JACK LONDON'S SUPERMAN:
THE OBJECTIFICATION OF HIS LIFE AND TIMES

by

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INTRODUCTION

Though extensive scholarly criticism of Jack London's work is not abundant, definitive and complete biographies of him do exist. Perhaps writers have found more interesting material in London's adventurous life than in his stories. Certainly none of the exploits of his fictional characters surpass, for sheer romantic glamour, his own triumph over the seemingly impossible. Possibly the lack of scholarship exists because many of London's stories, written hurriedly and with a money motive, do not seem to merit criticism. However two writers have produced serious and detailed studies of London's work. Margaret I. Pope, in her Jack London: A Study in Twentieth Century Values, has presented a thorough appraisal of all of Jack London's works, including the novels, short stories, plays and essays. This work attempts to evaluate and classify London's writings and to determine their significance in American literary history. Charles Child Walcutt's "Naturalism and the Superman in the Novels of Jack London," deals with a specific problem adequately defined in the title of his study. To these writers a debt is admitted for the valuable aid their analyses have provided this study.


Most critics agree that in his primitive and strong-minded heroes Jack London was drawing an accurate or fancied image of himself. When one surveys the many biographies of London, the reader is at once aware of the striking similarity between London's adventurous life and the stories he wrote. His stories are written from the point of view of autobiographical romance, and this probably accounts for the fact that London could successfully portray but one type of heroic character. In all of his novels the brutal and unusual experiences of London's life are percepted through the hero, a dauntless, confident character who always has Jack London's handsome face, Jack London's comely muscles and appetite for daring. Throughout his life he continued to exalt the adventurous memories of his youth and the self-consciousness of his manliness. His chief concern was to see himself in print. He could not be quite satisfied that he was real until he could feed his ambition on this trivial glory, and his egoism matured and concentrated in a desire to see himself externalized in a public, printed, official self which he could admire at his ease. He tended to view everything as if it were great or heroic, and his novels are remembered for their quality of exploiting a romantic glorification of strength, bravery and brutality.

Any attempt to judge Jack London's work without taking into account his nature and the external forces which shaped his life and his work is likely to produce unsatisfactory results. Probably more than any other writer of his time he was
profoundly affected by his generation. To read the biographies of London is to know a man who wanted to grasp every possible experience — physical, intellectual and emotional — that could be realized from his time. The world was his playground; but it was also his school, and the experiences he gained from it he wrote into his books. Because he was so much one with his age, writers invariably find it necessary to explain both the man and his works while studying the forces which at-tempered him.

This thesis is concerned with an examination of the heroes, the supermen, that Jack London developed in his novels. Its purpose is to determine the essential properties of Jack London's fictional characters by a method which considers both the author and the forces which affected him. Since there is general agreement among critics that London's heroes are the objectification of all his own desires, strivings and ideals and that London himself is a representative refraction of his age, a method which considers the physical and ideological forces which shaped London's generation, and subsequently himself, seems both expedient and valid.
PART I: PHYSICAL FORCES

Section I: The Frontier Spirit in America

"The American frontier is a state of mind rather than a geographical expression," writes Russell Blankenship, "but strictly speaking the term means a moving line of settlement with the uninhabited public domain before it and the settled country behind." The thinking of the American people was determined to a large degree by the frontier. Just as Columbus' reports of the New World had a marked effect upon European thought, so did the wilds of the West promote a spirit of adventure and dreams of personal wealth and ultimate security in the minds of Americans. A man who became dissatisfied with his location needed only the courage to travel beyond the periphery of settled territory to new land more to his liking.

Social life on the frontier was a great leveler. The very rich seldom staked their fortunes to penetrate the unknown, and it was never the group in power that emigrated. Pioneers were of the poorer classes to whom the Western regions promised more than the social group in which they lived, and the possibility of emigration fostered a spirit of freedom and independence in these people. Wealth counted little

in establishing one's self on the frontier; a man could be poor, and still be a leader, or be capable of hewing out a satisfying if not a comfortable existence for himself and his family. Possessing little capital, the pioneers risked little in the way of material goods when they embarked into an almost unknown frontier where various possibilities beckoned.

The man on the Western frontier insisted upon the right and even the duty of "getting on" in the world. Independence was physical and economic, but independence in thought was not popular. Indeed the pioneer prided himself in being identified in spirit, speech, ambition and rough ethics with his fellow settlers. Pioneers believed that the ability to gain wealth was proof of the virtue of the individual, that government's prime duty was to assist in the individual's exploitation of natural resources and was never to interfere with his struggle to acquire property. American business has always boasted of its distinctive characteristic of free competition, and this attitude is substantially an effect of the frontier force carried into the business world. The rise to fame of a Carnegie, a Morgan and other self-made individuals in politics, industry and finance, the emotional intemperances of American political campaigns, and the unique uniformity of our national thought are also in harmony with our pioneer heritage. Life in this land of opportunity did not

5. Blankenship, American Literature, p. 65.
6. Ibid., p. 68.
beget pessimism, but the attitude that the individual could
scale the ladder of fortune to a height proportionate to his
capabilities.

American frontier spirit was one characterized by optim-
ism, a spirit which was not unwarranted. Economic oppor-
tunities, vast natural resources, the promises of roads, ca-
nels, railroads and other phases of industrial progress and
lack of social stratification in the West were sufficient to
encourage settlers into the new lands where their individual
efforts could bring optimum returns. On the westward-looking
borders, iconoclasm, rugged individualism and self-reliance
became a religion. In an atmosphere like this, giants,
mythical or real, could be born, and the folk tales of the
time bear witness to this fact. Optimism and individualism
were symbolized in such folk heroes as Davy Crockett, Daniel
Boone and Kit Carson, whose fierce, wild courage, independence,
and "rough diamond" chivalry characterized and romanticized
the spirit of the frontier.

Settlers who were stopped in their westward emigration
by the Pacific settled down, industrialized, and after a
time came in contact with many of the same problems which had
pushed them into the once virgin territory. The West Coast
area was one of the last sections of the United States proper
where the pioneers were forced to stop their movement.
Westerners who had taken part in America's last great migration

7. Fred Lewis Pattee, *The New American Literature* (New
York, 1930), p. 137.
were alarmed when they noticed industrial and land opportunities depleting. Conditions from which they had fled in the eastern regions were not spreading to the "promised land" of the West. Opportunities they had sought, and to some extent, had realized were waning in the face of industrial conditions not compatible with individualism. The spirit of the Western frontier was, to their dismay, being frustrated. A number of political and economic theories were offered as a means of coping with industrial and land problems, but these solutions, of necessity, had to sacrifice individual enterprise for social solidarity. Some of these movements, however, enjoyed popularity among the working classes because, in theory at least, they offered individual opportunities with a minimum of social control.

The Single Tax of Henry George, Populism, and Nationalism were reform movements of the time whose popular platforms indicate how the pioneer spirit of people sought to re-establish the rapidly passing conditions which originally supported this spirit. Henry George's Single Tax proposed to retain pioneer individualism and preserve it in the face of growing industrial conditions. Equality of opportunity in the form of equal rights of individuals to the natural resources, to have been accomplished through a system of land taxation, was George's answer to the problem of monopoly. Populism also gained favor because of its intention to promote individual opportunities. It was organized as a move-
ment in 1891 to champion the interests of workers in general and agrarian classes in particular against the moneyed interests of the nation. Indicative of America’s native optimism and distaste for complete economic, political and social equality was the short-lived and only slightly popular movement of Nationalism. Nationalism, fomented in the eighties by Bellamy’s celebrated *Looking Backward*, sought to use government to control business. The idea was palatable to an individualistic American audience through the medium of romance, tinged with sentiment and expressed in a charming style. The movement, which grew directly from the book, while it expressed concretely the hopes and aspirations of many of the proletariat, could not feasibly reconcile Nationalism’s inherent socialism with the traditional free enterprise attitude of Americans. The traditional spirit of free competition was in conflict with measures which proposed to control competition for the betterment of working classes. Thus, a solution, though not by way of compromise, was sought.

Americans, especially Westerners, whose hopes for frontiers were still strong, held tightly to their dreams of eventual horizons. Easterners, having faced a more acute industrial crisis than the West, were prone to accept more drastic measures to obviate industrial and agrarian abuses. The spirit of the frontier force had ebbed in the East so that collectivist thinking met less reaction there; but Westerners still felt the feverish pulse of pioneer blood in their veins,
and this did not make for an attitude which would readily accept socialistic measures. Western literature reflected the unique temper of gold-rushers, farmers, sailors and writers who swarmed to California, the last great frontier in America's continental limits. The literature of the West from the gold-rush days until after the turn of the century mirrored the freedom and adventure of tall men in the big outdoors. Throughout America, however, enough of the breath of optimism and individualism remained to entice the man with ambitions of material wealth to hope for new opportunities rather than to accept governmental control.

In the face of restlessness, the United States took on a policy of imperialism. American frontier spirit, finding fewer and fewer outlets within the country's borders, peered beyond the national geographic limits at foreign lands. When Theodore Roosevelt announced that "England's rule in India and Egypt has been a great benefit to England," bade the United States to follow Britain's lead, and urged that "the first and all-important work to be done is to establish the supremacy of our flag," most Americans accepted this policy in the spirit of the frontier with no critical awareness that it might include a policy of aggression.

In the person of Theodore Roosevelt, many, too many, Americans envisaged a savior. Roosevelt became the symbol

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of individualism and manliness, the spirit of the frontiersman, and the idol of every American boy: he became President, hunted and killed lions, led the Rough Riders, became a hero in the war, quarrelled with the Pope and led the crusade of "he-men" against the mollycoddles. As a new symbol of the frontier he had kinship with Daniel Boone. He was a likely leader for a nation eager to expand and to exert her pioneer heritage.

Roosevelt's celebrated address, delivered at Chicago on April 10, 1899, not only delighted his age, but struck the keynote of a new era. This policy was to ignore the socialists or mollycoddles, equalitarians (other than "good Americans"), and those who would destroy monopoly by leveling economics. It was a policy well in keeping with the optimism which attends expansion, and Roosevelt gave impetus to the restlessness of Americans when he said: "... I wish to preach, not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife; to preach that highest form of success which comes, not to the man who desires mere easy peace, but the man who does not shrink from danger, from hardship, or the bitter toil, and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate triumph."

Thus, America had a man ready to lead her in her quest for new territories and fancied glorious frontiers, a man who


offered leadership consonant with the spirit of expansion, a man who could point to the West Indies, Philippines, Porto Rico, Cuba and the Klondike, indicate the "problems" they fomented, and say, "It is cowardly to shrink from solving them."  

Section II: The New Territories

The Klondike, which hitherto had been known only as "Seward's folly," became the most promising new territory to be penetrated during the era of the new frontier. Besides its attraction as an unsettled sector, the gold discovered in the Yukon was a lure which offered men a chance to make their dreams of fortune come true. Unlike previous new territories, the Klondike was inhabited primarily by a male population. Exploitation, not colonization, was anticipated, and families were left at home. The area also promised adventure in the conquest of the wilds and an escape from the ever increasing controls of civilization. Devotees of the strenuous life welcomed the opportunity to apply their philosophy of toil, and the Northland wilderness was chosen by many men as a place to practice it.

