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# Comfort and control : Trina and Frank Norris's McTeague

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**Grim, Kelly Anne**

**COMFORT AND**

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**TRINA AND**

**FRANK**

**NORRIS'S...**

**June 2001**

Comfort and Control: Trina and Frank Norris's *McTeague*

by

Kelly Anne Grim

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, I attempt to show that Trina, in Frank Norris's *McTeague*, is not the masochistic, money-loving monster she might appear to be. I refute Spangler's claim that Trina is Norris's version of the "fatal woman," who knowingly and willingly wreaks havoc on McTeague's life (as well as her own) because of her madness for money. I attempt to show that she is merely using what's at her disposal to grasp a certain amount of agency in a world that doesn't want her to have it. I demonstrate how she finds the comfort and control she needs in her work, in her management of the house and McTeague, and most explicitly, in the miserly, and sometimes erotic, relationship she has with her money. Trina is a victim and, as such, to blame for nothing but seeking comfort and lost control.

## Comfort and Control: Trina and Frank Norris's *McTeague*

George M. Spangler, in an article written in 1978 entitled "The Structure of *McTeague*," offered a reading of Frank Norris's novel that names McTeague the victim of Norris's version of the "fatal woman" (94). The second half of the novel, according to Spangler, sees Trina as a woman whose "economics are unnecessarily severe" (94) and who degrades her husband, as well as herself, until he has to turn to cruelty and ultimately murder to get what he wants. Spangler even suggests that though Trina's murder is abominable, "Norris quite skillfully manages to make the reader feel at least some sympathy for McTeague and none for Trina" (95).

What Spangler's reading does is recognize that something Trina possesses or can do is in some way not only threatening to McTeague but is willfully directed at or against him. This enables the reader to demonize Trina, as Spangler does, and suggests that her behavior is not only responsible for but also deserving of her punishment and death. What is interesting about Spangler's reading is that he recognizes and is responding to something very important: the fact that Trina becomes a threatening figure. Recognizing Trina as this threat necessarily affords her a certain kind of power, or something like it, and Spangler understands this power to have everything to do with her owning and hoarding of money.

After a first reading of *McTeague*, it is rather easy to see Trina as a weird version of the classic "fatal woman." Norris calls Trina a "strange" (310) woman in her hoarding, but what is even more striking is that he seems to present Trina as a monstrous woman for her love of money. After McTeague has stolen her money,

Her love of money for the money's sake brooded in her heart, driving out by degrees every other natural affection. She grew thin and meager; her flesh clove and tight to her small skeleton; her small pale mouth and little uplifted chine grew to have a certain feline eagerness of expression; her long, narrow eyes glistened continually, as if they caught and held the glint of metal (354).

Her physical appearance changes for the worse; her health suffers. Trina is a mad woman, maybe a maniac with glistening eyes and only care in the world, her money.

Furthermore, Norris turns Trina's interaction with the money into something erotic, and in his depiction of this eroticism renders her even more monstrous. In the following scene, one witnesses Trina sharing her bed with her money:

Not a day passed that Trina did not have it out where she could see and touch it. One evening she had even spread all the gold pieces between the sheets, and had then gone to bed, stripping herself, and had slept all night upon the money, taking a strange and ecstatic pleasure in the touch of the smooth, flat pieces the length of her entire body (360-1).

A stripped and naked Trina literally spends the night in bed with her money experiencing the "ecstatic pleasure" of a lover. In reference to this scene, William E. Cain, in an article that debates the extent to which Norris is present in the text and tries to understand Norris's dealings with power, suggests that Norris knows he's depicting something bizarre and horrifying when he depicts Trina's sex with the money. Cain also suggests that Norris is making an attempt to display his own power and shock the reader and that no matter how "horrifying" Trina's "perverse love-making" is, "it is mingled for the reader with Norris's own pleasure in presenting...as though to allow us to peer into the privacies of a woman's bedroom (210-11). The use of the word "even" does seem to suggest that this is behavior on Trina's part that is transgressing boundaries that set what

is acceptable and that which is “strange” and even beyond strange. The use of the word “even” also does seem to indicate that Norris is aware of this extreme behavior.

