they learn how to adapt to their world collectively.

While these aforementioned aspects of Norris's perspective are commonly known, there are other notable and oft neglected characteristics of his world view that are evident in his intended wheat trilogy. In The Octopus and The Pit, Norris emphasizes a significant facet of his world view: capitalism increases people's greed, and it encourages people's animalistic propensities. Main characters in both novels exist in a capitalist world, and this world fosters characters' greed and animalistic behavior. Capitalism suppresses characters' selfless thoughts, and it encourages impulsive behavior. Characters reach a point under capitalism where they are incapable of reflecting on their decision making. The literary critic Mohamed Zayani observes that characters in a naturalistic narrative

are caught up in the struggle for survival in a hostile environment over which they have little or no control. The lack of agency and the thinness of representation of inner life in naturalism are held to reveal the author's belief in the animalistic basis of human behavior. In this

perspective, human beings are animals lacking free will and, being such, have no power to resist the conditions which press upon them. Characters act the way they do because the forces of...environment act upon them and eventually defeat them. (345)

Animalism is an inherent feature of Norris's naturalistic world view. The capitalist system of both novels encourages characters' animalistic tendencies. Frequently, his characters respond to environmental forces in such a way that shows they lack free will. Characters are often influenced by capitalism to become impulsive, and they reach a point at which they are incapable of checking their behavior: they exhibit the inability to self-monitor and to consider their actions. Characters are typically unable to restrain themselves, and they are usually incapable of reflecting on their actions because of the forces of their world. Norris's characters become selfish, and characters who do exhibit selflessness are inevitably conquered by the capitalist system. Capitalism suppresses their unselfish behavior, and characters are encouraged to participate in destructive behavior. This occurrence results in characters' inability to consider the consequences of their actions on themselves and on others.

The capitalist societies of both novels are connected to business enterprises either by their defined business occupations or because of their roles as consumers. These societies are American, but their reach extends beyond the United States. In The Octopus, for instance, wheat growers are usually engaged in local business arrangements, but their crops are sold in the wheat markets of the world, so these characters are dependent on, as well as connected to, world markets. The

businessmen and railroad officials who oversee the transportation of the farmers' wheat to the marketplace are also participants in the world wheat trade, as are the middlemen who are dependent on the wheat trade for work. In The Pit, wheat speculators are active in the business and financial dealings of the wheat trade. Consumers are secondary to the characters in both narratives, but they are an essential element of both societies because of their dependency on wheat; the wheat economy is a vital factor in consumers' sustenance.

Wheat ties both volumes of Norris's intended trilogy together. Characters in each narrative are enthralled with the financial value of wheat. In The Octopus, Magnus Derrick and S. Behrman perceive wheat as a potential source of wealth and prestige. Similarly, in The Pit, the capitalists Jadwin and Cressler are drawn to wheat because they believe it has tremendous potential as a source of financial gain in the realm of wheat speculation. Wheat's monetary value, then, is integral to the reader's perceptions of characters' demises in both plot structures. According to Richard Chase, Norris "accepts the idea of the primacy of money" (299). Money is the focal point of the capitalist society of both novels: individuals are influenced by their world to desire financial gain. This is a significant characteristic of Norris's perspective on capitalism within his world, and this facet of both narratives is historically relevant because of the importance of wheat to the inhabitants of the real world in which Norris lived. In fact, economic changes during the 1890s most certainly influenced Norris's use of wheat in his trilogy. According to John C. Waldmeir, "The financial panic of 1894 was the worst that the nation had ever faced, and the fact that an

inordinately large demand of American wheat in Europe finally quieted fears meant that grain production, world hunger, and their relationship to the market economy became popular topics during the latter half of the decade” (50-51). The American people of 1890s were aware that wheat was a staple that was fundamental to one’s existence. Waldmeir further states: “the ‘whole scheme of human life,’ dependent as it is upon wheat for sustenance, comes under the control of the capitalist ‘businessman’ who is ‘manager and dictator of the world’s wheat movement’” (51). In Norris’s era, wheat had two very important functions: as a source of food, it sustained people’s lives, and as a financial commodity, it enabled individuals to profit financially. Wheat was vital to the inhabitants of Norris’s world.

The settings of The Octopus and The Pit are also significant when one considers characters’ avarice within the naturalistic environments. The historical realities of Norris’s time period, similarly to the discussion about the temporal significance of wheat, are relevant to setting. Each narrative includes agrarian and urban settings, and these qualities of both texts effectively establish the dominance of the naturalistic world over the citizenry of America. Norris’s novels are distinct responses to the world in which he lived. According to Donald Pizer, “The realization by the generation coming of age in the 1890s that American life had changed radically since the Civil War helped compromise a key aspect of the American Dream—the faith that America guaranteed all men the free and just pursuit of self-fulfillment and of the good life” (3). Norris’s America was a harsh environment for those who desired more than basic subsistence. People who desired upward mobility,

especially middle-class Americans, were frequently oppressed by American capitalism. These individuals were often thwarted when they attempted to improve their lives financially and socially. People throughout rural and urban America suffered in this dismal world; they were helpless victims who struggled against the oppressive forces of capitalism, and who usually lost. According to Donald Pizer, “this society was characterized by a struggle to survive materially rather than to prevail morally” (Pizer 4). The Octopus and The Pit are Norris’s responses to this historical reality. The capitalist civilization in which Norris and his contemporaries lived was a place where the individual had to struggle to survive, but where the individual was powerless to determine his or her destiny. Norris’s artistry is a response to this reality.

In The Octopus, Magnus Derrick and S. Behrman exist in the capitalist world of the novel. Derrick, a wheat farmer, is influenced by capitalism to pursue a corrupt business scheme designed to undermine the P. and S. W. Railroad’s power, and he is destroyed by his actions. He fervently leads a coalition of ranchers as they endeavor to secure favorable transportation rates for wheat growers. Derrick initially refuses to engage in this scheme; however, the forces of the capitalist system are insurmountable, and he succumbs to them. He is unable to resist participation in the business venture because his greed causes him to pursue the acquisition of prestige and wealth. He is encouraged to participate in corruption, and he is ruined. Behrman’s experiences in the narrative are similar. As a railroad agent and as a businessman, he is influenced by capitalism to seek wealth and, to a lesser extent, prestige. The

capitalist system encourages him to pursue financial gain and social prominence at the expense of the novel's wheat growers. Behrman is consistently motivated by avarice, and he makes business decisions that end with his death. In the end, greed shapes the overpowering naturalistic world that traps Derrick and Behrman.

Greed also informs naturalism in Norris's second volume of his intended wheat trilogy. In The Pit, Curtis Jadwin and Charles Cressler are hopelessly trapped in the capitalist system of the novel. Both characters are influenced by capitalism to desire the acquisition of wealth and social prestige. The system causes the destruction of both characters' morality, and as a result, their ruination is inevitable. Jadwin desires wealth and social prestige, and the forces of the world in which he lives draw him uncontrollably into wheat speculation. The capitalist system prevents him from ceasing his avaricious behavior, and he participates in wheat speculation until he is bankrupt and ruined socially. Cressler is also destroyed by capitalism, and his struggle is especially significant because he consistently resists the forces of the capitalist system. Nevertheless, his resistance is futile because his ruin is inevitable under capitalism. He ardently disregards the wishes of other characters as he repeatedly rejects their requests to engage in wheat speculation, yet the forces of capitalism overpower him and determine his fate. The system unleashes Cressler's greed, and this effect of capitalism causes him to succumb to the natural forces of his world as he pursues a business venture in wheat speculation.

In both chapters of this thesis, I will show that Norris depicts capitalism as a powerful force on the individual. In chapter one, I will focus on Norris's literary

portrayal of capitalism in The Octopus and The Pit and examine the relationship between capitalism and greed. By analyzing Magnus Derrick and S. Behrman in The Octopus and Curtis Jadwin and Charles Cressler in The Pit, I will prove that capitalism draws out and nourishes characters' innate greed. In chapter two, I will show how Norris's portrayal of capitalism in The Octopus and The Pit indicates his belief that people are expendable under the capitalist system. Under this system, characters are disposed of and lose their wealth, their social prestige, their physical well-being, and occasionally their lives, and capitalism wins because the system continues onward unimpeded by the destruction of individuals who participate in the system. There is a continuous supply of human replacements who are readily available to fill roles that are vacated by individuals who have been destroyed by the system. Either one human is replaced by another at the same level in the capitalist hierarchy, or more powerful capitalists toss the less powerful aside. In order to prove these characteristics of capitalism, I will focus on Derrick and Behrman in The Octopus and Jadwin and Cressler in The Pit. The examination of these aforementioned aspects of both texts will help the reader to understand the unique way in which greed drives naturalism in each volume of Norris's intended wheat trilogy, and it will help the reader see that greed is inherent in Norris's naturalistic view of the capitalist world he portrays in his narratives.

Chapter Two: Capitalism and Greed in The Octopus and The Pit

Introduction

Norris reveals intriguing qualities of his world view in both volumes of The Epic of the Wheat. In The Octopus and The Pit, Norris's literary portrayal of capitalism shows that the system is a powerful force on the individual because it draws out and nourishes characters' innate greed. In each novel, greed is characterized by characters' desire for money and social prestige. Norris's characters seek financial capital and materialistic objects of wealth, and they crave social power. In both cases, capitalism encourages individuals' pursuit of these objectives: the system feeds characters' greed. The wheat economy entrances capitalists, and it fosters animalistic behavior in characters. It encourages baseness, and it transforms individuals into selfish, parasitic profiteers who seek monetary reward without thinking of the consequences of their actions on themselves or others. This cutthroat economic system acts on individuals as it draws in and encourages individuals to pursue wealth and social prominence through the wheat economy in the production of wheat and in financial speculation. In The Octopus, the capitalist system in which Magnus Derrick participates as a wheat grower brings out and feeds his greed. Norris portrays a world that functions the same way in The Pit. In The Pit, Curtis Jadwin's greed is awakened and fueled by wheat speculation in the capitalist system.

Characters' Innate Greed

In The Octopus, Derrick's propensity for greedy behavior exists before he is acted on by the capitalist system. Derrick's one flaw is that he is inclined to gamble,

and this leaves him vulnerable to broader corruption under capitalism. He seeks opportunities to make money, and he pursues business ventures he hopes will be profitable: “He was always ready to take chances, to hazard everything on the hopes of colossal returns” (64). Derrick desires the acquisition of wealth and social prestige, and he takes risks if the potential to gain wealth is possible. Once the proprietor of a gold mine, his former venture is tied to his present occupation as a farmer on his ranch, Los Muertos: “Without knowing it, he allowed himself to work his ranch much as if he was still working his mine....Everything was a gamble—who took the greatest chances was most apt to be the greatest winner” (65). Derrick’s management approach to his ranch reveals his tendency to gamble. He views his farm as a means of furthering his wealthy lifestyle and social prominence within his society.