Other objects of America's imperialism -- Porto Rico, Cuba, the Philippines and the West Indies -- did not offer the glamour of the Klondike. These lands were problems, as Roose--

12. Ibid., p. 322.
velt had stated, and the problems were met with military strength. Nothing so enticing as gold impelled men to tropic islands where hot jungles and disease were encountered. The Klondike, moreover, could not be properly termed the object of foreign exploitation since it was a possession of the United States. Men, as in the days of the '49 gold-rush, were caught with the excitement of a wealthy new frontier, and the dash was on to claim what was theirs.

The strenuous life was now in vogue; individualism was revered. The world was available to the man strong enough and brave enough to put it to use. Here was opportunity. To the frontier force, anxiously waiting to exert itself, add the possibility of expansion in the form of the new territories; to these ingredients, supply a catalyst, Theodore Roosevelt, and behold the essence of American spirit upon the eve of the twentieth century! Individualism seemed again possible and desirable. Being placed apart from legal ethics of civilization men on the new frontier came to depend upon personal ethics, and this shift in values encouraged personal initiative, individual aggressiveness and self-reliance. A man is comparatively safe in a well-organized society, whatever his physical and mental powers, since society's laws protect him; but in the wilds a man must depend on himself, and the survival of the fittest takes on new meaning -- the survival and success of the strongest.
Section III: The New Frontier, Romance and Individualism

Forces which shaped the optimism of the American character with regard to her previous frontier spirit, i.e., possibilities of wealth, lack of social stratification, etc., were also manifest in America's enthusiasm for the new frontier. In fact, her eagerness was more pronounced than previously because new territories had not been available for a long time. Monopolies had grown more coercive, so that those persons who wished to remove industrialism's yoke became extremely rest- less. An involuntary proletariat was anxious to expand, to own, and to build, but only a small percentage of these people was actually to participate in the imperialistic program. Those who were left behind sought and found a measure of comfort through (1) social reform, designed to alleviate poverty and to level persons from the economic standpoint, and (2) romance in the form of fiction through which the reader could sublimate his concern by reading about persons and lands which reflected the pioneer spirit. Socialistic steps, of course, were hardly compatible with the thinking of the new frontier, but were being accepted by some, in lieu of escape through romantic fiction, as a real solution. The privileged few who actually took part in emigrations apprehended the actual romance, if not the wealth, which their immobile neighbors could only dream about, and they were seldom disposed to either social reform or romantic fiction.
Romance and individualism, then, were realized by but a fraction of those who pursued them. The only real outlet for a pent frontier spirit lay in the actual participation in the pioneering of new territories. Those who could not escape the stifling consequences of their society by retreating from it to the new territories were forced either to cope with the industrial monster or to seek escape vicariously through the wondrous tales of adventure painted for them by the writers of the time.

The call for colorful romance was joyously answered by a multitude of writers from 1890 to 1905. Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* and Stanley Weyman's *The Red Cockade* were followed by a flood of historical romances, notably, *The Conqueror* by Gertrude Atherton and Ellen Glasgow's *The Battleground*. The thinness of these romances was somewhat redeemed by their ability to stimulate sluggish imaginations which could not welcome the truth of realism. Richard Harding Davis' *The Bar Sinister* enjoyed considerable popularity by virtue of its escape value, and all of Kipling's works were eagerly read in an effort to satisfy the appetite for romance. In the realm of literature, romance opposed sordid and unsentimental aspects of naturalism and realism, which were, in part, manifestations of the growing pessimistic colour of industrialism. The glitter, optimism and sweetness of romance tended, not to remedy the unlovely conditions from which

naturalism and realism had sprung, but to escape from a realization of those conditions and to transport readers, through fiction, to the frontier.14

It was Rudyard Kipling who romantically reported the progress of England's imperialism to the world. As the United States embarked upon her quest for new territories, a "Kipling Americanus" was forthcoming; Jack London arrived as an author to prodigiously supply the romance of America's new territories.

Section IV: Jack London: Child of the New Frontier

"The one and last literary figure who was able to retain something of the energy and vigor of the frontier force was Jack London," writes V. F. Calverton. "With the passing of London, the frontier expended the last trace of literary energy. Since London's death it has given birth only to satire."15 Born in 1876; in California, of pioneer stock, living during the era of the new frontier force, possessing a nature which was akin to the pioneer spirit of individualism and self-reliance, Jack London was equipped to reflect the temper of the early twentieth century in America. He was part and parcel of his age, and his paradoxes were only its own.

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Throughout his life London remained immensely proud of his pioneer heritage and identified himself with the vigor and restlessness of the frontier spirit. He considered the pioneers a "race of doers," the Argonauts, the blond race which roamed the world and marched into the unknown beyond the horizon; subsequently he fancied himself in the same romantic light. He admired the individualism of the pioneer spirit, not the Emersonian variety, but a conquering energy to ruthlessly overcome obstacles which might stand between the individual and his objective. The Anglo-Saxon, whom London curiously identified directly with the most aggressive pioneers, was to him the acme of the races, a land robber, subject to blood lusts, and fascinated by plunder and booty.  

He believed himself to be of "pure" Anglo-Saxon stock, thus of the best of the pioneers. He took pains to trace his ancestry to its alleged Anglo-Saxon origin and claimed that his blood had not been diluted by that of any lesser race. This, of course, is an absurd concept of race, but in spite of his avid scientific reading he believed it. Though he should have realized that in-breeding, tantamount to a "pure" race, could have more serious consequences than cross-breeding, he was either ignorant of the fact or ignored it.

Jack London's early pride in what he believed to be his own superior race was due to two causes. The first was the influence of his mother. When he was a child she taught him

that his race was superior and that he should regard races or peoples other than his own with suspicion and contempt. Later in life he divulged how his prejudices were initiated:

It was wild primitive countryside in those days, and often I heard my mother pride herself that we were old American stock and not immigrant Irish and Italians like our neighbors. In all our section there was only one other American family. 17

My mother had theories. First, she steadfastly maintained that brunettes [sic] and all the tribe of dark-eyed humans were deceitful. Needless to say, my mother was blond. Next, she was convinced that the dark-eyed Latin races were profoundly sensitive, profoundly treacherous, and profoundly murderous. 18

Though the above statements would seem to indicate that London, in later years, mollified the prejudices with which his mother had imbued him, the fact is that his reverence for the Anglo-Saxon continued throughout his life. Before 1900, he had developed a conviction of race supremacy: "Not that God has given the earth to the Anglo-Saxon," he stated in an interview, "but that the Anglo-Saxon is going to take the earth for himself." 19

A second reason for his early adherence to the race theory was due to his environment as it affected his personality. Numerous biographies attest to the terrific ego of Jack London the child. He was of a low-middle class family,

and his lack of wealth did not nourish his egoism nor make for an atmosphere which would support his belief in his individual superiority. Young London, therefore, dwelled upon another factor; his pride in race became compensatory for his lack of wealth and station. If he could not be of a wealthy family, he could emphasize the excellence of his ancestors' blood.

His ideas of "pure" Anglo-Saxon stock and Anglo-Saxon superiority are not scientific but romantic. They are gratifying to the man of Anglo-Saxon descent, and parallel closely the content of Paul du Chaillu's two-volume work, *The Viking Age*, which Jack London obtained at the age of eight and which remained on his writing desk after his death. The work is a thorough study of Viking culture and tends to glorify the remarkable energy, prowess, daring, prosperity, adventure and great deeds of the race of Northmen. These ideas, however, were later to be confirmed, to London's satisfaction, by an alleged scientific source — Benjamin Kidd's *Social Evolution*.

Jack London's Anglo-Saxon views became fused with his respect for the pioneers. His strenuous race, he fancied, was the manifestation of the frontier force at its highest point, and his heroic characters, e.g., Billy Roberts, Frona and Jacob Welse; Vance Corliss and Wolf Larsen, embody it. They are rugged, restless individualists, always deep in the frontier; Americans, but first, foremost and always, Anglo-Saxons. Even before London had started to flourish as a

writer he was conceiving of heroes of the Anglo-Saxon race and placing them in the setting of the new frontier. The notes he took in the Klondike anticipated the race of his supermen:

Tuesday, June 14. 1898

Passed Tanana River & stopped at Tanana Station just above St. James' Mission & situated at the Indian town of Muklukyeto, at the junction of the Yukon & Tok-ikakat Rivers. The camp was large & the Indians had arrived in full force, waiting the fishing. Dance in progress, white man's dances -- low room in log cabin. Effect -- in the crowded heated room, discern the fair, bronzed skin & blonde mustache of the ubiquitous adventurous Anglo-Saxon, always at home in any environment.31

The blood factor was to be important in stories throughout his literary career. The Valley of the Moon (1913), whose heroine's name (uniquely) is Saxon, was an appeal to the Anglo-Saxon pioneer not to be pushed out of the fertile California area to make way for lesser breeds. London treated Saxon's character in a manner which approached adulation: "She was a flower of Anglo-Saxon stock, a rarity in the exceptional smallness and fineness of hand and foot and bone and grace of flesh and carriage -- some throwback across the face of time to the foregoing Norman-French that had intermingled with the sturdy Saxon breed."22

London's heroes so cherish their race heritage that the


importance of preserving the blood line is usually emphasized. Before marrying Bill, Saxon realizes and is ever conscious of her Celtic ancestry, and recognizing the virtues of the Viking in Bill, she feels that this is a commanding point in favor of the union. From the instant Bill and Saxon are introduced to each other, the congruency of their race and pioneer heritage forms a common bond between them, and their marriage is inevitable.

In one episode of the novel, Saxon takes a ride in a skiff with a young sailor boy (who curiously resembles London himself), and in the course of the outing the boy delivers a eulogy on the Anglo-Saxon:

"Did you ever hear about the Anglo-Saxons?" she asked the boy.

"You bet!" His eyes glistened, and he looked at her with new interest. "I'm an Anglo-Saxon, every inch of me. Look at the color of my eyes, my skin. I'm awful white where I ain't sunburned. And my hair was yellow when I was a baby. My mother says it'll be dark brown by the time I'm grown up, worse luck. Just the same, I'm Anglo-Saxon. I am of a fighting race. We ain't afraid of nothin'. This bay -- think I'm afraid of it!" He looked out over the water with flashing eye of scorn. "Why, I've crossed it when it was howlin' an' when the scow schooner sailors said I lied an' that I didn't. Huh! They were only squareheads. Why, we licked their kind thousands of years ago. We lick everything we go up against. We've wandered all over the world, licking the world. On the sea, on the land, it's all the same. Look at Lord Nelson, look at Davy Crockett, look at Paul Jones, look at Clive, an' Kitchener, an' Fremont, an' Kit Carson, an' all of 'em."

The above illustrations should indicate London's contention that the Anglo-Saxon is unique in physique, fighting,

23. Ibid., pp. 264 - 265.
roving, and ability to win. Even the young sailor boy, like his creator, easily wedded the concept of the "land hungry Anglo-Saxon" with the great names of the frontier.

