FATE, NATURALISM AND THE INDIVIDUAL IN JACK LONDON'S FICTION

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After a brief acquaintance with the work of Jack London, it might be assumed that he is simply a teller of escapist adventure stories. However, familiarity reveals that something lies deeper than the simple narrative. London gives us a clue to this when he writes:

> Without the strong central thread of a working philosophy, how can you make order out of chaos? how can you have a quantitative and qualitative perception of the relative importance of every scrap of knowledge you possess? and without all this how can you possibly be yourself? how can you have something fresh for the jaded world?[1]

An organising principle may be a common feature of the novel, but this point of view is particularly characteristic of the Naturalistic approach to fiction. "Their biological and philosophical assumptions separate them from the Realists with their unbiased objectivity, for in observing life the Naturalists already expect a certain pattern."[2] For Emile Zola, one of the first Naturalists, this pattern showed an "absolute determinism in the existing conditions of natural phenomenon", which requires the novelist

> to possess a knowledge of the mechanism of the phenomena inherent in man, to show the machinery of his intellectual and sensory manifestations under the influence of heredity and environment such as physiology shall give them to us, and then finally to exhibit man living in social conditions produced by himself which he modifies daily, and in the heart of which he himself experiences a continual transformation.[3]

This kind of point of view requires a degree of scientific objectivity and derives from a social application of the theories of Darwin. However, London's "working philosophy" is an amalgam of several influences, one of which was Herbert Spencer, who was "organising all knowledge for him, reducing everything to unity and elaborating ultimate realities. He showed there was no caprice, no chance. All was law."[4]

As this influence led Martin Eden to "seek out and follow cause and effect in everything before him" (p. 95), so it led Jack London towards "the application of the principles of scientific determinism to fiction."[5] But there is ample evidence of

contrary leanings in London's work towards both socialism and individualism. It is not clear that he manages to reconcile the teachings of Marx, Spencer and Nietzsche which are reflected in his work, and this could mean an impoverishment of his Naturalism. However, throughout his work there is a sense of a developing philosophy, and although the inconsistencies that we find there, like the prominence of self determinism, question the determined nature of man's fate, he does attempt to reconcile these various elements to his basic belief in Spencerian doctrine. In spite of variations in emphasis, then, the underlying philosophy is the same. It is simply that his naturalism manifests itself in different ways.

London's Naturalism first manifests itself in his short stories, a typical example of which is "Love of Life". It is set in the North West Territories against a background of indifferent nature and its theme is the struggle for survival. Two men, without food or ammunition, and faced with the possibility of death from the cold or starvation, are found on an arduous journey home. One is injured and left behind and the history of his struggle is traced until he is finally picked up by a whaling vessel. As time passes increasing weakness is not the only change that takes place in him. His values no longer coincide with those of society. The gold he carries is deemed worthless and left behind. There is no longer a place for ethics or etiquette. He is prepared to eat ptarmigan chicks alive and later kills a sick and dying wolf by sinking his teeth into its throat and drinking its blood. His needs have become the same as the wolf's, and, in many respects, his existence is closely related to that of an animal. When confronted by a bear, he "growled savagely, terribly, voicing the fear that is to life germane and that lies twisted about life's deepest roots."[6]

Here, Naturalism is presented as Atavism. In response to a harsh environment, Man, too, becomes harsh. He reverts to a primordial state naturally, a victim of his heredity. His actions are determined by his heredity and environment: a typical manifestation of Naturalism. However, London takes us even further. This case becomes representative of a truth which is even more fundamental, and the determined nature of the man's reaction is shown to be absolute. "He, as a man, no longer strove. It was the life in him, unwilling to die that drove him on" (p. 170). It is not simply hereditary animal traits that preserve this man, however. At one point he comes across the remains of a caribou calf. London writes: "He contemplated the bones clean-picked and polished, pink with the cell life in them which had not yet died. He sucked at the shreds of life which still dyed it faintly pink" (p. 170). The existence of the man is related directly to a simple cellular existence. Human will is passive and Man's struggle is not that of the individual, but of life itself. This suggests the representative nature of some Naturalist fiction. The incident not only exists in itself, but also as an example of scientific laws in action. It reflects Spencer's philosophy of the "struggle for existence" and the "survival of the fittest", and is, apparently, an absolute denial of individual will. However, the circumstances of the story are extreme and at times London's affirmation of this truth appears dubious, especially when he says that "Whatever he did was done by reason alone" (p. 172). This can be construed as the reluctance

of the individual to deny his individuality, but it is more likely that it is another way of denying the activity of any "will" to survive behind his actions.

