

Longing as Fulfillment in *McTeague*

Point of Departure: Greed—both romantic and monetary—is the great threat in this text, but Old Grannis and Miss Baker escape its most dangerous consequences by treating their desire with distinct caution. Unlike the younger cast of characters, whose craving for wealth turns destructive, the older couple practices enough restraint from passion to avoid suffering from it in the same way.

Introductory Questions: What precisely distinguishes Old Grannis and Miss Baker from the rest of Norris' characters? What forces in the novel are responsible for their fate? And what is Norris telling us, through these people, about the nature of greed, be it for love or for money?

Relevant Passages:

- I. Descriptions of Old Grannis and Miss Baker:**
 - Both over 60—she a retired dressmaker fond of tea (12), he a retired surgeon who binds pamphlets and runs a dog hospital (9).
 - Similar in dexterity, manner, goodwill; age exempts them from some of greed's pressures; same wallpaper—physical connection (14).
 - Kind but trifling description—the guy: “gentle, simpleminded” (9); the girl: “little old maid” (12).
 - Maria's loaded description: “ ‘You two people have less junk than anyone else in the flat...’ ” (30).
- II. Nature of Relationship:**
 - “Never a word had passed between them” (12). So why love? Question of memory and fantasy—does each remind the other of a former lover (13)?
 - “Miss Baker had chosen to invent the little fiction” (15)—endows Old Grannis with false history.
 - Restraint, embarrassment, “timidity of a second childhood” (12).
 - But intimate, sensory connection: “They had come to know each other's habits” (13). (Details: grenadine dress, titles of pamphlets, etc.)
- III. External Influence:**
 - Maria's raid: “In a way she brought the two old people face to face” (30).
 - Marcus at family dinner: “Like two children they faced each other...” (92). The reality reverts them to youth—we see this language repeated.
 - Afterward, he bolts himself into his apartment but cherishes the thrill: “What an event that evening had been in their lives!” (97).
 - Wedding: seated next to each other “in great trepidation” (132).
 - First exchange (about “fondness of children”)—Old Grannis thinks: “How *different* he imagined it would be!” (135, my italics).

- Lentil collision in stairwell: “malicious fate,” “inopportune moments,” “setting out with each other,” “sort of hypnotism” (172-3).
- Summoned again by the spat between Zerkow and Maria, the ruin of McTeague’s reputation, etc.

IV. **Clinching of Love:**

- Ch. 16 & Ch. 17—influenced by Trina, who lies: “Miss Baker had said nothing of the kind” (247).
- Consider timing in novel: reunion comes after Maria’s death, after Old Grannis has sold his “happiness for money”: “their little habits were disarranged, their customs broken up” (255).
- Teary, he doesn’t hear the door when Miss Baker presents herself with the “courage of the coward” (256).
- Miss Baker’s “shade of disappointment” (259) at Old Grannis’ sale.
- Gradualism versus immediacy: “It was to come... little by little, instead of, as now, abruptly and with no preparation” (259).
- “Elysium of their own creating” versus “commonplace and uneventful lives” (260): does the romance change those lives, or is it part of them?

Concluding Nuances:

- I. Though the younger, greedier people in this work threaten the old couple’s equilibrium, they also enable Old Grannis and Miss Baker to actualize their union. Would the pair end up together without the influence of McTeague, Marcus, Trina, and Maria?
- II. Would this be a bad thing? Does the reality of their relationship ruin the potential of its imagined—or at least less physical—form? Compare the pairs of lovers.
- III. What is Norris’ take on the pair? To be sure, he doesn’t paint a flattering portrait of McTeague and his peers, but the last look at Old Grannis and Miss Baker isn’t much brighter: “Far from the world and together they entered upon the long retarded romance of *their commonplace and uneventful lives*” (260, my italics). Could this plot line serve as a check against branding greed as inherently bad?