Norris refers to her other innate desire, her “pleasure in yielding” as “strange and unnatural” (309), and what this might be evidence of is “discomfort” on Norris’ part, his fear of Trina manifesting itself in the narrative. Norris moves beyond the less damaging critique of “strange” and calls her love of brutality “perverted” and “morbid” and “unwholesome” (309-10). His depiction of Trina in this regard as well becomes something bordering monstrous. Norris even depicts Trina taking a “strange sort of pride” (310) in her masochistic pleasure. In a startling and unsettling scene, Trina and Maria talk about their beatings, “each trying to make out that her own husband was the most cruel” (310). Both women “[glory] in their husband’s mistreatment” (311) and even fabricate stories and invent details, “magnifying their own mistreatment” (311). Showing Trina participating in this bizarre contest, these “long and excited arguments” (311) seems to be another way for Norris to turn her pleasure in masochism into something that is horrifying and even monstrous.

I feel however, that the death scene is one in which Norris shows sympathy for Trina and actually undoes all of his monstrous insinuations. She was once such a pretty woman and did work she was good at and proud of, and in this scene she is reduced to a woman wearing a “dirty cotton gown” that “clung about her shapeless, stunted figure” (372) working “down on her hands and knees in the midst of a steaming muck of soapy water” (372), a scene that suggests her desperation and unhappiness and her new, even more miserable existence. Even though it is her resistance that drives McTeague to kill her, the stark description of her murder is horrifying:

[McTeague] came back at her again, his eyes drawn to two fine twinkling points, and his enormous fists, clenched till the knuckles whitened, raised in the air.

Then it became abominable.

In the schoolroom outside, behind the coal scuttle, the cat listened to the sounds of stamping and struggling and the muffled noise of blows, wildly terrified, his eyes bulging like brass knobs (375).

The reader experiences the murder through the ears of a frightened cat. Readers can only hear the “stamping and struggling” and the “noise of blows” along with the cat. The actual murder isn’t described because the narration shifts from a description of the couple to the point of view of the cat outside, and one line marks this transition: “Then it became abominable.” Giving readers that simple line and a few audible clues is perhaps more bleak than an actual description would have been in that a reader is left to imagine the horrific crime being committed. Add to this stark statement, the description of the “terrified” cat with “bulging” eyes and the ghastly description that follows of “her body twitching with an occasional hiccough that stirred the pool of blood in which she lay face downward” (377-8) juxtaposed by the casual description of the children sniffing the air that smelled like a butcher shop and the “funnee” cat and how he pressed his nose under the door of the cloakroom and wagged his tail both “excited” and “very eager” (378), and the scene is definitely much more horrifying than any scene in which Trina loves her money.

In addition, a calm McTeague after the murder leaves his wife’s unconscious and hiccoughing body, enters her room, takes her money, comments offhandedly on the weather, washes his hands and forearms and then changes into his work clothes without so much as a hint of guilt or remorse or even disbelief, and his complete lack of remorse

for the rest of the novel is even more horrifying. There is no doubt that Trina is the victim, that the scene shows Trina as the victim of a horrific murder by a beast of a man, who possesses an “ape-like agility” (375) and the strength to tear the lock and bolt guard off the door and send “her staggering across the room” (373). I feel that readers are left thinking that McTeague has done a brutal and disgusting thing to a woman undeserving of this and will want to condemn him.

