

## Drowning *Martin Eden*'s Ideological Aesthetic

Steven J. Venturino (© 1996)

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To describe a particular form of body as historical is to say that it is continuously able to make something of that which makes it. Language is in this sense the very index of human historicity, as a system whose particularity is to enable events which transgress its own formal structure. But one aspect of this fathomable capacity for self-transgression, on the part of the linguistically productive animal, is the power to extend its body into a web of abstractions which then violate its own sensuous nature.<sup>1</sup>

Peter Brooks has recently revisited the terrain of Terry Eagleton's *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* and returned with a warning against certain contemporary trends in literary study. Brooks argues that poetics—the investigation of “*how* a text means”—is too often bypassed as literature professors lead students in search of ideological or political machinations—“*what* a text means” (517). Against this, Brooks suggests a return to the Romantic-humanist notion that “teaching the humanities involves *submerging one's individual personality into something larger*, into a cultural tradition that one speaks through and allows to speak through oneself” (519, emphasis added). The present essay also revisits Eagleton's Marxist aesthetics, particularly as it explores artistic identity and ideology under capitalism, but my intention is to trace how Jack London's 1909 novel *Martin Eden* both anticipates Eagleton's Marxism and suggests that “cultural submersion” in the capitalist West will *not* lead to the kind of progressive conversation suggested by Brooks and the Romantic-humanist tradition. My reading also argues that Martin Eden's rising career and subsequent breakdown enact the aesthetic paradox at the heart of capitalist submersion, revealing what Eden experienced as the fatally symbiotic advantages and dangers of humanistic individualism.

Claiming for the critic-professor what is identified with the artist, Brooks quotes T. S. Eliot:

What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality. (520)

With this in mind, Brooks argues, critics might acknowledge that they are not “virtuous philosophers” but “only chameleon poets,” and their consequent arrogance of refusing to submit to “the test of that otherness which is culture” might be avoided (520). The critical personality ought not simply “flaunt its idiosyncrasies,” but join the discussion created by tradition, poetics, and a striving for the common good.

For his part, Terry Eagleton also considers the dissolution of the artist and the effects of tradition, poetics, and the struggle for the common good. Yet while Brooks assumes that submersion into tradition indicates deference to “something which is more valuable,” Eagleton questions whether such a vision isn't simply a mirage created by humanism in order to conceal the inevitable collapse of its subjects through the annihilating paradox of capitalism.

Considering the beneficial results of conservatively traditional aesthetics and the humanist individual, Eagleton notes that “bourgeois political and cultural traditions nurture, however partially and abstractly, the ideals of freedom, equality, and universal justice” (218). Still, the benefits of the bourgeois condition cannot be separated from the cost of their achievement: “Capitalist development brings the individual to new heights of subtle self-awareness, to an intricate wealth of subjectivity, in the very act of producing him as a predatory egoist” (219). Ultimately, Eagleton notes, this predatory nature robs the capitalist subject of its own self-knowledge, as alienation between producer and product increases and ideology moves in to form

the basis of identity. The individual, enabled by the ideals and opportunities of bourgeois society, is necessarily annulled by the demands and limits of that society.

### **Ideology after *The Iron Heel***

London's *Martin Eden* was written at a time when socialist popularity in the United States was at its peak. After relatively strong support for "anticapitalist" Populist candidates such as James Weaver and William Jennings Bryan, the American electorate gave the Socialist candidate for president, Eugene Debs, almost six percent of the vote in 1912.<sup>2</sup> London had already written *The Iron Heel* (1908), a utopian novel of socialist revolution, and he had just concluded an extremely popular socialist lecture tour. Also at this time, Henry Demarest Lloyd (whose son became one of the founders of the American communist movement) had published *Wealth Against Commonwealth*, and Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* had become an instant classic.

