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Frederic's THE DAMNATION OF THERON WARE

One of Harold Frederic's working titles for *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (1896) was "Snarl"—a fact once familiar only to scholars who had studied the author's manuscripts and worksheets, but now widely known by way of Stanton Garner's useful "History of the Text," which is appended to the CEAA edition of the novel (1985).¹ Austin Briggs and Sidney Krause have noted this tentative title in print and have assumed the same brief conclusion: The early manuscript was named "Snarl" because of the tangled relationships in which the characters were engaged. But another explanation seems equally likely—and more explicative.²

Granted, the lives of Theron and Alice Ware, Celia Madden, Levi Gorringer, Dr. Ledsmar, and Father Forbes are "snarled," but hardly more so than those of the characters in any piece of realism. More important to the question of the title is that Frederic and other thinkers in his generation had begun to understand the philosophical implications of human beings stripped of their divinity, viewed as highly evolved animals. Frank Norris, Frederic's friend Stephen Crane, and other naturalistic writers of the 1890s would make animal imagery and atavism common devices in their novels, and it may well be that Frederic is demonstrating an early use of the same technique: It seems logical that a title such as "Snarl" would direct the reader to consider the beast within Theron Ware.

The abundance of animal imagery in the text supports such a consideration; Frederic never allows his readers to forget that his protagonist has a beast within. Quite to the contrary, when Theron instinctively seeks Celia after Sister Soulsby has left Octavius, he is "only obeying the universal law of nature" (185). After Theron's unfortunate visit to Dr. Ledsmar's laboratory and home, the scientist changes the name of one of his lizards: "Your name isn't Johnny any more. It's the Rev. Theron Ware" (226). And most importantly, Theron's name derives from a Greek word meaning "wild beast"—a constant reminder of what Theron is, or is becoming.³

It does not seem unlikely, then, that a *fin de siècle* author composing a novel with a protagonist named "wild beast" would reflect the nature of that character by tentatively titling his work "Snarl." Finally, Theron's last important speech, delivered in Sister Soulsby's parlor, supports the view that the work's "snarl" is that of a beast. With his religion gone and the life of an aesthetically mature lover out of his reach, Theron faces his ultimate dilemma:

Was I really rotten to the core all the time, years ago, when I seemed to everybody, myself and the rest, to be good and straight and sincere? Was it all a sham, or does God take a good man and turn him into an out and out bad one, in just a few months—in the time it takes an ear of corn to form and ripen and go off with the mildew? Or isn't there any God at all—but only men who live and die like animals? And that would explain my case, wouldn't

it? I got bitten and went vicious and crazy, and they've had to chase me out and hunt me to my death like a mad dog! Yes, that makes it all very simple. It isn't worth while to discuss me at all as if I had a soul. I'm just one more mongrel cur that's gone mad, and must be put out of the way—that's all. (336)

Sister Soulsby, whose relativistic pragmatism does not grapple with such questions, has a ready answer: She threatens Theron with a "good cuffing"—a particularly animalistic punishment—and simplistically explains that everyone is a combination of good and evil. According to her, Theron needs only "to slow steam, pull up, and back engine in the other direction." Sister Soulsby, like many readers, disregards his question: "Or isn't there any God at all—but only men who live and die like animals?" Such an oversight is unfortunate, for this question is Harold Frederic's as well—the question of a once religious man who now sees himself as a trapped "mongrel cur" gone mad. The centrality of this question is made clear in the manuscript's earlier title, "Snarl."

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NOTES

1. Charlyne Dodge and Stanton Garner, eds. *The Damnation of Theron Ware or Illumination*, vol. III of *The Harold Frederic Edition* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1985). Subsequent references are to this edition.

2. Austin Briggs gives this fact a footnote in his *The Novels of Harold Frederic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1969) 90; he states that the title "must have been intended to refer to a snarl of complications, not the snarl of a beast"—but he does not give his reasons for his assumption. See also Sidney Krause, "Harold Frederic and the Failure Motif," *Studies in American Fiction* 15 (1987) 56.