In 1995, Mary Beth Werner made an attempt to put the novel into its historical context in order to show that the novel foregrounds and ultimately critiques the picture of domestic violence just as I’ve attempted to argue above. What this seems to suggest is that feminist critics might have begun to see the need to respond to and refute readings akin to Spangler’s, that there is the need to show that the text doesn’t champion misogyny and that Trina, despite her strange and sometimes cruel behavior, isn’t responsible for her own punishment. Werner suggests that Trina and Maria are not to blame for their victimization even as she explains the ways in which Trina’s power is threatening to the patriarchal society in the novel. I aim to discuss what that power is for Trina, where it comes from, and most importantly what it does for her. I differ from Spangler in that I intend to show that it is not a power that is specifically directed at or against McTeague. I want to show that Trina is a victim in the narrative and that she is using what’s at her disposal to find an autonomous, self-contained space in which to grasp a certain amount of agency in her world. Trina is doing everything she can to try to find comfort and to have some control over something in a world that limits and even brutalizes the women in it.

Trina's control as the way in which she gains meaning in her life can be seen early in the text in her work. Trina's housework is something that allows her to find some meaning through her mastery of a skill, but more importantly, she's in charge of the domestic space and it is this ability to control and maintain their home that grants her power. Norris states that "Trina would be an extraordinarily good housekeeper" and that "economy" is her "strong point" (134). Trina is always busying herself with the housework, making breakfast, clearing away the breakfast things, making the bed, and dusting – it was a routine that seemed to offer Trina stability. She uses her housework and her control of the domestic sphere to comfort herself. For instance, following a fight with McTeague over money, "their first serious quarrel" (200), Trina begins to "cut the heads off a fresh bunch of onions" (207) and tells McTeague to go away by saying that she'd like to have her kitchen to herself. The kitchen is a space she feels she owns, that she has control over. Her heart breaks as she has to sell her kitchen utensils and the narrator exclaims, "How happy had she been the day after the marriage when she had first entered that kitchen and knew that it was all her own!" (275).

Even in her attempt to improve McTeague, "Trina was tactful enough to move so cautiously and with such slowness that the dentist was unconscious of any process of change" (190). Trina is successful in her attempts and the dentist improves under her influence. She breaks McTeague of his eating and drinking habits. She dresses him properly with clean linen shirts. Maybe most importantly, what the narrator says is "most wonderful of all" (191), Trina lends McTeague ambitions, "confused ideas of something better" (191) and it is through these that both share this dream of something better.

In addition to her mastery of her domestic space and the housework, Trina also works for her Uncle Oelbermann, whittling and painting Noah's Ark figurines. Trina performs her work on the figurines very quickly and easily:

One after another she caught up the little blocks of straight-grained pine, the knife flashed between her fingers, the little figure grew rapidly under her touch, was finished and ready for painting in a wonderfully short time, and was tossed into the basket that stood at her elbow (182).

Not only is her work finished quickly and effortlessly, but she's also very good at it: "She turns the little figurines in her fingers with a wonderful lightness and deftness" (288).

She gains a genuine pleasure and pride as a result of her accomplishment. She enjoys her ability to do autonomous work and is "very proud to explain her work to McTeague as he had already his own to her (133), putting herself on his level, sharing with him the ability to do a craft and to do it well.

The most obvious and greatest source of Trina's power, the reason why she becomes such a threat in McTeague's eyes, is the money. Trina wins the lottery money and hoards both it and the money she makes from Mr. Oelbermann. The threat to McTeague's masculinity early in the novel begins with Trina's winning of the lottery money, because it offers her the opportunity to possess something, to be an owner of something, which is a role really only granted men in the novel. Men possess not only material objects but also women in this world, and the narrative is not shy about the fact that "she belonged to him, body and soul" (89). So that shortly after McTeague has come to possess her through marriage, she happily comes to possess a rather large sum of money. And this money in addition to the money she earns and hoards gives her great pleasure through ownership, and this ownership means much to her. When McTeague

suggests they share ownership of the money, Trina cries out “vehemently”: “‘It’s all mine, mine’” (272), and when McTeague has taken her money, she cries, “‘...my money’s gone, my dear money – my dear, dear gold pieces that I’ve worked so hard for’” (347). Clearly, Trina feels a sense of pride in the ownership but maybe more so in her ability to earn the money, to have worked hard to be able to possess it.