Yet, despite the rise of socialism and London's own important contributions to it, London himself was considered one of the country's most widely read authors, steadily on his way to becoming America's first writer-millionaire. Philip Foner suggests that London initially gave up hopes of a commercial success with his radically propagandistic *The Iron Heel*, being "fully aware that no publisher might accept it, that no magazine would serialize it, that it would intensify the attacks upon him in the bourgeois press" (95). Nevertheless, as Susan Ward notes, London eventually came around to seeing *The Iron Heel* as yet another bestseller:

In several letters to his publisher, he stressed the potential popularity of the novel. "Practically, from a business standpoint, considering the widespread interest of socialism at the present moment, I think there is a fair chance of *The Iron Heel* being a hit," he wrote. . . . And in January 1908, noting the panic, the trade depression, and "the general situation in the United States for the past year," he commented, "the public is just ripe to boost *The Iron Heel* along into large sales." ("Ideology" 167)

The novel was not a success, not even among socialist critics, as Foner (95-96) and Granville Hicks (192) have noted. Yet I agree with Ward's assessment that London effectively used the fictional conventions of his day to express a radical socialist call to action, and that while audiences disagreed with his politics, they understood his message ("Ideology" 176).

To take this point further, however, I would maintain that *The Iron Heel*, while calling attention to the American proletariat's oppression, includes relatively little analysis of middle-class consciousness in general and London's own consciousness as a successful writer in particular. In other words, *The Iron Heel* may describe how to escape the exploitation of the ruling class, but it does not explain why so many of the oppressed are unable and unwilling to take that route.

The autobiographical *Martin Eden* (originally titled *Success*) is not so much a contribution to the "muckraking" or "social commentary" genres of the American novels as it is London's more personal attempt to explore and expose his own dual role in the ideology of American literary culture.<sup>3</sup> And it was this culture that kept *The Iron Heel*'s message from a wide readership. As Charles Watson notes, *Martin Eden* allowed London a chance to illustrate his own specifically aesthetic predicament: "to put in perspective the two strands of his career as a writer: the serious artist, contemptuous of the values of the marketplace; and the literary entrepreneur, struggling for commercial success before all else" (123). As I hope to make clear, London's predicament is also the predicament of American culture, not in the context of universal, "ideal" artistic aspirations at odds with marketplace value, but in terms of the market's creation and maintenance of such aspirations. *Martin Eden*'s plot is simple: the young, lower-class sailor Martin Eden discovers the "transcendent beauty" of the middle-class world and falls in love with Ruth Morse and her family, which he worships as a model of beauty, civility, and intellect. He

then sets out to develop his writing skills, convinced of his eventual mastery of self-expression and the literary marketplace. After a series of disappointments, setbacks, and futile ventures into the world of manual labor, Martin becomes enormously wealthy through his writing. Yet, along the way he has grown disillusioned with the writing profession and with Ruth, and although he has been introduced to socialism, he has rejected it. In the end, a calmly despondent Martin gives his money away, sails to Tahiti, and drowns himself.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Bourgeois Picture**

When Martin first enters the Morse's middle-class home, he is surrounded by bourgeois culture at its most comfortable. His reason for being there is partly accidental, since he has happened to have rescued Arthur Morse (Ruth's brother) from a mugging. Arthur has his own reasons for wanting Martin to visit, however; he wants to shock his civilized family with the rough but kind "wild man" of the lower classes. Martin's visit, then, serves as the family's entertainment for the evening, although Martin, unaware of Arthur's motives, feels that the only task before him is to negotiate the unfamiliar surroundings.

This introductory situation previews the discord that will haunt Martin to the novel's end. While he believes he is performing actions for a particular set of reasons and within an essentially benevolent context, he is in fact unaware of the true ends of his own performance. So, more used to the planks of a sailing ship than the carpets of a genteel living room, Martin awkwardly moves into the Morse home, annoyed by his acceptance of the invitation to dinner. He intends to make the most of it anyway: "He cursed himself for having come, and at the same time resolved that, happen what would, having come, he would carry it through" (33). Martin's resolve is a reflection of what Eagleton calls the "felicitous Fall" into capitalism by a society that must then make the

best of a contentious situation, “even if one might believe with the Milton of *Paradise Lost* that it would have been better had it never occurred at all” (218).<sup>5</sup>

Eagleton describes a kind of “Marxist sublime” that then emerges from bourgeois revolutions and lends bourgeois culture its seemingly historical validation: “Only by turning back, with the horror-stricken face of Walter Benjamin’s *angelus novus*, can the revolution be blown by the winds of history into the realm of the future” (213). History is seen to drive the bourgeois revolution forward out of feudalism and monarchism, and what is left is a sense of the “usable past” drawn into the present with renewed promise.

