

THE CALIFORNIA NATURALISTS: FRANK NORRIS, JACK LONDON, AND JOHN  
STEINBECK

by

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(Under the Direction of James Nagel)

ABSTRACT

The literary output of Frank Norris, Jack London, and John Steinbeck presents characters at the mercy of hereditary and environmental pressures that condition their experiences and opportunities, representations that emphasize the principals' limited ability to impact their material circumstances. In many texts, these Naturalist writers connect this theme to conventional formulations of the American Dream, which holds that people can attain financial security or perhaps even wealth through diligent labor. Significantly, these novelists drew on important events from California history in their handling of these concerns. From the Mussel Slough Affair of 1880, which provided the basic plot for Norris's *The Octopus* (1901), to the cotton strike of 1933 that Steinbeck incorporated into *In Dubious Battle* (1936), these occurrences inform the authors' portrayals of the institutional forces that determine the range of action available to the protagonists. The treatment of these issues further illuminates the social criticism that informed these works and their depiction of economic Determinism. This project will augment the existing scholarship on Naturalism by analyzing the immediate sources that Norris, London, and Steinbeck used for their major novels and investigating how they shaped

this material into illustrations of the causative agents that undermine the realization of individual potential.

INDEX WORDS: American Dream, American Literature, American Naturalism, “The Apostate,” “The Dream of Debs,” *The Grapes of Wrath*, *In Dubious Battle*, *The Iron Heel*, Jack London, *Martin Eden*, *McTeague*, Frank Norris, *The Octopus*, John Steinbeck

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2013

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August 2013

## DEDICATION

For Bess Bidar Dawson and Maxine Feral Falsarella

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank James Nagel for his insight, guidance, patience, and encouragement through all stages of this project. Dr. Nagel has taught me what it means to be a scholar and a professional, and words cannot express my gratitude. I am also deeply indebted to Hugh Ruppensburg, Richard Menke, Kristin Boudreau, and Douglas Anderson for their work on my committee and their roles in my intellectual development. I also wish to acknowledge Eric Solomon, Geoffrey Green, Michael Krasny, Gayle Davies, Mary-Kay Gamel, William Nickell, and Lloyd Laub, who have provided me with invaluable assistance throughout my academic career.

I am grateful to my parents, Bob, Derrick, Laurie, and Marcia, for all they have done for me and all they have put up with from me. I would especially like to thank my mother, Laurie Dawson, for introducing me to the writers I discuss in this study, reading countless drafts at every stage of development, and providing incisive analysis that improved this project in ways that are too numerous to articulate. I also owe a profound debt of gratitude to my wife, Alisha Marie Cromwell. Without her love, encouragement, and impressive command of American history, I would not have been able to complete this dissertation. Finally, I would like to thank my daughter, Stella, for giving me enough time to write each day while also reminding me that not every aspect of life revolves around American Naturalism.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
2 TWISTED FROM THE ORDINARY: ECONOMIC DETERMINISM IN FRANK NORRIS'S <i>McTEAGUE</i> AND <i>THE OCTOPUS</i> .....	75
3 WAGE SLAVES AND REBELS: CLASS CONFLICT IN JACK LONDON'S SOCIAL WRITINGS.....	164
4 A REVOLUTION OF VALUES: ECONOMIC THEMES IN JOHN STEINBECK'S <i>IN DUBIOUS BATTLE</i> and <i>THE GRAPES OF WRATH</i> .....	274
5 CONCLUSION.....	360
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	388



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Few critics have examined the strong regional basis of Naturalism and the role that social conditions in the West played in this movement.<sup>1</sup> Three of the most significant authors in this period, Frank Norris, Jack London, and John Steinbeck, are associated with California, and its expansion from the Gold Rush through the Great Depression supplied the raw materials for these novelists to observe the potential for individuals to improve their economic positions. This state provided an appropriate laboratory for examining the possibility for material progress due to its popular representation as a land of opportunity where people could transcend their humble origins and achieve prosperity, which mirrored the conventional arc of the American Dream. The circumstances facing many migrants, however, did not cohere with this ideal as this quest for financial gain produced widespread inequality within an institutional framework that limited upward movement among classes. The experiences underlying the narrative of success reflect the central tenet of Naturalism with its focus on characters as victims of impersonal forces beyond their control. The fiction of Norris, London, and Steinbeck prominently features this struggle for mobility against seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and their texts transform the history of California into illustrations of the Deterministic agents that waste human potential. The importance of these writers stems from their artistic responses to the tumultuous period of 1848 to 1939 and their emphasis on those who could not attain the promise of the American

Dream, elements that present a means of understanding the structures that constrain individual development.

While a definition of a tradition as diverse and complex as Naturalism is necessarily imperfect, its salient features are discernible in terms of established modes, ideas, and conventions. This movement, which begins with Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) and ends with Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), has its origins in nineteenth-century science, most notably Claude Bernard's *L'Introduction à l'Étude de la Médecine Expérimentale* (1865). Bernard challenged the dominant idea that illness and recovery were matters of divine will by arguing that physicians must determine the cause of a condition in order to cure a patient. Bernard posits that "the real and effective cause of a disease must be constant and determined, that is, unique; anything else would be a denial of science in medicine" and asserts that what "really should be done, instead of gathering facts empirically, is to study them more accurately, each in its special determinism . . . to discover in them the cause of mortal accidents so as to master the cause and avoid the accidents."<sup>2</sup> Impressed by Bernard's approach, Emile Zola applied this logic to literature, contending in *Le Roman Expérimental* (1880) that the novelist

should operate on the characters, the passions, on the human and social data in the same way the chemist and the physicist work on inanimate beings, as the physiologist operates on living beings. Determinism dominates everything. It is scientific investigation, it is experimental reasoning, which combats one by one the hypotheses of the idealists, and which replaces purely human imaginary novels by novels of observation and experiment.<sup>3</sup>

Zola argues that the text should serve as an experiment that enables the author, with the detachment and objectivity of a scientist, to ascertain how characters respond to both hereditary

and environmental phenomena. Within this framework, the writer should indicate the manner in which his subjects are controlled by circumstances that they are powerless to change as they cannot exist outside of their biology and economic background. Zola develops the significance of this method when he states that Naturalists “show the mechanism of the useless and the useful, we disengage the determinism of the human and social phenomena so that, in their turn, the legislators can one day dominate and control these phenomena. In a word, we are working toward that great object, the conquest of nature and the increase of man’s power a hundredfold.”<sup>4</sup> From this, the purpose of the novel was to portray the symptoms of injustice, to identify their broader causes, and to ultimately improve society by suggesting ways to adjust these conditions. Zola extends this idea and claims that his technique reflects “the modern method of universal inquiry which is the tool our modern age is using so enthusiastically to open up the future. Whatever their conclusions, they would approve of my starting point, the study of temperament, and of the profound modifications of an organism subjected to the pressure of environments and circumstances.”<sup>5</sup> In Zola’s formulation, Naturalists should present immediate reality in a manner that illustrates the determining forces operating on individuals, the alteration of which will facilitate a change in their behavior.

This conception of Naturalism as the application of nineteenth-century science to the novel has framed standard interpretations of the movement in America. In *The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction* (1950), Lars Åhnebrink argues for a close relationship among the works of Zola and those of Hamlin Garland, Crane, and Norris and traces many significant correspondences among their major texts. Åhnebrink makes a compelling argument based on these connections, and he clearly establishes the debt of these writers to their French predecessor. However, his analyses have provided the foundation for criticisms of Norris, London, Steinbeck,

and their peers when they fail to adhere to Zola's scientific formulations. For instance, Rod Horton and Herbert Edwards assert that no one "could adopt a thoroughly scientific attitude, without thesis or prejudice, in his portrayal of the American scene. Naturalism in literature is a moral and spiritual absolute zero, conceivable but unattainable, and the term 'naturalistic' when applied to a book or author must be taken only in a relative sense."<sup>6</sup> The American Naturalists deviate significantly from the principles outlined in *Le Roman Expérimental*, adapting these methods to conditions in the United States rather than as concrete precepts to be applied inflexibly to all modes of social organization. Donald Pizer notes that it "was Zola's broad impulse toward depicting truthfully all ranges of life rather than his distinctive philosophy or literary method which was the source of the strength and persistence of the movement in America."<sup>7</sup> Further, the novelists during this period had ambivalent reactions to the man who wrote *L'Assommoir* (1877), *Germinal* (1885), and *La Terre* (1887): Garland stated that "I am not a believer in the French 'realists.' They are too largely concerned with vice and crime. They slander the human race."<sup>8</sup> Crane objected to the ponderous nature of Zola's books and wrote that he "is a sincere writer but—is he much good? He hangs one thing to another and his story goes along but I find him pretty tiresome."<sup>9</sup> Even Norris, often hailed as the leading apostle of the French writer, advances an entirely different conception of Naturalism as a synthesis of Realism, with its emphasis on verisimilitude, and Romanticism, with its attention to aberrations from everyday experience.<sup>10</sup> The exclusive focus on Zola creates an understanding of Naturalism inconsistent with the writings of its American adherents, and his model of an objective treatment of mechanical forces has obscured other elements that comprise this literary trend in the United States.

Conventional interpretations of this movement often reduce it to an extension of Realism informed by a broader philosophical orientation. V. L. Parrington states that “Naturalism is pessimistic realism, with a philosophy that sets man in a mechanical world and conceives of him as victimized by that world.”<sup>11</sup> For George Becker, the *oeuvre* of Crane, Norris, London, and their peers reflects “an emphatic and explicit philosophical position taken by some realists,” with this perspective being a “pessimistic materialistic determinism.”<sup>12</sup> This literary tradition is not simply a more extreme form of its predecessor. Instead, Naturalism contrasts the dominant literary models of the late nineteenth century and advances an alternate conception of both humanity and a character’s responsibility for his fate. Realist fiction focuses on average individuals struggling with the social, political, and moral issues of existence, emphasizing an accurate representation of everyday life. William Dean Howells notes that “realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material.”<sup>13</sup> Howells, however, focuses on a limited range of experience, dealing with those of average, middle-class individuals in a manner that would be appropriate for all readers. Reflecting the range of concerns available to the Realist, Howells states that in “a land where journeymen carpenters and plumbers strike for four dollars a day the sum of hunger and cold is certainly very small, and the wrong from class to class is inappreciable. We invite our novelists, therefore, to concern themselves with the more smiling aspects of life, which are the more American.”<sup>14</sup> Howells seeks consolation in the tangible world since it is governed by a moral universe that can be understood and made the basis for art through capturing a stable physical reality. From this conception, the plots of these works center on the resolution of central ethical crises, which rest on the culpability of the protagonists for choices they are free to make.

While Realists portray sovereign individuals capable of making choices for which they bear ultimate responsibility, Naturalists emphasize ideas of Determinism and present characters who are shaped by broader impersonal forces. For these writers, their predecessors provided a version of experience that neglected the conditions facing the working class. Norris, for instance, argued that Howells's fiction merely reflected the surface of existence and explored the average circumstances of ordinary people. In "Zola as Romantic Writer," Norris asserts that Howells's works contain accurate descriptions of "the smaller details of every-day life, things that are likely to happen between lunch and supper, small passions, restricted emotions, dramas of the reception room, tragedies of an afternoon call, crises involving cups of tea."<sup>15</sup> Instead of commonplace people engaged in their mundane lives, Norris and his contemporaries emphasize those "twisted from the ordinary, wrenched out from the quiet, eventful round of every-day life, and flung into the throes of a vast and terrible drama, that works itself out in unleashed passions, in blood, and in sudden death."<sup>16</sup> From this perspective, these writers depict their subjects as the victims of environmental and hereditary forces that dictate their opportunities and their actions. The power of these causative agents has crucial implications for judging the nature of selfhood and moral accountability since the protagonists cannot define themselves through the exercise of free will. As a result, they are not responsible for their deeds since they lack the ability to live in accordance with a broader system of values and instead operate based on animal instincts and not on their limited powers of reason. The conception of the human enterprise that arises from these works signifies an important departure from Realism, and this distinction necessitates important differences between the genres in terms of theme, narrative method, characterization, tone, and style.

The primary studies of American Naturalism have argued that this emphasis on Determinism creates serious flaws within these works and have thereby deemphasized the role of causative agents. In *American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream* (1956), Charles Child Walcutt examines Naturalism in the context of Transcendentalism and its approach to the spirit through intuition, which produces idealism, progressivism, and radicalism, in addition to its understanding of nature through science, a development that plunges one into a mechanistic world. Walcutt observes that the “one is rebellious, the other pessimistic; the one ardent, the other fatal; the one acknowledges will, the other denies it. Thus ‘naturalism,’ flowing in both streams, is partly denying nature and partly submitting to it.”<sup>17</sup> For Walcutt, these opposing tendencies create a fundamental instability as the authors cannot reconcile a belief in human progress through individual initiative with representations of the conditioning forces of life. Walcutt posits that these inconsistencies reveal a fundamental conflict between a belief in human agency and a focus on characters driven by forces they cannot control, which negates the possibility of free choice. His study has made an important contribution to analyses of Naturalism by introducing an alternate philosophical framework into examinations of this movement and linking it to literary traditions in America rather than in Europe. However, Walcutt does not provide any empirical foundation for his argument, omitting any evidence that Crane, Norris, London, and their peers demonstrated an affinity for Ralph Waldo Emerson or Henry David Thoreau and investigating the texts through a series of binaries that are not the exclusive property of Transcendentalism.

While Walcutt interprets these opposing elements as defects, Pizer views these conflicting ideas as sources of strength. In *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (1966), he translates these apparent flaws into a tension “between the

individually significant and the deterministic” that affirms the importance of the values threatened by these forces and that broaden the scope of American Naturalism.<sup>18</sup> Pizer states that although the Naturalist describes characters who are controlled by environmental pressures,

he also suggests a compensating humanistic value in his characters or their fates which affirms the significance of the individual and of his life. The tension here is between the naturalist’s desire to represent in fiction the new, discomfoting truths which he found in the ideas and life of his late nineteenth-century world, and also his desire to find some meaning in experience which reasserts the validity of the human enterprise.<sup>19</sup>

The novels within this genre indicate that despite the fact that characters may appear to be conditioned by hostile agents that make no provisions for the individual, the imagination strives to create new structures that enable one to assert dignity and humanity. In *Twentieth-Century American Literary Naturalism* (1982), Pizer contends that these writers “appeared to be saying that we live in a trivial, banal, and tawdry world which nevertheless encloses us and shapes our destinies. We seek to escape from this world into their inner life because only there do we find the richness of feeling denied us in experience.”<sup>20</sup> Pizer has made valuable contributions to scholarship by challenging dominant arguments about the philosophical inconsistencies of Naturalism and by drawing attention to neglected works and writers, such as James Gould Cozzens. Despite these important insights, Pizer’s provisional definition is so elastic as to encompass a wide variety of texts that fall outside the parameters of this literary trend, such as *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) and *The Awakening* (1899). Further, by deemphasizing the significance of Determinism, he has stripped the movement of its central theme and primary source of meaning.



Recent studies have deviated even further from Determinism, introducing broader concerns into appraisals of Naturalism. In *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (1987), Walter Benn Michaels argues that fiscal processes behind this movement are as fictive as the books assembled under its banner and that these authors, by participating in this set of imaginative relations, reinforce the economic order that many of them attempt to subvert. Michaels removes his argument from conventional interpretations and strives instead “to map out the reality in which a certain literature finds its place and to identify a set of interests and activities that might be said to have as their common denominator a concern with the double identities that seem, in naturalism, to be required if there are to any identities at all.”<sup>21</sup> This strategy involves examining how narratives exemplify a broader cultural framework, yet Michaels’s approach entails tracing allusions to financial issues in the novels of Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and Edith Wharton, a method that distorts the complexity of their aesthetic achievements and neglects the actual socioeconomic perspectives they advance. For instance, Michaels posits that the gold theme in *McTeague* represents not an indictment of American materialism but a conflict between objects and their symbolic manifestations in relation to late nineteenth-century debates over gold and silver as standards of monetary value. In *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism* (1985), June Howard also diminishes the role of causative forces and instead offers a theoretical investigation of Naturalist writing against its social setting. Howard states that “my main task is not to set literary texts against a ‘history’ or ‘reality’ . . . but rather to trace how naturalism is shaped by and reshapes a historical experience.”<sup>22</sup> This relationship stems from Frederic Jameson’s conception of the political unconscious as she claims that “Naturalism does not provide a window into reality. Rather it reveals history indirectly in revealing itself.”<sup>23</sup> In these

formulations, history and reality seem unrelated, and Howard does not explain how one can separate literature from its background when it is, in fact, informed by these circumstances. Michaels and Howard have informed the study of Naturalism by examining its relation to a broader context instead of the philosophical and formal analyses of Walcutt and Pizer. Nonetheless, both Michaels and Howard frame their discussions in terms of abstract ideas of power separated from the operation of actual institutions, substituting critical models for the physical world mediated by the texts of Norris, London, Dreiser, and their contemporaries.<sup>24</sup>

John J. Conder's *Naturalism in American Fiction: The Classic Phase* (1984) represents a notable exception to these prevailing critical trends, returning Naturalism to its basis in Determinism. Conder contends the interpretations advanced by Walcutt and Pizer lack a rigorous philosophical methodology and fail to stress the causative agents that engender formal unity in the works associated with this movement. Conder identifies these elements in terms of not the hereditary and environmental forces that have animated previous scholarship but Thomas Hobbes's constructs of freedom, with the premise that all actions have broader causes, and Henri Bergson's distinction between clock time in which all events are determined and pure temporality when one escapes from causal relationships. Bergson's conception creates a division within the self, one that is governed by the world around him and another that possesses freedom, yet the latter rarely manifests since people are seldom capable of endeavors in accordance with this potentiality. While his study is significant in that it reintroduces Determinism to analyses of Naturalist fiction, Conder elides the political content and significance of the movement, removing an essentially ideological genre from its historical origins and transporting these narratives into a theoretical realm that undermines the social significance of these texts.

Despite these formulations to the contrary, Naturalists overwhelmingly emphasize the pervasive role of Deterministic agents that condition the opportunities available to the protagonists. In an inscription to Garland, Crane wrote that *Maggie* “tries to show that environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless.”<sup>25</sup> Crane indicates that the Bowery provides Maggie with no options to escape the limitations imposed by her dismal home life and dreary occupation, which frame her perception of Pete as a romantic figure who seems glamorous compared to the drudgery of her labor in a sweatshop. These restrictions blur Maggie’s awareness, evident in her vision of Pete as a means to transcend her surroundings, and the narrator undercuts this perspective by illustrating the discrepancy between the heroine’s exalted view of her lover and his base nature. Crane further traces the constraints that engender Maggie’s demise, attributing this fate to her community’s inflexible reliance on moral strictures that are inapplicable to the Bowery. These forces are evident in Mrs. Johnson, whose hypocrisy and self-righteousness leave Maggie with no alternative than to remain with Pete, and her subsequent abandonment compels her into prostitution and causes her eventual suicide.

Dreiser advances a similar conception of the causative elements that govern the actions of the individual in *Sister Carrie* (1900). The narrator notes that among “the forces which sweep and play throughout the universe, untutored man is but a wisp in the wind. Our civilization is still in a middle stage, scarcely beast in that it is no longer wholly guided by instinct; scarcely human, in that it is not yet wholly guided by reason.”<sup>26</sup> The inability of the central characters to operate within a rational framework and their guidance by their animal instincts limit their culpability, an insight that Dreiser develops through the narrator’s discussion of the chemical reactions that shape the behavior of Carrie, Drouet, and Hurstwood. These aspects, however, manifest in

relation to environmental influences. Dreiser connects the heroine to the imperatives of a commodity culture, and this desire for affluence determines her actions and animates her attraction to Hurstwood, whose deterioration also stems from economic pressures. Through his exploration of these forces, Dreiser presents the agents that dictate the outcomes of Carrie and Hurstwood without imposing conventional ethical codes since such constructs cannot apply to those who lack the means to live in accordance with a broader system of values.