Trina hides the money away in a brass match-safe at the bottom of her trunk, and this money she hoards, the dollars, half-dollars and gold pieces, is empowering for her in that it offers her the chance to act in many ways, experience many things, and enjoy it. Trina can watch the money accumulate and she can see the size of the money increase. She can actively add to the sum of her money and “each time she added a quarter or a half dollar to the little store she laughed and sang with a veritable delight” (188). What thrilled her was not that it was a large sum, “but that it could be made larger” (188). She found joy in counting it carefully, recounting and making piles with it, even arranging them “in patterns – triangles, circles, and squares” (357). She took care of it, and even “rubbed the gold pieces between the fold of her apron until they shone” (209). She plays with the money for long periods of time. She piles the money and then she “[draws] back to the farthest corner of the room to note the effect” (308).

Trina can also completely control who knows about the money and what they know, and she begins to lie about how much money she begins to lie to McTeague about how much she’s spending and how much she’s saving. She appears to find pleasure in lying to him, in tricking him, and even in denying him any of her money, but Trina is not trying to degrade their lives as “the destroyer” that Spangler claims she is. Trina truly isn’t intentionally manipulating McTeague, she doesn’t want to have to manipulate him

to keep her money, for she is not made happy in her manipulation of him. "I can't help it" (219) she says. In fact, often she experiences great regret over having denied him the money he asks for and is "sorry she had refused to help her husband" (208).

Furthermore, she actually entertains fantasies of pleasing McTeague by giving him the money he asks for:

She began to be sorry she had refused to help her husband, sorry she had brought matters to such an issue... She loved her "old bear" too much to do him an injustice, and perhaps, after all, she had been in the wrong. Then it occurred to her how pretty it would be to come up behind him unexpectedly, and slip the money, thirty-five dollars, into his hand, and pull his huge head down to her and kiss his bald spot. (208).

Trina loves McTeague and there is no doubt that she would actually like to give him the money, and yet even though she wants to, she just can't give the money up. "It's too pretty" (209) she says and after she's counted out ten silver dollars to give him, the sight of her "withered" bag is just too "lamentable" (209) and she can't bear to give him the money and see the size of it diminish. Furthermore, this response is not limited to McTeague. Trina can't bring herself to send twenty-five dollars to her own mother. Trina makes up excuses like they were "hard up themselves for that month" (251), and sends McTeague's twelve dollars, but she can never send her own money.

Ironically, Trina hoards her money even when she could spend it to ease her own suffering. In this light, the money doesn't offer Trina what we might expect it to: economic success or monetary wealth and the means to buy and provide for herself. She eases her suffering with her money in another way. Seeing her money, seeing and knowing she has this possession, offers her some sort of comfort, having it grants her solace. For Trina, the money is "a thing miraculous" (154) and the narrator calls the

money a “deus ex machina or “god-from-the machine, suddenly descending upon the stage of her humble little life” (154). She believes that the money is a gift from God, a gift with the ability to save her. She believes that it might actually raise her up out of her humble life. She invests the lottery money in Uncle Oelbermann’s business and when things get rough, after the brutality begins, one way Trina copes is that she imagines this money as a “glittering, splendid dream, which came to her almost every hour of the day as a solace and compensation for all her unhappiness” (307-8). In this way, the five thousand comes to serve Trina in that the money offers her a psychic space, allows her a means to literally imagine finding some happiness in her misery and thus grants her that happiness. The money gives her the means to fantasize, to find an imagined space in which she is happy.