It is interesting to note the attitude of the narrator. Towards the end of the story, when the man considers an act of cannibalism by sucking the bones of his "friend" Bill, who deserted him, there is no comment. The man is not judged for his callousness or lack of morals. This kind of amoral point of view is perhaps essential to Naturalism in order to reinforce its scientific nature.

The Call of the Wild, London's first big success, deals with a similar theme. A docile pet dog called Buck is taken from a warm and loving environment into the cold indifference of the frozen wastes in the North. The emphasis is laid upon the change that takes place in the animal due to this change. Again the circumstances are extreme, and the dog must either adapt or die: he must learn the "law of club and fang". London places a great value on this ability to adapt and in these circumstances, it is valuable to be able to adapt to primitive behaviour. Particularly in this novel, this ability is related to heredity. For Buck it is the combination of particular breeds which determines his fitness, and this is an early clue to the importance that London placed upon this kind of heredity. He did not apply it simply to dogs but was distinctly racist in its application to people. Although, this is again an example of "the survival of the fittest" philosophy, there is something more to be found. Buck is exposed to toughness and cruelty. He leads a primitive existence and hears the call of the wolves. That he is stirred by it,

> marked the completeness with which he barked back through the ages of fire and roof to the raw beginnings of life in the howling ages (p. 37).

It is a statement that in spite of an animal's exposure to domestication over many generations, its primitive instincts remain. The strength with which London declares this and the evidence of "Love of Life" shows that he believes this to be true of man also; that fundamentally Man's instincts are the same as they were thousands of years ago. Once more London presents an atavistic view of Naturalism where heredity and environment are the key factors but the Naturalistic basis of his argument is impaired by a strong identification with the main protagonist. Buck does not remain representative and he is rather extravagantly presented. For the purposes of Naturalism he is too much of an individual:

> When the long winter nights come on and the wolves follow their meat into the lower valleys, he may be seen running at the head of the pack through the pale moonlight or glimmering borealis, leaping gigantic above his fellows, his great throat a-bellow as he sings a song of the younger world, which is the song of the pack (p. 88).

His connection with his ancestors attains a mystical quality with the celebration of the dog's individuality. The author's strong sympathy with the animal smacks of romanticism and is a kind of justification for the dog's deeds. This is inconsistent

with the traditionally amoral perspective of the Naturalistic novel. However, in spite of the extravagance of the presentation, the points which are made can be justified. London's claim that Buck remembers a "hairy man squatted by the fire with head between legs" (p. 47) may be interpreted as a belief in genetic memory, which reinforces the claims that heredity makes upon both animal and man. In spite of an obviously romantic element, the cause and effect nature of events shows that the story remains Naturalistic in its embodiment of fundamental laws. As far as the reader is able to judge, Buck's fate, or the new conditions of his existence, are determined by heredity and environment although his attention may be drawn away from this by the romantic element in the tale.

So far, London has only dealt with his pattern of determinism in natural surroundings, but it is already clear that for him it is a sincere view of the world. George Orwell put it this way:

> It is not so much an approval of the harshness of Nature, as a mystical belief that Nature *is* like that. Nature is "red in tooth and claw". Perhaps fierceness is bad, but fierceness is the price of survival. The young slay the old, the strong slay the weak, by an inexorable law. Man fights against the elements or against his fellow man, and there is nothing except his own toughness to help him through. London would have said that he was merely describing life as it is actually lived... the constant occurrence of the same theme —struggle, toughness survival— shows which way his inclinations pointed[7].

This "inexorable law" appears to apply in Nature but it may not be so easily applied to society. By regarding the particular instance of *Burning Daylight* it will be discovered how representative London's Naturalistic beliefs are.

Naturalism is defined sometimes as the metaphorical application of Nature's laws in society and in *Burning Daylight* there is something of this kind. However, for London it is more than a literary device. The main protagonist resembles the idea of the Nietzschean Superman. He is larger than life, stronger than any rival and lives life to the full regardless of the dangers. Traditional values are of little consequence to him as his superb strength enables him to overcome any hardship. Consequently, he is unafraid to lose a fortune in a game of cards. The setting once more is the frozen gold country of the North. We witness Daylight's adventures until he amasses a fortune large enough to take him to the city. At last, here is a human specimen to observe in the transition from one environment to another. To the city, he brings not only a large fortune, but an attitude which is foreign to it. He regards the stock market as another form of gambling, leaving everything to "fate" in the knowledge that he is strong enough to win back. However, it is not long before he discovers the difference between the two environments. In the North his greatest adversary was Nature. However, in the city he is deceived by fellow businessmen and loses everything. He reacts quickly and by asserting his formidable strength he is able to threaten them into returning his money. He