Frona Welse, "fair and flaxen-haired, typically Saxon," is the heroine of *A Daughter of the Snows* (1902). She inherited the pioneer spirit from her father, Jacob Welse, whose wanderlust urged him to the wilds of the North many years before the Klondike gold-rush. In a symposium on Anglo-Saxon supremacy Frona argues the excellence of her race: "We are a race of doers and fighters, of globe-encirclers and zone-conquerors. We toil and struggle, and stand by the toil and struggle no matter how hopeless it may be. While we are persistent and resistent, we are so made that we fit ourselves to the most diverse conditions."24

Vance Corliss, Frona's prospective Viking mate, is reticent at first to voice his race heritage, but finally he boastfully makes it known: "'Yes,' he considered, 'I am my father's son, and the line goes back to the sea-kings who never slept under the smoky rafters of a roof or drained the alehorn by inhabited hearth. There must be a reason for the dead-status of the black, a reason for the Teuton spreading over the earth as no other race has spread. There must be something in race heredity else I would not leap at the summons.'"25

25. Ibid., p. 146.
All of London's heroes "leap at the summons" of their fighting blood; they do not merely voice their heritage, but they put it to use. Burning Daylight, the title character of London's fast-moving novel of a physical superman, lives the strenuous life of the inevitable white man in the cold North. Wolf Larsen, the superman of The Sea Wolf (1904), is a symbol of the frontier force with a grotesque twist. He lacks the optimism of a frontiersman, but displays the physical energy usually ascribed to the pioneer. And the Sea Wolf is not without the necessary attribute of Nordic blood, about which London could wax poetic: "Knowing him, I review the old Scandinavian myths with clearer understanding. The white-skinned, fair-haired savages who created the terrible pantheon were of the same fibre as he. The frivolity of the laughter-loving Latin is no part of him."26

Though London equated the pioneer spirit with the Anglo-Saxon race and its ability to spread and conquer, the equation was not repugnant to the American reading public, probably because the term "Anglo-Saxon," however vague its meaning, was current in America during London's time. In spite of their severe racism, his novels were in harmony with America's conception of the new frontier force. Even Theodore Roosevelt was taking time to comment favorably on London's novels, a tribute which would seem to stamp them with the approved seal of the high priest of strenuous Americanism.

Jack London always supposed that his restlessness and energy were the result of the blood in his veins, but, to a greater extent, it was due to his personality and to his times that he became both a literary and personal idol of the new frontier. As a human being he was intriguing because, given the ego and the industry to drive a mediocre talent to the limit, he contrived to overcome obstacles which separated him from success. He was not born in dire want, as he often contended in his autobiographical success stories or socialistic essays, but was born of a low-middle class family which had ambitions of wealth. His struggle was to get ahead, not to survive, and when his chance came to leave the ranks of the proletariat he was happy, since he could never reconcile himself to the "work-beast" level. He did, however, experience the bitter conflict of wage enslavement with the desire to escape from the proletariat. The romance of escape and the bitterness of the struggle were his. A nature not as rebellious as his might have succumbed to the oppressive environment to which it was exposed, but London's, with its deep belief in self, refused to conform to wage class psychology. With many other persons in his milieu, he, as a boy sought escape from the commonplaceness and drudgery of his surroundings through romantic fiction and physical diversion.

From small boyhood until his adventuring days, Jack London's one escape from his environment — other than sailing his skiff — was books. Where all about him there seemed to be ugliness, romances gave the boy visions of beauty. Ouida's
Signa, the story of an Italian peasant boy who became a great musician, affected him strongly. Observes Joan London:

Reading and rereading, he absorbed unknowingly much of Ouida's faintly rebellious philosophy, her conviction that in society as it now exists there is no place for genius and goodness and high-mindedness, her passionate espousal of democratic ideals, and the curious mingling of extravagant romance and bleak realism which characterizes everything she wrote. His frequent mention of this story later, both in conversation and in his books, testifies to the deep impression it made upon him.27

Stevenson, Melville and Kipling filled out the list of authors whom he read with an escape motive. Their stories were compensatory for what young London felt lacking in his life, until he found the actual adventure to which he was impelled.

Books were not for him a source of literary inspiration; perhaps, because of his dynamic physique, the call to action was more powerful than the need for expression.28 He wrote of himself: "When I was fourteen my head filled with tales of old voyagers; my visions with tropic isles and far sea-rims, I was sailing a small centerboard skiff around San Francisco Bay and the Oakland Estuary. I wanted to get away from the monotony and the commonplace. I was in the flower of adolescence, a-thrill with romance and adventure, dreaming of wild life in the wild man-world."29

Desire for adventure was soon satisfied. The oyster trade


on the West Coast was controlled by a monopoly, and this condition brought about oyster piracy. Jack bought a boat, became proficient at the risky game and was finally known as "Prince of the Oyster Pirates," a term which undoubtedly pleased him. He welcomed the thrill of taking hazards, the satisfaction of power, and the fast life of varying experiences. As he said later, "There was vastly more romance in being an oyster pirate or a convict than in being a machine slave." 30

When oyster piracy no longer held his interest, he accepted an offer to join the fish patrol and soon was apprehending some of the pirates with whom he had associated. Restlessness grew in the youth, and at the age of sixteen he shipped on a sealing vessel and traveled to Japan. Returning from the sea he joined Kelly's Army, the famous army of protest which, along with Coxey's Army, attempted to march on the White House. In the East, London deserted Kelly's army, and before returning home had tramped ten thousand miles through the United States and Canada. Then Jack finished high school and started his university work, paying his way by working at assorted labor jobs. In 1897 the call to romance and adventure was loud and promising; it drew him to a venture which affected him and his books more than any other single instance -- he joined the Klondike rush.

His rearing during adolescence, then, was in an atmosphere of nourished individualism. It appears that the monotony of

30. Ibid., p. 64.
his environment and his personal temperament were instrumental in pressing London into situations where individual initiative found reward if the individual concerned possessed the attributes of physical strength, self-reliance, cunning and aggressiveness. This was the strenuous life with a promise. Through these experiences he was able to write of the new frontier, being himself a neo-frontiersman. And when in his later years the frontiers that he pursued ceased to be real, he succeeded in establishing synthetic ones, if only in his novels.

London's heroes, most of them supermen, follow a like course. They, with their vital natures, could find no better way than escape. They express the doctrine of the strenuous life, reflect the desirability of individualism, and seek new vistas in lieu of over-civilized social life. Burning Daylight, next to Wolf Larsen, is the most powerful superman London ever developed. Indicative of his character is his name, given him by the miners whom he aroused during the long arctic night by shouting "Get up! It's burning daylight." By his associates Daylight was revered. London writes, "In point of endurance it was acknowledged that he could kill the hardiest of them. Furthermore, he was accounted a nervy man, a square man, and a white man." Daylight braved the deepest forests, pioneered secluded gold lodes, performed superhuman feats of endurance by running thousands of miles over the snows through blizzards when lesser men would have despaired. His whole life of toil

in the Klondike was a tribute to the strenuous life and to
the type of self-reliant strong man we associate with the pio­
neer. Burning Daylight, as London's most thorough critic has
pronounced, is the typical "London self-idealization of self
in titanic proportions -- the manly man, bursting with energy,
out-drinking, out-wrestling, out-lifting, out-smarting all
opponents; grueling himself in exploits of superhuman en­
durance; boasting and boisterous. He is the natural man, un­
lettered but shrewd." 32

Jack London's first novel, A Daughter of the Snows,
parallels Burning Daylight. In both novels London captures
the physical atmosphere of the Klondike; all of the romance of
that new territory is reflected throughout the books. Dyea
Beach is pictured as a mass of muscular activity. The strong,
courageous men, after unloading their gear, pack up and start
over the hazardous Chilkoot Pass; the weaklings either leave
on the same boat upon which they had arrived or fall exhausted
by the trail.

Frona Welse, the heroine of A Daughter of the Snows, is
one of the strong. She was born in the Klondike and educated
in the United States, whence she returned to her father, Jacob
Welse, in the North. Jacob Welse is the apotheosis of indi­
vidualism and shows pride when his daughter exhibits her self­
reliance. Frona is the feminine counterpart of Burning Day­
light; she is a child of nature, the picture of healthy vigor.

32. Pope, Jack London: A Study in Twentieth Century
Values, p. 180.
She forge ahead in spite of her sex to keep pace with seasoned Klondike men. Frona is the type of superwoman who runs with her dog sled on a ten-mile journey just for the exercise. When an ice break threatens to crush the boat in which she is traveling, her aid in saving the boat and the lives of its passengers is equal to that of the men. Two other characters share the heroic spotlight with Frona. Her father, Jacob Welse, though elderly, is physically virile and mentally agile. He is the personification of the rough-minded Klondike man. Frona's lover, Vance Corliss, is an example of the man who comes from the city to the wilds where the forces of fierce nature work upon him to develop his materialistic individualism. The qualities of the North, moreover, are defined as therapeutic to all men needing revitalization. London writes: "Thus, in the young Northland, frosty and grim, men stripped off the sloth of the south and gave battle greatly. And they stripped likewise much of the veneer of civilization -- all of its follies, most of its foibles, and perhaps a few of its virtues. Maybe so; but they preserved the great traditions and at least lived frankly, laughed honestly, and looked one another in the eyes."33

The "great traditions" which London mentions are most apparent in his character Jacob Welse. In one short speech the character represents the frontier community spirit, comradeship, courage and magnanimity of the frontiersman. When faced

with the possibility of a famine, Welse counsels a selfish miner: "You are a white man. A Bonanza property, or a block of Bonanza properties, does not entitle you to a pound more than the oldest penniless 'sourdough' or the newest baby born. Trust me. As long as I have a pound of grub you shall not starve. Stiffen up. Shake hands. Get a smile on your face and make the best of it."34 These are the words of a seasoned, resourceful, positive pioneer giving authoritative advice to another "white man" and trail-fellow. They are representative of a social code trimmed of superfluous manners and embodying the bare essentials of personal dignity and social equality.

Buck, the wonder-dog of The Call of the Wild (1903), is, like other London heroes, able to throw off the "sloth" of civilization and become a specimen of strength and vitality. During the first four years of his life the dog lives the life of a sated aristocrat, but, as his physical being becomes adapted to the strain and hardship of the Arctic he grows physically excellent, mentally shrewd and indomitable. Similar to London's human heroes, Buck is Jack London symbolically, and indeed, only Buck's species walls him apart physically from the Burning Daylights and Jacob Welsees.35 Most of Buck's mental, and all of his emotional qualities, are quite human: he hates, laughs, cries, respects, likes the fight, and feels an inner urge to gain power.

34. Quoted from A Daughter of the Snows, p. 66.

Being a super-dog, Buck can out-pull, out-fight and endure more physical punishment than any other dog in the team. When he hears "the call of the Wild" and joins the wolf pack, he gains supremacy over the wolves and leads them on their predatory raids. The dog-hero triumphs and finds a healthful habitat in the wilderness in the same manner as the pioneers in London's novels. That conquering energy and adaptability which London supplied his human heroes is clearly noticeable in Buck.