After Trina and McTeague are forced to find another dwelling, a room that according to Trina was “not gay” (288), she feels that her life is deteriorating and also no longer gay. It is around this time that Trina’s work and housework suffer, those things that earlier had brought her meaning and pleasure and a sense of control. She still performs her whittling for Uncle Oebermann but she is no longer careful, she is no longer concerned with efficacy, and she is no longer concerned with cleanliness. She doesn’t wear the gloves she used to wear and “the whittling and chips accumulate under the window where she did her work” (288). In addition “streaks and spots of the “non-poisonous” paint that Trina used were upon the walls and woodwork” (288). Trina pays little attention to her housework for Norris tells the reader that she was “not quite so scrupulously tidy now as she was in the old days” (287). In addition, she can no longer improve McTeague. He is fired from his job and has begun to drink a lot and demand

money from Trina that she just can't bear to give him. She says to McTeague "I never saw you this way before. You talk like a different man" (297). She is losing her influence on McTeague and his dreams for betterment; her mastery of her work and the domestic sphere isn't as fulfilling as it once was, it doesn't mean as much to Trina. Her mastery is vulnerable, fragile, uncertain, for after McTeague has bitten her fingers raw and she's poisoned from the paint, she loses her fingers and can no longer even perform her work.

As everything else disappears, it is in the money that Trina finds her only pleasure. She no longer even keeps up her appearance: "Trina lost her pretty ways and her good looks" (355). During the winter of their first year of marriage, "it was a passion with [Trina] to save money" (188), and it is no coincidence that during this time, "the tempest of passion, that overpowering desire that had suddenly taken possession of [McTeague] that day when he had given her ether...rarely stirred in him now" (189). Trina demands his love: "Oh, Mac, dear, love me, love me big" (186). She must sense his fading passion for she seeks to hear McTeague confirm his love for her: "Do you love me, Mac, dear?" (186). This loss of love from her husband and her need for love might be why Trina feels the need to love something and begins an erotic relationship with her money. After the "grind began" (284), when her work will no longer comfort her, her interaction with the money goes from seeing and piling and wiping it to feeling and smelling and even tasting and listening to it. She "put[s] the smaller gold pieced in her mouth" (308) and listens to "the delicious clink of the pieces tumbling against each other" (357). The gold becomes still something more for her by providing her yet another form of agency, the ability to carry out a sensual and even affectionate relationship:

Trina loved her money with an intensity that she could hardly express. She would plunge her small fingers into the pile with little murmurs of affection, her long, narrow eyes half closed and shining, her breath coming in long sighs (???)

Trina's "play" (308) with her money – the plunging of her fingers, the "murmurs of affection," the narrow, shining eyes and sighs – suggests this interaction is sexual in nature. It is after this play that Trina addresses her gold "dear money" (308) as she would "Mac, dear" and actually confesses to her money, "I love you so!" (308). Trina's sexual possession of her money mirrors McTeague's earlier sexual desire for her. She "gather[s] the gleaming heaps of gold pieces to her with both arms, burying her face in them with long sighs of unspeakable delight" (359) in much the same manner that McTeague, while in Trina's closet before they were married, "opened his huge arms and gathered the little garments close to him, plunging his face deep amongst them, savoring their delicious odor with long breaths of luxury and supreme content" (79). This suggests that just as McTeague's excitement is found in objects, her clothes, upon her absence, Trina might find pleasure and sexual excitement in objects, gold coins, upon the "absence" of McTeague's love for her.

Trina's life has "narrowed" to two pleasures: "her passion for her money and her perverted love for her husband when he was brutal" (310). Norris goes to great lengths to show that Trina receives much pleasure in the brutality she receives from McTeague:

...this brutality made Trina all the more affectionate; aroused in her a morbid and unwholesome love of submission, a strange unnatural pleasure in yielding, in surrendering herself to the will of an irresistible, virile power (309-10).

It seems that the submission that terrified Trina on their wedding night, that troubled Trina the night McTeague proposed to her, and an abominable form of it, has become

something she enjoys and revels in. Jessica Benjamin, in *The Bonds of Love*, explains how the organization of Western society prompts women to believe that they are nothing alone, that their sense of self is shaped by their self-sacrifice. It would appear that Trina, in her pleasure in masochism, is an example of this belief. She loves McTeague “more and more, not for what he was, but for what she had given up to him” (186). She “had merged her individuality into his” (183), confirming that she is no longer her own person, that she has her subjectivity only in her submission to McTeague. In other words, it is her very submission that defines her. For McTeague to leave would have been more devastating for Trina than his brutality, and she endures, and even enjoys, it because it is her only model of identity.