becomes tainted by the false values of these men and begins a campaign of ruining other businessmen for the sake of his own gain. His motives become purely capitalistic and his tactics often cause hardship for others. He weakens physically and no longer lives life quite to the full, his life style dictated by the society in which he lives. Meanwhile in the struggle to get richer, he continues to hurt others, until eventually his eyes are opened and he falls in love with his secretary. She influences him towards helping others while he helps himself and he decides to leave this contaminated place when he realises the changes that have taken place within him. Once again London romanticises the situation at the end but there is a definite Naturalistic pattern. The effects of environment are clearly depicted in their effect upon Daylight. There is a direct application of Spencer's doctrine of the "survival of the fittest". Daylight's attitude towards his fellows directly reflects this. Although he rides rough-shod over everyone, there is little or no moral judgement passed upon him. This is due partly to the identification with the character but also to the circumstances of his actions. Industrial society is presented as dangerous as the gold country and his actions appear justified. However, the amoral perspective shifts when Daylight's secretary converts him to a more benevolent attitude. This harks back to London's earlier novel, *The Sea Wolf* where there is a more didactic expression of such a philosophy: "The highest, finest, right conduct... is that act which benefits at the same time the man, his children and his race".[8] This is a paraphrase of the altruism embodied in Herbert Spencer's philosophy. In the context of *Burning Daylight*, the hero is willing to condone such a philosophy. It might seem to be a tentative step towards Socialism, but it appears to take Daylight out of the struggle. As he was in the North, he has grown above traditional values and is able to act in this way. However, he can hardly be called representative of those in the struggle for existence. Hence, the novel falters slightly as a Naturalistic work.

This movement above the struggle is a clue to another fundamental part of London's philosophy. It can be interpreted as a further step in Man's development towards the Superman and if not it is at least a strong plea for individualism. This point of view would appear to contradict a deterministic view of Nature, but it must be considered how he arrives at this position.

Daylight is presented as the typical god of Anglo-Saxon breed. This heredity places great strength in him and is in evidence during his attempts to overcome his environment. Even the rejection of values requires them to have a negative effect. Hence, as far as we can observe the effects of heredity and environment upon the hero, this is a naturalistic novel. However, London takes things a step further. Let us compare Burning Daylight's character in the latter half of the novel, where he considers no one, with that of Wolf Larsen in *The Sea Wolf*. Like Daylight at this stage, Larsen has no regard for altruism:

> With immortality before me, altruism would be a paying business proposition. I might elevate my soul to all kinds of altitudes. But with nothing eternal before me but death, given for a brief spell this yeasty crawling and

> squirming which is called life, why it would be immoral for me to perform any act that was a sacrifice. Any sacrifice that makes me lose one crawl or squirm is foolish, and not only foolish, for it is a wrong against myself and a wicked thing. I must not lose one crawl or squirm if I am to get the most out of the ferment. Nor will the eternal movelessness that is coming to me be made easier or harder by the sacrifices or selfishnesses of the time when I was yeasty and acrawl (pp. 68-9).

This is the totally amoral attitude which can be applied to Burning Daylight. There is a denial of the existence of God and nothing is of value except life itself. Wolf Larsen relates human existence to a life force, a force that must struggle for existence, the motive for which is to get as much as possible for oneself. In *The Sea Wolf*, London tries to show that such an existence acts as an irritant to the social body and kills Larsen off. Perhaps this is why Daylight is made to see the light of altruism. That Larsen should fail to continue in his individualistic way of life is not convincing. What is more convincing is the handling of Daylight's situation. He has been shown to evolve a stage further, above the struggle, but in order to do so he must move away from the environment in which the struggle takes place. It appears to be a statement that if individualism is to succeed, it must succeed outside the body of society. This implies acknowledgement of the existence and influence of environment.

Perhaps, allowing the rejection of values that takes place, this is the only way to avoid a nihilistic point of view. Here London coincides with the philosophy of Nietzsche, but may be denying determinism. It raises the question of just how much self-determinism there is in his philosophy. It also suggests a new system of values in what should be an amoral work if it is truly Naturalistic.

The kind of individualism that would appear to be consistent with Naturalism is that of Wolf Larsen. In the face of an indifferent world he adopts an amoral and purely materialistic view:

> Do you know the only value life has is what life puts on itself?... Take that man I had aloft. He held on as if he were a precious thing... he sadly overrates himself. There is plenty of life demanding to be born. Had he fallen... there would have been no loss to the world. He was worth nothing to the world. The supply is too large. To himself only he was of value, and to show how fictitious even this value was, being dead, he is unconscious that he has lost himself (p. 59).