Norris also connects the fates of individuals to their environment, examining how alterations to one's surroundings facilitate changes in his or her behavior while also presenting the controlling power of milieu through economic concerns that determine the fates of the protagonists. In *Moran of the Lady Letty* (1898), Norris highlights these subjects through shifting Ross Wilbur from fashionable San Francisco to the open seas where life is governed by the struggle for survival, yet his regression engenders a positive development since it allows him to transcend his previous idleness. In *McTeague*, Norris further develops these causative agents through the deterioration of the dentist. While he reverts to a savage state, this process results from environmental pressures, which serve as primary causes with the surfacing of biological elements as their predictable effects. The emergence of McTeague's animal impulses stems from financial stressors through the loss of his profession in addition to Trina's acquisitive mania. These factors undermine her humane impulses and trigger McTeague's reversion to a primitive state through the brutality that results from his wife's refusal to diminish her hoard for basic necessities. In *The Pit* (1903), Norris further highlights the workings of Deterministic forces through Curtis Jadwin's attempts to corner the nation's wheat supply, and the writer illustrates the dangers for both the person who tries to commandeer essential commodities and those who depend on these resources to survive. Norris dramatizes the human costs of

interfering with the capacity of the natural world to satisfy human need through Jadwin's breakdown after his defeat, Cressler's suicide as a result of his losses, and elevated prices wreaking havoc in Europe. The love triangle composed of Jadwin, his wife Laura, and Sheldon Corthell underscores these consequences by reflecting the hazards of the American economic system on an interpersonal scale: Laura's suffering stems from her exclusive focus on her own happiness, which parallels the operations of a social structure that emphasizes one's fiduciary interests over the needs of the general population.

London advances a similar representation of causative forces, tracing the power of environment over his protagonists while also highlighting the role of economic pressures to frame the actions of his central characters. London dramatizes these ideas in *The Call of the Wild* (1903), a novel that presents the reversion of Buck engendered by a shift from Judge Miller's estate to a savage existence in the Yukon. This move necessitates the loss of the civilized habits of his previous life as he learns that mercy and compassion are not applicable to the Arctic. London presents the opposite trajectory in *White Fang* (1906), a work that further illustrates the malleable nature of heredity due to the dictates of environment and suggests that alterations to one's circumstances can produce the potential for growth. London heightens the allegorical dimensions of this narrative through Beauty Smith and Jim Hall, who have been molded into wretched creatures by dominant society, the alteration of which would allow for the same progress exhibited by White Fang under the guidance of Weedon Smith. A similar conception of causation manifests in *The Sea Wolf* (1904) as Humphrey Van Weyden must abandon the trappings of civilization in order to survive aboard *The Ghost*. This development engenders the self-sufficiency necessary to create the basic conditions of his existence when he and Maud Brewster reach Endeavor Island. In "The Apostate" (1906) and *The Iron Heel* (1908),

London connects these concerns to the structure of capitalism. Through Johnny's labor in the former and the Oligarchy in the latter, London illustrates how social forces degrade the individual to a subhuman state, yet he also suggests the possibility to reclaim one's humanity outside this economic order.

This search for an alternative to capitalism informs the Naturalism of the 1930s, works that examine the extent to which characters are limited within the confines of dominant society. However, these novels delineate the struggles of those who attempt to confront the Deterministic world, refusing to accept this formula as the only basis for life and striving to create new models of development that enable people to assert their dignity and value. Steinbeck presents this theme in *The Grapes of Wrath*. This work traces the causative agents governing Dust Bowl migrants during the Depression through the financial institutions in Oklahoma and the large landowners in California, and Steinbeck heightens the representations of these groups through the interchapters that focus on the abuses of material resources and power. However, despite the degradation of the Joads, Steinbeck continues to stress the basic decency of his characters, and Tom's activism indicates the possibility for progressive change through concerted action by labor against those individuals and institutions that misuse their authority. Wright's *Native Son* advances a similar perspective, highlighting the pervasive racism and economic inequality that prevent African Americans from realizing their potential. Wright clarifies the restricted opportunities for the oppressed when Bigger and Gus play white and act out roles that will never be available to them in actuality since they are trapped within a hostile milieu. In this context, Bigger's murder of Mary serves as the logical result of the societal pressures operating in the text; however, the crime, despite its accidental nature, also expresses a challenge to these broader patterns of control. This deed represents a further development for Bigger: he views the killing

as self-actualizing since he actually does something, yet he cannot sustain this conception of power due to the reassertion of these forces. Through these elements, Naturalism does not reduce characters to mechanically-driven minions who blindly acquiesce to the forces that engender their demise. Instead, these writers emphasize the acts of defiance that temporarily allow the protagonists to feel that they have asserted their humanity within a framework that appears to negate the potential for progress.

This emphasis on struggles to overcome the seemingly insurmountable obstacles established by environment and heredity is related to a prominent reformist strain within Naturalism. George Wilbur Meyer observes that conventional analyses of the movement tend to confuse Determinism with fatalism, overlooking that while the tragedies of these books are inevitable for the central characters, this fact does not mean these results must necessarily be repeated in the world outside the narrative.<sup>27</sup> On the contrary, the representations of the forces that impel the protagonists to ruin provide a framework to illuminate the sources of exploitation that operate in these novels. Through the treatment of these causative agents, these texts have the potential to foster the critical reflection necessary to change this course of events and to ultimately improve society. This sensibility has two primary manifestations: an objection to the hostility of the natural world that cannot be altered through individual effort and a protest against human constructs and conditions that are subject to the actions of men. The former are prevalent in Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891) and *Jason Edwards* (1892), Crane's "The Open Boat" (1898), and London's Alaskan stories and novels.

The works in the latter category embody a more significant strain in Naturalist literature. In "The Novel with a Purpose," Norris asserts that fiction should be used "for the good of the people, fearlessly proving that power is abused, that the strong grind the faces of the weak, that

an evil tree is still growing in the midst of the garden . . . that the races of men have yet to work out their destiny in those great and terrible movements that crush and grind and rend asunder the pillars of the house of nations.”<sup>28</sup> Steinbeck advocated a similar purpose in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, contending that an author is “charged with exposing our many grievous faults and failures, with dredging up to the light our dark and dangerous dreams for the purpose of improvement.”<sup>29</sup> These dissenting voices are evident against concentrated land ownership in *Jason Edwards*, Norris’s *The Octopus* (1901), and Steinbeck’s *In Dubious Battle* (1936) and *The Grapes of Wrath* as they highlight the economic forces that prevent the workers from obtaining a means of advancement. Upton Sinclair and London advance similar critiques of industrial production in *The Jungle* (1906), “The Apostate,” and *The Iron Heel*, illustrating the human consequences that result from the excesses possible within capitalist society.

To develop these representations of the social structures that imperil the central characters, Naturalist writers based their works on abundant documentary detail, linking the events within their fiction to broader economic forces outside the narrative. *McTeague* has its origins in a murder covered by San Francisco newspapers from October 10, 1893, when a laborer stabbed his wife to death after she refused to give him money. The crime, which occurred when Norris was a student at the University of California, provided the basic plot of *McTeague*, and he augmented this narrative with minute observations of San Francisco and the milieu of Polk Street in the 1890s.<sup>30</sup> Further, the writer gleaned the particulars of dentistry from Thomas Fillebrown’s *A Textbook of Operative Dentistry* (1891) and those of mining from a visit to Seymour Waterhouse’s Big Dipper Mine, where Norris finished the manuscript in 1897.<sup>31</sup> Norris created *The Octopus* around the Mussel Slough Tragedy of May 11, 1880, a gunfight between ranchers and representatives of the Southern Pacific Railroad resulting from a dispute over land prices.



Norris returned to San Francisco to research this incident, and the company's recent activities, from the files of the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Examiner*.<sup>32</sup> He then traveled to the ranch of Gaston and Dulce Ashe in the San Joaquin Valley to observe the wheat harvest in 1900 and to begin the composition of the novel.<sup>33</sup> These sources supplied the raw materials for Norris's treatment of the causative forces that shape the fiscal policies of the nation and diminish the opportunities for the general population.

In his review of *The Octopus*, London objected to Norris's use of documentary detail, which he thought detracted from the novel, yet London's fiction also draws heavily on sources to inform his representations of dominant society.<sup>34</sup> London based "The Apostate" on investigations into child labor, gleaning the particulars of Johnny's work from John Spargo's "The Bitter Cry of Children," the descriptions of weaving and the episode of the one-legged boy from Juliet Wilbor Thompkins's "Turning Children into Dollars," and the physical effects of the protagonist's labor from Owen R. Lovejoy's "The Modern Slaughter of Innocents." These articles supplied the empirical foundation for the story, which London further developed with his experiences as a factory worker.<sup>35</sup> For *The Iron Heel*, he drew on the aborted Russian Revolution of 1905 and the significant electoral gains by the Socialists in 1904, incidents that sharpen the focus of the novel.<sup>36</sup> Most notably, London incorporated passages from his lectures "Revolution" and "The Question of the Maximum," William Pembroke Fetridge's *The Rise and Fall of the Paris Commune* (1871), W. J. Ghent's *Our Benevolent Feudalism* (1902) and *Mass and Class* (1904), Robert Hunter's *Poverty* (1904), Ernest Untermann's *Science and Revolution* (1905), Henry George's *The Menace of Privilege* (1905), and Spargo's *The Bitter Cry of Children* (1906).<sup>37</sup> These works provided London with the basis for the foreword and footnotes set after fictional Socialist revolution, which are juxtaposed against the brutality of the Oligarchy

in the Everhard manuscript and highlight the problems that the present economic order engenders for much of the population.

Steinbeck also utilizes documentary detail in his illustrations of the institutional forces that undermine the possibility of economic mobility. Warren French notes that *In Dubious Battle* stems from numerous strikes throughout California, which universalizes the narrative from a representation of a particular conflict to a broader treatment of the labor movement.<sup>38</sup> Jackson J. Benson and Anne Loftis have identified two particular disputes as the inspiration for the book: a work stoppage at the Tagus Ranch in August of 1933 and a shutdown of the cotton industry in Pixley during October of 1933.<sup>39</sup> According to Benson and Loftis, Steinbeck learned about these events from two organizers, Cicil McKiddy and Carl Williams, who were affiliated with the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union.<sup>40</sup> *The Grapes of Wrath* has its factual origins in a series of articles that Steinbeck wrote on migratory farm workers for the *San Francisco News*. These pieces were largely based on reports written by Tom Collins, head of the Farm Security Administration Camp at Arvin, and he accompanied Steinbeck on several trips to federal camps and the surrounding areas during the next few months.<sup>41</sup> Steinbeck drew on these documents again in the composition of the novel, further developing the narrative with accounts of the Salinas Lettuce Strike of 1936, his experiences during the Visalia floods of 1938, and additional first-hand interactions with Dust Bowl migrants.<sup>42</sup> This research provided the basis for Steinbeck's treatment of the economic predators in California, whose control over resources limits the Joads' prospects for advancement.

This emphasis on Deterministic forces that dictate the actions of the individual requires specific representational strategies to express the workings of causative agents. Instead of stories about the experiences of average people, Norris argues that writers should examine the "great,

terrible dramas . . . among the lower—almost the lowest – classes; those who have been thrust or wrenched from the ranks, who are falling by the roadway.”<sup>43</sup> Naturalists thereby populate their works with those who deviate from the conventional expectations and outcomes of middle-class life. The novels within this movement relate the experiences of marginalized groups: working-class women driven to prostitution through financial hardship, factory workers reduced to appendages of the machines they tend by modern industrial processes, and farmers forced from their ancestral land by large banks that control the resources of the nation. This focus on oppressed characters removes American literature from the drawing room, and this shift necessitates the use of settings more suitable to those on the periphery of society. Naturalist works are often set in urban ghettos, in desperate rural poverty, or in the Arctic, tracing the controlling effect of milieu on the protagonists and broadening the scope of the novel to those left outside of material progress.

In line with these characters and settings, the plots of Naturalist fiction deemphasize ethical conflict; instead, these narratives exhibit the workings of a Deterministic power, representing the broader forces that drive individuals to ruin. These writers primarily focus on the deterioration of their protagonists, which Pizer has divided into three main categories: one involves “the waste of individual potential as a result of the conditioning forces of life,” the next details “the failure of comparatively ‘successful’ but essentially undistinguished figures to maintain in a shifting, uncertain world the order and stability required to survive,” and the final “concerns the problem of knowledge.”<sup>44</sup> The first structure manifests in *Maggie* through the capacity of the heroine to respond to beauty, *An American Tragedy* (1925) through Clyde Griffiths’s inability to escape from the limitations of his environment, and *Studs Lonigan* (1932-35) through the juxtaposition of central character’s capability for love with the aspects of his

milieu that prevent this facet of his personality from emerging. The second group includes *McTeague* as the dentist initially attains economic mobility yet cannot maintain this position due to institutional forces that disrupt his ordered existence and *Martin Eden* (1909) through the protagonist's recognition of the emptiness of his material goals around which he had organized his life, which culminates in his suicide. The third configuration manifests in Crane's "The Open Boat" and "The Blue Hotel," Norris's *McTeague* and *Vandover and the Brute* (1914), and Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, since the principals lack a broader awareness of the causative agents that are responsible for tragedy.

Since the characters cannot comprehend the forces that dictate their fates, Naturalist fiction primarily involves omniscient narrators who possess a frame of reference unknown to the principals, whom they establish through exposition rather than dramatic revelation. This method typifies most of these works, functioning in *Maggie* through Crane's ironic method to reflect the discrepancy between the subjects' worlds and their ideals. The recording consciousness in *McTeague*, for instance, possesses a broader philosophical framework to explain the causative agents operating in the text, powers that he expresses through explicit analyses. In *Sister Carrie*, the storyteller clarifies the Deterministic agents through explaining the chemical reactions that animate Carrie, Drouet, and Hurstwood in the transitory state between their animal impulses and reason. American Naturalists, however, do not present the circumstances governing individuals with the clinical detachment of Zola's formulations. Instead, Pizer asserts that the narrative voice serves as "an imaginative presence infusing meaning and dignity and a sense of tragic potential into what he observes – creating a living engagement between artist and subject matter which results in a fullness and complexity of expression rather than emotionally sterile portraits of 'forces at work.'"<sup>45</sup> These aspects are evident in Norris's *oeuvre* through his use of indirect

discourse, shifting to a character's perspective while still employing the third-person singular. This mode enables Norris to examine the psychological dimensions of Mac's struggle and to reveal the how his perceptions have been shaped by Victorian moral values. This approach also features prominently in *The Octopus* to illuminate the limitations of Presley's point of view and to undermine his version of events. Steinbeck's speaker in *The Grapes of Wrath* heightens its complexity through impressionistic interchapters that elevate the Joads' plight to a commentary on the human condition and highlight the interrelationships among the central events within an exploration of the constructs that shape the working class.

This emphasis on Deterministic forces required the use of appropriate constructs to elucidate the causative agents that control the protagonists, and these devices create a broad range of aesthetic complexity. Naturalist fiction often involves symbols drawn from dominant traits of lust, greed, hatred, and revenge to underscore the central themes of these texts. In *McTeague*, these elements operate through the gilded molar, which Norris connects to the canary's cage, Maria Macapa's dinner service, and Trina's twenty-dollar coins, references that demonstrate the compulsive avarice that governs the major characters. Naturalist writers often employ symbols associated with the causative agents themselves, evident through the tractors in *The Grapes of Wrath* that represent the emerging industrial order, or their immediate practices, manifest through the destruction of oranges in order to increase prices when these commodities could feed starving citizens. In *The Octopus*, similar representations of mechanization are evident through the railroad that precludes the ranchers' development, and such constructs manifest in "The Apostate" through the factory apparatuses that efface Johnny's humanity. The central themes of the works associated with Naturalism are often reinforced through patterns of imagery that highlight the structures that threaten the central characters amid the struggle for

existence. Accordingly, Naturalists frequently employ animal and jungle images that demonstrate individuals' reversion to the behaviors of their primitive forebears. This outlook stems from Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859), which indicated that conduct can be the product of biological instincts and that people are capable regressing to a primal state.<sup>46</sup> While these descriptions often illuminate this process of devolution, they also highlight that environmental pressures are often responsible for the activation of these impulses.

The significance of Naturalism stems from its engagement with the fundamental ideal of American life: that individuals can improve their material conditions and attain prosperity through diligent application and effort. This conception forms the foundation of the American Dream, which is predicated on the beliefs that people can shape their destinies and that conditions in the United States would allow the higher aptitudes of men and women to germinate in the pursuit of prosperity. The term first appears in Walter Lippmann's *Drift and Mastery* (1914) and gains its fullest expression in James Truslow Adams's *Epic of America* (1931) as "the dream of a land in which life should be fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement."<sup>47</sup> Jennifer Hochschild expands on this formulation and observes that "the American Dream . . . promises that everyone, regardless of ascription or background, may reasonably seek success through action and traits under their own control."<sup>48</sup> The central premise of Naturalist fiction challenges this vision, highlighting the institutional forces that place advancement beyond reach and activate the remnants of man's animal past thought to have been eradicated on the march toward civilization.

The ideas of Adams and Hochschild express the central components of the American experience from the first European settlements on the continent. John Smith noted that God had

created a particularly rich and fertile land, observing that the “mildness of the air, the fertility of the soil, and the situation of the rivers are so propitious that to the nature and use of man, as no place is more convenient for pleasure, profit, and man’s sustenance.”<sup>49</sup> This image also appealed to the Puritans, who perceived the Massachusetts Bay Colony as a New Eden, and this view had its clearest expression in John Winthrop’s “A Model of Christian Charity” (1630), a sermon delivered aboard the *Arabella* during the voyage to North America. Winthrop established the principles of a harmonious Christian society, reminding those on board “we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have under-taken and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.”<sup>50</sup> This version of the American Dream differs significantly from its more modern manifestations. Instead of progress for a minority, Winthrop argued that the inhabitants of his “city upon a hill” would be a unit joined by the recognition of God’s spirit in each other. This connection indicates that the fate of the collective depended upon that of the individual and that all must work together for the common good. For Winthrop, this idea manifested not through faith alone but through works and sacrifice for the good of the group, evident through his exhortation to give one’s riches to another even if that person lacked the potential for repayment. This need for a unified community to protect the group reflects a persistent theme throughout the early American period and presents the solidarity necessary for the survival of the fledgling nation.

The Quakers also formulated the American Dream as a union between the concerns of terrestrial life and the performance of one’s religious duty, which would result in prosperity through diligent labor. George Fox, the leading Quaker in England, stated “friends, that are gone, and are going over to plant, and make outward plantations in America, keep your own

plantations in your hearts, with the spirit and power of God, that your own vines and lilies be not hurt.”<sup>51</sup> For Fox, wealth should not be the primary focus of the human enterprise; instead, acquisition must be rooted within a broader spiritual framework based on proper conduct, and material gain provided a reward for adhering to moral strictures. In a similar vein, William Penn wrote that “truly blessed is that man and woman who, in the invisible power, rule their affections about the visible things, and who use the world as true travelers and pilgrims, whose home is not here below.”<sup>52</sup> As the anonymous writer of *Planter’s Speech to His Neighbors* (1684) noted, spiritual peace would result in financial progress “as *trees* are transplanted from one soil to another, to render them more thriving and better bearers, so . . . in peace and secure retirement, under the bountiful protection of God, and in the lap of the least unadulterated nature, might everyone better improve his talent, and bring forth more plenteous fruits, to the glory of God, and public welfare of the whole creation.”<sup>53</sup> In linking economic benefits to spiritual concerns, the Puritans and Quakers introduced the key concepts of industry, frugality, and prudence that comprised the basis of the American Dream, precepts that have remained at the core of individual and national progress.