It is precisely the bourgeois promise—and delivery—of individual emancipation and extended intellectual reach that draws Martin into his career as a writer. Already “keenly sensitive” and “responsive” (32-33), Martin feels constrained by his inability to express what he feels: “He felt the bigness and glow of life in what he had read, but his speech was inadequate. He could not express what he felt, and to himself he likened himself to a sailor, in a strange ship, on a dark night, groping about in the unfamiliar running rigging” (41).

Martin’s goal is simply and stubbornly to overcome this inarticulate state, and his salvation seems to come from the college-educated Ruth Morse and the entire Morse household. Martin’s dinner with the family, whose sinister significance is hidden from Martin, seems to validate his choice of the family as the model for a larger reality:

For the first time he realized that eating was something more than a utilitarian function. He was unaware of what he ate. It was merely food. He was feasting his love of beauty at this table where eating was an aesthetic function. It was an intellectual function, too. His mind was stirred. He heard words spoken that were meaningless to him, and other words that he had seen only in books. . . . When he heard such words dropped carelessly from the lips of the members of this marvelous family, her family, he thrilled with delight. The romance, and beauty, and high vigor of the books were coming true. He was in that rare and blissful

state wherein a man sees his dreams stalk out from the crannies of fantasy and become fact. (48)

This ought not to be read as simply the awakening of a Romantic sensibility, as several commentators have noted,<sup>6</sup> but as a symptom of bourgeois ideology realizing its mask of humanist, aestheticized idealism and hiding its social determinations.

Martin's encounter with the Morses' oil painting is emblematic of this ideology. The painting of a pilot-schooner "caught and held him" as he entered the living room, since "there was beauty, and it drew him irresistibly" (33). Yet this sailor, identified with the painting's subject matter, is not so familiar with its technique of representation. As he steps closer to the picture, its composite nature is revealed:

The beauty faded out of the canvas. His face expressed his bewilderment. He stared at what seemed a careless daub of paint, then stepped away. Immediately all the beauty flashed back into the canvas. "A trick picture," was his thought, as he dismissed it, though in the midst of the multitudinous impressions he was receiving he found time to feel a prod of indignation that so much beauty should be sacrificed to make a trick. (33)

"Sacrifice" is a major theme of *The Iron Heel* and of London's socialist lectures, and Martin Eden's own suicide can be seen as a sacrifice. Yet, at this early stage of Martin's understanding of bourgeois aesthetics, he does not recognize the human analog to a picture that expresses its beauty only through the sacrifice of individual "daubs." The painting is an image of solidarity—like the tragic yet beautiful picture of revolution created by the martyrs of *The Iron Heel*'s Chicago uprising—but a solidarity co-opted by bourgeois aesthetics for the sake of a "trick."

Examining *Martin Eden*'s central conflict as one of artistic sensibility versus economic realities tends to undervalue London's placement of "ideal aesthetics" within the very framework of the American "economic reality." For example, Watson reads a passage in which Martin's

“trick of visioning” is described as the basis for his “sheerly automatic” technique of representation (*Martin Eden* 290-91). Taking the narrator’s words at face value, Watson notes that such a process of creation is “fundamental to the poetic imagination” and “underlies one of the major innovations of the modern novel, the stream-of-consciousness” (141). Martin’s “trick,” however, should be viewed beside the warning of the “trick picture.” From this perspective, “automatic” representation belies the dominant ideology and “poetic imagination” the sanctioned code of that ideology, while “stream-of-consciousness” is critiqued as the bourgeois-trained pattern of high Modernism.

Similarly, when Sam Baskett asserts that in *Martin Eden* London attempts “to write an intensely personal work and at the same time portray the fundamental human condition” (141), he falls into the same universalistic frame of mind that traps Martin himself. Rather, I would argue, London’s investigation follows Martin’s discovery that his “fundamental human condition” is in fact grounded in the interests of the bourgeoisie, and, further, it depicts the author’s own understanding that what is felt to be most “intensely personal” is also that which can be most profoundly implicated in the maintenance of capitalism.