For Larsen this philosophy does work, but only for as long as he has the strength to enforce his will. When his strength fails, so does his philosophy. However, this remains in line with the idea of the "survival of the fittest". There is little sense that Humphrey van Weyden, his adversary, succeeds over him with his morality. It is simply that his individualism has failed with his strength. In the terms of his own philosophy he has lost nothing. Being dead he is unaware that he has lost. This kind of individualism remains valid within the Naturalistic scheme of things as it is seen in terms of a struggle determined by heredity and environment.

It is Larsen's hereditary strength which allows him his superiority. It also appears to have given him a weakness. When the effect of the tumour is evident he is overcome by his environment. Unlike Burning Daylight he has not risen above the struggle.

It is probable that London wrote *The Sea Wolf* prior to having any knowledge of Nietzsche. This would explain Larsen's failure to overcome his environment. However, in his later work, London uses Nietzsche's philosophy to good effect. The early part of *Burning Daylight* can be interpreted as a celebration of Nietzsche's exhortation to us to "live dangerously". It is indeed a celebration of individualism. However, it is individualism which is subject to the dictates of scientific determinism.

The change in Daylight was caused by this environment and London, like Nietzsche considers this. Daylight must leave the market-place behind: "Flee, my friend, into your solitude! I see you deafened by the uproar of the great men and pricked by the small ones."[9] By possessing so much wealth, he becomes firmly bound to society and subject to their laws and values. It is this which changed him and he must throw it off in order to be truly an individual again. This philosophy of individualism would appear to have little to do with Naturalism. However, the way to the Superman is seen in terms of an evolutionary process by Nietzsche and as a consequence is easily adopted by London: "Then Zarathustra spoke thus: Man is a rope, fastened between animal and Superman —a rope over an abyss."[10] This metaphor implies aspects of evolution and of struggle. It is also interesting to note the optimistic tone of such belief: although there may be those who fall into the abyss, a general improvement is taking place. This relates to Spencer too. He believed that man and society were evolving "towards the good life and that perfection is the final outcome of change."[11] Now it can be seen that Daylight is representative of a greater truth. London, utilising the philosophy of Spencer and Nietzsche, endeavours to show that a kind of individualism can exist, not in spite of the laws of scientific determinism, but because of them.

However, the state of perfection predicted by Spencer is not yet come. Society simply continues to evolve towards it, but in so doing throws up certain individuals who, for Nietzsche, are stepping stones to the Superman. However, we said that London endeavoured to show that the individual had to turn his back on Society or would be destroyed. There must be a further step in London's philosophy, to integrate his individualists, otherwise his pattern breaks. Moreover, we may not yet be convinced that they are products of the same laws to which the rest of life is subject. There is even a degree of romanticism in the presentation of his protagonists which makes it difficult to reconcile them with Naturalism. Many contradictions begin to appear. The different aspects of Man which London has unearthed under the influence of different stresses seem to be joined impossibly in specimens of the same species. This is expressed succinctly by Charles Walcutt:

> From atavism he moves by natural steps to the superman, whom he considers at one time to be superior because he is non-moral and, at

> another, an anti-social irritant who cannot survive in the complex modern world. He attaches virtue now to will and self-assertion, now to social adaptability (p. 91).

Perhaps there is a reason why London emphasises different ideas at different times. From biographical data it is clear that he wrote from his different experiences. This includes his intellectual experiences and results in the philosophies of Spencer, Haeckel, Marx and Nietzsche being reflected in different degrees, dependent upon when he became aware of them. This leads to the apparent inconsistencies although it may be that he is able to reconcile them in his later work.

A fundamental inconsistency is the different effects that the same environment has upon different people. Burning Daylight is an example. He is able to raise himself above his compatriots in the North. A more striking example is in *The Valley of the Moon.* While Billy and Saxon, the main protagonists, survive the effects of their poverty and the strikes in Oakland, to find a new life away from the industrial squalor, their two friends are sucked down into the abyss, Saxon's best friend degenerates into a state where she becomes a prostitute while her husband is killed during a riot. People from a similar background and brought up in the same environment are found to react differently. There is an interesting comment from Emile Zola about a novel set in a similar environment:

> I wanted to depict the inevitable downfall of a working-class family in the polluted atmosphere of our urban areas. The logical sequence to drunkenness and indolence is the loosening of family ties, the filth of promiscuity, the progressive loss of decent feelings and, as the climax, shame and death.
>
> It is morality in action, just that.[12]

That Billy's and Saxon's closest friends should follow this "logical sequence" of events and that they themselves should not, at first sight appears to be another lapse by the author into Romanticism. Let us consider a similar statement made by London himself:

> The children of the Ghetto possess all the qualities which make for noble manhood and womanhood, but the Ghetto itself... turns upon and destroys all these qualities, blots out the light and laughter, and moulds those it does not kill into sodden and forlorn creatures, uncouth, degraded and wretched below the beasts of the field.[13]

This implies that Billy and Saxon should have had the same fate as their friends. Heredity appears to have no say in the matter: the Ghetto is indifferent to it. However, London, true to his earlier view, emphasises the background of Billy and Saxon. Both are descendants of the Anglo-Saxon types who first colonised America. It is their heredity, their pioneering spirit which tells. If this occurs

throughout London's work then there is an obvious dichotomy: those who fall into the abyss and those who are fitter and do not. It is likely that those of the abyss shall procreate with one another leading to an even more degenerate breed while the others produce a nobler, healthier race. "The people of the abyss" are the "superfluous" and "flies of the market-place" of Nietzsche's philosophy, while the fitter of the species must be the bridge to the Superman. This apparent contradiction is reconciled by incorporating it into an elaboration of the philosophies of Spencer and Nietzsche: a kind of natural selection.

Let us consider another aspect of London's work which arises out of the Naturalism which is manifested there. The "creatures wretched below the beasts of the field" who appear in some of his work would suggest some tragic significance. Indeed, the emergence of Naturalism was at first heralded as a new kind of Tragedy by critics. The downfall of characters like Gervaise in *L'Assomoir* was seen as tragic. It is curious to note, however, that in spite of a good deal of "death an degradation" in London's work, there is little sense of the tragic. The initial reaction to this would be to call upon London's romanticism, which appears to call for a happy ending for characters like Saxon and Billy and Humphrey van Weyden and Maud. However, it is something intrinsic to Naturalism which is perhaps enlarged upon by London which avoids the tragical. In Tragedy, there is usually some sense of the ideal and the tragic consequence arises out of the failure to achieve it. However in Naturalism there are no absolute moral ideals. There is no sense of a deity or of the soul's immortality. Hence in Naturalism there is no sense of catharsis. An action becomes tragic because the actors fail to achieve their ideal. The sense of tragedy in the audience arises out of a sympathy for their loss or failure. When there is an amoral perspective, the reader is simply an objective witness. There is only a simple chain of cause and effect with a logical result. There is no sense of failure. The determined nature of the climax means an absence of choice. There is no "hamartia" in the protagonist which causes his fictional loss. There is no alternative ending possible. As a consequence, the death of thousands in *The Iron Heel* or the suicide of Martin Eden cannot be deemed tragic. "Failure" and death in London's work cannot achieve tragic significance. Moreover, there is even a sense of optimism generated by some of his work. In Tragedy, the ideal is represented usually by some heaven, or god-like potential in Man. For London, if there is an ideal, it is the sense of a perfection which will be arrived at eventually through evolution and not something for which it is necessary to die to achieve. There is no "tragic fate" in London's work. Indeed, there can be none in any truly Naturalistic work. All life which is sacrificed in his work is part of a causal sequence which for Spencer is the evolution of perfection and for Nietzsche, the bridge to the Superman: "He who climbs upon the highest mountains laughs at all tragedies, real or imaginary."[14]

Up to this point it has been possible to reconcile apparent inconsistencies in London's Naturalism. However, it will be more difficult when his Marxist beliefs are considered. It seems impossible that Socialism can be integrated with a philosophy which is often individualistic and occasionally borders on fascism.

Socialism plays a large part in *The Valley of the Moon*, but it is worked into London's philosophy in a more didactic fashion in *Martin Eden* and *The Iron Heel*. The first thing to notice is that the philosophies of Spencer and Marx are mutually exclusive. Perhaps the most concise expression of this contradiction is this:

> Spencer placed so much importance on the "struggle for existence" and "the survival of the fittest"... that he could not look with any approval on any organised exercise of the social will that might in any way protect the unfit. Marx on the left wing, interpreting the same "struggle for existence" in terms of class warfare, found the Bourgeoisie which produced for profit guilty of interfering with the working man's "natural" instinct to produce well and abundantly. So the liquidation of the capitalists was to aid the survival of the more productive and therefore more "fit" workers.[15]

It has already been shown that London believed in Spencer's philosophy, so it must be discovered whether he amends his beliefs in his later work to admit Marx. In *Martin Eden*, London creates an example of the individualist. Martin says:

> As for myself, I am an individualist. I believe the race is to the swift, the battle to the strong. Such is the lesson I have learned from Biology... and individualism is the hereditary and eternal foe of Socialism (p. 220).