Jack London's heroes, therefore, appear to show the influence of the new frontier force and may be considered the very essence of it. But these characters are London's own creations, issuing from his own experiences, desires and dreams. Most critics agree that "London, like Melville and many another, sublimated his restlessness in his writing." 36 That part of his writing which has thus far been investigated deals with the new frontier force, its romance, individualistic ideals, optimism and desire for escape. The novels, as a whole, praise the pioneers of the cruel North and the sailors of the treacherous seas, their courage and ability to conquer nature and men. Indirectly they praise the author himself, since London always identified himself with the tall, blond, indomitable men he portrayed. The settings of the novels make it possible for London to exclude the pessimism, economic problems and monotony of an industrialized civilization, and,

in turn, to stress romance. But Jack London, as naive as he was, could not subsist on the fruits of a vanishing frontier for long, and was soon, as we shall see, seeking ideological and intellectual sustenance from philosophy, sociology and science.
PART II: IDEODYNAMICS

Section I: Darwinian Survival Values

With the coming of Darwinian evolution and the popularization of the concept of the struggle for existence, literature found a prosperous subject in the situations which revealed this factor in man. The primitive was admired because he was brawny, if he displayed his ability to succeed in the struggle, not necessarily because he was one of Rousseau's noble savages. A school of "red-blooded" literature, given impetus by Darwinism, sprang up, and its primary theme was the celebration of brute strength.

Darwinian concepts being the basis of the new school, writers in the field were necessarily familiar with evolutionary biology. Jack London wrote his way to greatest fame with the red blood cult, and not without a Darwinian background.

When Jack London returned home from his long trek with Kelly's Army, he began to read the books he had heard discussed by his road companions. From the Oakland Free Library he obtained works by Spencer, Darwin, Bellamy and others, and this material constituted a decided shift in his reading. About this time he joined the Ruskin Club, the rallying point...

for Bay Region intellectuals. Previously London had been interested chiefly in romance, but the men with whom he was now associating interested him in politics, philosophy and science. The natural sciences caught London's attention. Indicative of his interest in natural science, one of the courses he selected at the University of California was "Composition, based principally upon the reading of nineteenth century writers on science -- Darwin, Tyndall, Huxley, Spencer and others."38

Major biographies of London overlook the importance of David Starr Jordan in connection with London's development. David Starr Jordan was a leading scientist and educator in the Bay Region and president of Stanford University during the nineties. London met Jordan in Oakland when the writer was attending Jordan's lectures on evolution. The chief quality of Jordan as a lecturer was to bring abstruse conceptions into line with the common knowledge of educated people.39 London, who was pressed for time and who only recently had ventured into the realm of science, welcomed any digest or simplification of the evolutionary science. Jordan later stated that London was one of his most enthusiastic students and that he considered the writer one of his disciples.40 There is

38. Quoted from Joan London, Jack London and His Times, p. 133.


40. Ibid., p. 409.
further evidence that London was influenced by the educator. He subscribed to the Arena in which Jordan published essays, and also read Jordan's *Footnotes to Evolution*. Further personal contact between the two men occurred at the Ruskin Club, of which both were members. By 1899 London's respect for the scientist was patent. In a letter to a friend London stated: "I'm glad you took Jordan in the right way. He is, to a certain extent, a hero of mine."  

Darwinism in written form came to London chiefly through the works of Herbert Spencer, particularly *First Principles*. In London's *Martin Eden*, in which he claimed to have reported with considerable verity his own early study of science and philosophy, he gives credit to Spencer for "organizing all knowledge for him, reducing everything to unity, elaborating ultimate realities, and presenting to his startled gaze a universe so concrete of realization that it was like a model of a ship such as sailors make and put into a glass." The fact that he mentions Spencer fifty-four times in the novel seems significant. But London was not to interpret Spencer unaided, though his *Martin Eden* suggests otherwise. Other than David Starr Jordan, Frank Strawn-Hamilton was instrumental in explaining Spencer's more recondite ideas to the writer. Though Hamilton gauged the value and significance of Spencer in relation to the whole movement toward evolution—

ary interpretation, London, newly initiated in science, swallowed Spencer whole. He was prone to ignore some of the important qualifications which Spencer gave his ideas. An eclectic in his interests, London seldom devoted sufficient time to assimilate the finer distinctions in any work or theory before he conversed on the subject or wrote about it. With a propensity toward making his learning known, he delighted in "showing off" his newly acquired and undigested knowledge in public. Mary Austin, who visited Jack London during these formative years, noted that his social set was impressed with his recent discovery of Darwinian evolution. 44

The more striking ingredients of Darwinism were so thoroughly assimilated by London that it appears he unconsciously interpreted life in terms of them. When critics pointed to the Darwinian implication of The Call of the Wild, he immediately reread the book and admitted, "I plead guilty, but I was unconscious of it at the time. I did not mean to do it." 45 Unlike his Before Adam (1907), which is a rather comprehensive and detached anthropological study of man in the Mid-Pleistocene Age, his earlier work, The Call of the Wild, is so packed with poetic descriptions of Buck's adventures that the reader is not always aware that he is witnessing an instance of reversion to type. One of London's contemporary critics recog-

44. Mary Austin, Earth Horizon (New York, 1932), p. 300.

nized the story as altogether untouched by bookishness or overt attempts to show Buck's devolution in technical terms. 46

Indoctrinated with certain Darwinian ideas, London began to see life in terms of survival values, a view which is reflected in the characters of his stories. He was partial to subjecting his heroes to extreme privation and danger so that the cruel instinct of self-preservation could more powerfully assert itself, thus revealing the animal in them. A predominant theme is that of atavism, or reversion to type.

In A Daughter of the Snows London stresses the utility of atavistic traits in the human. The hostile environment of the North is explained as fatal to the over-civilized man — one that has become divorced from most of his animal instincts. The supposition is that man was once a lower animal and that many of his previous animal traits are latent within his being. Because Vance Corliss was able to revive some of his primitive qualities he was destined to survive: "Now his greatest virtue lay in this; he had not become hardened in the mould baked by his several forbears and into which he had been pressed by his mother's hands. Some atavism had been at work in the making of him, and he had reverted to this ancestor who sturdily uplifted. But so far this portion of his heritage had lain dormant." 47 The same "virtue" is evident in Buck, whose native habitat was California, but who was thrust into the alien


environnement of the North. He also experiences a metamorphosis: "His development (or retrogression) was rapid. His muscles became hard as iron, and he grew callous to ordinary pain."48 In The Sea Wolf we encounter the superman Wolf Larsen, "a magnificent atavism," as London calls him.49 Larsen is likened to a beast of prey; his fierceness, lightness of step and savage prowess are associated with these attributes in the hunting animal, and the reader is called upon to admire them. Even Van Weyden, the weakling, the over-civilized man, reveals some reversion to type as his muscles develop under the strain of primitive life aboard the Ghost.

In his two dog stories The Call of the Wild and White Fang London expresses vividly his conviction that the strong, adaptable being is victorious in the survival struggle. Animals during a famine display the theories of Spencer and Darwin. London explains: "Denied their usual food-supply, weakened by hunger, they fell upon and devoured one another. Only the strong survived."50 Always adaptability and strength argue the continued existence of an animal. When Buck is living in civilization and a kind master doles out his food, the problem of survival does not exist; in the North, however, he learns to steal meat from other dogs: "This first theft marked Buck as fit to survive in the hostile Northland environ-

ment. It marked his adaptability, his capacity to adjust himself to changing conditions, the lack of which would have meant swift and terrible death. Buck continues to rely more and more upon his instincts. From the act of stealing meat it was an easy step to the act of bringing down live prey. Finally, with most of the inhibitions of civilization stripped from his "moral nature," Buck devolves into the "dominant primordial beast." London explains: "The blood-longing became stronger than ever before. He was a killer, a thing that preyed, living on things that lived, unaided, alone, by virtue of his own strength and powers, surviving triumphantly in a hostile environment where only the strong survive." It is the indiscriminate animal energy in Buck which makes his ruthless killing something to be admired. There is something of a shiver and delight in the polite reader when he reads such a sentence: "Buck got a frothy adversary by the throat, and was sprayed with blood when his teeth sank through the jugular." On the hell-ship Ghost where force reigns supreme and animal passions are exhibited in unceasing acts of violence, a beast-like Wolf Larsen, though terrible, is credible and fine. Larsen jumps a full three yards to strike his adversary in the chest "with a crushing, re-

52. Ibid., p. 110.
53. Ibid., p. 231.
54. Ibid., p. 81.
sounding impact." London adds other significant details: "He left his chair just as he sat in it squarely, springing from a sitting posture like a wild animal, a tiger, and like a tiger covered the intervening space."55

Animal qualities in London's characters are usually celebrated, but atavism is not always the object of his admiration. He is sometimes careful not to carry the reversion theme to extremes. For instance, Ponta, the ape-like prize fighter in The Game (1905), is notably "too decided an atavism to draw the crowd's admiration."56

The cult of primitivism or primordialism, which was exploited by both London and Frank Norris, has been defined as "no more than the worship of animalism for its own sake."57 But Frederic Taber Cooper noted that "there is a vast difference between thinking of man as a healthy human animal, and thinking of him as an unhealthy human beast."58 These phases of the primordial in Jack London's characters bring forth the idea of vigorous athleticism rather than unhealthy animalism. Excellence and virility instead of degeneration are seen in the primitive. Here a distinction between the Darwin-inspired school of red blood and that of naturalism should be noted. Though the naturalistic novel was to treat not a little of

man's animal drives and his brutality, it stressed the idea of determinism and often the mood of pessimism. The school of red blood usually attempted to ignore deterministic doctrine and favored romance and elementalism. Just as Darwin, Huxley and Spencer inclined toward the faith that man is gifted with free will, so did many of the writers of fiction who were influenced by these teachers tend to emphasize a romance of Darwinism rather than determinism. According to Carl Van Doren, those writers who marched under the banner of red blood were too engulfed in the psychology of romance and the new frontier to follow their scientific beliefs to their literary naturalistic conclusions. Van Doren labels Norris and London "those generous boys of naturalism whose temperaments carried them again and again into the territories of vivid danger." The cult of red blood raised its voice through Frank Norris when he cried, "Give us stories now, give us men, strong men, with red blood in 'em, with unleashed passions rampant in 'em, blood and bones and viscera in 'em, and women too, that move and have their being."61

Jack London answered Norris' summons and wrote of virile, fighting supermen with atavistic traits. He gave many of his heroes animal drives so that they could cope with the terrible


environments to which he exposed them. Because he so often pictured his heroes as savage titans and superior beasts, many critics identify him with the first vogue of the primitive in America. But simultaneous with his prolific writing London was always reading, and always responding in some way to the matter he read. Imbued with Darwinian biology and with Spencer's philosophy, he was prepared to engage in a study of materialistic philosophy, a system which affected his personal outlook and, subsequently, the characters he developed in his stories.

**Section II: Materialistic Monism**

Though Jack London publicly gave credit to Spencer, Darwin and Huxley for his knowledge of philosophy and natural science, Ernst Haeckel was of major interest to him. Haeckel, who accredited Spencer with founding monistic ethics on the "solid ground of social instinct," became the champion of materialistic monism at the turn of the century.62 The logical outcome of his monistic theory was to conclude that "the human will has no more freedom than that of the higher animals, from which it differs only in degree, not in kind."63 The trend in evolutionary interpretation had been toward this dogma, but Haeckel

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63. Ibid., p. 137.
was one of the first materialistic philosophers of his time to be so forthright in his statement.