The images associated with Derrick’s office at Los Muertos also show his instinctive desire to acquire wealth and social prestige:

The office was the nerve-centre of the entire ten thousand acres of Los Muertos, but its appearance and furnishings were not in the least suggestive of a farm. It was divided at about its middle by a wire railing, painted green and gold, and behind this railing were the high desks where the books were kept, the safe, the letter-press and letter-files, and Harran’s typewriting machine. A great map of Los Muertos with every water-course, depression, an elevation, together with indications of the varying depths of the clays and loams in the soil,

accurately plotted, hung against the wall between the windows, while near at hand by the safe was the telephone. (53)

Derrick's elegant ranch office does not evoke the idea of a farm. Rather, his office is described in terms of its importance as a profit-making business headquarters. It is a commercial enterprise under a capitalist system. Many of the images in this excerpt reveal Derrick's conspicuous prosperity as a wheat grower. His social stature is important to him, and he yearns to show off his prosperity to anyone who might visit Los Muertos. His possession of a safe indicates he regularly has large sums of money at his disposal or that he would like to appear as though he does. The map of Los Muertos shows that Derrick meticulously examines every acre of his crop land in order to maximize productivity on his vast wheat farm. These images indicate that money and social status are desirable to Derrick.

In The Pit, Jadwin's desire for wealth and social prestige is evident because of his existence in a society dominated by capitalism. Jadwin's social stature is an important indicator of his innate greed: "He was one of the largest real estate owners in Chicago. But he no longer bought and sold. His property had grown so large that just the management of it alone took up most of his time" (Pit 68). At first, Jadwin's primary business concern under capitalism is real estate, but because he desires to increase his social prominence, he must appear to be connected to the financial world of the capitalist system. This characteristic of Jadwin explains his need for an office in the financial district of Chicago: "perhaps being so close to the Board of Trade Building, had given him a taste for trying a little deal in wheat now and then" (Pit

69). Jadwin wants people to perceive him as an important businessman in the capitalist system, and he wants to cultivate relationships with powerful capitalists. His infrequent engagements in wheat speculation further explain his underlying greed because they show that he enjoys the risk entailed with speculation.

Even though Jadwin rarely engages in wheat speculation, the fact that he does participate suggests he is greedy. The prospect of making money through speculation excites him, and this indicates he possesses avaricious tendencies: “Every now and then during the course of his business career, this intuition came to him, this flair, this intangible, vague premonition, this presentiment that he must seize Opportunity or else Fortune, that had so long stayed at his elbow, would desert him” (Pit 79). Like Derrick’s gambling tendencies, Jadwin’s inclination to gamble shows his innate greed. Risky financial ventures that hold the potential for significant profit appeal to him immensely, and this shows that his innate greed leaves him vulnerable to the forces of capitalism.

Greed Nurtured by Capitalism in The Octopus

In The Octopus, the agricultural-based environment of Tulare County, California thrives under capitalism, and this environment makes Derrick prone to greed. Derrick, a wheat farmer and prominent member of his society, is thrust into an adversarial relationship with S. Behrman, a rapacious agent for the P. and S. W. Railroad. Derrick competes against Behrman under capitalism, and both characters’ greed is fed by the system. Donald Pizer, a prominent Norris scholar, comments on this aspect of The Octopus: “In The Octopus both the ranchers and the railroad

greedily exploit the demand for wheat, the first by speculative ‘bonanza’ farming, the second by monopoly of transportation. Both, moreover, engage in corrupt acts in their struggle for possession of the profitable land and its crop” (79). While Derrick and Behrman are adversaries, both are dependent on each other under the capitalist system in which they are participants. Wheat growers depend on the railroad to transport their crops to the marketplace, and the P. and S. W. Railroad relies on wheat growers in order to generate freight revenue. Derrick selfishly pursues a corrupt business scheme designed to undermine the P. and S. W. Railroad’s power when he leads a coalition of ranchers as they endeavor to secure favorable transportation rates for wheat growers. He participates in this scheme because he desires to increase his wealth and social prestige. Behrman also engages in corruption. As the local agent for the P. and S. W., a railroad that abuses its clients fiscally, he wants to reap financial revenue and to gain social prominence at the expense of the novel’s wheat growers.

Capitalism is a constant force that acts on Derrick. This force is evidenced by the ranchers’ overt attempts to secure Derrick’s leadership to add credibility to their efforts against the railroad. Buck Annixter plays an important role in the capitalist system of Tulare County. Annixter voices the league’s sentiment, and he rationalizes the league’s corruption: “I know how you feel about politics nowadays. But, Governor, standards have changed since your time; everybody plays the game now as we are playing it—the most honourable men.... We want you in this thing, and we want you bad” (Octopus 184). Annixter’s perspective indicates that Derrick is scrupulous and possesses a stronger sense of morality than his peers. Annixter and

other wheat growers acknowledge Derrick's principled perspective on corruption in politics. In this instance, Derrick resists Annixter's plea as well as the forces of capitalism that work against him. He perceives his scrupulosity as an important component of his social stature, and he consciously refuses to compromise his *morality because his reputation would be tarnished if he were to engage in corruption.* Derrick remains honest and honorable--a significant characteristic of his social prominence prior to his involvement in corruption.

Derrick's growth of avaricious behavior is fostered by the capitalist system of Tulare County. He is repeatedly pressured by other ranchers to join and lead the coalition of ranchers who intend to elect a railroad commission fraudulently. The elections entail corruption within a committee of ranchers, and the league of wheat growers pursues this plan in order to benefit financially by depressing the railroad freight rates for wheat growers. Derrick reacts to societal pressure in a manner that indicates he is vulnerable to the influence of capitalism:

He, Magnus, the 'Governor,' who had been so staunch, so rigidly upright, so loyal to his convictions, so bitter in his denunciation of the New Politics, so scathing in his attacks on bribery and corruption in high places; was it possible that now, at last, he could be brought to withhold his condemnation of the devious intrigues of the unscrupulous, going on there under his very eyes? (179)

Derrick's frail resolve to reject the forces of capitalism suggests his process of change as he seriously ponders his participation in corruption. He wants to benefit financially

and socially from the corruptly elected commission, and he is aware that his age will not provide him with many more opportunities to improve those facets of his life that most matter to him. His mine was moderately successful, his run for governor failed, and his current success as a wheat grower has not provided him with the life he desires for himself. Derrick craves economic power and elite social standing, and he has neither. Therefore, the possibility of financial gain and elevated social status stirs his innate greed, and Derrick is susceptible to the forces of the capitalist system.

Derrick's moral struggle is a distinct indicator of the forceful effect of capitalism on the development of his greed. Earlier in his life, he failed in his attempt to win the California governorship because he refused to engage in corrupt political practices. Capitalism acts on him, though, as he now contemplates his participation in fraudulent elections: "Was this his Chance? But his honour! His cherished, lifelong integrity, the unstained purity of his principles? At this date, were they to be sacrificed?" (Octopus 185). The financial and social opportunities under capitalism kindle his desire for a greater existence. Derrick believes his "chance" to reap great financial reward has arrived, and his propensity to gamble is a factor in his decision making process because his "chance" represents an opportunity to reap financial gain and social standing through risk. He wants the elite social status that has eluded him up until this point in his life. The wheat economy feeds Derrick's greed: "to neglect his Chance meant failure; a life begun in promise, and ended in obscurity, perhaps in financial ruin, poverty even. To seize it meant achievement, fame, influence, prestige, possibly great wealth" (Octopus 185). Capitalism encourages Derrick to join the

corrupt scheme against the railroad because it causes him to seize opportunities to gain social prestige and financial power through the wheat economy. His greed-filled sentiments obscure his moral consciousness. The capitalist system undermines Derrick's self-control, and as a result, it assaults his integrity.

Derrick's relationships with his wife and son further show how capitalism's nourishment of his greed erodes his morality. Annie Derrick's perspective on her husband shows that Derrick's greed is unleashed by the capitalist system. She reveals a distinct change in Derrick as a result of the influence of the league of ranchers: "None better than she knew the iron integrity of her husband's character. None better than she remembered how his dearest ambition, that of political preferment, had been thwarted by his refusal to truckle, to connive, to compromise with his ideas of right. Now, at last, there seemed to be a change" (Octopus 178). Annie's perspective indicates that Derrick failed in his political objective of becoming governor because he was unwilling to compromise his strong moral beliefs and engage in corruption. The unscrupulous objectives of the league, however, influence him to believe he can acquire wealth and prominence. Annie's perspective also shows the harmful effect of capitalism on Derrick's relationship with his son, Harran: "That Magnus should not command Harran to refrain from all intercourse with the conspirators, had been a matter of vast surprise to Mrs. Derrick. Time was when Magnus would have forbidden his son to so much as recognise a dishonorable man" (Octopus 179). Under capitalism, Derrick's moral decay is observable in his role as a father and as a husband. Derrick neglects his duties to his family. He no longer instills his scrupulous

beliefs in his son, and he causes his wife to experience emotional turmoil and anguish. His family suffers because of his desire to gain wealth and power. Derrick's behavior, encouraged by capitalism, causes him to err in his moral example to his family.

Derrick's contemplation of his submission to the league is an important indicator of his process of change under capitalism. His thoughts of acquiescence show that the system entices him to participate in corruption because it stimulates his desire to obtain supreme social and financial power: "To control men had ever been his ambition; submission of any kind, his greatest horror....to be able to strike back, to crush his enemy, to defeat the railroad, hold the Corporation in the grip of his fist, put down S. Behrman....To be once more powerful, to command, to dominate" (Octopus 184). Derrick's self-concept shows his dissatisfaction with his current level of success under capitalism. Derrick craves greatness, but it continues to elude him. He is influenced by the system to be discontented with the circumstances of his life and with his place in the hierarchy. Like an aggressive animal, he is programmed by capitalism to want to dominate others forcefully—in this case, S. Behrman and the railroad. He wants to exist at the top of the capitalist hierarchy, and the system causes Derrick to crave superiority among his fellow humans: "For a moment, he saw himself controlling the situation, the foremost figure in his State, feared, respected, thousands of men beneath him, his ambition at length gratified; his career, once apparently brought to naught, completed" (Octopus 185). Hungry for power, Derrick fantasizes about occupying a supreme position in his state of California. His

fantasizing shows his greed is unleashed by capitalism, and it also shows that the system prevents him from being content with his current social status and level of prosperity. Capitalism causes him to doubt his financial and social accomplishments as a wheat grower. The system also causes him to feel unfulfilled because it consistently increases his awareness of more powerful individuals in the capitalist hierarchy. This reality motivates Derrick to desire more money and prestige for himself.