The American Dream is closely associated with Benjamin Franklin, whose writings illustrated the potential for mobility within the nation and whose experiences validated the possibility for such success during the colonial period. In his *Autobiography* (1781), Franklin portrayed his life as a narrative of accomplishment and asserted that honesty and diligence, with some measure of luck, would logically culminate in material progress. In the 1730s, Franklin devised a list of thirteen virtues that he later incorporated into his *Autobiography*. Among these qualities, he identified temperance, writing “Eat not to Dulness/ Drink not to Elevation”; frugality, asserting “Make no Expence but to do good to others or yourself”; and industry, stating



“Lose no Time.—Be always employ’d in something useful.”<sup>54</sup> Franklin developed these concepts in “Information to Those Who Remove to America” (1784) and presented the country as one of boundless opportunity for the poor. He discussed the abundance of inexpensive land on the frontier, a hundred acres of which could be obtained for eight to ten guineas, noting that “hearty young laboring men, who understand the husbandry of corn and cattle . . . may easily establish themselves” in these climes and that with the “good wages they receive . . . while they work for others,” they can save enough to “buy the land and begin their plantation.”<sup>55</sup> Through the assistance of neighbors and credit, “multitudes of poor people . . . have in a few years become wealthy farmers, who, in their own Countries, where all the lands are fully occupied, and the wages of labor low, could never have emerged from the poor condition wherein they were born.”<sup>56</sup> While the high costs of land in the United States, where the annual per capita income was ten guineas, complicated his optimistic vision, Franklin expanded the foundation of the American Dream to include economic freedom and the ability to shape one’s material circumstances through productive labor.

This emphasis played a significant role in the American Dream during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, most notably in the works of J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur. In his *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), he echoed the arguments of Winthrop, Penn, and Franklin, explaining that if one “is a good man, he forms schemes of future prosperity; he proposes to educate his children better than he has been educated, he thinks of future modes of conduct, feels an ardor to labor he never felt before.”<sup>57</sup> Crèvecoeur further outlined the prerequisites for advancement when he asserted that it “is not every immigrant who succeeds; no, it is only the sober, the honest, the industrious.”<sup>58</sup> In this view, material success depended on

the individual, who had to grasp at all opportunities for development. Crèvecoeur expanded on this theme by personifying the nation and appealing directly to potential immigrants:

Welcome to my shores, distressed Europeans; bless the hour in which thou didst see my verdant fields, my fair navigable rivers, and my green mountains! If thou wilt work, I have bread for thee; if thou wilt be honest, sober, and industrious, I have greater rewards to confer on thee—ease and independence. . . . Go thou and work and till; thou shalt prosper, provided thou be just, grateful, and industrious.<sup>59</sup>

Crèvecoeur and Franklin shifted the collective character of the Puritan and Quaker versions of the American Dream, replacing the collective good with the aspirations of isolated men and women, who would be rewarded for honest labor, with the clear implication that those who failed to attain prosperity had not demonstrated the proper patience, industry, and thrift.

Thomas Jefferson promoted a similar conception of the American Dream based on the opportunity and prosperity available to those who were willing to work and play by the rules of civil society. *The Declaration of Independence* (1776) supplied the foundation of Jefferson's understanding of the American experience and advanced an image of egalitarian individualism with its statement "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among those are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."<sup>60</sup> In this formulation, Jefferson indicates that despite being endowed with different natural abilities and potentialities, all men are equal in terms of their rights under the law. However, Jefferson's revision of John Locke's "life, liberty, and property" to "life, liberty, and happiness" is significant in that it replaces economic considerations with an abstraction. As such, Jefferson guaranteed equality neither of condition nor of outcome, which must stem from one's own effort and initiative. This idea of advancement was based largely on an agricultural republic with

available land and the means to labor on it. For Jefferson, the ability to rise was predicated on the relationship between man and the soil, and he viewed farmers as an exalted species, noting that “those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he had made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue.”<sup>61</sup> Jefferson reiterated this perspective of agrarian life in a letter to James Madison, observing that “our governments will remain virtuous for many centuries as long as they remain chiefly agricultural; and this will be as long as there shall be vacant lands in any part of America.”<sup>62</sup> This vision of a country of small producers closely associated with the earth involved the belief that each man could control his fate through his own tangible labor; however, this version of America quickly receded into the past due to developments in the nineteenth century that consolidated wealth among a minority of the population.

The Gold Rush played an important part in shaping nineteenth-century America by producing an alteration to the national narrative of success and creating an ideological climate that prioritized accumulation. These elements began to emerge when James W. Marshall discovered gold in January of 1848, which initiated an influx of migrants to the West and accelerated the development of California. The initial accounts of prospectors reflected the central virtues of the American Dream and reinforced the idea of diligent labor as the guarantor of material advancement. In the spring of 1850, a correspondent for the *Belleville Advocate* claimed that no “one should think of coming here to pick up a fortune without work; but, whoever is willing to live on flap-jacks, and pickled pork, and can carry dirt in a bag half the day and ‘rock the cradle’ the other half, the chances are 99 to 1, that he will make from 5 to 10 thousand dollars every year he stays in California.”<sup>63</sup> A corollary to this work ethic also manifested during this period as some attributed the inability of many to strike it rich to character

flaws or a refusal to labor with sufficient vigor. For instance, Levi Hillman traced his riches to “patience, perseverance, industry, and economy” as opposed to those who failed as a result of “reckless habits, want of ability to act for themselves, or lack of energy.”<sup>64</sup> While some took recourse in this conventional rhetoric, Marshall’s findings had significant implications by heightening the focus on financial gain above other concerns. As Kevin Starr observes, the economic activity of the region was characterized by “an essential selfishness and an underlying instability, a fixation upon the quick acquisition of wealth, an impatience with the more subtle premises of human happiness. These were American traits, to be sure, but the Gold Rush intensified and consolidated them as part of regional experience.”<sup>65</sup> This primary emphasis on acquisition caused a revision to the Puritan formulation of prosperity as a reward for diligent labor and virtuous conduct, and H. W. Brands contends that the Gold Rush shifted the nature of the American Dream itself. He asserts that the

old American dream, the dream inherited from ten generations of ancestors, was the dream of the Puritans, of Benjamin Franklin’s *Poor Richard*, of Thomas Jefferson’s yeoman farmers: of men and women content to accumulate their modest fortunes a little at a time, year by year by year. The new dream was one of instant wealth, won in a twinkling by audacity and good luck.<sup>66</sup>

Far from offering the potential for widespread affluence, this period in California advanced a new definition of progress that did not apply to the majority, who saw their hopes turn into a reality of frustration and poverty. Commenting on the ethos that emerged during the following period, Ray Ginger notes that no “personal feelings or humanitarian considerations should be allowed to interfere with the duty of making a profit,” and Walter Licht posits that production and consumption “became totally oriented toward selling and buying in the marketplace and that

everything – goods, land, labor, even time – became valued accordingly by the calculus of supply and demand and the cash nexus.”<sup>67</sup> This pursuit of wealth unhindered by ethical strictures drastically changed the nature of the national mythos and had a significant impact on the opportunities available to the common people during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Further accounts of the Gold Rush deviated from the traditional precepts of the American Dream, reinforcing the material promise of California and suggesting that vast fortunes were available for those who were brave and adventurous enough to find it. The national press accentuated the possibility for instant wealth in California. According to one story, gold was “*so abundant that there is not necessity for washing the earth; \$700 per day is the amount by each man.*”<sup>68</sup> An article in the San Francisco *Californian* noted that “the whole country from San Francisco to Los Angeles and from the seashore to the base of the Sierra Nevada resounds to the sordid cry of gold, gold!, GOLD! while the field is left half planted, the house half built, and everything neglected but the manufacture of shovels and pick-axes.”<sup>69</sup> This contrast highlights the broader consequences of the shift to acquisition with the juxtaposition between the mania for this precious resource overriding the productive acts of labor central to earlier concepts of the American Dream. This cautionary tale was drowned out by stories exaggerating the potential for prosperity in California, with accounts that captured the popular imagination through the references to El Dorado, *La Bonanza*, “the Age of Gold,” Hernán Cortés, Francisco Pizarro, and Ponce de León, which connected Marshall’s findings to the conventional, mythic associations of California.<sup>70</sup> News of his discovery spread to the French press in November and December of 1848 when the *Journal des Debats* reported that the “real facts are beyond the wildest dreams” and that the “most remarkable development of our age in the field of material progress is beyond

any contradiction the discovery and exploitation of the gold fields in California” in presenting a view of a region teeming with nuggets and ingots weighing up to twenty-four pounds.<sup>71</sup>

These material rewards presented California as a land of opportunity where individuals could attain prosperity, which produced an influx of prospectors into the state and shaped its future development. In the year following President James Polk’s announcement that the precious metal had been discovered, the non-Native American population of the state increased from less than ten thousand in 1848 to nearly one hundred thousand and would skyrocket to 255,000 by 1851.<sup>72</sup> Describing the 49ers, Hubert Howe Bancroft observed that those the Gold Rush brought into California were “the toiling farmer, whose mortgage loomed above the growing family, the briefless lawyer, the starving student, the quack, the harlot, the gambler, the hen-pecked husband, the disgraced; with the many earnest, enterprising honest men and women.”<sup>73</sup> Bancroft’s illustrations provide a cross section of those who could not attain the material promise of the American Dream in their native environments and others whose desire for mobility had caused them to deviate from the approved paths to progress. In pursuit of this seemingly limitless wealth, these individuals braved the treacherous path to California, which involved a sea voyage of five to eight months or a dangerous trek through the Southwest that would claim the lives of one traveler in twelve.<sup>74</sup> Initially, the potential rewards seemed to outweigh these risks as \$594 million in ingots, the equivalent to \$10 billion in 2001 dollars, was extracted from the goldfields over the next decade.<sup>75</sup> These economic benefits were magnified by Colonel Richard Barnes Mason’s decree that the mineral deposits were under the jurisdiction of the federal government and were available to anyone who staked his claim, removed the valuable nuggets, and transported them to one of the assay centers.

The experiences of those who came to California during this period illuminate the limitations of the national success story, and the reality encountered by the 49ers did not cohere with the dominant narrative of progress. Instead of providing widespread mobility, the material benefits of this period were concentrated among a narrow segment of the population. Opportunities for economic expansion were available in 1848 when some 6,000 miners discovered nearly \$10 million in gold, and this sum tripled in 1849, yet the number of migrants increased to over 40,000; in 1852, the peak year, the output was \$80 million, but there were 100,000 people working claims.<sup>76</sup> As a result, most prospectors found themselves laboring harder for less income, which decreased from a high of \$20 a day in 1848, to \$16 in 1849, to \$10 in 1850, and down to \$3 by 1856.<sup>77</sup> Although these figures seem quite high by the standards of the nineteenth century, these earnings were often insufficient to cover the high prices of goods and services in the mining districts. Reflecting on his experiences in a camp near Mariposa, Tom Archer explained that the “price of provisions had become so high that our paltry earnings were not nearly sufficient to pay for the food we required to keep ourselves alive. Flour was \$1 a lb, pork the same, Chilean jerky (dried beef) half a dollar to 75 cents, tea \$5, coffee \$3, frijoles (dried beans) about half a dollar, and everything else in the same proportion.”<sup>78</sup> Californians had no relief in San Francisco, where a pick or shovel sold for \$10, a tin pan or wooden bowl for \$5, a butcher’s knife for \$30, a loaf of bread for fifty cents, and a hard-boiled egg for a dollar.<sup>79</sup> The high costs of essential goods and services undermined the ability of average individuals to attain prosperity or to even live decently as they continued to work long hours under dismal conditions for decreasing returns. Brian Roberts asserts that goldseekers “envisioned an easy accumulation of wealth, figuring themselves rich men before they had even started. Now, faced with the extremely hard work of mining and the stunningly high prices of goods in the camps, they had to

do some drastic refiguring. Most, it seems, felt almost lucky just breaking even.”<sup>80</sup> While these prices express the increased rates of transporting goods to the gold regions, they also illustrate the ability of merchants to exploit the shortages created by the influx of customers, which further intensified the hardships experienced by the miners and consumed their modest compensation.

The changing nature of mining further exacerbated prospectors’ hardships as individual operations were replaced with capital-intensive forms of extraction that were beyond the means of most 49ers. Early in the Gold Rush, the rich deposits in rivers and streams allowed some to attain advancement with a shovel, pick-axe, and pan. However, the influx of people into the state and the scarcity of any new discoveries necessitated the adoption of different methods to remove ore from deep river beds through the creation of dams, flumes, and races. J. S. Holliday observes that “a major change evolved – from individual, nomadic prospectors with simple, portable equipment to a commitment by a group of men on a single claim to invest months of effort in a complex, cooperative project.”<sup>81</sup> This shift further diminished the opportunities for the average man as these massive projects required sophisticated engineering techniques and a tremendous infusion of capital. One 49er wrote that “all of the old mining ground that is now worked out will yet pay millions of dollars by working them Systematically it will be attended to by much hard labor but Capitalists will take hold of it and make money out of it.”<sup>82</sup> Further, the depletion of placer gold by 1852 intensified the hardships faced by miners because the removal of the resources from the hillsides required heavy machinery and even greater sums of money.<sup>83</sup> As a consequence of these developments, the independent individuals who came to California in search of prosperity were converted to wage earners, whose income decreased as the scale of operations expanded. One goldseeker noted that mining “is now Reduced to a system. What is commonly termed placer diggings being principally exhausted. The miners are seeking in the



bowels of the mountains for primitive leads. . . . If he is not successful in finding a lead his only reward is an empty pocket and complete disgust.”<sup>84</sup> These gains diminished greatly before they reached the common prospector, the majority of whom worked on large claims owned by others for an insignificant fraction of their yields or labored on smaller claims for limited returns. As one miner posited, it “takes a gold mine to work a gold mine.”<sup>85</sup> Despite the promise afforded by the material assets of the state, the immense riches realized during this period did not translate into gains for the majority who came in search of affluence.

As opposed to ushering a new era of general prosperity, the Gold Rush consigned the majority of the population to conditions that fostered the worst aspects of human nature. The low wages and blunted aspirations of the miners facilitated great desperation that manifested in the violent character of mining-camp life. David Vaught asserts that as “the prospects for individuals to strike it rich declined and all but disappeared by 1852, depression and disillusionment descended over the picked over goldfields, where elation and dreams had abounded only a short time before.”<sup>86</sup> This disenchantment is reflected in the miners’ journals, which are replete with incidents of crime and its consequences. On 29 August 1851, Garrett Low wrote that it “is an everyday occurrence to see a coffin carried on the shoulders of two men, who are the only mourners and only witnesses of some stranger whose name they do not know.”<sup>87</sup> William Perkins observed that it “is surprising how indifferent people had become to the sight of violence and bloodshed in this country.”<sup>88</sup> These accounts do not represent isolated incidents; rather, they are indicative of life in the mining communities and larger cities that emerged during this time. As John Boessenecker has demonstrated, the murder rate during this period was astronomically high: Sonora had 506.6 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 1850-51, which was fifty times that for 1999.<sup>89</sup> Outside of the gold regions, conditions could be even

more dangerous: in San Francisco between 1849 and 1856, the figure was 49 per 100,000, six times that for 1997; in Los Angeles between 1850 and 1851, the number peaked at 1,240 per 100,000.<sup>90</sup> The material promise of the Gold Rush had transformed into a wild scramble for riches that left many behind and turned the California Dream into a reality of exploitation and misery, elements that would feature prominently in the structure of the emerging state.

The Gold Rush played a central role in shaping modern California, creating an institutional framework that consolidated wealth and power among the upper echelon of the population. Kevin Starr notes that “in just about every way possible – its internationalism, its psychology of expectation . . . its rapid creation of a political, economic, and technological infrastructure – the Gold Rush established, for better or for worse, the founding patterns, the DNA code, of American California.”<sup>91</sup> These developments placed the economic self-interest of the individual over the needs of the collective, and the social structure that materialized during this period often thwarted the aspirations of most Californians. This process commenced through dispossessing the original inhabitants and transferring their holdings to Americans through the cancellation of Mexican-era land grants, which the federal government was required to honor under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In 1851, Congress passed a law that forced those who held Spanish and Mexican grants to present them for confirmation before the Board of California Land Commissioners yet placed the burden of proof on the ranchers. Prior to 1846, over thirteen million acres were held by only 800 Mexicans, very few of whom made it through the confirmation process with their original holdings intact.<sup>92</sup> Although the commissioners upheld 604 out of 813 claims, the litigation necessary as a result of this legislation was long and costly: the average length of time to secure evidence of ownership was seventeen years after initiating the process; further, many people often had to sell off large portions of their acreage at

deflated prices due to their uncertain status and were often bankrupt by end of the legal proceedings.<sup>93</sup> For Henry George, these acts of dispossession revealed “a history of greed, of perjury, of corruption, of spoliation and high-handed robbery for which it will be difficult to find a parallel.”<sup>94</sup> This issue emerged as one of the important themes of nineteenth-century California, a situation that would be compounded when the Southern Pacific became the largest landholder in the state.

The termination of the Mexican-era land grants played an instrumental role in shaping the character of modern California and produced an even greater monopolization of resources. Carey McWilliams notes that the economic underpinnings of the state originated from this consolidation:

California has more than once been referred to as a colonial empire, and, by and large, the description is accurate. The irrational character of California agriculture . . . may be traced to the fact that the lands of the state were monopolized before they were settled, that a few individuals and concerns got possession of the agricultural resources of the State at the very moment the State was thrown open for settlement and that the types of ownership thus established have persisted. The ownership itself has changed, but the fact of ownership remained.<sup>95</sup>

The legal wrangling to invalidate the Mexican-era grants did not break up the immense, underdeveloped *ranchos*. Instead, the holdings from the Mexican administration remained largely intact under the possession of Americans. W. J. Ghent found that “the dominant form of large holdings is the tract which has held the greater part of boundaries undisturbed from Mexican times” and that “the large holdings in California are an inheritance from Spanish-

Mexican times.”<sup>96</sup> The eradication of these titles led to an even higher concentration of agricultural holdings as 516 people owned 8,685,439 acres.<sup>97</sup> In Fresno County, 48 men held more than 49,000 acres each, and fifteen men in the state owned more than 84 square miles apiece; to put it another way, 1/ 500 of the inhabitants of the state possessed more than half of all arable land by 1870.<sup>98</sup> This tendency was further augmented by the prevalent nature of speculation, and individuals engaged in this practice had gained 3,381,691 acres of highly valuable and fertile property that was erroneously defined as swamp land plus an additional 7,421,804 granted by the federal government for settlement and cultivation.<sup>99</sup> Reflecting on these vast disparities, George asserted that the state “will have more wealth; but will it be evenly distributed? She will have more luxury and refinement and culture; but will she have such general comfort, so little squalor and misery; so little of the grinding, hopeless poverty that chills and cramps the souls of men, and converts them into brutes?”<sup>100</sup> This increasing inequality revealed the foundation that sustained the apparent prosperity of California during this time, and these conditions worsened as a result of the institutional forces that emerged during this period.