Haeckel's monism and parts of the systems of Darwin, Spencer, Huxley and Kidd, were assimilated into London's personal philosophy. As early as March 1, 1900, London wrote in a letter to Clodesley Johns, "In my modest opinion, Haeckel's position is yet unassailable." Fourteen years later this opinion had become a conviction. In a letter to Ralph Kasper, June 25, 1914, he wrote:

I have always inclined towards Haeckel's position. In fact "incline" is too weak a word. I am a hopeless materialist. I see the soul as nothing else than the sum of the activities of the organism plus personal habits, memories and experiences of the organism, plus inherited habits, memories, experiences of the organism. I believe that when I am dead, I am dead. I believe that with my death I am just as much obliterated as the last mosquito you or I smashed.

This statement agrees essentially with Haeckel's position. Haeckel, an absolute materialist, taught that consciousness could be reduced to terms of matter and physical energy. The universe, he maintained, was a self-existent mechanism which stood in no need of a God to explain its existence. Freedom of the will and immortality were naturally ruled out of the system along with the necessity for a Supreme Being. London's materialism seems to be congruent with these tenets, and his

materialistic credo together with his faith in the new science equipped him for literary naturalism. Charles Child Walcutt explains:

Naturalism appears in a novel when the philosophy of materialistic monism is somehow applied to its conception or execution. The perfectly naturalistic novel would be one in which the action is completely determined by material forces — economic, social, physiological. For this condition to exist a corollary requirement with respect to the characters in the novel must be fulfilled: they too must be explained in terms of purely material causation, and they must be so completely explained in these terms that impressions of free will and ethical responsibility do not intrude to disrupt the relentless operation of this material causation.67

Malcolm Gowley concurs with Walcutt's statement: "The effect of naturalism as a doctrine is to subtract from literature the whole notion of ethical responsibility."68 The perfectly naturalistic novel, however, has never been written. In practice, writers have been unable to apply the principle of determinism in their novels so that it entirely supplants the general belief that man is ethically free. As Lars Ahnebrink notes, there are different stages of determinism, since writers may be determinists only to a certain degree and may not be totally confirmed in their belief. All determinists admit the existence of the will but regard it as more or less enslaved by various factors.69 From this standpoint naturalism

is accomplished in degree as a writer complies with or falls short of the deterministic norm. A novel, however, may be deterministic and still not be naturalistic. The naturalistic novel should also, theoretically, achieve to a convincing degree the experimental calm of Zola — that objectivity and scientific fidelity to truth in which the artist ignores his selectivity and merely reports his observations. The supposition is that the author may accept the point of view of the scientist or observer, that he may select his characters, place them in a certain set of circumstances and allow dispassionate natural or physical forces to take their course. The study of naturalism in a novel, then, may resolve itself into a study of how and in what degree the action and the characters in a novel are moved by determining forces, and also into a study of the degree of objective accuracy the author practices in his presentation.

Jack London's confessed philosophical materialism found its way into his novels and made them, to an extent, comply with the deterministic thesis of naturalism. It might well be noted, before investigation, that London was not a writer who attained objectivity in his fiction works. A writer who closely identifies himself with his characters is tempted to show sympathy towards them and to direct their actions in a manner pleasing to himself. Indeed, a writer of adventurous romance finds it


difficult, if not impossible, to accomplish a semblance of scientific detachment in his stories. Our problem will be to see how completely and in what manner Jack London applied his personal philosophy of materialistic monism in his novels, and how, in turn, his materialism affected his characters.

The Superman of The Sea Wolf, a titan, an intelligent atavist, endowed with super-body and buoyant vitality, is shown as the product of a cruel environment where brute strength has utility and moral ideals have none. Born in a rocky, desolate region on the coast of Denmark, the Sea Wolf's early years were spent in dire poverty. From the age of eight until he reached maturity he worked on a ship where most of the gruesome conditions of the survival of the fittest existed. Faced with the terrible facts of his environment, Larsen adopted a code which had utility for him under these conditions. Larsen learned that brute force when intelligently directed allowed him not only continued existence, but a more materially successful life. He learned not only that moral ideals were unnecessary, but also that they frustrated his desire to get the most from life. In this manner, his brutal environment may be said to have forced Larsen to depend upon his primitive instincts; and his inherited super-strength and cunning, together with his pragmatism, allowed him to overcome his competitors in the struggle for existence and mastery. Larsen's definition of life reflects his early environment and also serves to account for his actions: "I believe that life is a mess," Larsen states. "It is like a yeast, a fer-
ment, a thing that moves and may move for a minute, an hour, or a hundred years, but in the end will cease to move. The big eat the little that they may continue to move, the strong eat the weak that they may retain their strength. The lucky eat the most and move the longest, that is all."

This statement is materialistic in that it defines life in terms of matter; it recognizes that matter is finite and mortal, and views the destruction of living beings by stronger living beings as the operation of natural laws which are necessarily good, though not necessarily moral. Wolf Larsen sees nature's determinism as acting upon himself; and, recognizing no values but those of his own life-impulses or primitive drives (which are strong because he is an atavist), he acts upon a program of complete selfishness. Consistent with his materialism is his sole recognition of earthly existence. In Larsen's dying moments, when he has lost the power of speech and is asked if he believes in immortality, he pens the message "B-O-S-H." Furthermore, every act he commits is in accord with his materialistic view. Conventional ethics have no control over his unbridled passions. Larsen's total lack of compunction allows him to murder a number of men during the course of the novel. When Maud Brewster, a shipwrecked poetess, is taken aboard the Ghost, we find that the Sea Wolf "desires" her. If Maud had not made a timely escape

73. Quoted from *The Sea Wolf*, p. 310.
from the ship, Larsen, ostensibly, would have satisfied his passion. In all of these acts the reader seems pressed to believe that Larsen is responsible neither for his predatory philosophy nor for his behavior which is consistent with this code. When Larsen follows compulsions to fight and kill and dominate, the reader, like Van Weyden, is unable to condemn his savage behavior on moral grounds. Van Weyden admits:

He was certainly a handsome man — beautiful in a masculine sense. And again, with never-failing wonder, I remarked the total lack of viciousness, or wickedness, or sinfulness, in his face. It was the face, I am convinced, of a man who did no wrong. And by this I do not wish to be misunderstood. What I mean is that it was a face of a man who either did nothing contrary to the dictates of his conscience, or who had no conscience. I am inclined to the latter way of accounting for it. . . . He was not immoral, but merely immoral.74

The Sea Wolf is thus absolved of any moral guilt. He is unable to make an ethical choice because his experience under the severe conditions of a "dog-eat-dog" society would allow for no spiritual values. A higher ethical nature denied him, Larsen, perforce, is compelled to rely upon his instinctive or brutal nature. Larsen's actions, therefore, depend on acts of will (a vital force or impulse), and one is inclined to admire many of his exploits which are actuated by this will. His acts, however amoral, are striking, and the story resolves itself into what Spiller terms the "romance of power."75 It is a phase of naturalism which celebrates the

74. Ibid., pp. 86 - 87.

will rather than denies it -- not free will, but will deter-
termed by a vital impulse. As a character Larsen is of the
naturalistic variety because his actions are explained by ex-
ternal and internal determining forces. However, as we shall
see, the actions of the other characters and the plot as a
whole do not depend upon the operation of material causation.

Particularly destructive to the deterministic quality
of the novel is London's treatment of the Ghost's refugees.
The actions of the other two main characters are patterned on
an ethical framework and are completely divorced from determin-
ing forces. Maud Brewster and Humphrey Van Weyden are moral
idealists, diametrically opposed to the materialistic Larsen.
After Maud and Humphrey escape from Larsen and reach the refuge
of a lonely Pacific island, an unconvincing Platonic relation-
ship exists between them. Only on the last page of the novel
does an inkling of powerful sexual attraction between the two
present itself, and then it is of a sweet, sentimental variety.
A cutter is about to rescue them when they speak:

"My woman, my one small woman," I said, my free hand
petting her shoulder in the way all lovers know though
never learn in school.

"My man," she said, looking at me for an instant with
tremulous lids that fluttered down and veiled her eyes as
she snuggled her head against my breast with a happy little
sigh.

I looked toward the cutter. It was very close. A
boat was being lowered.

"One more kiss, dear love," I whispered. "One kiss
more before they come."

"And rescue us from ourselves," she completed, with a
most adorable smile, whimsical as I had never seen it, for it was whimsical with love.76

In *A Daughter of the Snows* the discrepancies which usually occur when London attempts to apply the pattern of materialism to the development and behavior of his characters can be noticed. Frona, for example, is a child of the twentieth century; she exhibits a lack of inhibition towards the men of the Klondike as well as the snowy perils of the Arctic because she is a daughter of the snows. Being sexually attracted by Vance Corliss she evinces no marked concern over her emotion, nor does she question her desires:

She liked the man because he was a man. In her wildest flights she could never imagine linking herself with any man, no matter how exalted spiritually, who was not a man physically. It was a delight to her and a joy to look upon the strong males of her kind, with bodies comely in the sight of God and muscles swelling with promise of deeds and work. Man, to her, was preeminently a fighter. She believed in natural selection and sexual selection, and was certain that if a man had thereby become possessed of faculties and functions, they were for him to use and could but tend to his good. And likewise with instincts. If she felt impelled to joy in a well-built frame, and well-shaped muscle, why should she restrain?77

Sole emphasis on the body and reliance of the heroine upon her animal impulses would lead the reader to believe that she is an amoral female who would authorize sexual license. Her character, according to the above illustration, would seem to divorce her behavior from the influence of a conventional moral code. The fact is that Frona remains quite chaste.

76. Ibid., p. 321.
Furthermore, notice how Frona expresses moral ardor in the concluding scene when she denounces the coward Gregory St. Vincent:

"Shall I tell you why, Gregory St. Vincent?" she said again. "Tell you why your kisses have cheapened me? Because you broke the faith of food and blanket. Because you broke salt with a man, then watched that man fight unequally for life without lifting your hand. Why, I had rather you had died in defending him; the memory of you would have been good. Yes, I had rather you had killed him yourself. At least it would have shown there was blood in your body." 78

One fails to see what motivates Frona to make this moral judgment. Like her unwavering chastity, it is unconvincing. Some one hundred and fifteen pages previous to this righteous outburst Frona is pictured as an instinctively motivated atavist, but at the novel's climax she transcends her "natural" behavior to make an "unnatural" judgment. Thus, conventional ethics become confused with Frona's "natural" ethics.

These instances from the life of one character illustrates London's failure to follow a deterministic thesis with uniformity. Personages are introduced and their development is determined in one direction; their whole histories are presented in a way that shows heredity, environment and race to have affected their natures, hence, their behavior. But when the occasion arises that they must make a momentous and obvious choice between conventional good and evil, they miraculously choose the good. It appears either that London was unable to follow his deterministic premises to their logical

78. Ibid., p. 333.
conclusions, or that, in an effort to satisfy his readers, he endowed his characters with the gift of free choice. This practice does not make for a consistent character portrayal, nor does it lend itself to convincing narrative. Furthermore, it destroys what might otherwise be considered a naturalistic quality of his writing.