Capitalism inevitably stimulates Derrick's greed to a level at which he succumbs to the system. His submission to the league of wheat growers' wishes indicates this distinct change. The ranchers' final appeal to Derrick is characterized by their collective pressure as they publicly chant his name. His reaction indicates his integrity is the basis of his social prestige among his peers: "To accept control of an organisation whose principles are not yet fixed is a heavy responsibility. I shrink from it" (Octopus 277). Derrick's resistance indicates his desire to uphold his morality publicly in opposition to the league's desires. Derrick, however, is powerless to oppose the system as he gives in to the wheat growers' demands and joins the league. He cannot resist the formidable capitalist forces that act on him: "It was the uprising of The People; the thunder of the outbreak of revolt; the mob demanding to be led, aroused at last, imperious, resistless, overwhelming" (Octopus 279). Derrick's membership in the league guarantees the expansion of his greed because he is inserted at the head of a group of wheat growers who hunger for wealth and power in

the capitalist system. His leadership of this group of greedy capitalists shows Derrick's loss of self-control under capitalism.

Derrick's transformation after he joins the league shows how capitalism continuously feeds his greed. The escalation of his avaricious behavior shows that capitalism causes him to place his own economic prosperity before the interests of the league, and his self-serving needs overshadow the league's objectives in their conflict with the P. and S. W. Railroad. When Harran informs his father of the possibility of opening the wheat market into the Orient, the possible business venture stimulates Derrick's greed. Upon his discovery of this new business opportunity, Derrick is overwhelmed by a strong desire to expand his wealth and social stature: "it appeals to me. It's big and there's a fortune in it. Big chances mean big returns; and I know—your old father isn't a back number yet...I am quick to see chance" (Octopus 319). Derrick fervently seeks financial profit, and his reference to gambling emphatically legitimizes his aspirations. He views the Orient as an untapped market in which he and a few select members of the league will be able to generate significant revenue from their wheat production. His corrupt plan is predicated on his expectation that his other son, Lyman, will fraudulently ensure that freight rates on the P. and S. W. Railroad will be lowered. Derrick is motivated by his desire to profit, and he cannot consider the ramifications of his behavior. He does not ponder the possible negative outcomes of his actions because he is a ruthless profiteer ensnared in the capitalist system.

As Derrick's greed is unleashed by capitalism, he exhibits base behavior and unscrupulous actions. His submission to the league unburdens him of his moral consciousness, and he becomes blatantly selfish. His participation in the wheat economy causes him to give in to his greedy instincts, and he becomes impulsive. Upon his recognition of the possibilities of the wheat trade being opened up into the Orient, Derrick again demonstrates his tendency to gamble: "The great gambler perceived his Chance" (Octopus 319). Derrick is overcome with zeal as a result of his rapacious vision for this new financial possibility in which wheat growers in Tulare County will benefit at the expense of others. His callousness indicates he is incapable of thinking of anything other than his ability to profit: "The torrent of wheat was to be diverted...stranding the middleman, the entrepreneur, the elevator- and mixing-house men dry and despairing, their occupation gone. He saw the farmer suddenly emancipated" (Octopus 319). In this fantasy, Derrick's thoughts of emancipation are overtly selfish because of his attitude regarding the effect of this new market in the Orient on middlemen. Derrick believes that his gain is the middleman's loss, and he rejoices in this realization. He is not troubled by the reality that individuals who make a meager living from wheat will lose their livelihoods if his new vision becomes a reality. Derrick, hypocritical in his condemnation of the railroad, is infused with greed. Under capitalism, he values money, not people.

Colleen Lye comments on Magnus's greedy, ambitious plan. According to Lye, "the seduction of a China market lies in the fantasy of removing the middleman, the idea that the farmer can sell direct to his consumer, in a world of increasingly

globalized marketplaces that has meant ever reduced agency for the producer” (82).

The most significant qualities of Derrick’s economic vision are that he will maximize his profits through new markets, and he will reduce his overhead through the reduction of labor costs. As part of his capitalistic vision, others who are dependent on the wheat economy are to be coldly eliminated from the production process; many people who rely on the wheat trade for their meager incomes will be cast aside. While this economic arrangement benefits Derrick, it is a plan that has dire consequences for the lesser ones in the system. The evaporation of Derrick’s principles and his emergent baseness are distinct indicators of the forces of the capitalist system acting on Derrick. The system erodes his morality because now Derrick’s behavior shows that he is motivated only by his desire to gain wealth and social status. He does not concern himself with the negative consequences of his actions on others.

Derrick’s eroded morality under capitalism is further evidenced by his inclination to fantasize greedily about his opportunities in the wheat economy. As a result of the league’s influence on Derrick, he now believes he is destined for greatness in his society. As he considers Harran’s potential involvement in the aforementioned venture, as well as the other select ranchers who might become participants, Derrick’s egotism is evident: “He would convince them of the magnificence of the new movement. They would be its pioneers” (Octopus 320). Greed overshadows Derrick’s excitement. He, of course, was sought by other capitalists to join the league of ranchers, yet his greed now motivates him to pursue other potential investors to join him in his own corrupt money-making scheme, an

undertaking he never would have approved of prior to his involvement with the league. Derrick's behavior in this instance indicates that his greed has been unleashed by capitalism. He firmly believes he is capable of gaining wealth and power as part of the new potential market, and he also considers how his friends will benefit from this new lucrative economic arrangement. Derrick's avarice engrosses him:

Once again he became the pioneer, hardy, brilliant, taking colossal chances, blazing the way, grasping a fortune—a million in a single day. All the bigness of his nature leaped up again within him. At the magnitude of the inspiration he felt young again, indomitable, the leader at last, king of his fellows, wrestling from fortune at this eleventh hour, before his old age, the place of high command which so long had been denied him. At last he could achieve. (321)

Derrick, in the twilight of his career as a wheat grower, is powerless under the system of capitalism. His presumed last chance to achieve financial glory leaves him vulnerable to the capitalist system. The wheat economy inspires his greedy fantasy, and it causes him to disregard everything in his life other than the pursuit of social prominence and wealth. The opportunity to reap significant financial profit in a new market supports his willingness to take risks, and his inclination to gamble obscures his ability to consider his plan realistically and to consider the consequences of his actions on himself and on others in his society.

Greed Nurtured by Capitalism in The Pit

In The Pit, Jadwin's behavior under capitalism resembles Derrick's in that his greed is also fed by the wheat economy. Jadwin's office is in close proximity to the Chicago Board of Trade, and it is near the location of the wheat pit where speculators congregate for the purpose of trading wheat as a commodity; therefore, Jadwin's work environment is encapsulated by the capitalist financial district. Chicago is the center of the world's wheat economy, and characters are forcefully drawn into this capitalist environment to speculate in wheat because of the financial opportunities of the wheat trade. This market is a source of monetary gain for many, and speculators become entranced by the workings of the wheat economy and instinctively pursue financial gain.

Jadwin's greedy behavior is fueled by this capitalist economic system. As a successful businessman and conservative financial trader in the financial district of Chicago, Jadwin does not regularly participate in wheat speculation until he is acted on by the capitalism. He becomes enthralled by wheat speculation once he hears of the concept of cornering the wheat market, and his greed is stimulated: "There's something, perhaps, in what Charlie says...Corner this stuff—my God" (Pit 73). The prospect of cornering the wheat market excites him because it is a potential source of public notoriety and immense financial profit. Jadwin is conditioned by capitalism to desire both social status and wealth, and his perceptions of what it means to corner the wheat market indicate the concept appeals to him.

The commencement of Jadwin's regular involvement in wheat speculation occurs as a result of his relationship with other capitalists. Samuel Gretry, a

prominent financial trader and partner in a lucrative brokerage house, presents a proposal that stirs Jadwin's greed: he asks Jadwin to participate in an insider-trading scheme. Jadwin is not troubled by the dishonesty of the deal, and this reveals that he does not possess a strong sense of morality--unlike Derrick in his resistance to the league of ranchers. Jadwin is not against unethical business dealings. He is, however, opposed to speculation in this instance, even though the inside information guarantees a large profit margin for both businessmen. Jadwin's innate greed, then, is a factor in his opposition to wheat speculation.

Gretry's proposition shows how capitalism nourishes Jadwin's greed. Gretry appeals to Jadwin's desire for social power by informing him that, should he become a partner to Gretry, both men will establish their dominance over an opposing group of investors under the economic system: "Now...do you come in...I think we can make that Porteous clique look very sick" (Pit 77). Capitalism encourages Jadwin--similarly to the way it encourages Derrick to attempt to defeat Behrman and the P. and S. W. Railroad--to want to ascend to the top of the capitalist hierarchy and to dominate others. Gretry's proposition also stimulates Jadwin's desire for wealth: "And I tell you J., it's found money. The man that sells wheat short on the strength of this has as good as got the money in his vest pocket already" (Pit 78). Jadwin must seek his opportunity to reap financial profit because capitalism requires him to amass financial capital. He is expected to pursue the acquisition of wealth and social prestige under this system. When he encounters lucrative business opportunities, his participation is a necessary response. The capitalist system determines his response

because the system conditions him to desire a powerful public image. Capitalism causes him to seek positive public notoriety through financial gain.

Jadwin's behavior reveals his struggle within capitalism. His perspective on the wheat economy indicates his awareness of the hazards of wheat speculation: "A man gets into this game, and into it, and into it, and before you know he can't pull out....I don't want to make any more money, Sam" (Pit 78). Jadwin's response to Gretry's proposal is problematic because he has made money in the past under the capitalist system, yet he asserts that he does not want to add to his wealth. Jadwin was motivated in his past speculation, as well as in his other business ventures, by his desire to reap profit. He acknowledges his greed and his perceived vulnerability to speculation as factors in his reluctance: "and the trouble is not that I don't want to speculate, but that I *do*--too much" (Pit 78). He recognizes his inability to control his greedy behavior, and this explains his opposition to Gretry's scheme. Jadwin is afraid of his impulsiveness and of his perceived inability to control his actions in the arena of speculation. He fears behavior which he cannot control, and in doing so, Jadwin shows he exhibits self-awareness because he expresses his helplessness against the forces of capitalism.

Jadwin's impulsive behavior is a significant characteristic of the effect of capitalism on his greed. The first instance of this behavior is visible in his business relationship with Gretry. His involvement in Gretry's corrupt venture is determined by the flip of a coin: "then suddenly—the gambling instinct that a lifetime passed in that place had cultivated in him—exclaimed: 'All right. Flip a coin'" (Pit 80).