This is perfectly in line with what has gone before. London, however, creates another character called Brissenden. An ardent socialist, he believes

> Socialism is inevitable, because the present rotten and irrational system cannot endure: because the day is past for your man on horseback. The slaves won't stand for it. They are too many, and willy-nilly, they'll drag down the would be equestrian before he ever gets astride. You can't get away from them and you'll have to swallow the whole slave morality (p. 277).

Two contradictory ideals are expressed in the work. If they are mutually exclusive then one must bow to the other. Throughout the novel Martin argues forcibly for individualism but London covers the whole spectrum of his beliefs. The story is basically one of struggle. Martin is a young seaman who strives to attain recognition as a writer despite the opposition of family and friends. A point of view expressed early in the novel is this: "A man with will may rise superior to his environment" (p. 66). It is this that Martin strives to do. However, he forgets that by seeking recognition from that environment, he inextricably links himself to it. He fails to reckon with the power of social values. The example of a Mr. Butler, a successful lawyer, is placed before him as something to aspire to, but he cannot believe Butler's struggle has been worthwhile. His years of privation have led only to "dyspepsia and inability to be humanly happy" (p. 67). His goal was also

inextricably linked to his environment and Martin, rejecting these values as an individualist, hopes to succeed in another way.

While Martin struggles towards his goal, London shows the many ways in which "natural" law can assert itself. At one stage he returns to atavism when describing a fight between Martin and Cheese Face:

> They sank lower and lower into the muddy abyss, back into the dregs of the raw beginnings of life, striving blindly and chemically, as the stardust of the heavens strives, as atoms strive, colliding, recoiling, and colliding again and eternally again (p. 118).

Life is described as a struggle, even to its most fundamental levels, and the effect of environment upon life is powerfully presented, particularly in the episode where Martin works in a laundry. The effect of the work is that he no longer studies and again begins to drink. Joe, his workmate, is simply "aided ably by that other machine, that thought of itself as once having been one Martin Eden, a man" (p. 136). It shows how easily one can be degraded by one's environment. Other examples are the increasing slovenliness of his sister and the plight of his landlady, Maria. Here, the squalor of the abyss is represented: a woman who works hard but is unable to provide shoes for her children finds her only solace in dreaming over a glass of cheap wine. It is this that Martin fights against and he is strong enough to do so. His strength of mind and body, based upon his heredity wins through. However, in spite of success, in spite of "rising superior to his environment", he does not find the happiness he expected. He cannot find the Nietzschean "self-sufficiency-in-joy of the sovereign individual"[16] as he has been too strongly linked to his environment. Brissenden warns him:

> What you want is the magnificent abandon of life, the great free souls. But you won't live. You won't go back to your ships and sea, therefore you'll hang around these pest holes of cities until your bones are rotten and then you'll die (p. 245).

This is the advice that Zarathustra gave: to flee the flies of the market-place. It appears that within society there is no place for the individualist. It is the buzzing of the flies, the "prattled moralities" (p. 245), which man created for himself, which will disillusion Martin and will lead him to self-destruction. Unless he can escape, he can never be happy. Eventually, Martin does try to escape, but has left it too late. It is simply an acknowledgement of, and a negative reaction against society and its values. He is no longer a "Ja-sagender". His outlook is nihilistic. In spite of himself, his success has been dependent upon the values of his environment and in spite of his dislike for it, he is inextricably linked to it. There can be none of the Nietzschean "joy in existence" within such a society and there can be none outside it either. Martin has travelled the same road as Mr. Butler. He has forgotten that for Man, existence is a struggle and that true individualism is to rejoice in it

without heed of values or goals, and in spite of the determined nature of that existence. When Martin ceases to struggle, he ceases to be able to rejoice. Life can hold no more attraction for him. The forces of his heredity and environment have brought him to a point where he cannot exult in his individualism. He has been tainted by the environment which produced him and is, in his own words, "a sick man" (p. 334). It appears that there is only one act left open to him, and that is to take his own life. It is described as a heroic act and not tragically: "He had will —a will strong enough that with one last exertion it could destroy itself and cease to be" (p. 347). It appears to be the only act of will that is left open to him, and perhaps voluntary death is the only wilful act that is open to Man. However, his suicide can be looked at in another way. Considering his heredity and the pressures of environment that he was subjected to, his suicide was inevitable.

As yet, little has been said of the Socialist element in the novel. It certainly exists and to Brissenden is important in its relation to Martin:

> I would like to see you a Socialist before I'm gone. It will give a sanction for your existence. It is the one thing that will save you in the time of disappointment that is coming to you (p. 277).