If London could not apply his avowed materialism to his novels in order to achieve the deterministic requirement of naturalism, he could succeed in making most of his heroes speak like materialists. It appears that he found it expedient to make his heroes delineate his personal philosophy. We have already noticed that Wolf Larsen expresses a philosophy of materialism. Jacob Welse also voices his explanation of what constitutes a man -- an explanation which is unequivocally materialistic: "Each man is the resultant of many forces which go to make a pressure mightier than he, and which moulds him in the predestined shape. But, with sound legs under him, he may run away, and meet with a new pressure. He may continue running, each new pressure prodding him as he goes, until he dies, and his final form will be that predestined by the many pressures." 79

Man, in this statement, is determined by external "pressures." "Sound legs" or, one might say, a strong adaptable body only make it possible for a person to contact a variety of "pressures" which affect his organism. London's explanation of Burning Daylight's philosophy of life likewise

reflects London's own beliefs:

Religion had passed him by. "A long time dead" was his epitome for that phase of speculation. He was not interested in humanity. According to his rough-hewn sociology, it was all a gamble. God was a whimsical, abstract, mad thing called Luck. As to how one happened to be born -- whether a sucker or a robber -- was a gamble to begin with; Luck dealt out the cards, and the little babies picked up the hands allotted them. Protest was vain.

Those were their cards and they had to play them, willy-nilly, hunchbacked or straight backed, crippled or clean-limbed, addle-pated or clear-headed. There was no fairness in it. The cards most picked up put them into the sucker class; the cards of a few enabled them to become robbers. The playing of the cards was life; the crowd of players society. The table was the earth; and the earth, in lumps and chunks, from loaves of bread to big red motor-cars, was the stake. And in the end, lucky or unlucky, they were all a long time dead.

Vance Corliss and Ernest Everhard of The Iron Heel (1908) also explicitly state their materialistic philosophies. Like Burning Daylight's their philosophies depend upon the basic assumption that nothing after death is certain, that life should be lived for the sake of what can be enjoyed from it.

London's habit of digressing through the speeches of his heroes on the subject of materialism, thereby portraying their personal materialistic bias, seems to be a clearer reflection of London's own philosophy than any application of his system to the plots of his novels.

London's materialistic monism did not become an immutable pattern in his novels. Except in the case of Larsen, London invariably endowed his heroes with ethical choice. This practice is not compatible with a thorough-going materialistic

system, and it opposes the determinism tantamount to naturalism. But there are elements in London's novels which, in themselves, are naturalistic. While presenting the picturesque frozen North or the cruel sea, one sees the obvious conditions of the struggle for existence — the dangerous trails, the rigors of the wind and cold, the ever present threat of starvation and the spectacle of the ice break. These conditions compel men to rely upon strength and courage, and they also account for a large part of the formation and the conditioning (or determining) of characters and their actions. In such novels cowardice becomes the most despicable of crimes, e.g., Froma's censure of St. Vincent. Dishonesty, ruthlessness, murder, heartless egoism or any depravity which might be regarded as loathsome in civilized society are not considered as "sinful" as cowardice in the table of values of London's supermen. This accent upon cowardice, of course, is typical of most literature employing supermen, whether or not it is of the naturalistic variety, and is especially characteristic of superman literature evoked by Nietzsche's philosophy. But cowardice, as London conceives of it, argues unfitness in the struggle for existence and dominance, and this deficiency, being regarded with more indignation than other moral failings, is pronounced the worst "sin." The judgments and actions of London's heroes are often based on survival ethics (or instinct),


and this practice inclines his novels toward the naturalistic mode; but, as we have seen, conventional ethics are usually close at hand coloring the major choices which a character makes. London's materialism, therefore, reveals itself neither constantly nor uniformly in most of his novels and seldom accomplishes a consistent determinism. His personal monistic belief manifested itself in the speeches of his characters even when its occurrence was detrimental to the consistent portrayal of those characters.

The scientific theory that all effects are either proximately or ultimately caused by certain unalterable natural laws was a sub-stratum influence upon London's choice of most of what he embraced in his philosophy. This faith in science caused London to show a certain respect for those theses which claimed scientific fact as their basis. In his reading he came upon evidence of a determining factor in man other than environment and more striking than heredity. This was the factor of race, and it had a profound effect upon both London and his characters.

Section III: Racism

We have already noted how Jack London equated the Anglo-Saxon race with the more romantic elements of the frontier force. For him the Anglo-Saxon possessed a conquering ability, the ability to survive in any climate and over any other race
of people. This is somewhat in harmony with the popular nineteenth century conception of the Anglo-Saxon as an extraordinary colonizer. One of London's characters notes: "All that the other races are not, the Anglo-Saxon, or Teuton if you please, is." His faith in race supremacy, it should be noted, became manifest after his reading of Marx and other socialistic writers and after his membership in the Socialist Labor Party. It is immediately evident that socialism, which promotes the idea of the brotherhood of man, is incompatible with the theory of superior race. Belief in race supremacy appears even more inconsistent when it exists in Jack London, who wrote prolifically in the socialistic cause, lectured on socialism in some of America's leading universities, and who organized and was first president of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society.

The majority of critics explain this curious mixture of socialism and racism in London through his personality. It is the critic's opinion that he was intellectually in accord with what he understood of Marxian dogma, since it proved to him to be the most expedient way of dealing with the abuses of industrialism and capitalism; but London, an individualist by nature, found the results of socialism unendurable to contemplate, and in his desire to escape he embraced such anti-socialistic theories as race supremacy, Nietzscheanism and the philosophies of Spencer and Haeckel. Contraries could exist in London's system because he seldom saw the necessity

83. Quoted from Jack London, A Daughter of the Snows
of bringing his rational ideas into accord with his emotional interests. He was not able to allow the two opposite doctrines of socialism and racism to dwell within him indefinitely, and it was Marx who finally was abandoned; but, while he held tightly to them both, one so-called socialist, Benjamin Kidd, was able to reconcile them for him.

Benjamin Kidd's social philosophy has been pronounced a mixture of anti-rationalistic elements of romanticist philosophy and evolutionary biology. In his Social Evolution (1894), Kidd applied the theory of natural selection to society and concluded that, to keep maximum efficiency and to promote progress, society should yield to a minority of superior individuals, who should rule. In order to justify his social system, he turned to history where, it seems, he found that the Anglo-Saxon was through the ages the most effective exterminator of other races. Kidd did not maintain that the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon lay in his conquering energy, but in his altruism, and that “the weaker races disappear before the stronger through the effects of mere contact.” This theory is identical with that of Gobineau, though Kidd does not give him credit for it.

Kidd's conviction of race destiny fell on fertile ground, for London had been taught from small boyhood that his race

was vastly superior to others, and in *Social Evolution* he believed he had found scientific and historical corroboration of his beliefs. But London continued to hold that the Anglo-Saxons were a race of doers and fighters and did not agree with Kidd that altruism was the race's unique quality. In a letter of June 23, 1899, to a friend, London voices a conviction which indicates Kidd's success in reconciling socialism and racism for him. The socialism which emerged, it will be noted, is decidedly heterodox:

> Socialism is not an ideal system, devised by man for the happiness of all life; nor for the happiness of all men; but it is devised for the happiness of certain kindred races. It is devised so as to give strength to these certain kindred favored races so that they may survive and inherit the earth to the extinction of lesser, weaker races. The very men who advocate socialism, may tell you of the brotherhood of men, and I know they are sincere, but that does not alter the law — they are simply instruments, working blindly for the betterment of these certain kindred races, and working detriment to the inferior races they would call brothers. It is the law; they do not know it perhaps; but that does not change the logic of events. 87

A few months later he wrote in another letter: "You mistake. I do not believe in the universal brotherhood of

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87. Quoted from Charmian London, *The Book of Jack London*, I, 287. The "certain kindred races" which London mentions were the white races, the hallmark of which is the Anglo-Saxon, which he defined: "And by Anglo-Saxon is not meant merely the people of that tight little island on the edge of the Western Ocean. Anglo-Saxon stands for the English-speaking people of all the world, who, in forms and traditions, are more peculiarly and definitely English than anything else." (Quoted from Joan London, *Jack London and His Times*, p. 212.) Of the kindred class, those more closely related to the Anglo-Saxon are the Teutons, Celts, Welsh, Danes and other Scandinavians. (Pope, *Jack London: A Study in Twentieth Century Values*, p. 3.)
man. I think I have said this before. I believe my race is the salt of the earth."88 Examples from letters written throughout his life could be multiplied. A few months before London died a reporter was questioning the logic of his socialism in connection with his race theory; London became irritated and shouted: "What the devil! I am first of all a white man and only then a Socialist!"89 It is significant, though enigmatic, that he often voiced these sentiments in private conversation and that most of his novels reflect his racial theories, though in his socialistic essays and lectures he conveniently ignores them and preaches a more conventional revolutionary socialism. Fear of public opinion would not seem to be the reason for this, since he was never reticent, either vocally or in his essays, to present a blood-revolution, a "to-hell-with-the-Constitution" brand of socialism which shocked the public of his time and brought upon him the indignation of the American press.

The Anglo-Saxon theme had passed into general currency during London's time, and even the eminent David Starr Jordan, London's idol, who also may be responsible for some of the writer's racism, could say in 1894: "In these times it is well for us to remember that we come from hardy stock. The Anglo-Saxon race, with its strength and virtues, was born of


89. Quoted from Joan London, Jack London and His Times, p. 284.
hard times. It is not easily kept down; the victims of op-
pression must be of some other stock. We who live in America,
and who constitute the heart of the republic, are the sons
and daughters of 'him who overcometh.'
In this excerpt
Jordan has identified the Anglo-Saxon race with the American
spirit. Not only had recent studies in ethnology made racial
distinctions among the human race with a subsequent tendency
to revere the white race and consider it a peerless type, but
also America's nationalistic sentiments induced men to find
racial unity among her citizens. The United States was com-
posed predominantly of white, English-speaking people, and
this seemed to lend credence to the application of the term
Anglo-Saxon. The fact that America had never lost a war
seemed to argue that Americans (or Anglo-Saxons) were a unique,
unconquerable people.

When Jack London wrote, he not only echoed the popular
sentiments of his time, but also expressed his own feelings.
His temperament would not allow him to constantly write with
objectivity, but rather, urged him to emphasize and exaggerate
to gain effect. London's Froma Welse resembles the voice of
the Zeit-Geist when she proudly asks, "What race is to rise
up and overwhelm us?" She represents the writer's own
prejudices and feeling of power through race when she states:
"A superior people must look upon all others as inferior

90. David Starr Jordan, The Care and Culture of Men
(San Francisco, 1910), p. 38.

91. Quoted from Jack London, A Daughter of the Snows,
p. 82.
people. These are indicative of London's conviction that the Anglo-Saxon was superior and indomitable. London was prone to employ superlatives. To him it was inconceivable that a people could be superior and still not dominate. If a race possessed more perfect attributes than other groups, it had to manifest its excellence in some grandiose, masterful or heroic manner. It seems natural then that London's powerful heroes, his supermen, should be Anglo-Saxon. In his power sentiments, however, he responded not only to the Darwinians, who had shown their readers a power world where the strong survived, but also to the prophet of power and individualism in modern philosophy, Friedrich Nietzsche.

Section IV: Nietzschean Power Values

The doctrine of superman had derived strength in modern times from the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. Søren Kierkegaard, Carlyle and Emerson, to name only a few thinkers, have also preached supermen of sorts — aesthetic, historical, democratic, and probably as many types as there are protagonists for superman — but head and shoulders above them all stands the egocentric, supra-group, supra-normal Nietzschean ideal.