Jadwin's gambling tendencies surface, and as a result of the coin toss, Jadwin becomes a participant in Gretry's scheme. Jadwin reaps fifty thousand dollars in net profit, and this monetary gain fuels his greedy behavior. He becomes a ravenous capitalist who is incapable of ceasing his involvement in wheat speculation. He cannot control his actions, and his aggressiveness is an indicator of his increased greediness under capitalism. His behavior is distinctively different after his deal in wheat with Gretry: "Jadwin was aggressive, assertive, and his addresses had all the persistence and vehemence of veritable attack" (Pit 101). Capitalism encourages him to assert himself aggressively in his financial ventures. The system brings out his baseness, and it drives him to acquire wealth and prestige.

Jadwin's incessant speculation shows the effect of capitalism on the development of his greed. Charles Cressler, Jadwin's capitalist peer, reveals Jadwin's compulsiveness: "since his deal in May wheat he's been getting into it more and more" (Pit 140). In the past, Jadwin rarely engaged in wheat speculation, and he was reluctant to join Gretry's scheme because he did not trust that he could control his actions in the enticing arena of speculation. Capitalism destroys his self-awareness, and at this point, his behavior is animalistic. He is incapable of checking his impulses, and he is unable to cease his involvement in the wheat economy. Jadwin becomes obsessive. He must continue to invest and to add to his profits, and he desires to elevate his social stature in the capitalist hierarchy. Capitalism tugs at him as he is pulled into the ominous world of the wheat economy: "Jadwin, inevitably, had been again drawn into the troubled waters of the Pit" (Pit 168). His continuous

participation under capitalism is now inevitable because he is incapable of ceasing his avaricious behavior. He is consumed by his desire to profit and to reach the top of the capitalist hierarchy. Capitalism drives his existence: "Every time he speculated in wheat, it was upon a larger scale, and every time he won" (Pit 191). Jadwin behaves as though he is an addicted gambler who is unable to restrain himself. The capitalist system feeds this process. Jadwin reaps a profit and wins. He then uses his financial capital in his following speculative ventures. It is a continuous cycle that fuels his greedy behavior. His pursuit of wealth and power through wheat speculation consistently increases. He is never satisfied, and he becomes more involved with speculation each day of his life. Speculation dictates his existence: "It was with him the instant he woke in the morning. It kept him company during his hasty breakfast... 'Wheat—wheat—wheat, wheat—wheat—wheat'" (Pit 247). Jadwin is helpless under capitalism. He is obsessive, and he is driven by his desire to profit so that he will exceed the prominence of his fellow capitalists in terms of their wealth and public stature.

An intriguing aspect of Jadwin's transformation under capitalism is that he surpasses his capitalist peers' avaricious behavior. Jadwin's risky behavior is revealed when he ignores Gretry's warning to cease his incessant speculation and aggressive strategies: "Instantly—disregarding Gretry's entreaties as to caution—Jadwin had brought the vast bulk of his entire fortune to bear" (Pit 169). Jadwin, of course, would only agree to engage in wheat speculation after he endured significant pressure from Gretry, a greedy speculator himself. Under capitalism, Jadwin reaches a point where

he is willing to risk most of his financial resources in order to dominate his peers and expand his wealth. He surpasses his peers' greed, and he exhibits behavior that has been previously uncharacteristic of him. The system also causes Jadwin to become irrational as he impulsively switches from a seller of wheat commodities to a buyer: "I'm going to boost this market right through till the last bell rings" (Pit 173). His behavior in this instance is characterized by immense risk-taking. Jadwin fails to demonstrate the ability to consider the consequences of his actions. He is incapable of demonstrating rational thought processes, and he believes he is supreme and that he can dominate others in every possible way through speculation. Under capitalism, Jadwin only thinks in terms of obtaining a position of definitive power in the wheat economy.

Jadwin's acquisition of a seat on the Chicago Board of Trade stems from his capitalist-driven desire for social prominence and power. This aspect of Jadwin's behavior exemplifies the occurrence of avarice among individuals at the top of the capitalist hierarchy. Jadwin possesses enough wealth and social power that he is capable of purchasing a seat in an exclusive capitalist organization. His acceptance into the board is based largely on his financial power under capitalism because it is predicated on his ability to acquire financial capital. Under capitalism, Jadwin is required to join the board to legitimize his social status. In order to prove his success to his peers, he must possess this membership. He must show his power outwardly.

Selfishness and Arrogance under the Capitalist System in The Pit

Jadwin's selfish indifference toward other humans is a notable feature of capitalism's effect on the nourishment of his greed. Jadwin wants to profit in the wheat economy, and the consequences of his actions on other humans do not factor into his decisions as a wheat speculator. Jadwin views wheat as money and not as a vital source of sustenance for humans. Under capitalism, he perceives people as consumers and who provide him with wealth and prestige. Jadwin's perspective shortly before his wheat corner shows his ruthlessness: "It's the 'European demand' at last. They must have wheat, and I've got it to give to 'em—wheat that I bought, oh, at seventy cents, some of it, and they'll pay the market—that is, eighty cents, for it. Oh, they'll pay more. They'll pay eighty-two if I want 'em to" (Pit 208). Capitalism destroys Jadwin's moral consciousness. He ceases his philanthropic pursuits to help the children of Chicago, and instead, he uses his resources to expand his wealth. His exploitation of others is an emergent feature of his greed. He wants to reap financial gain through the wheat trade without much regard for other humans. As far as he is concerned, he wants maximum profits, and the welfare of others does not enter into his consciousness. He merely views people as consumers whom he can use in order to profit financially under the capitalist system.

Jadwin's aforementioned selfish behavior exemplifies an integral part of Norris's world view. Jadwin shows just how deleterious human greed fostered by capitalism can be and what the consequences are for humans throughout the world. Through Jadwin's greed, we see others suffer. Jadwin's imminent corner on the wheat market has broad-reaching consequences on humans throughout the European

civilization: “And all the while, Liverpool, Paris, Odessa, and Budapest clamoured ever louder and louder for the grain that meant food to the crowded streets and barren farms of Europe” (Pit 237). Under capitalism, individuals’ greed is fed, and American capitalists such as Jadwin perceive life from an entirely selfish vantage point. Either they do not care about or they do not consider the consequences of their economic pursuits on others, especially those beyond the United States. Jadwin is incapable of acknowledging the impact of his actions on consumers elsewhere in the world. Capitalism influences him to look out for his own selfish interests. The suffering of others does not weigh on his conscience.

Deception and corruption are related components of Jadwin’s selfishness. His determination to maintain his corner on the wheat market causes him to engage in corruption that is exploitative in nature. Jadwin owns numerous newspapers and trade journals, and he uses them fraudulently to influence the marketplace in order to benefit his financial interests: “What do I own all these newspapers and trade journals for? We’ll begin sending out reports to-morrow that’ll discourage any big wheat planting” (Pit 304). Jadwin’s perspective on farmers is as equally exploitative as his view of the consumer. Jadwin endeavors to influence wheat growers in order to benefit his corner. He resorts to fraud to promote his corrupt agenda, and it comes at the expense of the wheat grower as well as those who publish the newspapers and journals. He compromises the legitimacy of those publications to benefit himself.

Jadwin’s arrogance toward other capitalists is an important indicator of his growth of greed. His financial success causes him to form a self-concept that exudes

narcissism. He brags and believes he is the epitome of the supreme capitalist: “I knew it was a good thing to buy wheat...Oh, they’ll all buy now—when I’ve showed ‘em the way” (Pit 224). Jadwin’s societal power perpetuates his egotism, and he considers himself to be the leader of his peers, at the top of the capitalist hierarchy. He desires to control the market, and once he achieves his corner, he fantasizes that he is the ruler of the wheat. He perceives himself to be dominant and above all other speculators in the capitalist hierarchy. He greedily contemplates his position of dominance in the marketplace: “wheat...was not to be got except from him—and at whatever price he chose to impose” (Pit 247). Jadwin’s control over his peers causes his greed to thrive under capitalism, and in this case, the wheat economy influences Jadwin’s oppressiveness.

Jadwin’s corner reveals his omnipotence in the wheat market, and it further shows the effect the capitalism on his greed. Norris includes an allusion to Napoleon, to emphasize Jadwin’s quick action, strategic adeptness, and tyrannical approach to the marketplace:

the figure and name of Curtis Jadwin loomed suddenly huge and formidable in the eye of the public. There was now no wheat on the Chicago market. He, the great man, the ‘Napoleon of La Salle Street,’ had it all. He sold it or hoarded it, as suited his pleasure. He dictated the price to those men who must buy it of him to fill their contracts. His hand was upon the indicator of the wheat dial of the Board of

Trade, and he moved it through as many or as few of the degrees of the circle as he chose. (291)

Jadwin dominates the marketplace, and he is the supreme speculator among the businessmen in the capitalist hierarchy. He is thoroughly fixated on his economic power, and he rejoices in the domination of his peers. His public prominence is evident as he awes even the common citizens of Chicago. His acquisition of wealth and social prominence is at its pinnacle, and seemingly, there is nothing left in his society to feed his greed. Capitalism places him in a position in which he cruelly influences the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

Capitalism also fosters Jadwin's hostility toward his competitors. This aspect of his behavior is exemplified through Jadwin's ruthlessness. In his business relationship with his primary adversary in the marketplace, Calvin Crookes, Jadwin is violently disdainful of his opponent: "There's not room for Crookes and me in this game. One of us two has got to control this market. If he gets in my way, by God, I'll smash him" (Pit 277). Under the capitalist system, Jadwin views himself as being formidable, and his self-concept encourages his aggressiveness in his dealings with others. He firmly believes he possesses the power to destroy his opponents in the arena of wheat speculation. His ruthlessness colors his hostility toward other capitalists: "The more the fellows cringed to him, the tighter he wrenched the screw" (Pit 307). Jadwin is transformed from a philanthropist who cares about his fellow humans to a cutthroat, insensitive capitalist. This change in Jadwin is directly attributable to his perpetual participation in the wheat economy: "in the end, the

business hardened his heart to any distress his mercilessness might entail” (Pit 307).

Jadwin’s ultimate level of greed is characterized by his complete selfishness. He does not care about anything but his financial power and his access to speculative business deals. Capitalism smothers his sensitivity for his fellow humans.