### **“Work performed”**

As Martin struggles to master those techniques which will allow him to articulate his “personal” vision, he also grows increasingly subservient to the articulation of bourgeois aesthetics, although it will not be until he has achieved success that he will realize what has happened. Eagleton describes Marx’s view of personal aesthetics as one which acknowledges an inherently economic aspect:

It is in the concept of use-value, above all, that Marx deconstructs the opposition between the practical and the aesthetic. . . . We experience the sensuous wealth of things by drawing them within our signifying projects—a stance which differs on the one hand from the crude instrumentalism of exchange-value, and on the other hand from some disinterested aesthetic speculation. (205)

Marx's theory of use-value does not deny the affective force of "experience," "beauty," or "thought," but it refuses to preserve an ideal nature of aesthetic response that can be isolated from signifying use. Eagleton points out that bourgeois ideology strives to do just the opposite: "classical aesthetics and commodity fetishism both purge the specificity of things, stripping their sensuous content to a pure ideality of form" (205).

Paradoxically, while Martin feels he is training himself for the expression of his own "specificity," his horizon is actually the false ideality of the bourgeois "picture." Capitalist ideology, in the person of Ruth, seems to "possess" Martin's sense of self:

Ambition soared on mad wings, and he saw himself climbing the heights with her. . . . It was a soul-possession he dreamed, refined beyond any grossness, a free comradeship of the spirit that he could not put into definite thought. He did not think it. For that matter, he did not think at all. Sensation usurped reason, and he was quivering and palpitant with emotions he had never known, drifting deliciously on a sea of sensibility where feeling itself was exalted and spiritualized and carried beyond the summits of life. (59)

The ironies of Martin's Romantic daydream are profound. He will not "climb the heights" with Ruth, but instead sink into the sea, alone. He dreams of a "free comradeship," but cannot see that such a relationship would require the disillusion of Ruth and all that she represents; in fact, it would have to take place "beyond the summits" of bourgeois life. And while Martin, with his reason "usurped," drifts "deliciously on a sea of sensibility," he is actually headed for his rendezvous with a revalued reason at the novel's end, a rendezvous that does not take place *on* the sea, but submerged *in* it.

As Martin pursues his yet unrewarded literary career, working far into the night and voraciously scanning magazines, “taking note of the stories, articles, and poems that editors saw fit to publish” (119), he can recognize the “machinery” of the literary market, but he myopically sees himself as residing *outside* of this machine: “He began to doubt that editors were real men. They seemed cogs in a machine. That was what it was, a machine. He poured his soul into stories, articles, and poems, and entrusted them to the machine” (160). Specifically, he describes the market as a slot machine that takes in pennies and, with the pull of the handle, delivers either chewing gum or chocolate: “and so with the editorial machine. One slot brought checks and the other brought rejection slips. So far he had found only the latter slot” (161).<sup>7</sup>

Persevering, Martin trusts in his “work performed,” assuming that because he has worked to create, he has therefore created, and it is only a matter of time before his is compensated. Yet, while he is well aware of his need for *economic* reward, he still maintains that the work itself already corresponds exactly to his *personal* vision: Martin explains (“his thoughts whirling on from the particular to the universal”), “It’s work is done. . . . it has achieved its reason for existence” (163). While this individualized view of production (indeed, of art for art’s sake) ignores the role of the very “machine” upon which Martin must depend for success, it also reinforces Martin’s illusion of his individual ability to represent himself. Marx notes that “a writer does *not* regard his works as a means to an end. They are an end in themselves; so little are they “means,” for himself and others, that he will, if necessary, sacrifice his own existence for their existence” (quoted in Eagleton, 204). Martin claims both positions at once. He sees his writing as unquestionably a means to an end *but also* as an immediate expression of his identity. His error is

in thinking that the two positions result from the operations of two distinct worlds, that of economics and the ideal world of his self-expression.

Martin is convinced that his written "work" reflects his identity, that "in his work, [Ruth] would discern what his heart and soul were like, and she would come to understand something, a little something, of the stuff of his dreams and the strength of his power" (162).<sup>8</sup> Ironically, it is only through his "work" as it is defined by the relations of production that Ruth (and the public) will recognize Martin's dreams and power. Those relations, however, alienate Martin from his own work as they reconfigure Martin's dreams and power to bourgeois ideology. Martin's two positions must occupy a single world.