92. Quoted from A Daughter of the Snows, p. 83.

Übermensch, or superman, was Nietzsche's word for the individuals who, according to his philosophy, were destined to practice the heroic virtues of "master morality" and would emanate from and perfect a higher aristocratic culture. The superman's forerunners were supposedly the "higher men" whose characteristics were egoism, severity, strength of will, and affirmation of life -- men who possessed the attributes of the supermen to be, but in a lesser degree. Their offspring would become the lofty heaven-kissing beings (supermen) who were to be as far divorced from contemporary homo-sapiens as as modern men are from the apes. 94

Thus, the ultimate and goal of Nietzsche's philosophy was the superman. Nietzsche believed that the development of a super-being warranted his whole philosophy of will to power as the basal instinct of an organic being, slave and master morality as a double standard of ethics, and war and struggle as necessary processes. Man's desire and ability to grasp power, according to Nietzsche, argues for the division of society into two classes: the masters, who possess the will to power in heroic proportions, and the slaves, whose power urge is deficient. This social division was to be complemented by an ethical division. The master class was to practice "master morality," a code of egoism diametrically

opposed to "slave morality," which belonged to the weak, religious and stupid slave class. War and struggle were necessary because power could be exerted only against obstacles capable of some resistance. In a social and ethical system which possessed the above-mentioned features, Nietzsche believed that the master class would produce the superman.

Nietzsche's philosophy rests on the hypothesis that, given the correct conditions, a super-being -- a new species, rather than an improved man -- will evolve. (Of course, Nietzsche was a Lamarckian, and was convinced that acquired characteristics could be inherited.95) Nietzsche hoped that man would be surpassed, and his philosophy was gauged to accomplish this.

But the "mad German," as he has often been called, did not draw a clear picture of what his superman would be. Walter Lippman notes: "It [the doctrine of superman] is magnificent, but who can say, after he [Nietzsche] has shot his arrow of longing to the other side, whether he will find Caesar Borgia, Henry Ford or Isadora Duncan?"96 As Mr. Lippman's observation indicates, Nietzsche's works have been interpreted in various ways. Nietzsche used an aphoristic style and made no apparent effort to unify his jottings into a complete and coherent system. His definitions and explanations are usually metaphoric rather than literal. As a result of these facts, his philosophy has been criticized in some quarters as brutal and hedo-

nistic, and hailed in others as benevolent and idealistic.

Hence, the terms "tough Nietzschean" and "gentle Nietzschean"
are ascribed respectively to those interpreters and followers
of Nietzsche who hold that the German was an "anarchist par
excellence," a prophet of the predatory, and a demon, and to
those who believe him to be a scourge of totalitarianism, a
prophet of progress, and a saint.

After Nietzsche published his Zarathustra proclamation
a number of German writers began to live and write their
conception of superman. From the years 1886 until 1893 the
superman vogue flourished in Europe. But Nietzsche's works
were neither well known nor very accessible in translation in
the United States before 1905, and the first complete transla-
tion by Dr. Oscar Levy was issued between 1909 and 1914.
What is more, critical works on Nietzsche between 1897 and
1907, both in periodical and book form, were not plentiful
in this country. Bernard Shaw is given credit for first
bringing Nietzsche to America in a diluted form in his Three

97. For instances of these opposed views see M. D. Petre,
"Studies of Friedrich Nietzsche," Catholic World, LXXII
(January - March, 1906), 317 - 330, 518 - 536, 610 - 621; Max
Simon Nordau, Degeneration, tr. from the 2nd ed. of the German
work (New York, 1895), pp. 415 - 472.

98. See Brinton, Nietzsche, pp. 233 - 235; Walter
Kaufmann, Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist

99. Berg, The Superman in Modern Literature, pp. 179 -
199.

100. See Walcott, "Naturalism and the Superman in the
Flairs for Puritans (1900) and in Man and Superman (1905), Shaw was also responsible for popularizing the word superman in the English language after he had unsuccessfully tried the word overman. Major critics have overlooked it seems, Max Simon Nordau's Degeneration, listed as a better seller in 1895. Though extremely critical of Nietzsche, Nordau renders a coherent and interesting account of what appears to be more significant in the German's philosophy. With Henry L. Mencken's The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (1908) and James Huneker's Eroits: A Book of Supermen (1908), the English-speaking reading public of the United States was exposed to the first popular studies of the man called Nietzsche.

That Jack London attained some knowledge of Nietzschean philosophy previous to 1905 can be demonstrated. Indeed, it must; else his repeated assertion in later years that the character, Wolf Larsen, in The Sea Wolf (1904) was a conscious attempt to display a Nietzschean individualist may well be deemed an afterthought.

Whether or not he actually read Nietzsche before 1905 is not known. Sometime during that year he gave his wife newly purchased volumes of Thus Spake Zarathustra, A Genealogy of


Morals and The Antichrist. After she had read these, she and London discussed the works. At this time then, if not previously in his avid reading, he presumably read some of the German's works.

One must also consider the rather unique intellectual circle in which Jack London oscillated during his formative years of intensive reading and more intensive intellectual conversation in order to understand how it was possible for him to contact and be influenced by various, heterodox philosophies, of which Nietzsche's was not the least impressive. In the main, Jack London's early associates were persons of anarchistic thought, including a few socialists with similar leanings, who were able to imbue him with Nietzsche's teachings. Of this group, Frank Strawn-Hamilton, a thorough individualist who dabbled in socialism, and a scholar at home in the German language, was formidable. He led Jack through complex Hegelian dialectics, filled him with enthusiasm for Spencer, and explained Nietzschean philosophy to him.

Further nourishment from German-speaking sources was forthcoming from Herman Scheffauer, a friend of the famous Ernst Haeckel; Austin Lewis, who translated Engel's Anti-Dühring; Ernst Untermann, translator of Das Kapital, and Upton Sinclair, who, influenced by Also Sprach Zarathustra, anonymously


published *The Journal of Arthur Stirling* (1903). This novel, according to Sinclair, helped launch the Nietzschean cult in America. Minds of this caliber and colour were those upon which London depended for his early initiation into Nietzschean dogma. But, above all, Emma Goldman, who studied Nietzsche in Europe in 1895 and who supported the ideals of the *Übermensch*, infected London with the anarchistic view of Nietzscheanism. London's acquaintance with Miss Goldman grew into what might pass for intellectual friendship. Her influence upon him was soon evident. When she rang the cymbals for free love, London began to discourse lucidly in private on the decay of monogamy. London's pages in the *Kempton-Wace Letters* (1903) resembled the theories of a more erudite Emma Goldman displaying to the world an exciting exegesis of Nietzsche's *A Genealogy of Morals*.

With this background one is not surprised that Jack London became somewhat notorious among his more conventional friends for his Nietzschean credo. Upon one occasion in early


1903, one of London's associates, obviously with the intent of provoking London, made the statement that the Eternal Recurrence was nothing more than warmed-over Buddhism, and Jack retorted at once: "The anemic Buddha with his anemic religion has never been a yea-sayer. He has been as negative as Christianity where the passions and desires are involved. At the heart of the Eternal Recurrence is denial of sin, denial of conscience which makes awareness of sin possible." 110

This was, of course, a naive exaggeration, but the very enthusiasm with which it was dictated is an instructive fact. London's broad distinction between Buddhism's doctrine of negation of life and Nietzsche's doctrine of affirmation of life seems valid enough. The significance of his statement lies in the fact that he could make a distinction between the dissimilar elements of the two ideologies and that he seemed eager to defend Nietzsche's philosophy.

London's enthusiastic defense of Nietzsche is not indicative of the German's treatment at the hands of more mature intellectuals such as Upton Sinclair or David Starr Jordan. Upton Sinclair's observations on Nietzsche appear more critical and acute than London's. Sinclair wrote: "Moral sublimity lies in escape from self. The doctrine of Christ is negation of life; that of Nietzsche an affirmation; it seems to me much easier to attain sublimity with the former." 111

110. Quoted from Footloose in Arcadia, p. 39.

David Starr Jordan could not, perhaps because of his rational habit of mind, become enthusiastic about Nietzsche. Jordan dismissed as preposterous Nietzsche's prophet of the higher man, Zarathustra, and termed him "the drivelling Zoroaster of Nietzsche." 112

London's interpretation of life was raw and rather vulnerable. He was intrigued with the new and the radical. By the time he had become interested in Nietzsche, the writer had already committed himself to the more conspicuous features of Darwinism, particularly the concept of the primordial. When Nietzsche stated that the strong, selfish, uninhibited, healthy individual should rule, London might have accepted the dogma in the same spirit he had embraced the notion that the primitive was excellent. Nietzsche, who taught that the instincts of an organic being were good, was inclined to praise those men who followed their instincts, especially the instinct of will to power. The Darwinian concept of the atavist, which London championed, also implies that man's primitive instincts are good because they aid him in the survival struggle. Nietzsche's philosophy, therefore, might have appealed to London merely through its apparent espousal of the primitive. Indeed, the primitive animal-like qualities of London's heroes are those that enable the characters not only to survive, but to gain power.

London adopted from Nietzsche that which had the most

utility for him in his personal philosophy of materialistic individualism. He also took that which could enhance his vocabulary or enrich his phraseology. Furthermore, Nietzsche could often serve as a convenient authority in an argument. In *A Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche mentions the "beast of prey, the splendid, blond beast, lustfully roving in search of spoils and victory," as the basis for what he calls the "noble race," that uninhibited group of strong-willed individuals (of no particular nationality or color) from which the superman supposedly will spring.113 Passages like this evidently impressed London. The year 1902 found him utilizing Nietzschean terminology in an essay in which he described the "profesh" or professional tramp:

The "profesh" are the aristocracy of the Underworld. They are the lords and masters, the aggressive men, the primordial [notice the Darwinian implication] noble men, the blond beasts of Nietzsche, lustfully roving and conquering through sheer superiority and strength. Unwritten is the law they impose. They are the Law incarnate. And the Underworld looks up to them and obeys. They are not easy of access. They are conscious of their own nobility and treat only with equals.114

Nietzsche's scintillating words and terms were now his own — "blond beasts," "yea sayers," "the glad perishers," "live dangerously," "superman," "noble races," "become hard!" — and, as we shall see, he used them often in his novels. When


these words occur in a novel either they are used to describe a strong, primitive, masterful individual, or they are voiced by one of these characters. Like Santayana, London saw in Nietzsche's prophecy magnificent brutes with powers resembling those of wilder animals. In Nietzsche London found a promise of victory for the amoral individual who possessed the combination of primitive physical strength and genius. Hartley C. Grattan explains how Nietzsche's doctrine was particularly acceptable to London: "London had a passion to dominate -- men, women, things. He had many of the characteristics which Dreiser attributes to his financiers. The drive of his personality was in the direction of domineering individualism, which is hostile to collectivism. Thus, while his head argued socialism, his nature argued individualism." It was predatory amoral individualism which London embodied in Wolf Larsen when the author consciously attempted to create his conception of a Nietzschean individualist.

