The art of Frank Norris, storyteller

Hochman, Barbara

Abstract
Over the past twenty years, critics have increasingly challenged the conventional wisdom on Frank Norris as an exponent of literary naturalism. In the present study, Barbara Hochman goes still further in redefining his affinities. She focuses on his artistry as a storyteller, and on his overriding concern with human contact and the functions of aesthetic form. Hochman begins by considering traditional approaches to Norris. She notes thin although the rhetoric of the narrative voice and the pattern of events in his fiction made Norris's work seem to fit neatly into the naturalist category, his four major novels—Vandover and the Brute, McTeague, The Octopus, and The Pit—lend themselves to very different readings. Hochman argues that the imaginative focus of Norris's work centers on the vulnerability of the self and its quest for a measure of equilibrium. She shows how Norris's work increasingly depicts constructive individual responses to experience, and the stabilizing power of memory, language, and art. These concerns are seen to account for the enduring vitality of Norris's work, and for the popularity it enjoyed in its own time.-- Book jacket.

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