Jadwin’s Materialism in The Pit

Jadwin’s materialism is also a notable characteristic of his greed. Before his involvement in Gretry’s scheme, he is moderately wealthy and powerful, but he is not concerned with showing off his wealth. His residence is modest: “He lived...in one of those discouraging eternal yellow limestone houses with a basement dining-room” (Pit 68). He does not want to appear ostentatious, unlike many others in powerful positions who often do desire to exhibit their wealth—and likely their power—such as Derrick. However, Jadwin’s attitude toward material changes shortly after his deal with Gretry. His acquisition of a new residence is one of the first indicators of his increasing greed. Aunt Wessels describes his new home: “why it’s a palace! Of course I know it. Why it takes in the whole block, child, and there’s a conservatory pretty near as big as this house” (Pit 151). As Jadwin’s wealth and social prestige increase, he must show off his power to the individuals in the capitalist hierarchy. Jadwin’s mansion is a source of satisfaction at his financial accomplishments, and his new home also accentuates his social prominence and his vast wealth. In order to appear influential in the capitalist system, he needs to display his wealth and impress his peers. Above all, Jadwin must meet his perceived ideal of the dominant capitalist. Capitalism encourages Jadwin to believe that his wealth must be on display for

everyone in his society: he must be noticed. His social prominence is dependent on this societal practice.

Jadwin's acquisition of a country estate and steam yacht further reveals his need to prove his immense wealth to his peers. Laura Dearborn, Jadwin's fiancée, fondly describes these aforementioned materialistic images associated with Jadwin's wealth. In speaking to Aunt Wessels and to her sister, she says: "We're to go there after we are married, and Mr. Jadwin has bought the dearest, loveliest, daintiest little steam yacht" (Pit 151). In this excerpt, Laura's affectionate description of the yacht indicates her attachment to Jadwin's capitalist spoils. She desires Aunt Wessels and her sister to know of Jadwin's material acquisitions and her resultant improvement in lifestyle. Jadwin's steam yacht is yet another ostentatious image that shows his change under capitalism. He desires to display his wealth and power to other capitalists, and typical of a businessman, one who is driven by greed, he rarely visits his country estate because he is too obsessed with making money. He must not be away from the financial district.

Capitalism and Marriage

Jadwin's greedy behavior is also visible through his relationship with his wife. Laura's perspective indicates that Jadwin's desire for wealth and social power causes him to neglect his wife. Jadwin regularly focuses on the wheat economy instead of his wife: "you only go into town because you can't keep away from La Salle Street" (Pit 199). Wheat speculation pulls Jadwin away from Laura repeatedly, and Laura becomes a casualty under capitalism. Laura also reveals Jadwin's distinct change as a

result of his participation in speculation: "You never used to be this way....your mind seems to be far away from me" (Pit 203). Laura perceives her husband as an obsessive gambler who, because of his greed, cares more about speculation than his bond of marriage. Her perspective indicates Jadwin was not always so greedy. Prior to his involvement in speculation, he honored his obligations to her. She recognizes his greedy behavior, behavior that was encouraged by capitalism, as being the source of their poor relationship.

Laura's perspective on Jadwin indicates that her husband is hopelessly trapped by wheat speculation. Jadwin's incessant involvement in speculation indicates that capitalism controls his existence: "You've forgotten my very existence. When it's a question of wheat I count for nothing. And just now, when you read the despatch to yourself, you were all different; such a look came into your face, so cruelly eager, and triumphant and keen" (Pit 208). Laura's perspective shows that capitalism prevents her husband from engaging in healthy social interactions with her. The system drives his obsessive behavior, and this occurrence undermines his ability to be intimate with his wife. Wheat speculation will not allow him to engage in serious conversation with his wife about the troubled state of their relationship. Instead, it causes him to ignore her desires and to focus on his business matters. Jadwin's behavior also indicates that he views his wife as part of his display of wealth. The system forces him to be engaged in his business dealings and to fight against his capitalist competitors: "She thought of her husband hurrying away from her, ignoring her and her love for him in the haste and heat of battle" (Pit 278). Wheat speculation causes Jadwin to ignore all

matters in his life outside of the wheat economy. Laura's relationship with her husband reveals that capitalism nourishes Jadwin's greed to a point at which he is incapable of ceasing his speculation because of his greedy competitiveness. The system prevents him from retiring. Instead he continues onward, motivated by the system to increase his wealth and prominence without any concern for his wife.

Laura shows that under capitalism wives of capitalists become financial partners whose husbands are often drawn away from them by the system. Capitalism drives a wedge between wives of capitalists and their husbands. Wives benefit monetarily and materially as financial partners to their husbands; however, under the system, wives, as a result of their husbands' greed, lose their emotional closeness with their husbands. Laura loses her emotional connection with Jadwin because of capitalism, and her perspective shows her husband's personal transformation because of his involvement in wheat speculation. In this respect, Laura's relationship with Jadwin elucidates the role of capitalism in the intensification of her husband's greed.

Conclusion

In both volumes of Norris's intended wheat trilogy, Norris portrays capitalism as an oppressive force on the individual. As I have proven, the system brings out and fuels characters' innate greed. In The Octopus, capitalism acts on Derrick as it draws out and nourishes his greed. The system pushes him into greedy behavior that he is incapable of controlling. Once his greed is unleashed, he cannot cease his participation in the capitalist system because of his ensnarement in the wheat economy. Instead, his greed is continuously nurtured, and he becomes selfish as he

seeks the acquisition of wealth and power through wheat farming. In The Pit, the effect of capitalism on Jadwin is similar. The system also acts on him. His greed is brought out under capitalism, and his greedy behavior is fostered and then flourishes because of wheat speculation. Jadwin is driven by capitalism to gain wealth and social prestige. In this process, he becomes noticeably aggressive and selfish, and the economic system in which he participates perpetuates his greedy behavior. In both characters, then, Norris shows that in a naturalistic world, capitalism thrives because of people's innate greed. The system draws it out and unmercifully nurtures it.

Chapter Three: The Disposability of the Individual under Capitalism

Introduction

In both volumes of The Epic of the Wheat, Norris portrays capitalism as a powerful force on the individual. In a literary portrayal of this system, characters are disposed of and lose their wealth, their social prestige, their physical well-being, and occasionally their lives. People are disposable because there is a continuous supply of humans to occupy the economic roles of individuals who are destroyed. Either one human is replaced by another at the same hierarchical level, or more powerful capitalists toss the less powerful aside. In either case, capitalism always wins because it continues onward unimpeded by the destruction of individuals who participate in the system: it thrives even though the humans who enable the system to function are frequently ruined. Individuals are motivated to seek opportunities to profit, and the system encourages individuals to be selfish and to gain at the expense of others through economic competition. Capitalism ensures that humans will always be available to fill the economic roles of those who fail because the system conditions humans to want more than they have. At the end of the The Octopus, capitalism destroys Magnus Derrick, a participant in the wheat economy, and the system inevitably refills his economic role. The system functions similarly in The Pit. Curtis Jadwin and Charles Cressler are destroyed by capitalism, but the system is saturated with other businessmen who will replace both characters. Both novels reveal that capitalism sustains itself and thrives because of the expendability of humans.

The Capitalist Hierarchy and Economic Competition

Norris's literary portrayal of the capitalist hierarchy in both novels shows that characters are engaged in ferocious economic competition with one another. Characters compete with one another either between hierarchical planes or at the same level. Under the system, there is frequent upward mobility for characters, and most levels of the hierarchy beneath the top are continuously in flux. In the structure of the hierarchy, people always benefit from individuals who are beneath them, and although all levels are unstable, the highest level is the most secure place for individuals. In The Octopus, Shelgrim, Cedarquist, and Gerard are dominant capitalists who exist at the highest level of the hierarchy, and each character enjoys a secure financial existence under capitalism; however, as Norris shows us in The Pit, even characters at the top are vulnerable to ruin in the capitalist system. Jadwin and Cressler are elite businessmen, and both are destroyed by capitalism. In The Octopus, Derrick ascends to an upper level in the hierarchy, but he is prevented from going any higher by the most powerful capitalists at the top. In order to profit, Shelgrim and Gerard oppress Derrick and the other wheat growers at his hierarchical level. Individuals at the top are not the only capitalists who benefit, though. Behrman is above Derrick in the hierarchy, and he represents the business interests of the more powerful capitalists he serves: Behrman gains under the economic system when Shelgrim and Gerard profit. Each of these aforementioned characters rises up through the hierarchy and gains wealth and social power. Even Derrick and other successful wheat growers in Tulare County ascend to a certain point in the hierarchy. The

economic competition under capitalism, however, causes some individuals to rise higher than others.

Norris's portrayal of the capitalist hierarchy in both novels reveals his belief that individuals beneath the top level are hostile toward the most powerful capitalists at the top. He emphasizes that the individuals at lower levels will, at some point, violently react to the upper-class capitalist victors: "Yes the People would turn some day, and turning, rend those who now preyed upon them" (Octopus 608). Norris implies that individuals at the same hierarchical level as Derrick and the other successful wheat growers of Tulare County will eventually rebel against the supreme capitalists at the top—Shelgrim, Gerard, and Cedarquist. The problem with this aspect of his perspective is that the system of capitalism encourages all characters to prey on one another. While the most powerful capitalists exploit individuals beneath them in the system, Derrick and the other wheat growers are also guilty of exploitative behavior because they use individuals beneath them in the hierarchy in order to benefit monetarily.

The capitalist hierarchy in both novels is characterized by ruthless economic competition under capitalism. In the aftermath of the shootout between the wheat growers and the railroad in The Octopus, the actions of the capitalist victors reveal aggression toward the individual: "It was a half-ludicrous, half-horrible 'dog eat dog,' an unspeakable cannibalism" (Norris 608). The bloodthirsty competitiveness Norris portrays in the capitalist system is conspicuously destructive in terms of the outcome for losers in the wheat economy. In theory, the capitalist system is supposedly

civilized, yet Norris uses animalistic imagery to show capitalism's barbarous effect on the individual. He indicates there is a distinctively violent quality to capitalism because characters are motivated to compete against one another selfishly. In The Pit, Norris also reveals that capitalism encourages brutal financial competition among characters. The behavior of wheat speculators at the wheat pit shows this characteristic of the wheat economy: "the rush of millions of bushels of grain, and the clatter of millions of dollars, and the tramping and the wild shouting of thousands of men filled all the air with the noise of battle! Yes, here was drama in deadly earnest--drama and tragedy and death, and the jar of mortal fighting" (Norris 38). Norris depicts a system in which capitalists are at war with one another. Characters brutally fight against one another within the confines of the wheat economy to determine the levels within the capitalist hierarchy, and as a result of the battling, some characters win, and others lose. In both novels, Norris shows that the capitalist hierarchy is characterized by constant mobility beneath the top because of the perpetual economic competition within the wheat economy.

Norris portrays capitalism as being frequently violent for participants in the system. The occurrence of physical violence in both works shows the brutal nature of economic competition under capitalism, and such violence is often represented metaphorically. In The Octopus, Gerard and the other elite capitalists atop the hierarchy are portrayed as ravenous vampires who feast on the blood of the wheat growers who lose in the shootout with the railroad: "They fattened on the blood of the People, on the blood of the men who had been killed at the ditch" (Octopus 608). In

this comparison, Gerard and Shelgrim are depicted as exploitative railroad magnates who sadistically gain as a result of their brutal consumption of the capitalists in the middle to upper levels of the capitalist hierarchy. They are upper-class, civilized capitalists, yet Norris portrays them as base, oppressive businessmen who gain monetarily through brutal means.