Wolf Larsen is able to control unforeseen and difficult situations and to be a master of men because his heritage makes him a master rather than a slave. Because the Sea Wolf has no moral scruples, the potentiality of his severity and power are increased so that he becomes not only a sinister but a titanic figure. Power, not survival, appears to be Larsen's primary urge. The instinct of self-preservation does not seem to


motivate Wolf Larsen who neither fears death nor shrinks from any danger. Power is Larsen's incentive for his cruel acts. He believes that anything that leads to power is good because it is an inherent drive to gain and demonstrate might in any manner whatsoever. Larsen contends that for one of his kind "to serve" is "to suffocate," and to give poetic emphasis to his declaration he quotes Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven." The Sea Wolf's many desires are usually shown to be subordinated to his instinct for mastery. When a member of his company refuses obedience to his commands, the person is either severely punished or killed. Larsen's unbridled passion to exert the force of his will upon others is in harmony with Nietzsche's claim that will to power is man's primary instinct. Nietzsche proclaimed: "Physiologists should bethink themselves before putting down the instinct of self-preservation as the cardinal instinct of an organic being. A living thing seeks above all to discharge its strength — life itself is Will to Power; self-preservation is only one of the results thereof." The Sea Wolf's thirst for power seeks its logical outlet in the fight. He has a zest for the intellectual and physical battle. He welcomes a Pacific typhoon because it is a challenge to his seamanship. He is jubilant when other ships

118. Quoted from *The Sea Wolf*, p. 231.
arrive to compete in the seal hunt because they represent competition and an opportunity to manifest his superior wit and prowess over his competitors. There is almost a moral fervor in the sea captain's desire to prove his belief that "Might is right. Weakness is wrong." 120 If his lucid arguments in favor of domination of the strong man over the weak are not sufficient to win Van Weyden to Larsen's opinion, the realities of that philosophy in its application aboard the Ghost do impress him. But Van Weyden is, to some extent, swayed by the Sea Wolf's arguments and he admits: "I laughed bitterly to myself, and seemed to find in Wolf Larsen's forbidding philosophy a more adequate explanation of life than I found in my own." 121

Larsen's indictment of Humphrey Van Weyden also appears to be a judgment with a basis in Nietzsche's philosophy: — "You are impotent," Larsen taunts. "Your conventional morality is stronger than you. You are a slave to the opinions which have credence among the people you have known and have read about." 122 According to Larsen's statement, Van Weyden's code of ethics identifies him with the herd, the inept slave class whose only merit is its service to the masters. The Ghost's crewmen are also doomed to be controlled by the Sea Wolf because their slave psychology fits them only

120. Quoted from Jack London, The Sea Wolf, p. 70.
121. Quoted from The Sea Wolf, p. 106.
122. Quoted from The Sea Wolf, p. 269.
for a servile role. And above all other life on the ship stands Wolf Larsen, egregious and conscious of his strength, proud of his individuality and his supra-group code. Most actions that take place and every judgment made by characters in the novel represent the separate and opposite values of masters and slaves. This practice of having Larsen operate under a decidedly different set of values than those possessed by weaker characters subservient to him seems to conform to Nietzsche's dictum that "the spirit of the herd should rule within the herd -- but not beyond it; the leaders of the herd require a fundamentally different valuation for their actions, as do also the independent ones or the beasts of prey." 123

His habit of interpreting life in terms of power and weakness and master and slave morality does not make Larsen appear like one of Nietzsche's *superman*, but rather, like one who has read Nietzsche and acts up to formula. It is the Sea-Wolf's constant demand that the amoral, strong individual should rule that parallels Nietzsche's constant plea for the dominance of ultra-aristocratic, powerful individuals over the weak herd, that seems to indicate London's conformity to the German's ideas. Larsen's conviction seems to agree with Nietzsche's, that the facility to gain and retain power places an individual in a master or elite class with a moral code suited to that class; and, conversely, that the inability

to gain power places the individual in a herd or conventional class with its altruistic, humanitarian values. While sanctioning this sort of social and ethical stratification in society it is little wonder that Nietzsche demanded that his masters be powerful, egoistic, pitiless and selfish individuals with a contempt for the slave class. Notice how the words of London’s Jacob Weise exemplify this dogma: "Conventions are worthless for such as we. They are for the swine who without them would wallow deeper. The weak must obey or be crushed; not so with the strong. The mass is nothing; the individual everything; and it is the individual, always, that rules the mass and gives the law. A fig for what the world says!" 124

Nietzsche’s power theories were emotionally acceptable to London. The ruthless triumph of the "higher man" or master over others who happen to be weaker, less fortunate, more scrupulous -- and who, therefore, have less right to live -- was nourishing to an egoistic London who wanted to be a master. His semi-autobiographical Martin Eden depicts a hero, an avowed Nietzschean, who delights in exhibiting his unconventional beliefs. Through sheer genius and hard work Martin Eden becomes a success and shakes the literary world with his new school of criticism. Fame and fortune are his, and he is indebted to no one for his triumph. Disgusted with the bourgeois society around him Martin attacks its values and

defines his own:

Nietzsche was right. I won't take the time to tell you who Nietzsche was, but he was right. The world belongs to the strong -- to the strong who are noble as well and who do not wallow in the swine-trough of trade and exchange. The world belongs to the true noblemen, the great blond beasts, to the non-compromisers, to the "yea-sayers." And they will eat you up, you socialists who are afraid of socialism and who think yourselves individualists. Your slave morality of the meek and lowly will never save you. -- Oh, it's all Greek, I know, and I won't bother you any more with it. But remember one thing. There aren't half a dozen individualists in Oakland, but Martin Eden is one of them.135

In London's treatment of the character Burning Daylight he also shows power to be the important characteristic of the hero. Daylight, like Wolf Larsen, Jacob Welse and Martin Eden, is proud of his selfish individualism, and his pride issues from the consciousness of his own might and the realization that ordinary men are impotent. London wrote: "Power had its effect on him that it had on all men. Suspicious of the big exploiters, despising the fools of the exploited herd, he had faith only in himself."136 Though the author did not make a clear distinction between master and slave morality in this novel, he nevertheless portrays Burning Daylight as ethically distinguished: "He was one of the few that made the law of that land, who set the ethical pace, and by conduct gave the standard of right and wrong, but was nevertheless above the Law. He was one of those favored mortals who can do

no wrong. What he did had to be right, whether or not other
men were permitted to do the same thing.”

Nietzsche's theories that only a constant state of
struggle is of value, that knowledge is delusion and instinct
is right, that pity, by permitting the weak to rule, weakens
the natural conqueror and society as well, that the develop-
ment of ever stronger individuals is society's supreme duty —
these are the fundamental concepts that appealed to London.
To Nietzsche life was experimental and aristocratic; where no
false morality entered, the best man won. Some of Nietzsche's
sycophants, London, for example, shifted the emphasis from
this aspect to the more attractive zest for struggle and
power. London was too devoted a supporter of many causes
to be a consistent Nietzschean. His Ernest Everhard of The
Iron Heel exemplifies, more than any one of London's charac-
ters, the discordant amalgam of Nietzschean and non-Nietzschean
traits in one character. Ernest, an ardent Marxian revo-
lutionist who amazes the capitalists with his imperative
application of the Marxian doctrine of surplus value to the
socio-economic conditions of his time, is also a "natural
aristocrat — and this in spite of the fact that he was in the
camp of the non-aristocrats. He was a superman, a blond beast
such as Nietzsche had described, and in addition he was aflame

127. Ibid., pp. 60 - 61.

128. Pope, Jack London: A Study in Twentieth Century
Values, p. 244.
with democracy." London might have added that Ernest was also a pioneer, an Anglo-Saxon, a materialistic monist and an atavist, and in one concise statement he would have enumerated the attributes of the London heroic archetype. As the novel progresses we find that Ernest is all of these things at one time or another. He is Nietzschean in that he is a strong-willed genius who dominates bourgeois capitalists as well as revolutionary socialists. He is a pioneer and an Anglo-Saxon because he is of "Mayflower stock" and has white skin, blue eyes, and blond hair. When Ernest confutes the clergy's metaphysics he is a materialistic monist, and while beating capitalist mercenaries with his powerful arms and fists he manifests his atavistic qualities. The inclusion of all these elements in a character leads to melodramatic excess. Even the "gentlest" Nietzschean would deem it grotesque to read that one of the German's favored individuals was "afame with democracy."

London equated Nietzsche's "blond beast" and "superman" in his description of Ernest Everhard. The most ardent or credulous Nietzsche scholar would deplore this identification. The German, after all, saw a promise of perfection in the blond beast. He discerned only the potentialities of the superman in this lower specimen. London was a Nietzsche "fan" rather than a Nietzsche scholar, and he used many of the German's terms indiscriminately. In Nietzsche, the prophet

of power, London, it seems, found his own emancipation from the herd of men. His voice might have been raised through his "blond-beastly," sea-faring hero, Pathurst, when the character triumphantly declaims: "Now at last I knew Nietzsche. I knew the rightness of the books, the relation of high thinking to high conduct, the transmutation of midnight thought into action in the high place on the poop of a coal carrier in the year nineteen thirteen, my woman beside me, my ancestors behind me, my slant-eyed servitors under me, the beast beneath me and beneath the heel of me. I knew at last the meaning of kingship."130

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CONCLUSION

In Jack London it is difficult to distinguish a coherent approach to life. An individualist by nature, a romanticist in taste and temperament, a man essentially one with the vigor of the new frontier force, London nevertheless persisted in exposing his mind to the cold objectivity of science and philosophy. Perhaps it was unfortunate for London, both as a man and as a writer, that he was intellectually inquisitive and at the same time emotionally impressionable. Toward the end of his life, disillusioned and weary of fighting with ideas, he lamented that he had ever opened the books. His extensive reading brought him in contact with many ideas that were alien to his nature. Yet, London was not one to view ideas with detached interest; he assimilated those that appealed to him, altered others to suit himself, or completely annihilated them. Consistent with his own individualism was his explanation of philosophy: "The ultimate word is I LIKE," he declared in later years. "It lies beneath philosophy and is twined about the heart of life. When philosophy has mused ponderously for a month, telling the individual what he must do, the individual says in an instant I LIKE -- and philosophy goes glimmering. Philosophy is very often a man's way of explaining his own I LIKE."131

This explanation may account for London's eclecticism. Not finding any one philosophy or ideology which could adequately exposit or condone his own "I Like," he was prompted to accept parts of systems that he encountered and to ignore them in their totality. Indeed, it seems that what he adopted from the various ideas he contacted was compatible with his own emotional needs.

It was not, of course, merely rare instinct that decided the tone of London's temperament; it was the pattern of the time. Jack London's nature presents the lively and contradictory characteristics typical of his generation — individualism, drive, zest for romance, acquisitiveness, faith in science and progress. Native optimism had received a bolster from America's imperialistic program. On the other hand, European ideologies with their class consciousness and scientific coldness were finding their way to America's shores. London, at once impetuous and inquisitive, attempted to grasp these ideologies and to retain his native optimism. This resulted in a kind of an unsystematized coalescence of the two through a subjective interpretation of the ideologies and a careful choosing of parts of them.

London's fictional heroes were also a disharmonious mixture of his own traits and ideas. Always his own hero, he could not help giving to his fictional heroes those qualities or ideas which he regarded as great or unique in himself. Perhaps if London had not been such a vital person, or if he had not been so conscious of his own individuality, he could
have brought them into some logical accord. Thus the very limitations of the man himself become the limitations of his best known characters, in turn excluding London from the front rank of American writers.
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