The character of California emerged through the creation of the Transcontinental Railroad, and this development introduced a period of monopoly control under the Southern Pacific Railroad, which absorbed the Central Pacific in 1870. The purpose of this construction project was to transport the resources of the West to the Eastern manufacturers while also opening the former to the industrial base of the latter. The Central Pacific, formed by Collis P. Huntington, Mark Hopkins, Leland Stanford, and Charles Crocker in 1861, started on the West coast heading East, spending \$200,000 on bribes to acquire nine million acres and \$24 million in bonds.<sup>101</sup> To develop additional further transit lines, the federal government carved out a significant portion of California and gave it to the Southern Pacific, which possessed 20,000,000

acres by 1870.<sup>102</sup> This concern was still the chief landowner in 1919 with 2,598,775 in Southern California and 642,246 in one county alone.<sup>103</sup> These grants were given as alternating tracts alongside planned lines, and the corporation often encouraged settlement in these areas for the purpose of appropriating the labor and investments of these individuals. A notorious example of this practice was the Mussel Slough Tragedy when the Southern Pacific charged settlers higher prices for land they had improved, and subsequent attempts to dispossess the farmers led to a gunfight that claimed the lives of seven men. The Southern Pacific exacted a further toll on people who relied on the firm to transport goods by setting exorbitant rates to further maximize earnings. The railroad further exploited this dependency by forcing those who that wanted to ship freight to submit their books to Southern Pacific accountants so that transportation costs could be increased if a business's profits began to rise.<sup>104</sup> For instance, when the Payne-Aldrich Tariff of 1909 went into effect and augmented the revenues of California farmers by fifty cents per ton, the Southern Pacific raised its rates accordingly and pocketed nearly half of these earnings.<sup>105</sup>

The Southern Pacific's monopoly extended from control over the land and transit of California to domination of the state government, whose policies were dictated primarily by the railroad for five decades. George Mowry observes that

California, like so many of her sister commonwealths at the turn of the century, had only the shadow of representative government, while the real substance of power resided largely in the Southern Pacific Railroad Company. To a degree perhaps unparalleled in the nation, the Southern Pacific and a web of associated economic interests ruled the state.<sup>106</sup>

The details of this process emerged through the correspondence between Huntington and David D. Colton as these documents contain numerous references to the expected prices for particular legislative measures and politicians. In one, Huntington wrote that it “costs money to fix things. . . . I believe with \$200,000 I can pass our bill, but that it is not worth that much to us”; in another dispatch, he observed that “the boys are very hungry, and it will cost us considerable to be saved.”<sup>107</sup> Through these means, Huntington and his associates used their power to avoid effective regulation and to protect their interests, which were secured through engineering the elections of three successive governors, Henry T. Gage, George Pardee, and James Gillette.<sup>108</sup> The California Railroad Commission was of special interest to the Southern Pacific since this body had the ability to establish shipping rates, yet the commissioners themselves were elected and sustained by the company.<sup>109</sup> Reflecting on its dominance over the agency and resulting ability to shape policy, a study in 1895 declared that not “a single majority report has ever been issued from the railroad commission of a nature unsatisfactory to the company the commission was established to control.”<sup>110</sup> These actions had a destructive effect on the state, diverting resources from the public to serve the interests of the Southern Pacific and providing the population with no legal means to challenge the firm through its authority over the political process of California.

These developments within California are central to the works of Norris, whose fiction traces the human consequences of the socioeconomic structure that emerged during the nineteenth century. Although born in Chicago, Norris moved to San Francisco in 1884 and spent many years in the city that provided the setting for *McTeague*. Gold plays an important role in the novel through Norris’s symbolism and imagery, which the narrator connects to the pervasive materialism of Polk Street, describing the setting through the commodities that frame the

McTeagues' hopes of attaining middle-class respectability. This quest for wealth engenders the turbulence under the seemingly placid surface of existence. A related aspiration for mobility manifests through the lottery with its implication that one can achieve prosperity through luck and with minimal effort, an idea that reflects the revision of the American Dream following the Gold Rush. The narrator juxtaposes the financial component of the national success story with Trina's embodiment of the prudence, thrift, and industry that characterized the earlier incarnation of this concept. The virtues of the Puritan dream, however, do not lead to progress for the McTeagues as Trina's acquisitive mania undermines her humane impulses and causes her husband's reversion to a savage state. In this context, the protagonist's fate does not originate from biological forces; instead, these elements materialize due to the dictates of environment and highlight the impact of economic pressures on the individual.

*The Octopus* extends this treatment of the causative agents that hinder mobility, shifting these elements from San Francisco to the San Joaquin Valley and tracing the effects of rampant materialism on the nation's food supply. Norris's research into the Mussel Slough Tragedy and the recent activities of the Southern Pacific to manipulate freight rates provided the raw materials for the Deterministic forces in the narrative. These structures manifest through the corporate monopolies that dictate the opportunities available to the populace, the role of these institutions in the increasing concentration of agrarian ownership, and a social system that prioritizes financial gain. These acquisitive impulses also govern the actions of Magnus Derrick, a former prospector, and the other farmers, who seek to extract as much wealth from the earth as possible through wheat harvests, which had taken the place of gold in California by the 1870s. While Norris indicates that greed tarnishes individuals at all levels of society, *The Octopus* highlights the broader culpability of the Pacific & Southwestern Railroad and its functionaries, over whom

the growers exercise no control. Despite Shelgrim's assertions to the contrary, this lack of agency does not apply to the company as it manipulates market conditions to protect its interests regardless of the consequences for landowners.

These developments in California reflected a broader transformation of the national economy, one that seemed to diminish the possibility of advancement and created a society in which many people were unable to attain prosperity. Nelson Lichtenstein asserts that as

large industrial and financial institutions secured ever-greater economic and political power, ordinary Americans of all ethnic backgrounds found themselves increasingly subject to forces beyond their control. Lifelong wage earning meant dependence and a betrayal of the longstanding American dream of being beholden to no one, once symbolized by the autonomous farmer and the self-employed artisan. Workers' earnings and the prices they paid for goods were subject to the impersonal mechanisms of world trade and to decisions made on behalf of profit in remote corporate boardrooms.<sup>111</sup>

These barriers to mobility stemmed from the social order that emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century. During this period, America shifted from agriculture, based on individual enterprise, to industry, with its emphasis on mass production and technological innovation. American farmers suffered tremendously in the period following the Civil War as a result of lower prices and an attendant decrease in living conditions. This decline was prevalent among staple crops: wheat sold for \$2.50 a bushel in the late 1860s, \$1.25 in the late 1870s, \$1.00 in 1884, and \$0.56 in 1894; corn fell from \$0.66 in 1866 to \$0.21 in 1896; and cotton dropped from \$0.24 a pound in 1870 to less than \$0.10 from 1891 to 1903.<sup>112</sup> These reductions coupled with rising transportation costs minimized the growers' ability to subsist and initiated a migration



from the country to the city and from farming to industry. Prior to the Civil War, nearly 52% of the population cultivated the land, with only 14% employed in manufacturing; however, the number of factory workers almost tripled between 1860 and 1890, and the percentage of industrial laborers nearly doubled again by 1910.<sup>113</sup> This occurrence eradicated the image of the yeomanry central to Jefferson's conception of the American Dream, replacing these self-employed, independent producers with individuals who sold their labor in order to live. Glenn Porter observes that these changes undermined the fundamental values that once defined the nation: the "belief in competition and democracy, the goals of producing and saving, the idea that individuals could rise by their own efforts to wealth and power—or at least to something close to self-sufficiency—all seemed overshadowed by the giant corporations whose influence had come to be felt in virtually every city and town across the land."<sup>114</sup> Many people learned that they were confined to their class positions as those who moved to urban areas to improve their financial circumstances often found that the fiscal climate of the Gilded Age limited the attainment of material progress.

The growth of unregulated corporate monopolies undermined the prosperity of the general population by engendering vast disparities of wealth within an economic system that seemed to be outside the average worker's command. This trend toward consolidation began with the nation's railroads in the 1870s, which had organized themselves into pools to divide traffic and set freight rates, efforts that were weakened by competition among these rivals.<sup>115</sup> Realizing the problems of markets, the major conglomerates significantly increased the scope of their operations to drive smaller companies out of business and to consolidate their power.<sup>116</sup> This tendency soon spread to other fields, and by the turn of the twentieth century, American Telephone and Telegraph dominated the nation's means of communication, International

Harvester made 80% of all farm machinery, Standard Oil controlled 90% of the refining capacity in the nation, and consolidation shaped commerce throughout the country.<sup>117</sup> Major banks had interests in so many of these concerns that they created an interlocking network of corporate directors who also had stakes in other firms. According to a Senate report, John Pierpont Morgan sat on the boards of forty-eight businesses at his peak and John D. Rockefeller on thirty-seven.<sup>118</sup> These institutions fostered immense gains, yet this material progress primarily benefitted those in the upper echelons of society, gains that ironically served to represent the potential for mobility rather than barriers to such progress for the working class. The last decades of the nineteenth century seemed to demonstrate the possibilities for advancement through an increase in the number of millionaires from 400 before the Civil War to 4,047 by 1892.<sup>119</sup> Andrew Carnegie and Rockefeller provided the most prominent figures of achievement during this period since both men rose from humble origins to acquire vast fortunes. However, they owed their success less to the application of Puritan virtues than to their clever manipulation of economic forces: they amassed their riches through maintaining high prices, assimilating or destroying all competition, and paying wages that were barely sufficient for basic survival, practices that had an adverse impact on the general public.<sup>120</sup>

The vast resources commanded by corporations gave them extraordinary control of the American political process, and these institutions of economic power often molded policy to promote their fiduciary interests. Even when popular pressures demanded government action, the resulting laws did not undermine the dictates of the business community. The wealthy used their influence to shape the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887 and the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890. The former was implemented to prevent collusion among the major railroads and to regulate their activities on behalf of consumers, yet Richard Olney, a lawyer for the Boston &

Maine and soon to be Attorney General in the Administration of Grover Cleveland, explained that the Commission could “be of great use to the railroads. It satisfies the popular clamor for a government supervision of the railroads, at the same time that supervision is almost entirely nominal. . . . The part of wisdom is not to destroy the Commission, but to utilize it.”<sup>121</sup> Since this body was comprised of representatives from the very institutions that the act was supposed to govern, this legislation created the semblance of a regulatory apparatus yet failed to change how these firms functioned. The Sherman Antitrust Act, designed to curb the power of business combinations, focused on eliminating practices that undermined competition among industries, and judicial interpretations further weakened this law, employing it to serve the interests of the powerful. In 1895, the Supreme Court applied the Sherman Act in a manner that rendered it completely harmless, arguing that a monopoly of sugar refining was one of manufacturing and not of commerce, which left it outside the parameters of the edict.<sup>122</sup> Further, instead of breaking up major enterprises, this bill actually intensified the consolidation of multiple concerns into singular entities. Between 1894 and 1904, 131 mergers absorbed 1,800 businesses into conglomerates; in this same period, more than half of these acquisitions consumed over 50% of their industries, and nearly a third gained control of 70%.<sup>123</sup> While the Supreme Court utilized the Sherman Act to disband Standard Oil and American Tobacco in 1911, Licht observes that “these firms were broken into separate new concerns, but these new large-scale entities themselves came to dominate their industries. In effect, antimonopolism led to oligopoly, or the control of trades by a few firms, not to truly competitive marketplaces.”<sup>124</sup> As a result, the population had limited means to protect themselves from institutions of economic power, which continued to expand despite statutes designed to check their growth.

Although the development of corporate monopolies posed significant problems, this social framework provided many opportunities through the need for trained professionals to administer the operations of vast conglomerates. The number of these positions increased dramatically from 38,776 in 1870 to 254,880 in 1900.<sup>125</sup> Similar developments were even more pronounced in specific occupations: those employed as managers, proprietors, and inspectors in transportation rose from 12,501 to 67,706; chemists, assayers, and metallurgists in the mineral industry escalated from 774 to 8,947; and foremen and overseers swelled from 186,036 to 676,997.<sup>126</sup> This specialized group of employees made considerably more money than those who toiled in the factories, mines, and mills. In 1875, the average remuneration of \$1,054 for a white-collar worker in Suffolk County, Massachusetts nearly doubled the \$603 of a skilled laborer, and even higher incomes were prevalent in related fields as accountants and bookkeepers could receive up to \$2,000 a year during the 1880s, and clerks had salaries of \$1,500.<sup>127</sup> As a result of such comparatively high earnings, these people were often able to purchase detached, single-family houses outside the city center. For instance, dwellings in the Boston suburbs soared from 8,545 in 1873 to 31,059 in 1900, a growth rate consistent with the areas surrounding New York, Chicago, and most major metropolitan areas during this period.<sup>128</sup> Further, the children of the emerging middle class had greater possibilities for economic advancement than youths from more impoverished backgrounds. The former did not have to augment their families' incomes, which allowed them to obtain the education necessary to enter specialized professions, evident through dramatic increases in the number of doctors, lawyers, and scientists during this period. Notable gains were also apparent for highly-skilled hands, who earned from \$800 to \$1,100 annually.<sup>129</sup> This level of compensation allowed many of them to own homes and luxury items, and their progeny were able to attend school, which is an important indicator of future progress.

These individuals had considerable potential for mobility, which often enabled them to attain higher living standards than their parents, experiences that reflect the contours of the American Dream and project the image of the nation as an open society.

While many were able to improve their social positions during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the prosperity of this era did not engender progress for most workers. The experiences of trained professionals were not indicative of the conditions that faced the majority as only 2.6% of the labor force was employed in these occupations in 1870, a figure that increased to 4.1% by 1900.<sup>130</sup> Stephan Thernstrom observes that for the rest of those engaged in industry, there

were definite rigidities in the occupational structure, a series of barriers that impeded mobility and perpetuated inequality. The level at which a young man entered the labor market strongly influenced the course of his subsequent career. His point of entry into the occupational competition was in turn significantly related to the social-class position of the family in which he was reared. Thus it was that sons of professionals and substantial businessmen were four times as likely as children from low white-collar homes to attain upper white-collar status themselves, 6 ½ times as likely as the sons of skilled workers, and no less than 12 times as likely as the youths from households headed by an unskilled or semiskilled laborer.<sup>131</sup>

This inability to rise in the ranks did not necessarily stem from the attributes of the individual but from wage rates and the extent to which these shaped opportunities for future generations. Skilled laborers, a group that comprised roughly 15% of industrial employees, had annual incomes that allowed for high living standards and reasonable expectations of advancement.<sup>132</sup>

However, 45% of the manufacturing workforce during the 1880s barely subsisted on incomes slightly above the poverty line of \$500 yearly, 40% struggled to survive below this threshold, and a quarter of this group lived in destitution.<sup>133</sup> As a result of compensation that was insufficient to meet physical requirements, parents often had to augment their pay by sending their progeny into the factories, mines, and mills. In his study of Philadelphia, Michael R. Haines found that 77% of families in the bottom economic quartile had to rely partly on the earnings of their offspring, which prevented them from obtaining the education and training necessary to prosper.<sup>134</sup> Examining the prospects for mobility between generations, Thernstrom found that only one in ten children born into the working class succeeded in becoming substantial businessman or professionals and that only three in ten secured positions as clerks, salesman, or proprietors of small shops.<sup>135</sup> Thus, most people found that they had a limited ability to improve their material circumstances and thereby had been excluded from the American Dream.

The possibility of material progress was hindered further due to an unstable economic system characterized by frequent depressions and panics since the consequences of these declines disproportionately affected the working class. The first fiscal catastrophe of the late nineteenth century, the Panic of 1873, stemmed from the financing of Northern Pacific Railway and the control of related concerns over American politics. After the collapse of Jay Cooke & Company and the temporary closing of the New York Stock Exchange, a resulting panic caused banks across the country to fail as people rushed to withdraw their deposits. Over the next few years, 5,000 businesses shut their doors.<sup>136</sup> As a result, unemployment reached three million by 1877-78 with two-fifths of the labor force working only six months out of the year.<sup>137</sup> Although the Panic of 1873 wiped out small firms and intensified the hardships for poor families, some

used market conditions to their advantage and enlarged their fortunes and power. During the crisis, Carnegie captured the steel industry, and Rockefeller eliminated his competitors in oil.<sup>138</sup> The nation experienced another significant downturn from March 1882 to May 1885, which occurred due to a decline in rail construction and related industries, and suffered another serious depression from 1893 to 1898 as a result of rampant speculation and overproduction. The insolvency of the Philadelphia and Reading inaugurated this calamity, and more than 150 enterprises in this field were bankrupt by the middle of 1894, including the Northern Pacific, the Union Pacific, and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe.<sup>139</sup> Following the stock market collapse on May 3, 1893, 360 banks and 8,000 companies failed, two to three million were unemployed, and those who kept their jobs experienced drastic wage reductions.<sup>140</sup> As with the Panic of 1873, the poor suffered disproportionately during the 1890s with 11 million families earning an average of \$380 annually, while the richest 1% collected more income than the poorest 50% and possessed more wealth than the bottom 99%.<sup>141</sup> Reflecting on the Depression of 1893, Lichtenstein observes that drawn “ever more tightly into a national economy, Americans were increasingly vulnerable to economic forces they could not control. What happened on Wall Street now affected the lives of Massachusetts railroad workers and Mississippi sharecroppers who would never own stocks or bonds.”<sup>142</sup> These determiners were not isolated to the 1890s as the recurrent slumps and downturns were disastrous for the impoverished, who lacked the fiduciary means to insulate themselves from the vicissitudes of the financial system.

Workers experienced only moderate gains during the following decades and most continued to find themselves excluded from the periods of material progress that characterized the early twentieth century. Paul Douglas observes that wage rates stagnated between 1890 and 1926 despite the prosperity following the recovery of 1897. These gains continued to accrue to

those in the top income bracket and to highly-skilled employees, while their unskilled counterparts saw their pay decrease until World War I, which caused a temporary increase, yet these people experienced another decline from 1919-1926.<sup>143</sup> During this period, social workers investigated living standards among the poor and estimated the compensation necessary to support an average family in New York City with some measure of health and decency. These figures ranged from a necessary total of \$800 to \$876 for a family of four, to \$505 for a single man, and \$446 for a working woman, yet numerous federal, state, and private studies found that the majority of the population existed beneath this threshold.<sup>144</sup> In a sample of 10,000 male laborers, the United States Commission of Immigration determined that the average payment amounted to \$413 and that nearly half of those who were questioned received less than \$400 annually.<sup>145</sup> From 1911-1915, the New York State Factory Investigating Commission revealed equally troubling evidence of hardship. After surveying 109,481 wage earners, the Factory Commission discovered that most were paid less than \$10 a week and that 15 to 30% received only \$3 to \$6.<sup>146</sup> As a result of these conditions, individuals did not appear to be masters of their fates, and the possibility of rising within American society seemed to be the product of economic forces that inflexibly shaped the course of human experience regardless of any attempts to alter these circumstances.

These developments provide the historical foundation for London's social fiction, which delineates the causative forces that minimize human potential and emphasizes the need for an alternate system to facilitate individual progress. These impulses are manifest in "The Apostate," a work that inverts the success formula of Horatio Alger and illustrates the barriers to mobility under capitalism. Rather than progressing through his exertions, Johnny becomes an automaton, evident through references to his mechanization and the deterioration of his mental



life as his productive capacity increases. Johnny's illness and subsequent flight from the factory allow for the return of his basic humanity, and this outcome signifies that advancement for the protagonist is only feasible through a rejection of the existing economic framework. London extends his treatment of the Deterministic agents that govern the fate of the common people in *The Iron Heel* (1908). This novel portrays the excesses within the free enterprise system, and Avis Everhard's narrative indicates that the powerful will not cede their control over resources and will crush any challenges to their interests. London, however, complicates this depiction through Anthony Meredith's foreword and footnotes written after the successful revolution, which locate the ruling class's brutality in a particular historical moment and expresses the transience of the present order. London also expresses the necessity of change in "The Dream of Debs" (1909), representing a successful general strike that articulates the possibility for improved conditions when laborers operate in concert with one another. The story, narrated by a member of the bourgeoisie, focuses on the destabilization of economic hierarchies through collective action. This occurrence prevents the affluent from coping with the changed circumstances produced by the conflict and reflects the potential strength of a united working class.