Norris also uses metaphorical violence to show the effect of the violence of capitalism on capitalists at the top of the hierarchy. Shortly before Jadwin's defeat, businessmen beneath the top of the hierarchy involved in wheat speculation exhibit seeming bloodlust at the prospect of destroying Jadwin and redistributing his economic power among the victors: "There in the middle of the Pit, surrounded and assaulted by herd after herd of wolves yelping for his destruction, he stood braced" (Pit 344). The less powerful businessmen are depicted as ferocious animals who collectively desire to devour their more powerful capitalist adversary in the hierarchy. The wheat economy is permeated with people who aggressively seek Jadwin's destruction because they want to benefit monetarily from his annihilation, and, as base humans, they instinctively want to see him lose and suffer. This comparison shows that Norris depicts wheat speculation as a destructive competition for the individual at any level in the capitalist hierarchy.

Capitalism's Omnipotence

Norris's literary portrayal of capitalism in both novels indicates his belief in the omnipotence of the system in its relationship with the individual. Norris consistently shows that the system is far more powerful than the capitalist, regardless

of the individual's power in the capitalist hierarchy. In both novels, characters are just cogs in the capitalist machine who are easily replaced if they are destroyed, especially if they are below the top of the hierarchy. The economic system progresses onward as a force that consumes humans who are powerless to control their destinies: "Nature was, then, a gigantic engine...crushing out the human atom standing in its way" (Octopus 577). Those who fail are pushed aside, and others seize financial control. The winners, regardless of their position in the capitalist hierarchy, may eventually lose as well because the system is an overpowering force.

In many instances, Norris depicts characters and capitalism as opponents. While human beings and capitalism are non-equivalent forces, they are antagonists nonetheless. Capitalism is the enemy of the individual because its abstract forces frequently destroy individuals who seek financial profit within the system. Capitalism is dependent on individuals to perform economic duties within the system, but there are always individuals ready to refill positions that have been vacated by individuals who have perished through economic competition: "the individual suffers, but the race goes on" (Octopus 651-652). The system uses people to sustain itself, and the destruction of the individual is a frequent consequence of one's participation in economic competition. Norris also shows that capitalism often requires humans to stand in for the system. This characteristic of capitalism creates adversarial relationships between humans in the system, and so humans, because of capitalism, often become enemies. Norris emphasizes that characters can stand in for the system and wield significant power, but, in the end, capitalism is omnipotent.

In The Octopus, Norris depicts capitalism as an unrelenting force on the characters who participate in the wheat economy. Capitalism defeats Derrick and other wheat growers who occupy prominent positions in the capitalist hierarchy. These characters do not exist at the highest hierarchical level, but they are prominent capitalists. Their experiences in the wheat economy indicate that the capitalist system is more powerful than any human: “*But the Wheat remained. Untouched, unassailable, undefiled, that mighty world-force...indifferent to the human swarm*” (Octopus 651). This literary portrayal of the wheat economy indicates that the forces of capitalism are omnipotent and indiscriminate. Characters are drawn into the system, and they are helpless against its abstract forces. Innumerable characters drift toward the wheat economy and seek monetary profit, and the system determines the individual’s fate.

Like Derrick’s ruin in The Octopus, Jadwin’s ruin in The Pit is caused by capitalism. Norris shows that wheat speculation, a force within the capitalist system, defeats Jadwin. While Jadwin’s capitalist competitors certainly influence his collapse, Norris emphasizes that Jadwin is destroyed by the system: “They can cheer now, all they want. *They* didn’t do it. It was the wheat itself that beat him; no combination of men could have done it—go on, cheer, you damn fools!” (Pit 347). Just as in The Octopus, the capitalist system in The Pit is a force that overpowers the individual and cannot be controlled. In Jadwin’s case, the system destroys an individual at the top of the hierarchy—a character at Shelgrim’s hierarchical level in The Octopus. Jadwin’s destruction indicates that even the most powerful capitalists are incapable of

overpowering the wheat economy because the forces of capitalism inevitably dominate the individual. According to Richard Lehan:

In *The Pit* Norris depicts the limits of human power: when Jadwin tries to raise the price of wheat beyond its limit, the market breaks and he is a ruined man. Every man and every social institution has its limit, and even abstract matters like wheat speculation are governed by laws that ultimately come back to nature--back to the land, back to wheat, and to the forces out of which life germinates. (128)

In terms of financial and social power, Jadwin may surpass his capitalist peers, but he cannot become bigger than capitalism. Once he establishes his corner, he quickly learns that humans are incapable of becoming more powerful than the system as the abstract forces of capitalism crush him. Jadwin's individual power is regulated and, in the end, destroyed by the capitalist system.

In *The Octopus*, Norris portrays some characters atop the hierarchy as being cognizant of the immensity of the forces of capitalism. The vast financial and social power these characters have provides them with clarity other characters beneath them in the hierarchy lack. Shelgrim, one such character, sees capitalism as a force even he cannot control. He is unique because as the most powerful figure for the P. and S. W. Railroad, he stands in for capitalism. The railroad company he leads is the enemy of the wheat growers, and his business perspective on the P. and S. W. Railroad indicates his belief in the infinite power of capitalism over the individual: "if I run my road, as a business proposition, I can do nothing. I can *not* control it. It is a force born

out of certain conditions, and I--no man--can stop it or control it" (Octopus 576).

Norris portrays an economic system that always overpowers the individual.

Shelgrim's perspective emphasizes that humans are pitted against a system. Even though Shelgrim exists at the top the capitalist hierarchy, capitalism is vastly more powerful than he is. He recognizes that the individual is powerless against the forces of the system, and he acknowledges there are winners and losers under capitalism and that ruin is inevitable for some: "Complications may arise, conditions that bear hard on the individual--crush him maybe" (Octopus 576). Capitalism annihilates some individuals and allows others to continue to participate. The system destroys individuals at all levels in the capitalist hierarchy.

Norris's portrayal of Cressler in The Pit indicates that even the most powerful capitalists are not exempt from the forces of capitalism. Cressler occupies a position at the top of the capitalist hierarchy: he is wealthy, he is socially prominent, and he is a member of the Board of Trade. His narrow escape from ruin as a participant in a mammoth wheat corner early in his business career teaches him to avoid wheat speculation, yet capitalism overpowers him during his late-adult life and destroys him. Cressler's behavior shows that even if an individual refuses to participate in the wheat economy, the system will inevitably draw him in and usually dispose of him.

Cressler is scornful of the individuals who are constantly ready to fill the spaces of those who fail in the wheat economy. He describes the harmful effect of wheat speculation on the typical day-trader: "First thing you know he's thrown up his honest, humdrum position--oh I've seen it hundreds of times" (Pit 116). Cressler

shows that the financially competitive economic system of the wheat economy encourages individuals to be self-destructive and amoral. Capitalism influences characters to give up their safe economic roles in the lower levels of the capitalist hierarchy in order to pursue the risky practice of wheat speculation: “Oh, the fine, promising manly young men I’ve seen wrecked—absolutely and hopelessly wrecked and ruined by speculation” (Pit 116). Characters are driven to trade in the wheat economy because there are consistent vacancies in the capitalist hierarchy as a result of individuals’ ruin under the system. Wheat speculation regularly provides individuals with opportunities to dominate their peers financially and to elevate their positions in the capitalist hierarchy. The system presents individuals with the potential to achieve significant upward mobility in the capitalist society without a lot of effort: “They make three hundred, five hundred, yes, even a thousand dollars sometimes in a couple of hours, without so much as raising a finger” (Pit 116). Success in the system certainly involves some strategy, but it mostly occurs because of luck and one’s willingness to risk financial resources. The system causes characters to engage in behavior that is self-destructive and exploitative, and as Cressler shows, the system perpetually devours individuals. This process is continuous because Cressler indicates he has seen innumerable individuals be destroyed by wheat speculation during his lifetime.

Cressler’s morality further reveals the omnipotent power of capitalism on the individual. Cressler initially opposes wheat speculation as a means by which to gain financial profit because he deplores the unscrupulous characteristics of economic

competition in the wheat economy. He understands the dangers of wheat speculation because of his first-hand knowledge of speculation and his past experiences under capitalism: “he had learned his lesson....And he was never wearied of protesting against the evil and the danger of trading in margins” (Pit 18). Cressler imparts his scrupulosity to others. He desires to prevent Jadwin’s involvement in speculation, and he is motivated to obstruct Jadwin’s movement into the wheat economy because of his morality and his existential knowledge. Like Hargus, Cressler’s very existence should deter Jadwin from pursuing speculation, but it does not. Cressler’s warnings are incessant, and they reflect his strong character: “it’s wrong; the world’s food should not be at the mercy of the Chicago wheat pit” (Pit 18). Cressler’s disapproval of the effect of wheat speculation on global consumers shows that capitalism has dire consequences for individuals at the bottom of the world civilization. His perspective on the wheat economy shows that the economic system is oppressive to humans.

Norris’s depiction of Cressler’s involvement in Crookes’s ring shows that the individual at any level in the capitalist hierarchy is powerless against the forces of capitalism. Cressler repeatedly resists wheat speculation, yet the system eventually brings about his participation. Other capitalists at Cressler’s hierarchical level—in this case, Crookes’s group of speculators—tempt Cressler to pursue a massive venture in the wheat economy: “Why, Charlie, we’re going to make our everlasting fortunes” (Pit 241). Cressler and the other capitalists in the speculation group already occupy the highest level in the capitalist hierarchy; however, the system encourages these characters to compete against Jadwin and to dominate him (of course, Cressler is

unaware of the identity of the group's opponent). Capitalism encourages these businessmen to deceive one of their own in order to defeat an adversary at their level: "Cressler is not to know by the longest kind of chalk; anyhow not until he's so far in, he can't pull out" (Pit 243). Given Cressler's morality and perspective on speculation, his compliance is a distinct indicator of the overpowering forces of capitalism on the individual. He does not need to reach a higher level in the capitalist hierarchy because he already occupies a position at the highest level. The forces of the wheat economy, though, influence his self-destructive behavior. He is drawn into speculation and inevitably into a financial competition that jeopardizes his lifestyle--wheat speculation is inherently risky. His participation shows the competitiveness of the capitalist system as well deceptiveness as forces on the individual.