Both Norris and this naturalist text present Trina as a particular representative of womanhood that harbors inside “something strong and overpowering” (88): an innate desire to yield to man. After McTeague takes “her in his enormous arms” and kisses her “grossly, full on the mouth” (84), Trina “gave up in an instant” (88). With his “sheer brute force” (88),

McTeague has awakened the Woman, and, whether she would or no, she was his now irrevocably; struggle against it as she would, she belonged to him, body and soul, for life or death. She had not sought it, she had not desired it. The spell was laid upon her (89).

According to the text, becoming a woman seems to mean that one desires to yield to man, and that this yielding is an unavoidable, even if unwanted, desire. Shortly after his proposal, Trina decides that she doesn’t love McTeague and vows to tell him so, but she loses her resolve and her desire to push him away as McTeague “grip[s]d her to him in a bearlike embrace that all but smother[s] her” (90).

This naturalist text, however, does something more with Trina's desire to yield: it couples this desire with an equal and innate fear of McTeague. McTeague expresses a desire to marry her immediately following his violation of her on the dentist chair, and Trina is "suddenly seized with the fear of him, the intuitive feminine fear of the male" (33). She is "frightened at his huge hands...his immense square-cut head and his enormous brute strength" (33). On their wedding night, Trina is again plagued by her fear of him. As McTeague tries to embrace her, she shrinks from him, "suddenly seized with the fear of him – the intuitive feminine fear of the male – her whole being quailed before him" (179). She even cries out, "No, no – I'm afraid" (179).

Her fear of McTeague arises at moments of submission for Trina and thus seems intimately connected to her submission. The fear of McTeague Trina experiences on their wedding night is most likely the fear of her submission to him in the consummation of their marriage – the thought of her submission to "his powerful, salient jaw, his huge, red hands" and "his enormous, resistless strength" (179). The fear seems to be in the possibility that she can't free herself of him and his "hands" and his "strength." It is so extreme, that even her own desire to submit that had "leaped to life in her" (88) at the train station "frightened her ... as she thought of it" (88).

The fact that Trina's fear of McTeague is more likely the fear of her own submission to him means that Trina's desires are ambivalent or contradictory in nature. On Trina's wedding night, her fear eventually gives way to "her great love for McTeague" (180) and she "[gives] up to him as she had done before, yielding all at once to that strange desire of being conquered and subdued" (180). In this passage, Trina yields not only to McTeague but also to the "strange" desire to do it. What Norris seems

to suggest is that while it may be natural, and even pleasurable, to want to submit, there is something “strange” about Trina’s desire because at the same time she fears doing it.

It is, by now, very clear that Trina fears submitting to, or yielding to, McTeague, and the reason I’ve dwelt on this fear is because I want to move to the effect of it. The fear of losing herself, of losing control, is acted out or compensated for in her manipulation of the money. Barbara Hochman, in an article contending that habits and routines of daily life serve to stabilize and that habit gives way to obsession when danger arises, argues exactly that. She asserts that Trina’s hoarding is a strategy employed by her to protect and defend herself from the experience of, or fear of, loss. More explicitly, Hochman argues that “it is the meaning of surrender for Trina herself that accounts for her fear and finally for the conversion of her ‘little habits’ into her uncontrollable obsession” (69). I wouldn’t want to deny Trina a “real” pleasure in submission, but that pleasure must mask or hide a true fear of loss, or lost control. This fear does serve to turn her “little habit” of saving money into an “uncontrollable obsession” with hoarding, and as Hochman contends her hoarding “leaves her with a temporary feeling of gain and control rather than with a sense of loss” (70).