It is presented as the only alternative to individualism, and as individualism fails in the novel, it should assume a natural ascendancy over it. However, this fails to occur. It is clear that London wishes us to believe that Socialism is the proper alternative, but he argues for it only in a negative way. Brissenden is the only Socialist on the scene and his earlier argument might be accepted as a cause for Socialism suitable to a Naturalistic novel. However, to argue that the present system is illogical denies the cause and effect nature of the development of that system. Meanwhile, Martin calls upon London's basic Naturalistic precepts to show that Socialism would "annul the law of development" (p. 280). The weight of the argument certainly lies in favour of Spencer in spite of Martin's demise. It appears that where both Naturalism and Socialism "are present, one must eventually gain ascendancy."[17] In this case it is Naturalism that succeeds. Perhaps the most striking fact to come out of the novel is that individualism cannot survive in the face of society and that the individual is readily sacrificed in the wake of social development.

The Iron Heel was published two years before *Martin Eden* and manages to reconcile Brissenden's prediction of revolution with London's evolutionary doctrine. Once more life is described as a struggle where the fittest survive: "It is dog eat dog, and you ate them up. But on the other hand you are being eaten up by the bigger dogs..."[18] However, this is also used as a description of capitalist society and within this society is a struggle which can be expressed in economic terms: "The class struggle, therefore, presents itself in the present stage of social development between the wage-paying and wage-paid classes" (p. 32). The novel is written from the perspective of a period in the future after the revolution has taken place. It provides commentary upon a supposedly contemporary manuscript which

describes the activities of the Socialist movement. The hero, Ernest Everhard, consistently predicts the shape of the struggle that is to come, and it is through his mouth that London endeavours to reconcile the contradictions in his philosophy. As a believer in the "survival of the fittest", he must believe that it is power or strength that must have the ascendancy. Consequently, the ruling class or "oligarchy" as he calls them will be initially in the ascendant. However, Everhard goes on to say:

> It is true that labour has from the beginning of history been in the dirt. And it is equally true that so long as you and yours that come after you have power, that labour shall remain in the dirt... Power will be the arbiter... It is a struggle of classes. Just as your class dragged down the old feudal nobility, so shall it be dragged down by my class, the working class (p. 88).

He calls upon biology and sociology as proof of his predictions. He foresees a slow social evolution in which the oligarchy will be at odds with a privileged labour class, and that eventually, through their weakness which results in this struggle, an opportunity for the common people to rise up will arrive. These "people of the abyss" will be subject to degradation and death, but in the end, it will be the fittest proletariat which will survive to come out from under the "Iron Heel". London, also incorporates Nietzsche in this philosophy. It requires a "superman" or "supermen" like Everhard to organise and lead the proletariat to Socialism when the time is right. In this way his pattern of Spencer, Marx and Nietzsche becomes complete. The Spencerian doctrine of natural selection is kept in force as it is the development by determined laws of a fitter proletariat which will secure the downfall of a weakened oligarchy. The process is shown to take hundreds of years. The individual is an easy sacrifice. Everhard must die in the pursuit of his beliefs in spite of his strength and individuality. Values, individuals and institutions are swept aside as evolution marches on. Atavism for society is denied: "You can no more cause the tide of economic evolution to flow back along its channel... than you can make water flow uphill" (p. 113).

Individualism is a thorn in the side of society. One Bishop Morehouse is conveniently deemed insane for going against established morality. Hence, atavism is admitted for individuals. The "people of the abyss" atirred up into a riot revert and degenerate into the "Roaring Abysmal Beast". Despite his identification with the common people, London is not a true Marxist. He is too great a believer in natural aristocracy. Essentially, he cannot approve of any interference with the natural laws of development to protect the unfit. He is not a Marxist and his kind of revolution is not really a revolution at all. One can equate it with Spencer's idea of the movement towards perfection. The continual struggle between classes finally produces perfection in the shape of "the fittest proletariat". He tries to graft "his own crude imperialism onto socialism... the survival of the fittest race must precede the victory of the fittest proletariat. Imperialism must therefore run its full course and should be supported."[19] This is the message of *The Iron Heel*: the

superfluous must die. It is not really socialism at all in spite of London's belief that it was.