Eagleton points out that for Marx, "it is not the use of an object which violates its aesthetic being, but that abstraction of it to an empty receptacle which follows from the sway of exchange-value and the dehumanization of need" (205). That is, Martin's dreams, inspired by visions of the emancipated bourgeois world, will be put (in the form of magazine stories consumed by the middle class) into the service of maintaining that bourgeois world, while Martin himself finds that the capitalist conversion "from the particular to the universal" is not so much an *expansion* of his self as the *transformation* of himself into a receptacle for the desires of others.

That Martin has fatally internalized the bourgeois mystification of aesthetics is made particularly clear in his elaboration of a Romantic-humanistic faith in reason. Martin explains to Ruth the development of one of his early stories: "It quickened with ambition under the dreary downpour of last winter, fought the violent early spring, flowered, and lured the insects and the bees, scattered its seeds, squared itself with its duty and the world" (163). The natural imagery contrasts explicitly with what we already know to be Martin's laborious and analytic investigation

of the literary market, yet Martin's explanation is not a rejection of analysis, but a naturalization of it.

Ruth recognizes the analysis implicit in Martin's answer, and asks him, "Why do you always look at things with such practical eyes?" (163) Martin's answer reveals his investment in the epistemological validity of his work: "Beauty has significance, but I never knew its significance before. I just accepted beauty as something meaningless, as something that was just beautiful without rhyme or reason. I did not know anything about beauty. But now I know, or, rather, am just beginning to know" (163-64). These words ironically presage Martin's final state of mind when he will irrevocably slip away from bourgeois ideology at the cost of his existence. At this point in the novel, however, "knowing" is Martin's way of validating (and universalizing) his individualist dreams and actions.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, by putting into Martin's mouth the following rhapsody on "grass," London also indicts a prevalent theme of American literature, springing from the naturalist transcendentalism of Thoreau and Whitman:

The grass is more beautiful to me now that I know why it is grass, and all the hidden chemistry of sun and rain and earth that makes it become grass. Why, there is romance in the life-history of any grass, yes, and adventure, too. The very thought of it stirs me. When I think of the play of force and matter, and all the tremendous struggle of it, I feel as if I could write an epic on the grass. (164)

Confidence in the "struggle" of natural forces to produce grass is projected onto the American writer who reveals universally occurring "romance" and "adventure." Martin sees his own life and dreams as reflections of a larger, natural system, and bets his life on the uncovering of the secrets of that system. The limits of the system within which Martin moves, however, are not the edges of *human* experience, but the superstructural girding of narrowly bourgeois experience.

### **“The Rest of the Alphabet”**

In a key scene of *The Iron Heel*, the novel's iconic hero, Ernest Everhard, explains his version of the fate of surplus value and the collapse of capitalism. Addressing a group of businessmen, Ernest carefully describes a shoe factory in which workers produce shoes they themselves cannot afford to buy, since the value added to their work is unequally distributed between capital and labor. Since labor cannot buy all of the product produced, capitalists must continually find new markets for their goods, and when those markets become saturated (or developed to the point of becoming producers themselves), still more markets must be found.

When the businessmen complain that “it is a waste of time to elaborate these A B C's of commerce,” Ernest counters by pointing out that such A B C's will be the capitalists' own undoing, since

“The planet is only so large. There are only so many countries in the world. What will happen when every country in the world, down to the smallest and last, with a surplus in its hands, stands confronting every other country with surpluses in their hands? . . . We started with A B C, Mr. Calvin,” Ernest said slyly. “I have now given you the rest of the alphabet.” (95)

Despite the more sinister response to this question by the protean capitalisms of world history since 1908,<sup>10</sup> the businessmen of London's novel are stopped in their tracks: “The bewilderment in their faces was delicious. Also, there was awe in their faces. Out of abstractions, Ernest had created a vision and made them see it” (95).

Of course, it is also Martin Eden's task to create visions and make people see them: “And he felt the stir in him, like a throe of yearning pain, of the desire to paint those visions that flashed unsummoned on the mirror of his mind” (129). Importantly, Martin's “raw material” for his art is not the abstractions of political economy, as it is for the propagandistic Ernest, but the dreams

that “flashed unsummoned on the mirror of his mind.” It is bourgeois ideology, sublimated in the illusion of Martin’s own self, that is to be “worked” into expression. In this way, what is a lesson in economic exploitation for the workers in *The Iron Heel* becomes an examination of the aesthetic manipulation of the middle class in *Martin Eden*. Martin, like all of bourgeois society, will never be able to “buy back” what he produces, which is its own representative identity.