Cressler's participation in the speculative deal with Crookes's ring indicates he is acted on by capitalism. After he commits himself to the financial clique, he publicly feigns ignorance about the nature of Crookes's speculative venture; however, when he is broken financially and pulls out of the ring, he acknowledges that he compromised his morality and gave into temptation. Cressler is incapable of resisting the forces of capitalism: "I did know. I knew from the first it was to be speculation. I tried to deceive myself" (Pit 289). Even though Cressler indicates he learned from his past mistakes and establishes a strong moral consciousness, he experiences an inevitable degenerative downfall under capitalism. He is transformed into a hypocrite. His personal honor is destroyed, and he loses his money. His suicide is a "final surrender to a temptation he had never outlived" (Pit 321). The system defeats

Cressler, and his personal erosion ends with his death. Norris portrays Cressler's suicide as the only alternative to his moral and financial collapse under capitalism. Other capitalists act on Jadwin, but it is the system that beats him as he is forced by capitalism to give in to temptation.

Hargus also reveals capitalism's power over the individual. He shows that people are consistently drawn into capitalism and that individuals usually are not deterred by the failures of others under the system because capitalism influences people to profit at all costs. Jadwin acknowledges Hargus's past failed wheat corner: "And that was Hargus, that wretched broken'....And Jadwin, taken all aback, sat for a moment speechless...there was a long silence" (Pit 77). Jadwin is aware of the dismal effect of wheat speculation on Hargus, yet he pursues a corner in wheat and, like Hargus, he is ruined. Jadwin's knowledge of Hargus's story does not prevent him from participating in speculation, and it does not deter him from cornering wheat. In the end, Jadwin's life is comparable to Hargus's, and just as Hargus's failure does not discourage Jadwin from participating in wheat speculation and cornering wheat, Jadwin's failure will not deter others in the capitalist system from endeavoring to profit from wheat speculation.

Hargus gains wisdom under capitalism because of his failed corner long ago. He is made aware that the individual cannot control the forces of capitalism as he was destroyed by the system when he tried to maintain his corner. Even though he acquires this knowledge, the system still motivates him to participate in speculation. Hargus's response to Jadwin's charitable gesture shows that wheat speculation

possesses him. As soon as Hargus receives Jadwin's money, he asks Jadwin for inside information on the current wheat market: "But just a little tip now, hey?" (Pit 302).

While Hargus understands the dangers of speculation and has lived as a pauper for many years because of his failed corner, his behavior indicates he is powerless against the system. Capitalism acts on him, and this reality shows that the system is far more powerful than the individual. Jadwin's reaction to Hargus's question indicates that Jadwin, too, is incapable of resisting the forces of capitalism. He refuses to give Hargus inside information because he wants to protect him from the dangers of speculation, but Jadwin hypocritically continues to participate in wheat speculation.

Just as Norris portrays capitalism as an omnipotent, adversarial force that destroys individuals, he also shows that the system thrives because of the continuous supply of humans in the capitalist system. Capitalism sustains itself because it fosters a cycle of human life that allows the system to evolve: "FORCE only existed--- FORCE that brought men into the world, FORCE that crowded them out of it to make way for the succeeding generation" (Octopus 634). The system disposes of individuals it no longer wants, and gathers new humans as they are needed. Each successive generation provides new humans to re-populate the system. This indicates that Norris depicts capitalism as a continuous system that flourishes because of an endless supply of humans, and the individual's actions whether moral or amoral are irrelevant because the system always wins: "Greed, cruelty, selfishness, and inhumanity are short-lived" (Octopus 651-652). Under capitalism, the individual can experience ruin or death, and it does not impede the growth of the system because

there is a bottomless population of humans in the United States who will perpetuate the system. The abstract forces of capitalism use up and discard the people who are no longer important to the system, and these forces also restock the system.

Disposability in The Octopus

In The Octopus, capitalism destroys Derrick. At the end of the novel, Derrick is ruined because the league of ranchers' corrupt scheme against the P. and S. W. Railroad fails. Derrick loses his social prestige, his wealth, and his livelihood. His family is also dismantled. Derrick's degeneration is brought about by his participation in the capitalist system: "he had failed. He was ruined. Harran was gone. His ranch would soon go; his money was gone. Lyman was worse than dead. His own honour had been prostituted. Gone, gone, everything he held dear, gone, lost, and swept away in that fierce struggle" (Octopus 559). Even though he survives with his life, he is destroyed. Derrick tries to reach the top of the societal hierarchy, but he fails, and his downfall is markedly dismal. Under capitalism, Derrick's vacant economic role is immediately filled by Behrman. Derrick's degeneration allows others in the capitalist society to benefit—in this case a more powerful capitalist. Los Muertos is confiscated by Behrman who will profit in the wheat economy at Derrick's expense. Derrick's loss of social prestige in his community also creates a void that offers an opportunity for someone else within the wheat economy to fill.

Derrick's ruin shows that his behavior under capitalism resembles Behrman's in terms of his attitude toward characters beneath him in the capitalist hierarchy. Prior to his ruin, Derrick displaces his tenant farmers in order to increase his profit margin.

He desires to maximize his profits even though it has an adverse effect on his tenants. Presley comments on Derrick's business decision: "He sunk a great deal more than any of us believed in his ranch, when he resolved to turn off most of the tenants and farm the ranch himself" (Octopus 562). Derrick adopts this self-serving strategy to increase his profits, and although this is a good business decision because it increases Derrick's profit margin due increased production at Los Muertos, Derrick's former tenant farmers lose their livelihoods as they are cast aside by a more powerful member of the capitalist hierarchy. Derrick's experiences under capitalism mirror those of the tenant farmers in that he is also displaced by a more powerful capitalist. Behrman's confiscation of Los Muertos is evidence of this: "Well, the bonanza came right enough--just in time for S. Behrman and the Railroad to grab it" (Octopus 562). Derrick's role as a wheat grower is quickly occupied by his primary business opponent in Tulare County. While the circumstances are not quite the same, both the tenant farmers and Derrick are driven out of their occupations by an individual who is more powerful than they are. Behrman usurps Derrick's power, and he is elevated to an even higher level in the hierarchy because of his acquisition of Los Muertos. Behrman benefits because he displaces Derrick as the proprietor of Los Muertos, and he confiscates Derrick's sources of revenue in the wheat economy.

Behrman's confiscation of Los Muertos occurs because the capitalist system in which he participates stimulates his desire to compete in the wheat economy. He is encouraged to pursue financial opportunities when they arise, even if the opportunities have negative consequences for individuals beneath him in the capitalist

hierarchy. In the aftermath of the shootout, Behrman is immediately portrayed as if he is a brutal conqueror:

And this man was to crush Magnus Derrick—had already stamped the life from such men as Harran and Annixter. This man, in the name of the Trust was to grab Los Muertos as he had grabbed Quien Sabe, and after Los Muertos, Broderson's ranch, then Osterman's, then others, and still others, the whole valley, the whole State. (543)

Behrman's opportunism is a distinct quality of his domination of his peers. He benefits from the wheat growers' failure in their struggle against the railroad. In the case of Los Muertos, he seizes valuable crop land, equipment, and buildings that belong to his competitor in the capitalist society. He benefits because of Derrick's degeneration, and he also acquires the properties of other ranchers who are ruined by capitalism—those who die in the shootout. He leads the railroad officials as they evict the defeated ranchers from their land and replace the defeated farmers with P. and S. W. figureheads: "They are serving the writs in ejectment and putting the dummy buyers in possession" (Octopus 509). Behrman gains personally, but he also represents the interests of the P. and S. W. Railroad, a company operated by elite capitalists who are at the top of the capitalist hierarchy. As a result, he becomes the most dominant figure in Tulare County because of his relationship with the P. and S. W. Railroad. He serves the railroad's corporate interests, and while doing so, he benefits from his acquisition of the economic vacancies that occur because of the ruin of wheat growers.

Behrman's death shows that Norris portrays a system that is continuously replenished with humans. Once Behrman dies, opportunities arise for other participants in the capitalist system. Given the lucrative business dealings of the P. and S. W. Railroad, Behrman's responsibilities for the railroad must be undertaken by others. The installation of another person to oversee the railroad's operations in Tulare County is inevitable. Shelgrim, the president of the railroad, must replace Behrman to promote the business interests of the railroad: Shelgrim's position as the most powerful member of the capitalist hierarchy requires him to preserve the railroad's profit-making ability. He does not concern himself with the ruin of his subordinates in the hierarchy because he knows people are easily replaced. Even though Behrman dies, his business role for the railroad will easily be filled by someone else who desires an opportunity to make money for the railroad and ultimately for himself.

Cedarquist's position as an upper-class capitalist also shows the disposability of the individual. Norris's portrayal of Cedarquist indicates that the system of capitalism continues on despite the loss of individuals in the system. Cedarquist thrives atop the capitalist hierarchy. He takes Derrick's economic vision for the Orient, and he implements it after Derrick's ruin and Behrman's death: he organizes and finances a line of wheat ships to develop trade with the Orient. He succeeds where Derrick and Behrman failed. Cedarquist shows us that capitalism's disposal of the individual results in opportunities for other capitalists. Cedarquist also reveals that

the system always reorganizes itself to adjust to the human changes that occur under economic competition.

Disposability at the Top of the Capitalist Hierarchy in The Pit

In contrast to the system in The Octopus, the capitalist system Norris portrays in The Pit shows the disposability of individuals at the top of the capitalist hierarchy. Jadwin, a member of the Board of Trade, occupies a position at the highest level of the capitalist hierarchy. He participates in the brutally competitive wheat economy, and his ruthless dominance of his opponents in the capitalist system ends with his ruin. Participants in the wheat economy perceive him as a heartless, despotic businessman who exploits a vast population of humans.

Norris shows that Jadwin's ruin provides many new economic opportunities for characters in the capitalist system. When Jadwin's corner in wheat fails, he is immediately pushed out of the capitalist system, and his financial dominance is eliminated. This occurrence provides opportunities for other capitalists. Jadwin and his wife are also forced to give up their mansion and luxurious lifestyle. As they leave their mansion, Jadwin acknowledges his downfall: "No servants now, Laura, to carry our things down for us and open the door, and it's a hack, old girl, instead of the victoria or coupe" (Pit 366). Jadwin understands he will not recover from his downfall, and he knows he will never regain his social standing. His destruction under capitalism is permanent: "look your last at the old place, Laura. You'll never see it again" (Pit 367). Jadwin's mansion, vacation home, and luxurious belongings are now available for other capitalists to acquire. In the capitalist system, another

businessman, one who has ascended to the top of the capitalist hierarchy, will inevitably purchase Jadwin's mansion and fill Jadwin's vacancy in the wheat economy.