*Martin Eden* also centers on the American Dream, invoking both the early formulation of this concept and its revision through the impulses unleashed after the Gold Rush. The novel, originally titled *Success*, stems from London's struggles to transcend the poverty of his early years and to achieve prosperity as a writer. In its representation of the protagonist's efforts to rise above his origins, *Martin Eden* demonstrates the virtues of the Puritan dream as he appears to advance through industry and diligence. Martin's fate, like that of the McTeagues, expresses the destructive nature of these qualities in an environment that prioritizes capital accumulation.

The young author's quest does not exist solely in fiscal terms but has its basis in love and the desire for intellectual growth with money as a means of pursuing these goals. However, the acquisitive impulse governing society precludes the realization of these aspirations, reducing both the heart and mind to mere commodities subject to broader economic forces. Martin's eventual attainment of upward mobility suggests the problematic nature of the American success story: through his affluence and education, he has alienated himself from the working class community that could have sustained him. This advancement indicates that the national myth may be empty even for the rare individual who improves his social position since this development comes at the expense of his identity, and the central character's subsequent suicide signifies his rejection of a framework that values only wealth.

The economic conditions that London portrayed in these narratives were also present after World War I, and many people found that their circumstances remained unchanged from the previous period. This decade was characterized by an increase in inequality. In 1929, the 36,000 wealthiest families received as much income as the 12 million poorest, and 200 companies controlled nearly half of all corporate assets.<sup>147</sup> The affluence among the upper echelon of the economic system did not often lead to improvements for the masses. Six million families earned less than \$2,500 annually, and the top one-tenth had a combined income equal to that of the bottom 42%; overall, corporate profits rose by 62%, while wages experienced modest growth of 5%.<sup>148</sup> This figure, however, does not reflect the circumstances of a significant segment of laborers. Lizbeth Cohen observes that "wages advanced modestly if at all for in big manufacturing sectors such as steel, meatpacking, agricultural implements, and the clothing industry, particularly for the unskilled and semi-skilled workers who predominated in this kind of work."<sup>149</sup> Further, gains for those employed in the automobile, electrical, and printing trades

were offset by decreases for those in coal, shoes, and textiles.<sup>150</sup> This stratification existed even within industries, most notably for those employed by the railroads as the highly-skilled brakemen experienced wage growth of 14%, yet their unskilled counterparts, who comprised one-third of the industry, found themselves earning 2.5% less.<sup>151</sup> The appearance of relative prosperity during the 1920s did not extend to the majority of the working class, who still found themselves laboring for meager compensation.

Conditions for those workers who remained on the soil continued to deteriorate during the early twentieth century, ushering in a more intense period of hardship and imposing more constraints to material progress. Agricultural prices had risen steadily before World War I, and the high demand for crops further improved earnings for the nation's farmers. However, these individuals were victimized by a crisis over the next two decades that stemmed from overexpansion as large European orders for American produce caused growers to enlarge the scope of their operations through funds raised by mortgaging their assets.<sup>152</sup> Between 1910 and 1920, the dollar value of such transactions increased from \$3.3 to \$6.7 billion, a figure that rose by an additional \$2.7 billion through the first half of the twenties.<sup>153</sup> When demand dropped after the war yet output still swelled as a result of technological innovations, nearly half a million people were unable to make their payments and lost their land.<sup>154</sup> The problems facing producers were exacerbated by the increasing concentration of agrarian ownership and the monopolistic control that these conglomerates exerted over the economy. By 1930, half of the farms in the nation yielded nearly 90% of all cash crops, and the resulting inability of small planters to sell their yields caused a surge in foreclosures and forced many more off their property.<sup>155</sup> Instead of the Jefferson yeomanry, the majority of the nation's farmland fell under

the control of a handful of individuals and corporations, who organized agricultural production in line with conventional methods of industrial management.

The Great Depression provided another illustration of the instability of capitalism and further increased material hardship for the poor. The collapse stemmed from the pervasive speculation of the previous decade when share prices drastically outweighed the value of assets, and the stock market crash in October 1929 caused the general failure of the global economy.<sup>156</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith observes that the Depression stemmed from the volatility of the economy as a result of unhealthy banking and corporate structures, an imbalance of trade, misinformation, and rampant inequality as the top 5% of the population received approximately one-third of all personal income.<sup>157</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the crash, 5,000 banks failed, and a large number of businesses closed because of insufficient demand and the unavailability of credit.<sup>158</sup> Between 1929 and 1933, the gross national product fell by 29% with even more drastic declines in individual industries: construction dropped by 78%, manufacturing by 54%, and investment by 98%.<sup>159</sup> These regressions lead to disastrous consequences for laborers, and by the spring of 1933, nearly one in four wage earners was out of work.<sup>160</sup> The Ford Motor Company, which had employed 128,000 people in the spring of 1929, was down to 37,000 by August 1931, and nearly 140,000 workers from textile mills in New England were unemployed by the end of 1930.<sup>161</sup> Those who managed to retain their jobs did not emerge from the Depression unscathed as companies, rather than fire all of their employees, reduced their days and hours dramatically with a commensurate decrease in their income. The Depression exemplified the inability of the free market to sustain the working class, erasing the modest gains from the previous period and further undermining the ability of citizens to subsist, let alone prosper.

Workers did not acquiesce to their economic subordination during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; instead, they organized themselves into trade unions to promote their interests against the bitter and often violent opposition of the owners, with strikes as the principal means of increasing wages and improving conditions. Melvyn Dubofsky observes that by “the end of the nineteenth century, then, the strike had become the wage worker’s primary line of defense against employers’ exactions. Together with the trade union, it served as the characteristic form of response by workers to an industrial society, their adoption of new rules for the game.”<sup>162</sup> After the Great Upheaval of 1887, these practices intensified during the 1880s with an average of 500 work stoppages annually from 1881 to 1885 and peaked with 1,411 in 1886 involving 499,489 people.<sup>163</sup> Many of these disputes pertained to demands for an eight-hour day, and 340,000 laborers participated in various actions toward this objective with 190,000 striking on May Day.<sup>164</sup> The most notable demonstrations occurred in Chicago when 80,000 shut down most industries in the city.<sup>165</sup> The industrial conflicts of the 1890s offer a parallel illustration of attempts by the working class to gain control over the economic forces that shaped the nation, most notably during the Homestead Strike of 1892 and the Pullman Boycott of 1894. In the former, steelworkers fought off the importation of strikebreakers by Pinkerton detectives and gained control of Carnegie’s Homestead plant. In the latter, the American Railway Union (A. R. U.) organized a boycott of all trains hauling Pullman cars, and the resulting actions paralyzed shipping and transit throughout the country.<sup>166</sup> However, these early successes only supplied the impetus for what became the standard pattern of managerial response as executives secured court injunctions against their employees, which were enforced by federal troops and state militias; local police forces arrested the leaders; and those who walked off their jobs were blacklisted. These practices led to the weakening of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and

Steel Workers and the A. R. U., ultimately culminating in victories for Carnegie and Pullman. Although both struggles ended in defeat, they further radicalized labor by demonstrating the collective strength of the producers and paved the way for the labor militancy that characterized the early twentieth century.

This pattern of unrest continued throughout World War I as inflation cancelled out earlier increases in compensation, and the government suspended safety, hour, and child labor regulations that had been won through decades of struggle. Philip S. Foner notes that 4,359 strikes and lockouts occurred during 1917, an increase of 700 over 1916 and 3,000 over 1914.<sup>167</sup> Further, 19,915 work stoppages transpired between 1914 and 1918, and 7,414 took place during the two years the nation was at war.<sup>168</sup> These disputes forced the federal government to give unions an extensive role in determining and administering industrial policies through the National War Labor Board, an advisory body that advanced the principles of collective bargaining, the eight-hour day, living-wage guarantees, and equal pay for women.<sup>169</sup> After the war, employees tried to consolidate the gains they had made during the previous years, while employers sought to roll back these advances. In response, nearly four million people, one fifth of the workforce, walked off their jobs in 1919.<sup>170</sup> The Seattle General Strike set the tone for the year when 35,000 shipyard laborers went out to demand higher incomes, and they were joined by 65,000 people, who took control over the city and provided essential services for the populace.<sup>171</sup> While this action eventually ended as a result of pressure from national union leaders, this demonstration of solidarity spread to various industries throughout the nation. In New York, 50,000 clothing workers struck and won a forty-four hour week; in New England, female telephone operators forced the Post Office Department, which was still running the phone system, to increase their wages; and 425,000 coal miners stopped toiling despite a court

injunction against doing so, eventually winning a 14% pay increase and arbitration of their grievances.<sup>172</sup>

The Depression precipitated a reawakening of an organized and militant trade union movement that provided the working class with a means to promote their interests. One of the most significant disputes occurred in San Francisco during the spring of 1934 when a clash between police and longshoremen engendered a general strike involving 130,000 people, and this cessation paralyzed shipping on the West Coast and halted commerce in the city.<sup>173</sup> The turbulence of this event, in addition to similar conflicts in Minneapolis and Toledo, contributed to the passage of the National Labor Relations Act of 1935. Informally known as the Wagner Act, this measure banned unfair practices, guaranteed that individuals could select their own representation, established the right to strike and picket against their employers, and formed the National Labor Relations Board to arbitrate grievances. Despite this important development, conflicts intensified throughout the period. Corporations routinely sought to cut wages and rollback the gains from previous decades, and employees responded by implementing a new tactic, the sit-down strike, that involved remaining in the factory or walking out. This approach had many advantages over more traditional methods as companies could no longer import replacement workers, laborers controlled the situation themselves, and employers were less likely to use violence since such practices might damage expensive machinery.<sup>174</sup> After rubber workers in Akron successfully employed this technique in 1936, there were 48 sit downs that year, and this number increased to 477 in 1937.<sup>175</sup> The longest such occurrence took place at the Fisher Body Plant # 1 from December of 1936 until February of 1937, which spread to other General Motors' plants in the area and eventually forced the company to recognize the United Automobile Workers. The agitation of the period also gave rise to important concessions, most

notably the Minimum Wage Act of 1938 and the Social Security Act. The first instituted the forty-hour week, a gain sought for five decades, and outlawed child labor, while the second supplied retirement benefits and unemployment insurance. These measures created the basic framework of state policy that allowed for the expansion and prosperity following World War II.

This period in California was also characterized by bitter conflicts that often turned violent when workers challenged the institutions and individuals who controlled the state. As McWilliams observes, “the industrial character of California agriculture was firmly established. The industry was organized from top to bottom; methods of operation had been thoroughly rationalized; control tended more and more to be vested in the hands of the large growers.”<sup>176</sup> These men considered themselves to be businessmen rather than farmers as they presided over their vast estates, which relied on a migrant workforce to pick crops for low wages and without union representation. Recognizing the limited opportunities for advancement, 48,000 people, the vast majority of whom were Mexican American, undertook 37 strikes in 1933, and there were 156 more between 1933 and 1939.<sup>177</sup> In response to these disputes, anti-union forces mobilized later that year, terrorizing agricultural districts in addition to beating organizers and their supporters. The most powerful anti-labor group in the state was the Associated Farmers, a network of bankers, industrialists, Chamber of Commerce groups, shippers, utilities, and landowners that had strong ties to local police.<sup>178</sup> The collective strength of this organization manifested during the Salinas Lettuce Strike of 1936 when the organization coordinated the resistance of the growers, assembling local police and sheriff’s deputies, the Highway Patrol, and local vigilantes to end the dispute through violent means.<sup>179</sup> The dispute ended on November third with the complete victory of the growers and shippers, who replicated these tactics the following year in Stockton.



These developments supply the historical foundation for Steinbeck's fiction from the 1930s, which also portrays the systemic forces that imperil the downtrodden and illustrates how the concentration of land ownership further serves to restrict progress for the individual. This theme is central to *In Dubious Battle*, which examines how unbridled capitalism can adversely impact men and women at all levels of society and engenders alternative models for action that offer little hope for improved circumstances. Steinbeck juxtaposes the inhumanity of the owners with the opportunism of the Communists, who seem to view the workers in abstract terms. While the narrative does not present the organizers favorably, it indicates that the primary responsibility for suffering rests on those who preside over an economic arrangement that limits general prosperity to the extent that the common people can only attempt to protect their interests through tactics that deviate from ideal conduct. Steinbeck suggests the dubious nature of the conflict through Jim Nolan, who perceives the pickers' cause in terms of his personal fulfillment and cannot transcend the confines of his ego, in addition to Doc Burton, who reduces the strikers to abstractions in accordance with his scientific formulations. The novel provides a counterpoint to Jim and Doc through the perspective of Mac as he situates the immediate concerns of labor within a broader structure that gives the working class a means to create conditions favorable to their welfare and does so without subordinating the group to revolutionary dogma.

*The Grapes of Wrath* advances a similar view of people as victims of a restrictive social structure. The novel reflects the underside of the California dream, presenting characters who are at the mercy of both natural and economic forces. Steinbeck develops the former through the drought that keeps the earth from supporting the farmers and with the floods later in the narrative that end the Joads' fleeting moment of prosperity. These elements pale in comparison to the financial institutions in Oklahoma that view the soil only in terms of the profits it could yield,

and these agents have a counterpart in the growers in California, whose apparent greed prevents the abundance of the fields from sustaining the poor. These causative agents drive the Joads from their land, with its connection to their lives and histories, and engender their migration to California, where they are exploited by those who control resources. Contrary to Norris, and in concert with London, Steinbeck suggests that while individuals are seemingly powerless against the dictates of the Deterministic world, they can improve the conditions under which they live by acting in unison with one another. This potential manifests through the Joads' progression from a narrow focus on their interests to an outlook that emphasizes the needs of the broader human community. Through their shared experiences, the Joads begin to realize the benefits of cooperation, which Steinbeck underscores through the events at Weedpatch and the interchapters. This shift toward a collective consciousness, culminating in Tom's movement toward activism and Rose of Sharon nursing the starving man, demonstrates the capacity for the working class to create structures to defend their interests against the imperatives of capital.

The engagement of Norris, London, and Steinbeck with the Deterministic forces that hinder advancement highlights the political impulses of Naturalism and the broader ideological ends of these writers. By representing how unbridled capitalism has corrupted the American Dream, these novelists identify the causative agents behind the conditions facing most of the population with the aim of ultimately improving society for those who produce its wealth. While these authors did not engender the change they sought, their fiction still serves the important function of contextualizing the experience of the working class and illuminating causes for justice to create a nation in which individuals can maximize their capabilities and realize their aspirations.

## Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> The most notable exception to this trend is Mary Lawlor, *Recalling the Wild: Naturalism and the Closing of the American West* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000). Lawlor examines the fiction of Frank Norris, Jack London, Stephen Crane, and Willa Cather against the romanticized narratives of the West in American Fiction. Lawlor's emphasis on discursive and formal models, however, overlooks the broader historical, economic, and political developments in California that serve as the basis for the fiction of London and Norris.

<sup>2</sup> Claude Bernard, *An Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*, trans. Henry Copley Greene (1865; repr., New York: Macmillan, 1949), 137.

<sup>3</sup> Emile Zola, *The Experimental Novel*, trans. Belle M. Sherman (1880; repr., New York: Haskell House, 1964), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Zola, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Zola, 26.

<sup>6</sup> Rod W. Horton and Herbert Edwards, *Background of American Literary Thought* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1952), 260.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Pizer, *Twentieth-Century American Literary Naturalism: An Interpretation* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Lars Åhnebrink, *The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1950), 142.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Beer, *Stephen Crane: A Study in American Letters* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1923), 157.

<sup>10</sup> Frank Norris, "Zola as Romantic Writer," *Wave* 15 (June 27, 1896), 3; repr. in *The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris*, ed. Donald Pizer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 72.

<sup>11</sup> V. L. Parrington, *The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920*, vol. 3 (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1930), 323.

<sup>12</sup> George J. Becker, "Introduction: Modern Realism as a Literary Movement," *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, ed. George J. Becker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 35.

<sup>13</sup> William Dean Howells, "Editor's Study," *Harper's* (November 1889): 966.

<sup>14</sup> William Dean Howells, "Dostoyevsky and the More Smiling Aspects of Life," *Harper's* 73 (September 1886): 642.

<sup>15</sup> Norris, "Zola as Romantic Writer," 71.

<sup>16</sup> Norris, "Zola as Romantic Writer," 72.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Child Walcutt, *American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), viii.

<sup>18</sup> Donald Pizer, *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), 31.

<sup>19</sup> Pizer, *Realism and Naturalism*, 13

<sup>20</sup> Pizer, *Twentieth-Century*, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 27.

<sup>22</sup> June Howard, *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 70.

<sup>23</sup> Howard, 29.

<sup>24</sup> For further theoretical analyses of Naturalism, see Harold Kaplan, *Power and Order: Henry Adams and the Naturalist Tradition in American Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Lee Clark Mitchell, *Determined Fictions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); and Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Crane, *The Portable Stephen Crane*, ed. Joseph Katz (New York: Viking, 1969), 1.

<sup>26</sup> Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (1901; repr., New York: Signet, 1961), 74.

<sup>27</sup> George Wilbur Meyer, "A New Interpretation of *The Octopus*," *College English* 4 (1943): 357.

<sup>28</sup> Frank Norris, "The Novel with a Purpose," *World's Work* 4 (May 1902), 2117-19; repr. in *The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris*, 93.

<sup>29</sup> John Steinbeck, "Acceptance," *Nobel Lectures: Literature, 1901-1967*, ed. Horst Frenz (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1969), 575-76.

<sup>30</sup> Donald Pizer, *The Novels of Frank Norris* (1966; repr., New York: Haskell House, 1973), 52.

<sup>31</sup> Robert D. Lundy, *The Making of "McTeague" and "The Octopus"*, Ph.D. dissertation (Berkeley: University of California, 1956), 149-53; and Jesse S. Crisler, *A Critical and Textual Study of Frank Norris's "McTeague"*, Ph.D. dissertation (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1973), 39-62.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph R. McElrath and Jesse S. Crisler, *Frank Norris: A Life* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 341.

<sup>33</sup> Lundy, 211-12.

<sup>34</sup> Jack London, "The Octopus," *Impressions Quarterly* 2 (June 1901): 45-47; repr. in *The Social Writings of Jack London*, ed. Philip S. Foner (Secaucus: Citadel Press, 1964), 507-11. In one of the few commentaries on a Naturalist by one of his contemporaries, London observes that no "man, not large of heart, lacking in spontaneous sympathy, incapable of great enthusiasms could have written *The Octopus*" and that Norris "has laid down the materialistic conception of history, or, more politely, the economic interpretation of history" (508). While London does object to Norris's "inordinate realism," which detracts from the flow of the narrative, such considerations are inconsequential since Norris "*has produced results. Titanic results. . . . It was the only way to get results, the only way to paint the broad canvas he has painted, with the sunflare in his brush*" (509).

<sup>35</sup> Steven T. Dhondt, "'There is a Good Time Coming': Jack London's Spirit of Proletarian Revolt," *Jack London Newsletter* 3, no. 1 (1970): 27-28.

<sup>36</sup> Earle Labor and Jeanne Campbell Reesman, *Jack London* (New York: Twayne, 1994), 64-65.

<sup>37</sup> Charles N. Watson, Jr., *The Novels of Jack London: A Reappraisal* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 103-12.

<sup>38</sup> Warren French, *John Steinbeck's Fiction Revisited* (New York: Twayne, 1994), 69.