It has been evident that London continually modified his basic pattern to incorporate new ideas. However, there are certain facts wich have remained basically unaltered. Spencer remains forever London's greatest influence. This is a view which virtually precludes self-determinism. Even the introduction of Marx and Nietzsche did not fundamentally change his philosophy. Basically he believed in a determined evolutionary process and it was their ideas which were modified rather than his own. Nietzsche's ideas of individualism and the bridge to the Superman were certainly incorporated but were deemed unable to work in modern society: the stresses of environment over which Man has no control either force the individualist out of it or destroy his individuality. *The Iron Heel* proves that he did not truly adopt the teachings of Marx. He simply believed that one day, through natural selection, a day of the common man would arrive, when that law would be obsolete and perfection would occur. Hence, in simple terms, Man is a victim of his destiny, and that destiny is for him to struggle a short while and then die. The efforts of the individual will have no effect upon the development of the species. However, this is an over simplification. The reader of London's work is granted many examples of individualists who appear to master their own fate. Wolf Larsen, Burning Daylight and Martin Eden dominate through the exertion of their will. Yet, this seems to occur out of a romantic identification with the characters who are each larger than life.

Outside of indifferent Nature, Man creates an artificial environment for himself. It stifles individuality and pidgeon-holes men into categories of class. The complex machinery of industry and economics make it impossible for an individual to strive alone. The relations of mankind have become so complex that all are interdependent. Oligarchy is dependent on working class as working class is dependent on oligarchy. Society is as indifferent as Nature itself. It is envisaged as a machine. The evolutionary process grinds on indifferent to the individual, who, if he attempts to halt the machine, is ground under its wheels. Each of the characters mentioned is impotent. This may sound tragic, but any tragic quality is denied by the denial of any god-like potential in them. Potential exists only for the development of the human race as a whole. Hence Jack London's Naturalistic fiction must deny self-determinism as it denies tragedy. It is perhaps the complete absence of choice which makes this so. However, this denial is at times half-hearted. The perspective cannot be truly objective when he identifies so much with his characters. They have rejected traditional values. There is a celebration of individualism in *Burning Daylight.* Still there remains a slight contradiction, although it can be reconciled. London believed that although the logic of Darwinian selection could not be denied, the individual might do as he wished. From the evidence of his work it appears that the nature of the particular circumstances determined to what extent heredity and environment impinged upon the individual will. Had he stuck rigidly to the laws he laid down, there would have been little place for self-determinism, but our assertion shows that his

philosophy bowed to his individualist pride, and that this pride could not totally deny influence over its fate.

It has been necessary to consult several of Jack London's works to trace the development of his philosophy. But when the fancy frills are torn away, the core of his thinking remains as it was in the beginning as expressed by Koskoosh in "The Law of Life":

> It was the law of all flesh. Nature was not kindly to the flesh. She had no concern for that concrete thing called the individual. Her interest lay in the species, the race... But one task did Nature set the individual (Procreation). Did he not perform it, he died. Did he perform it, it was all the same, he died. Nature did not care.[20]

Notes

1. Jack London, "On the Writer's Philosophy of Life", in *Jack London: American Rebel,* ed. P. S. Foner (New York: The Citadel Press, 1947), p. 33.
2. Lilian R. Furst and Peter N. Skrine, *Naturalism* (London: Methuen & Co, Ltd., 1971), p. 9.
3. Emile Zola, *The Naturalist Novel* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1964), pp. 2 and 12.
4. Jack London, *Martin Eden* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p. 95. All further references to this work will appear in the text.
5. C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature* (Indianapolis: The Odyssey Press, 1975), p. 337.
6. Jack London, "Love of Life", in *The Call of the Wild and Other Stories* (New York: Signet Classics, 1960), p. 169. All further references to this story and *The Call of the Wild* will be taken from this edition.
7. George Orwell, "Introduction to 'Love of Life' *and Other Stories* by Jack London", in *Collected Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), Vol. IV, p. 45.
8. Jack London, *The Sea Wolf and Other Stories* (New York: Signet Classics, 1964), p. 68. All further references will appear in the text.
9. Friederich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* trans R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 78.

10. Nietzsche, p. 43.
11. In C. C. Walcutt, *American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), p. 8.
12. Emile Zola, "Preface", in *L'Assomoir,* trans. Leonard Tancock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 21.
13. Jack London, *The People of the Abyss* (London: The Journeyman Press, 1977), chapter 23.
14. Nietzsche, p. 68.
15. Walcutt, p. 8.
16. See R. J. Hollingdale, introd., *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* by Friederich Nietzsche.
17. R. Morgan, "Naturalism, Socialism and Jack London's *Martin Eden*", in *Jack London Newsletter,* 10, 21.
18. Jack London, *The Iron Heel* (London: Mills & Boon, n.d.), p. 111. All further references will appear in the text.
19. A. Sinclair, *Jack: A Biography of Jack London* (London: Harper Row, 1978), p. 75.
20. Jack London, "The Law of Life", in *The Sea Wolf and Other Stories,* p. 287.