“Like any emancipatory theory,” writes Eagleton, “Marxism is concerned with putting itself progressively out of business”: “It exists to bring about the material conditions which will spell its own demise, and like Moses, will not pass with its people into the promised land. All emancipatory theories carry some self-destruct device within them, eagerly anticipating the moment when they can wither away” (216). The A B C’s of economics “spell the demise” of capitalism in London’s earlier novel, but in *Martin Eden*, the hero must compose his own sentence from within the closed universe of bourgeois reality. London’s Marxist “theory of emancipation” operates within Martin’s consciousness, but while the character reads this theory into his humanistic ideals, the novel shows that Martin, as representative (and representation) of the bourgeois world, is limited to realizing the theory only as the will to die.

But before this theory is realized as such, Martin moves through two final stages. The first is his own, bourgeois, version of Mosaic censure, from which he would exempt himself. As Martin himself sees it, he is “an intellectual moralist, and more offending to him than platitudinous pomposity was the morality of those about him, which was a curious hotchpotch of the economic, the metaphysical, the sentimental, and the imitative” (315). Having precisely described the composition of the very novel in which he appears and the nature of the stories that will bring him

wealth and fame, Martin proceeds to struggle futilely with editors and publishers, enlisting his ideal “intellectual morality” to force his salvation from poverty.

The next stage follows the failure of the first, since the individualist intellectual approach has only resulted in five dollars for one of his stories (353-54), alienation from his family and his proletariat roots (362, 402), his rejection of socialism (389), and a foreboding sense of being “frightened at the thought of hearing philosophy discussed” (413). This new stage of Martin’s commercial success is short-lived, however, and it is fittingly inaugurated by images of surrender, of submersion into the subject that he has become:

All that he was and was not, all that he had done and most of what he had not done, was spread out for the delectation of the public, accompanied by snapshots and photographs. . . . At first, so great was his disgust with the magazines and all bourgeois society, Martin fought against publicity; but in the end, because it was easier than not to, he surrendered. He found that he could not refuse himself to the special writers who traveled long distances to see him. (435)

Although Martin recognizes his identity as a composite of bourgeois images—some posed, some “snapped” from his life—he cannot help responding to the very image of his own younger self, in the person of a young writer drawn to the larger world of celebrity. The ideology that had “caught and held” Martin can also make use of Martin to catch others.

After living as if his own identity corresponded to a representation of the “bases” of universal human society Martin discovers his function as a component of society’s superstructure. Eagleton’s elaboration of productive force is particularly relevant to the novel’s conclusion, even to the extent of remarking on the role Nietzsche’s philosophy plays:<sup>11</sup>

The whole concept of a productive force hovers indeterminately between fact and value, rather, as we shall see, like the Nietzschean notion of the will to power. If human capacities are regarded as inherently positive, and viewed as *part* of the productive forces, then it might seem to follow that the expansion of those forces is a good thing in itself. If,

however, the development of the forces of production is seen as *instrumental* to the realization of human capacities, then the question of which form of material development is likely best to accomplish this goal inevitably poses itself. (223)

Martin's initial understanding reflects the first view: his "human capacities" seem to correspond to beauty and love, and his unquestioned goal is to expand his natural force into the world.

However, from the beginning, those capacities themselves are shown to be determined by productive forces, though Martin recoils from this possibility even as he steps away from the oil painting. But the material development of Martin's ideality (his "work performed") can never really be backed away from, because it is his own self that is painted. As a result, the question is one of whether or not Martin's *consciousness* can serve the ends of Martin's ideal of development.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, Martin answers this question in the negative, slipping out of a porthole in the *Mariposa* as it sails for Tahiti. Although in his first attempt to drown himself he responds to "the automatic instinct to live," Martin checks himself and recognizes the dubious nature of this "instinct"—"The will to live, was his thought, and the thought was accompanied by a sneer. Well, he had will,—ay, will strong enough that with one last exertion it could destroy itself and cease to be" (481). Here, crucially, Martin's will is not engaged in a struggle against the external force of the literary machine, or the internal influence of "hotchpotch" morality; instead, will is seen as a productive force that defines its own existence and maintains its own limits. It is a will exposed as sublimely material.