<sup>39</sup> Jackson J. Benson and Anne Loftis, "John Steinbeck and Farm Labor Unionization: The Background of *In Dubious Battle*," *American Literature* 52 (1980): 202.

<sup>40</sup> Benson and Loftis, 202.

<sup>41</sup> Jackson J. Benson, "'To Tom, Who Lived It': John Steinbeck and the Man from Weedpatch," *Journal of Modern Literature* 5, no. 2 (1976): 174-75.

<sup>42</sup> Robert DeMott, Introduction to *Working Days: The Journals of "The Grapes of Wrath," 1938-1941* (New York: Penguin, 1989), xxxviii-xlii.

<sup>43</sup> Norris, "Zola as Romantic Writer," 71.

<sup>44</sup> Pizer, *Twentieth-Century*, 6-7.

<sup>45</sup> Pizer, *Twentieth Century*, 6.

<sup>46</sup> For further discussion of Darwin's influence, see Arthur E. Jones, Jr., "Darwinism and Its Relationship to Realism and Naturalism in American Fiction, 1860 to 1900," *Drew University Bulletin* 38 (1950): 3-21; and Paul Civello, *American Literary Naturalism and its Twentieth-Century Transformations* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 6-23.

<sup>47</sup> James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (Garden City: Blue Ribbon Books, 1931), 404.

<sup>48</sup> Jennifer Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 4.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in T. H. Breen, *Puritans and Adventurers: Change and Persistence in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 72.

<sup>50</sup> John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," in *Pragmatism and Religion: Classical Sources and Original Essays*, ed. Stuart Rosenbaum (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 23.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682-1763* (1948; repr. New York: Norton, 1963), 4.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Tolles, 54.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Tolles, 33-34.

<sup>54</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography and Other Writings* (1781; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 84-85.

<sup>55</sup> Benjamin Franklin, "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America," *The Works of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 2, ed. Jared Sparks (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, and Company, 1836), 471.

<sup>56</sup> Franklin, "Information," 471-72.

<sup>57</sup> J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782; repr., New York: Penguin, 1981), 83

<sup>58</sup> Crèvecoeur, 84.

<sup>59</sup> Crèvecoeur, 89-90.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas Jefferson, "The Declaration of Independence," in *The Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution of the United States*, ed. James Brown Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1917), 3.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785; repr., New York: Penguin, 1999), 170.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 20 December 1787, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 39 vols., eds. Julian P. Boyd, et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950-), 12: 442.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *Days of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the American Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 193.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Rohrbough, 193.



<sup>65</sup> Kevin Starr, *Americans and the California Dream, 1850-1915* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 65-66.

<sup>66</sup> H. W. Brands, *The Age of Gold* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 442.

<sup>67</sup> Ray Ginger, *The Age of Excess: The United States from 1877 to 1914* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 20; and Walter Licht, *Industrializing America: The Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), xvi.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Rohrbough, 27.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft* (San Francisco: The History Company, 1882-90), 6: 60.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Rohrbough, 26. The popular imagination has long equated California with the possibility of prosperity framed by abundant natural resources. In 1863, Edward Everett Hale sent a paper to the American Antiquarian Society, which was republished in *The Atlantic Monthly* in March 1864 and identified the source of “California” in Garci Ordóñez de Montalvo’s *Las Sergas de Esplandián* (1510), which chronicled the exploits of Esplandián along with the Californians, who resided on an island of immense wealth and fought with golden weapons. In 1533, a party of Spanish explorers under the command of Hernán Cortés landed on what they believed to be this island in the Pacific Ocean. After 1539, they named their discovery “California” after this locale, and they hoped to find the gold and precious stones described in Montalvo’s romance. Cortés arrived in Baja California at La Paz in 1535 and spent two years trying to found a colony due to the prevalent belief that the region contained El Dorado, the fabled city of gold. When this search proved futile, Cortés turned his attention to the North and sent his lieutenant, Francisco Ulloa, to explore the sea between Mexico and the alleged island of California in the hopes of discovering the seven cities of Cíbola. This conception of El Dorado

played a central role in the Gold Rush with its metaphoric suggestion of any place where fortunes could be rapidly acquired and continues to shape ideas of California. The dreams of the conquistadors reemerged following the annexation of Mexican California and the discovery of this precious metal, merging the mythic conceptions of the Spanish with the reality of the modern territory with its expectation of sudden wealth in which anyone could attain prosperity.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Malcolm J. Rohrbough, “‘We Will Make Our Fortunes – No Doubt of It’: The Worldwide Rush to California,” in *Riches for All: The California Gold Rush and the World*, ed. Kenneth N. Owens (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 63-64.

<sup>72</sup> Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2005), 80.

<sup>73</sup> Bancroft, 23: 118.

<sup>74</sup> Starr, *California*, 81.

<sup>75</sup> Starr, *California*, 83.

<sup>76</sup> Walton Bean and James J. Rawls, *California: An Interpretive History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983), 95.

<sup>77</sup> Rohrbough, 205-06.

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Brands, 211-12.

<sup>79</sup> Mary Hill, *Gold: The California Story* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 56. The most notorious of the speculators was Sam Brannan, an enterprising merchant who stockpiled every article of mining equipment he could find at his store near Sutter’s Mill. To further increase the value of his merchandise, he filled a jar with gold dust and rode down to San Francisco to announce Marshall’s discovery. This effort paid off as his store grossed an average of \$5,000 per day through the summer and fall of 1848, and Brannan would become the wealthiest man in the state by overcharging miners for essential supplies (Brands, 276). Vicente

Pérez Rosales noted that Brannan's store, "situated right on the road to the placers, was admirably supplied with all that could be desired for the tasks incidental to mining. I say nothing about prices, since they gave the retailer only the infinitesimal profit of five hundred or a thousand per cent or so" (Brands, 212). These inflated prices had a parallel in the exorbitant sums charged for essential goods, food, and medicine, in the mining districts, which allowed a small number of speculators to grow wealthy at the expense of the miners.

<sup>80</sup> Brian Roberts, *American Alchemy: The California Gold Rush and Middle-Class Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 156.

<sup>81</sup> J. S. Holliday, *The World Rushed In: The California Gold Rush Experience* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 307.

<sup>82</sup> Rohrbough, 197.

<sup>83</sup> David Vaught, *After the Gold Rush: Tarnished Dreams in the Sacramento Valley* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in Peter J. Blodgett, *Land of Golden Dreams: California in the Gold Rush Decade, 1848-1858* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1999), 66.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in John Walton Caughey, *Gold is the Cornerstone* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948), 293.

<sup>86</sup> Vaught, 6-7.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Starr, *Americans and the California Dream*, 55.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Starr, *Americans and the California Dream*, 56.

<sup>89</sup> John Boessenecker, *Gold Dust and Gunsmoke* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1999), 324.

<sup>90</sup> Boessenecker, 323-24.

<sup>91</sup> Starr, *California*, 80.

<sup>92</sup> Bean and Rawls, 129.

<sup>93</sup> Bean and Rawls, 129.

<sup>94</sup> Henry George, *Our Land and Land Policy: Speeches, Lectures, and Miscellaneous Writings* (New York: Doubleday and McClure, 1901), 39.

<sup>95</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (1935; repr., Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 21-22.

<sup>96</sup> Quoted in McWilliams, 15.

<sup>97</sup> Starr, *Americans and the California Dream*, 138.

<sup>98</sup> McWilliams, 20-23.

<sup>99</sup> McWilliams, 18.

<sup>100</sup> Henry George, *Progress and Poverty, an Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth* (1879; repr., New York: Robert Schalkenbach, 1929), 266.

<sup>101</sup> Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1980), 248.

<sup>102</sup> McWilliams, 15.

<sup>103</sup> McWilliams, 17.

<sup>104</sup> George Mowry, *The California Progressives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 9.

<sup>105</sup> Mowry, 16.

<sup>106</sup> Mowry, 9.

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Bean and Rawls, 247.

<sup>108</sup> Spencer C. Olin, *California's Prodigal Sons: Hiram Johnson and the Progressives, 1911-1917* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 4-9.

<sup>109</sup> Mowry, 18.

<sup>110</sup> Mowry, 18.

<sup>111</sup> Nelson Lichtenstein, Susan Strasser, and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *Who Built America? Working People and the Nation's Economy, Politics, Culture and Society* (New York: Worth, 2000), 69.

<sup>112</sup> Cal Jillson, *Pursuing the American Dream: Opportunity and Exclusion over Four Centuries* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 122.

<sup>113</sup> Lichtenstein, Strasser, and Rosenzweig, 28.

<sup>114</sup> Glenn Porter, *The Rise of Big Business 1860-1920* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 2006), 4.

<sup>115</sup> Porter, 39.

<sup>116</sup> Porter, 40.

<sup>117</sup> Zinn, 251.

<sup>118</sup> Zinn, 252.

<sup>119</sup> Ginger, 97.

<sup>120</sup> Matthew Josephson, *The Robber Barons* (New York: Harcourt, 1934).

<sup>121</sup> William M. Wiecek, *The Lost World of Classical Legal Thought: Law and Ideology in America, 1889-1937* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 147.

<sup>122</sup> Naomi R. Lamoreaux, *The Great Merger Movement in American Business, 1895-1904* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 165-66.

<sup>123</sup> Licht, 158; and Lamoreaux, 108.

<sup>124</sup> Licht, 159.

<sup>125</sup> Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), 37-38.

<sup>126</sup> Bledstein, 37-38.

<sup>127</sup> Stephan Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians: Poverty and Progress in the American Metropolis, 1880-1970* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 298; Stuart R. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 274.

<sup>128</sup> Blumin, 277.

<sup>129</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 90.

<sup>130</sup> Bledstein, 36.

<sup>131</sup> Thernstrom, 257.

<sup>132</sup> Trachtenberg, 90.

<sup>133</sup> Trachtenberg, 90.

<sup>134</sup> Michael R. Haines, "Poverty, Economic Stress, and the Family in a Late Nineteenth-Century American City: Whites in Philadelphia, 1880," in *Philadelphia: Work, Space, Family, and Group Experience in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Essays toward an Interdisciplinary History of the City*, ed. Theodore Hershberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 260.

<sup>135</sup> Thernstrom, 241.

<sup>136</sup> Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 10 vols. (New York: International Publishers, 1947), 1: 439.

<sup>137</sup> Foner, 1: 439.

<sup>138</sup> Josephson, 172-73.

<sup>139</sup> Eric T. L. Love, *Race over Empire: Racism and U. S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 80; and Charles Hoffman, *The Depression of the Nineties: An Economic History* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1970), 109.

<sup>140</sup> Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919* (New York: Norton, 1987), 116.

<sup>141</sup> Trachtenberg, 99.

<sup>142</sup> Lichtenstein, Strasser, and Rosenzweig, 123.

<sup>143</sup> Paul Douglas, *Real Wages in the United States, 1890-1926* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), 178-79.

<sup>144</sup> Melvyn Dubofsky, *When Workers Organize: New York City in the Progressive Era* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1968), 12.

<sup>145</sup> Dubofsky, 12.

<sup>146</sup> Dubofsky, 12.

<sup>147</sup> Gwendolyn Mink and Alice O'Connor, *Poverty in the United States: An Encyclopedia of History, Politics, and Policy* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 26.

<sup>148</sup> Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression: America, 1929-1941* (New York: Times Books, 1994), 38; and Meyer Weinberg, *A Short History of American Capitalism* (New York: New History Press, 2002), 209-10.

<sup>149</sup> Lizbeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 102.

<sup>150</sup> Mink and O'Connor, 26.

<sup>151</sup> Lichtenstein, Strasser, and Rosenzweig, 325.

<sup>152</sup> McElvaine, 36.

<sup>153</sup> McElvaine, 36.

<sup>154</sup> Lichtenstein, Strasser, and Rosenzweig, 342-43.

<sup>155</sup> Lichtenstein, Strasser, and Rosenzweig, 344.

<sup>156</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Great Crash 1929* (1955; repr., Boston: Mariner Books, 2009), 169.

<sup>157</sup> Galbraith, 177-186.

<sup>158</sup> Mink and O'Connor, 26.

<sup>159</sup> McElvaine, 75.

<sup>160</sup> McElvaine, 75.

<sup>161</sup> Zinn, 378.

<sup>162</sup> Dubofsky, *Industrialism and the American Worker, 1865-1920* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 1996), 41.

<sup>163</sup> Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1997), 47. For a further discussion of the Great Upheaval, see Philip S. Foner, *The Great Labor Uprising of 1877* (New York: Monad Press, 1977). For concise overviews of this dispute, John Rogers Commons, *History of Labour in the United States*, 2 vols., (New York: A. M. Kelley, 1966), 185-91; Foner, *History*, 1: 464-74; and Brecher, 13-37. For detailed analysis of the strikes of 1885-86, see James Green, *Death in the Haymarket: The Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement, and the Bombing That Divided Gilded Age America* (New York: Pantheon, 2006); and Theresa A. Case, *The Great Southwest Railroad Strike and Free Labor* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 2010). For more condensed versions, see Foner, *History*, 2: 93-114; and Commons, 2:356-94; and Brecher, 39-68.



<sup>164</sup> Brecher, 56.

<sup>165</sup> Brecher, 56.

<sup>166</sup> For a discussion of the Homestead Strike, see Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead, 1880-1892: Politics, Culture, and Steel* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992); Foner, *History*, 2: 206-218; Commons, 2:495-98; and Brecher, 69-80. For an overview of the Pullman Boycott, see Almont Lindsey, *The Pullman Strike: The Story of a Unique Experiment and of a Great Labor Upheaval* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1942); Foner, *History*, 2: 261-278; Commons, 2: 500-08; and Brecher, 98-112.

<sup>167</sup> Foner, *History*, 7: 169.

<sup>168</sup> Foner, *History*, 7: 169.

<sup>169</sup> Foner, *History*, 7: 174-75.

<sup>170</sup> Mitchell Newton-Matza and Peter C. Mancall, *Jazz Age: People and Perspectives* (Westport: Greenwood, 2009), 131.

<sup>171</sup> Painter, 347.

<sup>172</sup> Brecher, 130-32 and 151-52.

<sup>173</sup> Brecher, 166-74.

<sup>174</sup> Sidney Fine, *Sit-Down: The General Motors Strike of 1936-1937* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 121.

<sup>175</sup> Zinn, 391.

<sup>176</sup> Quoted in *On the Dirty Plate Trail: Remembering the Dust Bowl Refugee Camps*, ed. Donald Wixson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 55.

<sup>177</sup> Daniel Cornford, "Editor's Introduction," *Working People of California*, ed. Daniel Cornford (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 208.

<sup>178</sup> McWilliams, 232-39.

<sup>179</sup> T. H. Watkins, *The Hungry Years: A Narrative History of the Great Depression in America* (New York: Henry Holt and company, 1999), 440-41.

## CHAPTER 2

## TWISTED FROM THE ORDINARY: ECONOMIC DETERMINISM IN FRANK NORRIS'S

*McTEAGUE* and *THE OCTOPUS*

Frank Norris has a central role in Naturalism since he was the first writer in the United States to produce a consistently Deterministic explanation for behavior. Reflecting on this broader significance, Joseph R. McElrath, Jr. observes that “Norris registered dramatically the transition from the age of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman to that of Fitzgerald and Steinbeck. More specifically, he signaled the movement away from Victorian cultural values – and especially from the defunct metaphysical idealism that Zola so despised to the more positivistic and pragmatic modern sensibility at the turn of the century.”<sup>1</sup> Following Rebecca Harding Davis, Hamlin Garland, and Stephen Crane, Norris presents protagonists at the mercy of insuperable forces that shape their fates, which challenges Realistic views of people as sovereign individuals who can be held accountable for their actions. While the body of scholarship on Norris attests to his importance, many critics question both his artistry and the ideas developed in his books. For instance, Walter Berthoff asserts that “composition in Norris’s novels seems to be reckoned exclusively in calculations of decibels and gross tonnage,” and Donald Pizer opines that “Frank Norris was not a great novelist. His work lacks the breadth and depth of human understanding that we require of the greatest writers of fiction.”<sup>2</sup> Contrary to the claims of Norris’s detractors, *McTeague* and *The Octopus* exhibit artistic complexity and philosophical

consistency as these novels are unified by an examination of the environmental pressures that adversely impact his central characters. Through the use of California history in these works, Norris illustrates the causative agents that impede economic mobility and provides a means of understanding the structures that constrain human potential.

Norris is a unique figure in American Naturalism since he, unlike his contemporaries, actually discussed his works in relation to this movement, which he also addressed in a number of essays. In a letter to Isaac Frederick Marcosson explaining the *Epic of Wheat*, Norris wrote that in *The Octopus*, “I am going back *definitely* to the style of MacT. and stay with it right along. . . . The Wheat series will be straight naturalism with all the guts I can get into it.”<sup>3</sup> Norris’s conception of Naturalist fiction stems largely from his immersion in the literature of Emile Zola, to whom he referred in numerous articles that reveal the central thematic concerns of Norris’s *oeuvre*.<sup>4</sup> He first mentioned Zola in a review of *Rome* (1896), noting that this text “leaves one with an impression of immensity, of vast illimitable forces, of a breadth of view and enormity of imagination almost too great to be realized. You lay the book down, breathless; for the moment, all other books, even all other *things*, seem small and trivial.”<sup>5</sup> This focus on elements beyond immediate control anticipates Norris’s primary subjects. These impulses are evident in *McTeague* through its treatment of a protagonist assailed by economic forces he cannot alter and in *The Octopus* through its representation of the railroad and its effects on the ranchers. Norris returned to his French predecessor in “Zola as Romantic Writer,” observing that the “world of M. Zola is a world of big things; the enormous, the formidable, the terrible is what counts; no teacup tragedies here” and that everything within “is extraordinary, imaginative, grotesque even, with a vague note of terror quivering through like the vibration of an ominous and low-pitched diapason.”<sup>6</sup> This emphasis on aberrations from commonplace experiences

indicates a major theme in Norris's books as he situates *McTeague* among the lower classes in an urban environment and traces the principals' deterioration through the workings of an inexorable Fate. Further, the reference to "teacup tragedies" denotes the restrictions of Howellsian Realism, with its presentation of middle-class characters and settings, and Norris expresses the need for the American novel to address a broader range of issues that reflect the human condition.

This contrast between Zola and Howells establishes a primary component of Norris's conception of Naturalism, which he defines not as an extension of Realism but as a synthesis of the verisimilitude of this movement and the philosophical depth associated with the Romantics. Defining these literary trends, Norris asserts that the latter "is the kind of fiction that takes cognizance of variations from the type of normal life. Realism is the kind of fiction that confines itself to the type of normal life."<sup>7</sup> Norris indicates that this focus is problematic because it involves the "meticulous presentation of teacups, rag carpets, wall paper and haircloth sofas, stopping with these, going no deeper than it sees, choosing the ordinary, the untroubled, the commonplace."<sup>8</sup> For Norris, this practice illustrates the surface of existence through detailing the circumstances facing average individuals and thereby advancing a limited examination of terrestrial life. Norris's criticism of Howellsian Realism stems from its emphasis on accuracy, "a mere machine-made thing that comes with niggardly research and ciphering and mensuration and the multiplication table," rather than the pursuit of a broader truth, which cannot be ascertained through such methods.<sup>9</sup> Norris identifies Romanticism as a means of transcending this approximation of superficial forms since it provides "an instrument with which we may go straight through the clothes and tissues and wrappings of flesh down deep into the red, living heart of things" and allows the writer to trace "the unplumbed depths of the human heart, and the mystery of sex, and the problems of life, and the black, unsearched penetralia of the soul of

man.”<sup>10</sup> This approach presents a means to perceive the causative agents that shape the human enterprise. Norris argues that Naturalist fiction successfully negotiates a balance between these positions, posing the questions

what school, then, is midway between the Realists and Romanticists, taking the best from each? Is it not the school of Naturalism, which strives hard for accuracy and truth? The nigger is out of the fence at last, but must it not be admitted that the author of *La Débâcle* (not the author of *La Terre* and *Fécondité*) is up to the present stage of literary development the most adequate, the most satisfactory, the most just of them all?<sup>11</sup>

In this view, novelists should not reproduce reality with the authenticity of a photograph but must rearrange experience through the mechanics of their craft to reveal the forces that govern the actions of men and women, and this understanding explicates the ideas underlying Norris's writings.