Norris portrays a system in which there are other capitalists in the system who can replace Jadwin's economic role. Crookes, Jadwin's main adversary and peer in the capitalist society, reveals there are numerous individuals who have the potential to conquer Jadwin and to take over his position in the economic system either collectively or individually: "Think you're boss of the boat now, don't you?...Don't get so big that all the other fellows can see you---they throw bricks" (Pit 291). Crookes's perceptions show that the system fosters competition and encourages other powerful capitalists to regulate the power of those atop the hierarchy. A single businessman, regardless of his power, cannot sustain his economic dominance permanently over all others in the capitalist system. Just as Jadwin cannot control the system, he also cannot maintain his control of the capitalist competitors in the system. Crookes's perceptions show that individuals at the top of the hierarchy can be disposed of by capitalism just as easily as individuals who occupy much lower hierarchical positions.

The circumstances of Jadwin's destruction reveal there are many other individuals who will be elevated to replace his economic roles in the wheat economy. His demise means that individuals throughout the hierarchy are rescued from the brink of financial ruin. Jadwin's adversaries in Crookes's ring--individuals who are at the top of the hierarchy--are now emancipated from his economic tyranny and can

now scarf up the financial opportunities that will result from his fall: "The great corner smashed! Jadwin busted! They themselves saved, saved, saved!" (Pit 345).

Jadwin loses under capitalism, and the capitalists who remain quickly seize the financial opportunities that appear because of his downfall. Jadwin's ruin reveals that capitalism wins because it gains humans who will become engaged in wheat speculation and who will perpetuate the capitalist system.

Norris's portrayal of Jadwin's public downfall reveals that under capitalism there are countless individuals in the system to replace the roles of those who are destroyed. When Jadwin loses his corner, there is an endless supply of euphoric people to fill the void left by his economic defeat: "In a frenzy of delight men danced and leaped and capered upon the edge of the Pit, clasping their arms about each other, shaking each other's hands, cheering and hurrahing till their strained voices became hoarse and faint" (Pit 345). The victors recognize that Jadwin's failure means economic opportunities for those individuals who have survived the oppressive corner. The brokerage houses that carry on throughout the financial district are filled with capitalists who are ready to restructure the wheat economy. There are innumerable speculators and businessmen who are able to engage in wheat speculation once Jadwin's market shares are wrestled from his grasp and become accessible to other capitalists. These individuals seize the financial ventures that were not possible during Jadwin's tyrannical reign.

Norris's portrayal of Jadwin's departure from downtown Chicago at the end of the novel further indicates his belief in the continuous replacement of the

individual under the capitalist system. As Jadwin leaves Chicago with his wife after his failed corner, both are overshadowed by the omnipotent images of capitalism: “the tall gray office buildings...the haze of light in the heavens, and raised against it, the pile of the Board of Trade building, black, monolithic, crouching on its foundations like a monstrous sphinx” (Pit 369). The edifices of capitalism loom in the distance as Jadwin departs, a forever ruined man. After he is gone, the Board of Trade building will continue to house the most powerful individuals in the capitalist society, and people will continue to rise to the top of the hierarchy. Those businessmen who arrive at the top will consistently purchase seats on the board. Some will be destroyed by the system, and others will succeed. The cycle will continue because individuals will perpetually be drawn into economic competition by capitalism.

Under capitalism, Jadwin and Cressler lose and are disposed of, but capitalism prevails. People are ruined, but their roles are easily replaced or refilled because there are always humans who become participants in the wheat economy. Norris shows that wheat corners have occurred in the past and will continue to occur in the future. The Helmick wheat corner that is discussed by Jadwin and Cressler precedes Jadwin’s venture by mere months, and Helmick’s place in the wheat economy is rapidly replaced by Jadwin and members of Crookes’s group. Even though Cressler is destroyed, others in Crookes’s group survive financially and will continue to participate in the system. Similarly, Jadwin is, of course, destroyed, but Samuel Gretry continues onward unscathed. Norris depicts a cyclical system in which other

capitalists continuously rise to the top of the hierarchy through wheat speculation, and the capitalist system determines the destinies of these participants.

Norris's portrayal of capitalism at the end of The Pit shows that the forces of the wheat economy dominate the members of the capitalist system in the United States. He emphasizes that capitalism annihilates some individuals and benefits others. Norris expands his depiction of the American system to include the European population: "The wheat that had killed Cressler, that had engulfed Jadwin's fortune and all but unseated reason itself; the Wheat that had intervened like a great torrent to drag her husband from her side... had passed, leaving Death and Ruin in its wake, but bearing Life and Prosperity to the crowded cities and centres of Europe" (Pit 368). While some individuals are destroyed, life continues for others. The wheat economy allows the surviving businessmen to profit from the international wheat trade, and it allows European capitalists to benefit as well. Norris's view also shows that the effect of the wheat trade on Europe, once it is freed up by Jadwin's collapse, favors capitalists in that civilization as it brings prosperity to European people. People in Chicago are destroyed, but European businessmen are now able to access the economic system and benefit. Jadwin and Cressler are disposed of, but the capitalist system that links the United States and Europe moves forward.

Conclusion

In both volumes of Norris's wheat trilogy, the forces of capitalism destroy some individuals and allow others to survive. In The Octopus, Derrick is destroyed by the capitalism, but the system is not impeded by his departure because his economic

function in the system is easily replaced. In The Pit, Jadwin and Cressler are also destroyed by capitalism, but the roles of both are filled by others capitalists. Year after year, capitalism continues to flourish, just as the life cycle of wheat continues in the fields of Norris's America. Wheat is planted, it grows, and it is harvested. Some harvests are better than others, and some crops fail, but the life cycle continues perpetually. In both novels, life goes on in the capitalist system, and the abstract forces of capitalism ensure that the individual never overpowers the system.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

In the uncompleted trilogy The Epic of the Wheat, Norris portrays an American civilization that is drawn into and ruled by the wheat economy within the system of capitalism. According to Richard Lehan, "What Norris wanted to show was how modern capitalism had created an economic network that spread over thousands of miles and that had life-threatening consequences for markets all over the world" (127). The behavior of characters who participate in the wheat economy reveals Norris's belief in the detrimental effect of capitalism on the individual throughout the United States. In The Octopus and The Pit, capitalism is an omnipotent force on the individual, and the system thrives on people's greed. The system destroys individuals, and either one human is replaced by another at the same hierarchical level, or more powerful capitalists toss the less powerful aside. In either case, the system consistently prevails, and the individual is often ruined. Characters who are destroyed by capitalism lose their wealth, their social prestige, their physical well-being, and occasionally their lives. These qualities of capitalism are vital facets of Norris's world view in both novels.

Ultimately, both novels show that Norris perceived his world as a machine that destroys some humans and spares others. Norris believed capitalism increased people's greed, and it encouraged people's animalistic propensities. He felt that people became trapped under capitalism, and many, as a result of their greed, reached a point at which they were incapable of reflecting on their decision making. The system suppressed characters' selfless thoughts, and it encouraged impulsive

behavior. As a result, people in Norris's world were frequently obliterated by the omnipotence of capitalism, but there were always more individuals to fill in the gaps and perpetuate the system.

Derrick's behavior in The Octopus shows that capitalism ensnares and overpowers individuals. The system unleashes and nourishes Derrick's greed, and it causes his ruin. His destruction as a result of his participation in the wheat economy shows his helplessness against the forces of capitalism as he becomes driven by his hunger for wealth and social prestige. In the end, the system destroys his morality and causes him to lose his wealth, his social standing, and his family members. Derrick's experiences indicate that ruin is a likely consequence of individuals' participation in the wheat economy.

In The Pit, Jadwin's behavior reveals his entrapment in the system of capitalism. The system unchains and feeds his innate greed, and it causes his downfall. The wheat economy drives his insatiable desire for wealth and social prestige, and it causes him to lose his wealth and his social standing. His destruction, as a result of his participation in the wheat economy, shows his helplessness against the forces of capitalism. Jadwin's experiences under the system indicate that ruin is a likely outcome for individuals who participate in wheat speculation, and his fate shows the deleterious effect of capitalism on individuals at all levels of the capitalist hierarchy.

Norris depicts capitalism as a system that thrives because of the availability and endless supply of humans. Characters in both novels support this claim. Derrick

and Behrman's experiences under the system reveal how the individual is often disposed of by capitalism. Characters are either replaced by individuals at their same hierarchical position, or they are ousted from their positions by more powerful people in the capitalist hierarchy. Derrick's self-destruction does not hinder the wheat economy because Behrman tosses him aside and immediately occupies his economic role. Behrman's subsequent death further shows how the system continues on as capitalists above him in the hierarchy occupy his economic role in the wheat economy. Both characters' experiences are indicators of the expendability of the individual under capitalism. Jadwin and Cressler's experiences under capitalism also reveal a similar process in which individuals are ruined and, in their cases, replaced by individuals at the same hierarchical level. Both characters are destroyed by capitalism, but their economic roles are replaced by other capitalists at their hierarchical level. This shows that Norris portrays a system that consumes individuals and thrives because of the availability of humans.

A little more than one hundred years later, Norris's world view remains relevant to the American civilization. His portrayal of capitalism resonates through the United States of the twenty-first century. While American democracy has brought about political reform to improve the plight of the individual under capitalism, there are still many negative qualities of American capitalism. The system continues to overpower humans and to encourage avaricious behavior in individuals who participate in the system. In contemporary America, capitalism encourages people to be ostentatious and to want too much. The system fosters materialism in individuals,

and it encourages people to be impulsive and financially irresponsible. The current real estate foreclosure crisis is evidence of these tendencies among the American people. America is also still populated with ruthless profiteers who greedily exploit individuals beneath them in the capitalist hierarchy in order to gain wealth and social prestige. Corporate greed is rampant in American capitalism, and insider trading continues to occur. Recently, Kenneth Lay, the former head of Enron, unscrupulously used people beneath him to profit, and during the 1980s, Ivan Boesky's behavior exposed corruption among Wall Street financiers. Chief executive officers use their positions of economic power to exploit the masses and to increase their wealth; they are often above the law because they wield immense social and political power. Special interest groups are funded by powerful capitalists, and they are the driving force behind the arguably corrupt American political process of the twenty-first century.

In short, the modern United States resembles the United States Norris portrayed as a naturalist writer. Capitalism still encourages people to behave greedily and to seek wealth and social prestige, and the system breeds corruption in people who desire more than they have. While the wheat economy is no longer significant in the twenty-first century, the fictional legacies of Norris's characters are relevant today. Perhaps the only major difference between Norris's view of capitalism and the reality of the present system in America is that capitalism's omnipotence now reaches well beyond the United States into a global economy--Norris's world view indicates he believed it was probably headed in that direction. American capitalism thrives in

sweatshops in third-world countries, and capitalists in this country profit at the expense of disadvantaged humans in other parts of the world. If Norris could witness American capitalism in the present world, he would most likely be awed by its tremendous growth since the early 1900s.

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