Martin's epistemology and aesthetics come together, but they do so outside of the bourgeois structure. The conscious "artistry" of Martin's suicide merges with his sense of a new knowledge that is the Marxist dialectic's "unknowing" state between the false consciousness of

bourgeois relations to a greater emancipation. *Martin Eden*'s movement into history acknowledges the self-transgression always at the horizon of bourgeois thought, and its hero's submersion gives us London's final word on humanism's dangerous reliance on bourgeois ideology.

## Notes

1. Eagleton 199.

2. See Draper (36-42), who also notes that while the Populists were "anticapitalist" in that they protested against Wall Street and the robber barons, "the agrarian revolt never threatened the foundations of private property. Its shock troops were property-conscious farmers threatened with debt and bankruptcy." In essence, Populism "was a peculiar American device to defend the capitalism of the many against the capitalism of the few" (38). In contrast, the socialism advocated by, among others, Debs, Max Hayes, and John Reed, featured workers' strikes and calls for class struggle.

3. Fredric Jameson asks,

When one is the prisoner of such ideology . . . how could one ever become aware of it in the first place, let alone patiently undo—or deconstruct—its complicated machinery, through which we have hitherto learned to see reality? (170)

London's response seems to be the enactment of his own writing subject, not only in the character of Martin, but in London's own ideological soundings achieved through lectures, articles, pamphlets, and his novels themselves.

4. Watson offers the best examination of *Martin Eden*'s autobiographical elements. See especially 123-29. He also notes the novel's affinities with Howell's *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, Norris's *McTeague*, and Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, "in each of which the protagonist's social and economic advancement comes into conflict with alternative values" (131). The present paper identifies these values in *Martin Eden* as specifically dialectic rather than alternative.

5. Appropriately, Joan Hedrick's chapter on *Martin Eden* is subtitled "Paradise Lost."

6. See, for example, Sinclair's introduction to the Penguin edition, Watson (139), and Baskett (147).

7. The hero of one of London's most successful Socialist stories, "South of the Slot" (1909), consciously leads a dual life: North of the "slot" (which serves as the cable car track on Market Street in San Francisco), the hero works as a professor at Berkeley, while "south of the slot," he is a revolutionary labor leader. It is interesting to note that while this hero ultimately decides to stay with the Socialists and deny his middle-class life, *Martin Eden* cannot recognize his own situation as "south of the slot" (at a disadvantage), even while the image forms in his mind.

8. Another of London's Socialist stories, "The Strength of the Strong" (1911), celebrates the communal strength of commonwealth and condemns those who, as Hedrick paraphrases, "sing songs that justify the oppressive social order" (170). Again, London gives his character words that cast an ironic light on the writer's aspirations.

9. Jeanne Reesman examines "the problem of knowledge" in London's work, although her conclusions are based on Jungian psychology, which, while important to London's last year of life, would seem to be open to the same critique as the "psychologizing" of economic determinism at issue in political ideology.

10. Or, from the 1930s, consider Walter Benjamin's assessment, which strikes at the heart of London's own material success:

the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication can assimilate astonishing quantities of revolutionary themes, indeed, can propagate them without calling its own existence, and the existence of the class that owns it, seriously into question. (229)

11. The scope of this paper does not allow for a full elaboration of Nietzsche's philosophy as it appears, in my opinion, curiously alike in both London's and Eagleton's readings of Marx. While many critics condemn London's hybridized Nietzschean superman and Marxist sympathizer in *The Iron Heel* and *Martin Eden*, Eagleton devotes a chapter of *Ideology* to an insightful examination of "a certain shared teleology" between the two writers (Marx and Nietzsche) and their shared view of transforming the "sickness" of humanist idealism into a new consciousness (see esp. 236-39).

12. Ward, in her discussion of *The Sea Wolf*, points out that London "believed that the superman was anti-social and would not have a place in the new socialist society" ("Social" 325-26). Again, the superman as the prophet who cannot pass into the promised land.

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