Norris does not portray Naturalism as a primarily aesthetic enterprise; rather, he presents the movement as a means to delineate the causative agents that shape human affairs, to expose injustice, and to ultimately engender social change. Norris highlights the novelist's role in molding opinion, asserting the need for a literary conscience in order to write novels that guide the public. In "The Novel with a 'Purpose,'" Norris claims that the best class of books "proves something, draws conclusions from a whole congeries of forces, social tendencies, race impulses, devotes itself not to a study of men but of man."<sup>12</sup> This desire to probe the inner workings of men and society speaks directly to the central premise of Naturalist fiction, with its basis of explaining the material and hereditary forces governing individuals and limiting their possible achievements. Norris further contends that in these narratives, the "social tendencies must be

expressed by means of analysis of the characters of the men and women who compose that society, and the two must be combined and manipulated to evolve the purpose—to find the value of *x*.”<sup>13</sup> For Norris, literature should reveal a fundamental truth about experience as it appears to the author, who must represent these observations in a manner that informs and directs readers to purposeful action. In “The Responsibilities of the Novelist,” Norris declares that the people

have a right to the Truth as they have a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is *not* right that they be exploited and deceived with false views of life, false characters, false sentiment, false morality, false history, false philosophy, false emotions, false heroism, false notions of self-sacrifice, false views of religion, of duty, of conduct, and of manners.<sup>14</sup>

In Norris’s formulations, writers must be conscious of the social function of their works and delve past the surface forms of existence to perceive the deeper causes of suffering, which can theoretically be ameliorated by popular pressure.

California reflects the central components of Norris’s definition of Naturalism, offering an appropriate setting for an examination of these concerns and enabling the writer to scrutinize the broad scope of human affairs. This point was evident to some of his earliest reviewers. Marcossan viewed *McTeague* as “artistic evidence of the determination of its author to build out of the Western city life the fiction of California”; Charles F. Lummis, after criticizing the novel for its emphasis on “humans so uninformed of humanity at their best, so sodden at their worst with the thing we flatter ourselves to call brutality,” stated that “it is a human document, a fine and powerful piece of work, an honor to its smith, and a matter of pride to those of us who love literature, love California and respect honest craft.”<sup>15</sup> These reviews echo Norris’s critical writings, which attempt to stake out the potential of this state for fictional explorations of the

forces that animate humanity, most notably in “An Opening for Novelists.” In this piece, Norris calls for a writer to truthfully capture the dynamic character of San Francisco and “get at the heart of us, the blood and bones and fiber of us, that shall go a-gunning for stories up and down our streets and into our houses and parlors and lodging houses and saloons and dives and along our wharves and into our theatres.”<sup>16</sup> For Norris, violence and unrestrained impulses reflect existence in both this city and the nation as a whole, yet he notes that an overly-refined aestheticism has obscured these elements. Focusing his attack specifically on *Les Jeunes*, a group of San Francisco bohemians and artists, Norris posits that while

you are rounding a phrase a sailor has been shanghaied down there along the waterfront; while you are sustaining a metaphor, another See Yup has been hatcheted yonder in Gambler’s Alley; a man has time to be stabbed while you are composing a villanelle; the crisis of a life has come and gone while you have been niggling with your couplet.<sup>17</sup>

California in general and San Francisco in particular provide apt illustrations of Norris’s distinction between life, predicated on the dark and tragic aspects of existence, and literature, imitative art that neglects the unseemly aspects of experience.

Norris returned to an examination of the literary potential of this state after he had completed *The Octopus*. In “The Literature of the West,” Norris responded to William B. Lighton’s call for propriety to guide depictions of the region, arguing that its distinctive character precludes such a representation. Norris asserts that under the surface of the prosperous, respectable Westerner, one will find “the Forty-niner. There just beneath the veneer is the tough fiber of the breed, whose work since the beginning of the nineteenth century has been the subjugating of the West.”<sup>18</sup> For Norris, the elements unleashed by the Gold Rush still played a



pivotal role in modern California, and severing these elements from the texts about this locale would compromise their validity. Norris further observes that idealized depictions pose a broader problem since this part of the country has “the material, Homer found no better, the heroes, the great fights, the play of unleashed, unfettered passionate humanity, and we let it all go, this national epic of America, the only one we shall ever have” in favor of outmoded European models and formulaic tales of adventure, like *Deadwood Dick*.<sup>19</sup> A version of the West that probes beneath the surface forms of respectability to the forces that animate this area and its inhabitants provides the possibility for an epic national literature, one that Norris began to develop in *McTeague* and *The Octopus*.

Norris traces the fictive possibilities of California in *McTeague*, examining the socioeconomic conditions that undermine human potential as manifested through the protagonist’s plight. This emphasis on the extent to which people can shape their fiscal destinies situates the narrative within the national success story, yet few critics have analyzed the book in this context. Joseph R. McElrath, Jr. notes that *McTeague* “is the kind of individual one might point to when celebrating the American Dream” in the first half of the work.<sup>20</sup> According to Lawrence E. Hussman, *McTeague* suggests the emptiness of this concept “as a subset of the pervasive disillusionment that always follows hard on the single-minded pursuit of the objects of our desires.”<sup>21</sup> McElrath and Hussman introduce these points in relation to broader arguments and do not develop how the topic functions within the text as a whole. Further, the prevailing discussions of *McTeague* do not connect the workings of hereditary and environment to a critique of the American Dream, which obscures the importance of this idea to the novel.<sup>22</sup> Norris’s handling of economic Determinism illustrates the limitations to advancement in the United States, revealing the fiscal forces that cause the deterioration of the main characters.

Through the treatment of the pervasive materialism of Polk Street, with its emphasis on consumption, and extensive patterns of gold imagery, *McTeague* illustrates that individuals rarely transcend the restrictions of their surroundings. This representation calls into question the ideas of upward mobility central to the American experience while expressing the consequences of greed when severed from ethical constraints.

The initial inspiration for *McTeague* stems from a homicide in San Francisco on October 10, 1893. A man named Patrick Collins killed his estranged wife in the cloakroom of a kindergarten, where she worked as a charwoman, after she refused to give him money. The resulting newspaper reports corresponded to the themes Norris would develop in the narrative. The local media stressed the gruesome nature of the occurrence, with a journalist for the *San Francisco Chronicle* noting that the “examination made by the physicians showed fully fifteen knife wounds. Most of them were upon the body and arms. . . . The wound which caused death was a deep lunge which penetrated the spinal column at the neck,” a description that evokes Zerkow’s murder of Maria.<sup>23</sup> The daily papers further reflect the plot of *McTeague* through the portrayal of Collins: “Whenever he got drunk he beat [his wife] and if she did not give him money he knocked her down.”<sup>24</sup> This element of the coverage manifests in the novel through the protagonist’s violence toward Trina, and the economic context of this abuse mirrors Norris’s representation. *McTeague* has further parallels to accounts of Collins as a reporter for the *Chronicle* declared that the killer continues “to bear himself with a stolid, brutish indifference that marks him as a type of all that is low in humanity.”<sup>25</sup> The *Examiner* advanced similar ideas in “He Was Born for the Rope” through subheadings that referred to Collins as the “Savage of Civilization” and “a Mixture of Moral Idiocy, Egotism and Shallow Cunning.”<sup>26</sup> This correspondent emphasized Collins’s hereditary degeneracy, concerns central to Norris’s

conception of *McTeague*, asserting that if “a good many of Patrick Collins’ ancestors did not die on the scaffold then they either escaped their desert or there is nothing in heredity.”<sup>27</sup> The article extended this depiction of Collins and observed that his “face is not degraded, but brutish. That is to say, he is not a man who has sunk, but one who was made an animal by nature to start with. The face is broad, the brown eyes are set wide apart, the nose is flattened at the bridge and as broad as a negro’s. The jaw is heavy and cruel.”<sup>28</sup> This passage expresses the primary characteristics of McTeague, whom the narrator describes through extensive animal imagery, and the reference to the pronounced jaw found its way into the text as it reinforces Cesare Lombroso’s physical markings of criminality. This piece features a possible source of the parallel between the dog fight and the conflict between McTeague and Marcus. The writer closed by stating that one has “seen a chained bulldog bare his teeth and growl softly when a kind word was tossed to him. That is Collins.”<sup>29</sup> However, the writer attempts to understand the deed from Collins’s perspective and to comprehend the circumstances that gave rise to the killing, a strategy that anticipates Norris’s approach in the book.

From the raw materials of this case, Norris obtained the basis for the plot of *McTeague*, which he developed while studying at Harvard under Lewis E. Gates.<sup>30</sup> Although the eight student themes written between January 7 and March 8, 1895 largely emphasize the protagonist’s drunkenness and brutality toward Trina, they also suggest the broader ideas in the book. The last one provides a synopsis for the narrative that states,

McTeague who is a third class dentist on an uptown business street marries Trina a kindergarten teacher. Their misfortunes begin after a few years. McTeague, having no diploma, is forbidden to practice and begins to drink heavily. For a long time Trina supports the two, until she finally loses her place and in a short

while the household falls into great poverty and misery. McTeague goes from bad to worse and finally ends by killing his wife. He manages to escape and goes back to the mines where the first part of his life has been spent. The facts concerning him come to light here and he is obliged to run for it. His way is across an arm of an Arizona desert, here he is ridden down by a deputy sheriff. The two are sixty miles from the nearest human being and McTeague determines to fight, he kills the sheriff and is about to go on when he discovers that even in the fight the sheriff has managed to hand-cuff their wrists together. He is chained to the body sixty miles from help.<sup>31</sup>

Norris's overview illustrates that the much-maligned conclusion was part of his conception from an early stage in the composition process. He focuses primarily on McTeague's deterioration, linking his fate to financial pressures rather than biological forces as his drinking stems from the loss of his profession, and his brutality results from increasing poverty. The economic themes of the finished novel are also evident through the dentist's return to the mines where he spent his youth, a movement that conveys his inability to attain material advancement contrary. Despite these connections, many significant aspects of the work are not present in this early summary, most notably Trina's compulsive avarice. Further, Norris had apparently not conceived of the two subplots since they do not appear in the outline, he does not present the McTeagues' courtship, and he does not mention Marcus Schouler, although this character appears in a previous installment for Gates's class.

Many of Norris's other themes pertain to *McTeague*, presenting embryonic versions of episodes and scenes that he would develop in the novel. For instance, the assignments from January 7 and 8 involve the attempts of Trina, then named Bessie, to account for her husband's

cruelty by claiming that she had closed her fingers in a door, and Norris ends the first paper by conflating McTeague's violence with his sexual appetites: "These brutalities inflamed his sensual passions and he threw her, bleeding and stupid from his fists across the bed and then it was abominable, bestial, unspeakable."<sup>32</sup> While McTeague's brutality does not culminate in rape during the book, Norris links desire and abuse in Trina's responses to her husband's viciousness in Chapter 16. An installment from February 15 focuses on the protagonist's Sunday routine in a form similar to that in *McTeague*. However, Norris does not refer to the canary in its gilded cage, and he had apparently not yet settled on McTeague's profession as the references to the operating chair, appointment calendar, and *Allen's Practical Dentist* do not appear.<sup>33</sup> Further, one from February 19 covers Trina's death in a manner consistent with Chapter 19, another from February 20 involves Marcus's denunciation of replacement workers as "white-livered cowards" that ends Chapter 1, and a piece from February 28 describes McTeague and Trina at the gallery opening during the Mechanic's Fair that appears in Chapter 10.<sup>34</sup> These projects represent the earliest known treatment of the materials that would become *McTeague*, yet Norris did not complete the manuscript until the Fall of 1897. He submitted the text to Doubleday & McClure in early 1898, shortly after he began working for the firm; however, publication was delayed until February 1899 due to concerns over the realistic content and sordid nature of the narrative.

From the raw materials of the Collins case, Norris created an examination of the American Dream, an exploration of the extent to which people are masters of their economic fates. McTeague's initial experiences establish him as a figure for the progress possible in nineteenth-century America as he has ascended from the working class to a comfortable lower middle-class existence through individual initiative. The narrator refers to the protagonist's

mother, a cook in his father's mining camp, as "an overworked drudge, fiery and energetic for all that, filled with the one idea of having her son rise in life and enter a profession."<sup>35</sup> This passage presents America as an open society where men and women from all ranks could achieve mobility, and Norris further underscores this development through McTeague's ethnic background. Hugh Dawson identifies the dentist as an Irishman because "Teague" was often employed as a derogatory term for those of Celtic ancestry, and his propensity for alcohol situates him within conventional nineteenth-century representations of this group.<sup>36</sup> As such, the arc of McTeague's early life coheres with the promise of material improvement that appealed to immigrants to the United States, who left their homelands for opportunities to attain higher living standards or to enable such outcomes for their progeny. Norris further develops this concept by emphasizing the intellectual limitations of the central character, whose mind is "heavy, slow to act, sluggish" and who is animated more by unconscious drives than rational thought (6). These references suggest that one's ability to rise in America is not predicated upon any innate qualities and that the restrictions governing human potential are inapplicable to life in the New World since advancement is possible for those willing to labor diligently.

Norris connects these ideas of material progress to the economic context that frames the actions of the principals, highlighting both the initial mobility of the central character and the broader tensions that imperil his social position. The narrator observes that McTeague's hands were "hard as wooden mallets, strong as vises, the hands of the old-time carboy" and that "he suggested a draught horse, immensely strong, stupid, docile, obedient" (6). The association of the dentist with a draught horse links McTeague to his former occupation as these animals were often used in the early days of the mining industry. The narrator heightens this connection by noting that McTeague "dispensed with forceps and extracted a refractory tooth with his thumb

and finger” (6). The strength developed in his previous environment helps him to practice his new profession yet expresses that he is out of place within polite, middle-class society. These elements emerge in the opening paragraphs of the novel, which outline the protagonist’s Sunday routine and introduce the prominent imagery of consumption that unifies the narrative. Describing this routine, the narrator states that

McTeague took his dinner at two in the afternoon at the car conductors’ coffee-joint on Polk Street. He had a thick, gray soup; heavy, underdone meat, very hot, on a cold plate; two kinds of vegetables; and a sort of suet pudding, full of strong butter and sugar. On his way back to his office, one block above, he stopped at Joe Frenna’s saloon and bought a pitcher of steam beer. (5)

This description reflects the central attributes of McTeague through references to “thick,” “heavy,” and “strong” as these words appear throughout the text in relation to this individual, indicating that he is governed by the basic animal instinct for food, a desire that intensifies in the second movement of the novel.

The narrator juxtaposes this imagery of consumption with the first references to gold, which serve as an important motif throughout the work.<sup>37</sup> In describing the dental parlors, the narrator refers to the aesthetic objects in McTeague’s possession, most notably the canary in his gilt cage. The imprisonment of this creature alludes to both the economic framework that confines the central characters and the protagonist’s earlier life as these birds were once used in mines to indicate the presence of danger.<sup>38</sup> The narrator further accentuates the importance of this precious metal to the narrative when he mentions McTeague’s purchase of “a steel engraving of the court of Lorenzo de’ Medici, which he had bought because there were a great many figures in it for the money” (6). As Nan Morelli-White observes, the inclusion of Medici is

significant in that he presided over the Golden Age of Florence, and this context connects the engraving to the broader patterns that Norris employs in this chapter, while McTeague's emphasis on obtaining a bargain reflects his preoccupation with material concerns.<sup>39</sup> Norris underscores this point through linking the dentist to this precious metal through the mats that he uses in fillings for his patients and his prominent crop of yellow hair, elements that make him the figurative embodiment of gold and suggest its power over his life.

Norris further develops the economic context of *McTeague* through his descriptions of Polk Street, which provides a microcosm for the impulses that govern dominant society and delineates how class relations shape human interactions in this environment. When McTeague looks out his window at the street below, the narrator states that there

were corner drug stores with huge jars of red, yellow, and green liquids in their windows, very brave and gay; stationers' stores, where illustrated weeklies were tacked upon bulletin boards; barber shops with cigar stands in their vestibules; sad-looking plumbers' offices; cheap restaurants, in whose windows one saw piles of unopened oysters weighted down by cubes of ice, and china pigs and cows knee deep in layers of white beans. At one end of the street McTeague could see the huge power-house of the cable line. Immediately opposite him was a great market; while further on, over the chimney stacks of the intervening houses, the glass roof of some huge public baths glittered like crystal in the afternoon sun. (7)

This description privileges the manifestations of middle-class life through the commodities that demonstrate one's social position, and the acquisition of these articles animates the principals. As David McGlynn posits, Norris also stresses the confining character of these interests through



images of bars that allude to the canary's cage from the roof of the baths, the cables of the street car line, and the goods in the shop windows.<sup>40</sup> In this framework, Norris introduces McTeague's longing for the gilded molar, which highlights the restrictive nature of his desire for mobility. The narrator notes that McTeague's chief ambition is "to have projecting from that corner window a huge gilded tooth, a molar with enormous prongs, something gorgeous and attractive" (7). This object presents an outward sign of McTeague's professional status and serves as a key symbol that connects his occupation to the greed theme.<sup>41</sup> However, the prongs also evoke bars, offering another parallel to the canary in his enclosure and indicating that McTeague is trapped within the material aspirations of his surroundings. Norris represents this sense of imprisonment within a clearly-demarcated socioeconomic milieu through the class-based temporal and spatial relations on Polk Street. The narrator observes that each day begins with the appearance of the news boys and common laborers, who are followed by the street and municipal workers, the shop clerks and office workers, and then the "ladies from the grand avenue a block above Polk Street" who "made their appearance, promenading the sidewalks leisurely, deliberately" (8). This passage of nearly two pages not only emphasizes the rigid order of this locale but also illustrates that monetary concerns dictate people's roles within the vast panorama of existence.

These impulses determine the perspectives of the central characters, who act in accordance with the economic imperatives of their surroundings. The narrator situates Trina in this fiscal climate through the preparations for her wedding when she "spent the morning between nine and twelve o'clock down town, for the most part in the cheap department stores" and would meet McTeague "breathless from her raids upon the bargain counters" before showing him what she had purchased and discussing at length the prices of these items (76). Norris locates these excursions during the couple's period of domestic tranquility, yet the focus

on acquisition reflects the tensions responsible for their fates later in the novel, which the narrator links to Trina's thrift in terms of her genetic inheritance: "She had all the instincts of a hardy and penurious mountain people – the instinct which saves without any thought, without idea of consequence – saving for the sake of saving, hoarding without knowing why" (78-79). While the narrator emphasizes hereditary Determinism through Trina's Swiss-German ancestry, the initial presentation of this idea is framed by the dictates of a commodity culture. This connection implies that environmental forces trigger this impulse for accumulation, and this reading gains further credence through the intensification of her hoarding in relation to the McTeagues' eventual deterioration. Norris parallels this theme through Maria Macapa, who also operates in line with the desires of dominant society. The narrator describes Maria's routine of collecting useless items that she would sell to Zerkow in exchange for money to spend "on shirt waists and dotted blue neckties, trying to dress like the girls who tended the soda-water fountain in the candy store" who "were elegant, they were debonair, they had their 'young men'" (23). Maria's yearning for these articles displays the controlling power of her environment, which limits her vision to the extent that she views shop girls as barometers of achievement and provides her with few opportunities for mobility save rummaging through rubbish. Maria's oft-repeated tale of the golden dinner service functions in this context, representing the outward forms of affluence to signal a higher class position, and she has been shaped by his milieu to the point that even her delusions originate within this framework.