I agree with Hochman in that Trina’s hoarding is a compensation for loss that does indeed grant her a feeling of “gain and control.” She enjoys her mastery of the money – her ability to keep it and store it and deny others of it – and this mastery is an indicator of Trina’s desire for it, even need for it. She needs this control so much so that she won’t give up the money even when faced with her own death. Even “beside herself with terror” and fighting for her life with the “exasperation and strength of a harassed cat” (375), Trina resists McTeague and stands resolutely in her decision to keep the

money. But this scene, her death scene, and the very fact that “the more her husband stormed, the tighter she drew the strings of the chamois-skin bag” (307) suggests that her hoarding is in direct response to the threat and realization of the brutal nature of her husband.

I differ from Hochman in that I don't believe that Trina's hoarding is the only way in which Trina compensates for loss; this is only part of the dynamic working for Trina in the text. As I've already established, Trina's money makes her an owner, as opposed to a thing owned, an agent with the ability to completely control her money, and allows her to experience pleasure in it through tactile and sensual experiences. And lastly, Hochman doesn't take up the fact that Trina's obsession with the money becomes erotic, which I've argued could be in response to yet another loss Trina experiences, not a loss of herself or her control of herself, but in response to her inability to control McTeague and in particular his feelings for her. Trina feels yet another loss with the loss of McTeague's love, and must act out a loving, emotional exchange with the only thing she has, her money. I also don't feel that the feeling is temporary as Hochman suggests, nor do I fully want to claim that this relationship with her money is a negative thing. In some very clear ways, Trina's obsession with money is bad, as one does have to admit that her money ultimately fails her in death, but it is an outlet for Trina, and it becomes one of the only ways that Trina can find comfort, never mind control. It continues to be the only thing that provides her over and over again with any solace. When her money is taken from her, for example, Trina resorts to getting and having the money invested in Uncle Oelberman's business, and she relies even more so on her particularly sexual relationship with it to find some control and comfort. Her desire for

her money comes “upon her all of a sudden” and during these fits “her cheeks flushed, her eyes glistened, her breath came short” (358). She allows herself to have a little bit of her money at a time, she “content[s] herself with only twenty” (358) at one point and then a “debauch of five hundred” (358) another time. If anything her desire for her money is something she enacts more frequently to “content” herself.

To argue that Trina’s need for control might be one that Norris recognizes and wants to grant her by giving her a relationship with the money – the very thing that I’ve argued offers her comfort, agency and pleasure in a world that doesn’t want to offer these things to her – might be optimistic and hopeful. It is clear, however, that Norris seems to understand the horrors that exist for a woman in a completely misogynist world for both Trina and Maria are brutally murdered for having something that their husbands want from them, something society doesn’t want its women to have and hoard: money. It also seems that what society doesn’t want its women to have is the opportunity to have control. By giving Trina this money, I’ve argued that Norris is granting her a way to hold onto that which gives her pleasure and control in a world that wants to strip her of her ability to control, a world that asks her to yield. Through her money, Trina can have agency and even express love, but what troubles this optimistic depiction is that face that Norris doesn’t valorize her possession of money; he makes it a horrible and monstrous thing. What I believe might be closer to the truth is that Norris doesn’t know how to present Trina, that he is torn between wanting to condemn her for fear of her power like his male characters in the novel and at the same time knowing that she is a victim and that in such a brutal victimization, a woman might need to be or act a little bit “strange.”

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### About the Author

Kelly Anne Grim was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania on 22 March 1975 to Ronald L. Grim and Emelia J. Grim. She attended Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania where she received a B.A. in English and a B.S. in Biochemistry and graduated with Honors in January 1998. After graduating, Kelly spent one year and a half in the biotechnology industry working as a Research Assistant at Human Genome Sciences, Inc. in Rockville, Maryland. Currently, she is finishing her M.A. in English at Lehigh University and graduating in June 2001.

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