These motifs of consumption frame McTeague and Trina's coupling, suggesting that their interactions operate within economic considerations rather than the instinctive impulses often employed to explain their behavior. George M. Spangler assigns a central role to sexual Determinism as the primary force that necessitates the fates of the central characters. Spangler

asserts that in “the first part the over idea is that man’s instincts, especially his sexual desire, have great power to trap and degrade him,” while the second section of the novel reveals that “female sexuality is threatening and finally destructive to men.”<sup>42</sup> Although McTeague and Trina act in accordance with basic biological drives, Norris situates these carnal appetites within broader patterns of commodification. The narrator identifies Trina in the context of the “younger women of Polk Street – the shop girls, the young women of the soda fountains, the waitresses in the cheap restaurants” and notes that

Trina was McTeague’s first experience. With her the feminine element suddenly entered his little world. It was not only her that he saw and felt, it was the woman, the whole sex, an entire new humanity, strange and alluring that, that he seemed to have discovered. How had he ignored it so long? It was dazzling, delicious, charming beyond all words. His narrow point of view was once enlarged and confused, and all at once he saw that there was something else in life besides concertinas and steam beer. Everything had to be made over again. His whole rude idea of life had to be changed. (19)

The association of Trina with those who sell the consumer goods that impressed McTeague early in the novel indicates that his lust is connected to his desire to consume. In this fiduciary context, the importance of objects stems from the value individuals attribute to them rather than any intrinsic worth. A similar logic governs McTeague’s relationship with Trina since he wants not a particular women but “the whole sex, an entire new humanity,” which makes Trina as replaceable as any of the products that line Polk Street.

McTeague emphasizes Trina’s function within the domestic economy, viewing her as a sexualized commodity to be consumed in the gratification of male desire. Norris heightens this

development when McTeague opens Trina's closet and observes that it "was not only her hair now, it was Trina herself – her mouth, her hands, her neck" and that, "seized with an unreasoned impulse, McTeague opened his huge arms and gathered the little garments close to him, plunging his face deep amongst them, savoring their delicate odor with long breaths of luxury and supreme content" (47-48). McTeague defines Trina in terms of her clothes, comparable to the garments that populate the stores on Polk Street, which further reduces her to the status of an object to satisfy his libidinal appetites. Norris exhibits this idea of subjugation through the juxtaposition between the "huge arms" of the protagonist and the "little garments" of Trina, and the resulting dialectic between strength and frailty reinforces the nature of their courtship, with McTeague's gathering of the garments anticipating his later crushing embraces of the heroine. Describing the methods employed to win Trina, the narrator states that "he only had to take her in his arms, to crush down her struggle with his enormous strength, to subdue her, conquer her by sheer brute force" (52). This focus on McTeague's aspiration to possess Trina irrespective of her conscious wishes signifies her status as a sexualized article of trade, one that has no more say in her affairs than would an item in a shop window. This perspective demonstrates the extent to which interactions in the narrative are shaped by market forces, and Norris's emphasis on acquisition in this relationship prefigures the central tensions responsible for the characters' deterioration.

Norris's treatment of consumption gains its clearest expression through the lottery, which has significant ramifications for the American Dream and its transformation during the nineteenth century. When Trina learns that she has won five thousand dollars, the assembled neighbors and the agent recount "the legends and myths that had grown up around the history of the lottery" and conclude that "it was the needy who won, the destitute and starving woke to

wealth and plenty, the virtuous toiler suddenly found his reward in a ticket bought at a hazard; the lottery was a great charity, the friend of the people, a vast beneficent machine that recognized neither rank nor wealth nor station” (67-68). This account reveals the contours of the national success story, presenting this sweepstakes as an embodiment of the narrative of progress with riches as the reward for virtuous conduct, a perspective that reflects the Puritan vision of the New World. The emphasis on achievement with regard to “neither rank nor wealth nor station” denotes the potential for mobility due to individual initiative within a social structure that does not lock people into the positions of their births.<sup>43</sup> However, the fact that this movement does not manifest through human agency underscores the shifting nature of American life. In this formulation, fortunes occur independently of merit, transpiring purely as a result of luck, and the reality that there is only one winner suggests that financial gain is a mere gamble with the odds stacked against the aspirant. As a result, acquisition is no longer a secondary consideration to performing one’s moral duty; instead, capital accumulation has been severed from these ethical constraints and becomes the focal point of the human enterprise. The role of the lottery as a vehicle for economic advancement further highlights the problematic basis of such an occurrence, which stems from the operations of chance separated from the labor that once enabled prosperity and indicates that such developments only pertain to a lucky few.

The relative absence of labor in *McTeague* also accentuates the transforming basis of the American Dream. The descriptions of the employees on Polk Street emphasize those in the service economy, providing no images of people heading to the factories to produce essential commodities. Despite the fact that some minor figures are connected to manufacturing, and McTeague is briefly employed by a firm that makes dental equipment, Norris seldom presents his principals in the process of working. Although the initial chapters are set primarily in the

protagonist's parlors, these episodes stress the limited ability of McTeague, who spends more time reclined on his operating chair than engaged in his profession, and Norris further destabilizes McTeague's career through his lack of formal training since he does not have a license to practice. Trina is shown carving figurines for her Uncle Olbermann's toy company, yet the narrator largely focuses on the "non-poisonous" paint that causes the loss of several fingers and necessitates the shift to another position. Maria and Zerkow operate in a slightly different context, serving as figurative miners that sift through refuse for potentially valuable items in a manner that evokes those who preceded them to California in order to find gold. Further, Norris links both individuals to this precious metal with Maria stealing mats from McTeague and Zerkow ransacking his rooms for the illusory dinner service. While the representations of the central characters' occupations stem from the function of Polk Street as a business district rather than an industrial one, the emphasis on this segment of the population draws attention to an environment where acquisition is severed from production, one in which wealth and its trappings have become the central focus of the human enterprise.

The McTeagues' advancement culminates during the chapters surrounding their marriage, which situate these characters within the middle class through conventional markers of wealth while also presenting the material tensions that will be responsible for the pair's deterioration. Norris highlights this striving for bourgeois respectability through the depiction of the couple's flat. As Don Graham notes, the extensive descriptions of their first dwelling, with the Grandma and Grandpa pictures and assorted bric-a-brac, "express perfectly the infantile, sentimental quality of Trina's mind. They echo a motif developed at length in the meeting and courtship of McTeague and Trina: the childlike state of their sexual awareness."<sup>44</sup> This representation of sexual innocence correlates to a broader economic context based on

accumulating objects. The wallpaper, with its hundreds of Japanese mandarins, reflects Trina's concern with numbers. This reference implies her future interest in counting her gold pieces, and this effect is intensified by the cramped apartment teeming with decorative items. The account of the wedding banquet further underscores the emphasis on consumption through illustrations of gluttony. This tendency is most apparent in McTeague, who "ate for the sake of eating, without choice; everything within reach of his hands found its way into his enormous mouth" (97). This passage reinforces the protagonist's unreasoned existence in the context of Naturalistic treatments of individuals governed by forces that they cannot control, evident through the dentist's lack of choice. Further, the focus on food suggests McTeague's central preoccupation with gratifying his animal instincts. His desire to eat without knowing why anticipates Trina's irrational impulse to hoard her savings, which prefigures the primary conflict between the characters in the second half of the novel.

The narrator further reveals the problematic nature of McTeague and Trina's coupling through imagery that pertains to warfare and death. When Mr. Sieppe leads the groom to the ceremony, the narrator states that it "was like King Charles summoned to execution" and that the procession "moved at a funereal pace" (93), while the song that follows the reception "became a dirge, a lamentable, prolonged wail of distress" (99). These associations anticipate the fates of McTeague and Trina, whose union will become a prolonged battle due to the economic pressures that govern their actions. Norris reinforces this point through the aftermath of the wedding banquet as the narrator refers to the skeleton of the roast goose, the calf's skull, and "dead soldiers," noting that the scene "was a devastation, a pillage; the table presented the appearance of an abandoned battlefield" (99). This representation of destruction during what should be a joyous event underscores the fissures that compromise the stability of the McTeagues' union,

and the use of these images to describe the feast depicts the cause of this conflict in the tension between consumption and the satisfaction of basic human needs.

This focus animates the following chapters, which continue to employ the rhetoric of the American Dream while tracing the McTeagues' attempts to enhance their social position. These impulses are initially apparent through Trina's efforts to remove the lingering traces of McTeague's common origins and to further situate him within the bourgeoisie. Trina makes her husband give up his usual Sunday routine in favor of activities more properly befitting their current economic standing with walks in the park to display the idleness enabled by their relative affluence. This transformation manifests further when McTeague starts to drink better beer, trades in his frayed cuffs for new ones, and begins to "observe the broader, larger interests of life, interests that affected him not as an individual, but as a member of a class, a profession, or a political party" (109). These changes to his appearance and the awakening of broader concerns indicate his cultivation of qualities suitable for his station. These aspirations gain their clearest expression through the dentist's yearning for property, for a "little home all to themselves, with six rooms and a bath, with a grass plat in front and calla-lilies" (109). Expanding on the significance of a house, the narrator states that McTeague

would have a son, whose name would be Daniel, who would go to High School, and perhaps turn out to be a prosperous plumber or house painter. Then this son Daniel would marry a wife, and they would all live together in that six-room-and-bath house; Daniel would have little children. . . . The dentist saw himself as a veritable patriarch surrounded by children and grandchildren. (109)

This aspiration for a conventional middle-class life reflects central features of the American Dream through the hopes of parents, like McTeague's mother, for their children to have better,



easier lives than the previous generation.<sup>45</sup> However, Norris locates this interest in a home within the financial context that undergirds the narrative by following this discussion with a description of the couple looking in shop windows on Market and Kearney Streets. The narrator notes that they “stopped before the jewelers’ and milliners’ windows, finding a great delight in picking out things for each other, saying how they would choose this and that if they were rich” (111). Even the leisure of these characters is occupied with the desire for wealth, yet the irony of the passage is clear: the McTeagues are well off by 1890s standards and have the resources to obtain the objects they covet.

The narrator undermines the solidity of the McTeagues’ class position through Trina’s incipient acquisitive mania, which distorts the cardinal virtues of the American Dream. Her refusal to spend her lottery money reflects the thrift central to the Puritan vision of material progress and correlates to ideas of industry since she only spends what the couple can earn without recourse to her five thousand dollars. While Trina’s capital seems to offer a protection against economic need, her behavior involves a significant departure from this template. The narrator states that the heroine “clung to this sum with a tenacity that was surprising; it had become for her a thing miraculous, a god-from-the-machine, suddenly descending upon the stage of her humble little life; she regarded it as something almost sacred and inviolable” (89). The reference to the “god-from-the-machine,” the convention of classic drama in which a deity is introduced to solve a seemingly insoluble dilemma, highlights Trina’s exalted view of her riches. The narrator destabilizes this perspective by noting that it “was a passion with her to save money. . . . Each time she added a quarter or half a dollar to the little store she laughed and sang with a veritable childish delight. . . . She did not save this money for any ulterior purpose, she hoarded instinctively, without knowing why” (107). Trina’s covetous impulses stem not from a

rational desire for financial security, evident through the fact that she does not save for “any ulterior purpose,” but from unreasoned impulses that make her winnings the focal point of her existence, apparent through her exclamations of joy. Further, the use of “passion” to denote her savings anticipates her eroticization of the gold coins later in the novel. The problematic character of her hoarding manifests in her refusal both to rent the house because the payment aroused “every instinct of her parsimony” and to send her parents fifty dollars to stave off the impending failure of their business (116). This unwillingness to draw on her funds in order to attain a more comfortable existence or to assist her family indicates that monetary concerns have superseded more humane considerations. Trina’s incipient avarice signifies the potential for alienating the possessor of wealth from basic humanity, and her actions convey the destructive nature of acquisition when severed from ethical considerations.

Trina’s greed intensifies after McTeague loses his practice, which destabilizes their middle-class status and reiterates the role of environment in framing the characters’ actions. Prior to the late nineteenth century, there were no licensing requirements for dentists, who could operate without risking legal sanction even if they had no prior training. Few options for professional instruction existed until the second half of the century. In 1875, there were only seven dental colleges in the United States, a number that increased to 47 by 1900, and practitioners had to obtain certification from an accredited school in order to operate.<sup>46</sup> When McTeague learns that he is prohibited from seeing patients, he initially fails to process the significance of what has occurred; instead, he takes recourse in his experience, although it makes no difference within the professionalization of American life. As McTeague occupies himself in arranging his parlors for clients who will never come again, Trina perceives this alteration in monetary terms, exclaiming “now we’re paupers, beggars. We’ve got to leave here – leave this

flat where I've been – where *we've* been so happy, and sell all the pretty things; sell the pictures and the melodeon” (149). The loss of the commodities that display the couple's class position reflects the decline of their social standing, and this process is exacerbated by Trina's refusal to spend her savings in order to meet the pair's physical requirements, which sets in the motion their deterioration. The narrator develops McTeague's descent through the loss of the refined habits associated with his ascension and the resumption of his earlier customs. The narrator states that McTeague “slipped back into the old habits (that had been his before he knew Trina) with an ease that was surprising. Sundays he dined at the car conductors' coffee-joint once more, and spent the afternoons lying full length upon the bed, crop-full, stupid, warm, smoking his huge pipe, drinking his steam beer, and playing his six mournful tunes on his concertina” (159). The reference to McTeague's original routine locates his regression in the economic context of Polk Street and Trina's pervasive avarice, which ironically juxtaposes his past condition against his present one. Norris provides a parallel illustration of this reversion through the protagonist's new occupation working for a manufacturer of dental instruments. This job mirrors his previous vocation, yet McTeague no longer controls the particulars of his labor. Further, the narrator emphasizes his reversion to a state based solely on gratifying his animal instincts in the context of the struggle for survival, evident through the references to food throughout the description of his new position.

The representation of Trina's miserliness exhibits the nature of the Deterministic forces operating in the narrative and further illustrates the destructive potential of greed within an economic system that privileges wealth. McTeague's deterioration, as apparent through his alcoholism and subsequent violence toward Trina, emerges in response to his wife's avarice.<sup>47</sup> The narrator observes that “Trina's stinginess had increased to such an extent that it had gone

beyond the mere hoarding of money. She grudged even the food that she and McTeague ate, and even brought away half loaves of bread, lumps of sugar, and fruit from the car conductors' coffee-joint" (164). The references to food link the conflict between the couple to the patterns of consumption throughout the work and illuminate the central tension between Trina and McTeague: he emphasizes the necessities that would allow him to live with a measure of decency, whereas she prioritizes acquisition divorced from any practical purpose and hoards from a blind compulsion. McTeague's violence toward Trina originates in the denial of his basic humanity, which initially emerges through her refusal to provide him carfare in spite of an impending rainstorm. When Heise buys McTeague a drink to stave off illness, the narrator states that the whiskey "roused the man, or rather, the brute in man, and now not only roused it, but goaded it to evil. McTeague's nature changed. It was not only the alcohol, it was idleness and a general throwing off of the good influence that his wife had had over him in the days of their prosperity" (169). This focus on preserving her savings entails stripping away the elements that had previously blunted her husband's animal nature, which now surfaces as a result of Trina's actions. Norris reinforces this background in the accounts of McTeague's brutality, demonstrating the extent to which his behavior stems from environmental agents rather than hereditary or biological ones. The narrator further develops this point by noting that the protagonist "drank no more whiskey than at first, but his dislike for Trina increased with every day of their poverty, with every day of Trina's persistent stinginess" (171). The former dentist's preferred mode of torture, biting his spouse's finger tips, operates in the context of this desire to consume: he devours Trina when she diminishes his ability to possess the very commodities that comprise middle-class prosperity and begrudges him the nourishment necessary to sustain his physical existence.

Norris further highlights the consequences of avarice through the erotic charge of money, which illustrates that a singular focus on acquisition undermines natural human interactions. The narrator states that the heroine “loved her money with an intensity that she could hardly express. She would plunge her small fingers into the pile with little murmurs of affection, her long, narrow eyes half closed and shining, her breath coming in long sighs” (170). Instead of the capital as a means to fulfill human need, Trina regards it with an intimacy that she denies to others, evident when she refers to the coins as her “beauties” and declares “*I love you*” to these objects in contrast to her exchanges with McTeague (196). The narrator provides a parallel illustration of this point when the former dentist absconds with his wife’s savings, and she exclaims, “he’s gone, my money’s gone, my dear money – my dear, dear gold pieces that I’ve worked so hard for. Oh, to have deserted me – gone for good – gone and never coming back – gone with my gold pieces. Gone – gone – gone. I’ll never see them again, and I’ve worked so hard, so *so* hard for him – for them” (191). Trina’s concern is not with the disappearance of McTeague but with the fact that he has stolen her funds, evident through her continual shifting from him to her lost riches, which expresses the displacement of her affection from a person to mere things. The narrator reinforces this concept when he notes that Trina’s “avarice had grown to become her one dominant passion; her love of money for the money’s sake brooded in her heart, driving out by degrees every other natural affection” (194). Trina’s exalted view of wealth has caused the values of the marketplace to replace conventional bonds between individuals, alienating her from her husband, her family, and her friends, a development that further dramatizes the perils of greed. This process culminates when Trina spreads “all the gold pieces between the sheets, and had then gone to bed, stripping herself, and had slept all night upon the money, taking a strange and ecstatic pleasure in the touch of the smooth flat pieces the length of

her entire body” (198). Trina’s near orgasm at the touch of her gold coins and her substitution of a sexual relationship for a monetary one display the extent to which her passions are governed by material considerations, which shape her relations with others and condition her eventual fate.

Zerkow also operates in this context, and his actions are governed by an acquisitive instinct that mirrors Trina’s controlling passion. Norris writes that it “was impossible to look at Zerkow and not know instantly that greed – inordinate, insatiable greed – was the dominant passion of the man. He was the Man with the Rake, groping hourly in the muck-heap of the city for gold, for gold, for gold. It was his dream, his passion” (28). The reference to the “Man with the Rake,” borrowed from John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678), is significant in that it designates one who has rejected salvation to focus on filth. This characterization is appropriate for Zerkow, who roots through junk heaps in search of gold, an object that has transcended any other concern. The preeminent role of this precious metal to Zerkow manifests when Maria unveils the fillings made from this material, and the narrator states that “Zerkow drew a quick breath as the three pellets suddenly flashed in Maria’s palm. There it was, the virgin metal, the pure, unalloyed ore, his dream, his consuming desire” (28-29). This language of virginal innocence and purity suggests the nature of Zerkow’s investment in this valuable resource and the displacement of his sexual desires from individuals to money. Norris further develops this theme through Zerkow’s reactions to Maria’s tale of the dinner service, which he hears as “a beast of prey had scented a quarry,” and the narrator describes the junk man’s reaction in terms associated with orgasm as the story “ravished Zerkow with delight,” causing him to “breath[e] short” and “gnaw at his bloodless lip,” a process that culminates in a “spasm of anguish” as he begs to “have it all over again” (29-31). This episode, which echoes Trina rolling on the bed with her coins, expresses the relationship between the central narrative and the subplot of

Zerkow and Maria, with the latter as a parallel illustration of the main themes of the former and an indication of the McTeagues' probable fates.

While the Maria and Zerkow storyline has a clear connection to the central narrative, the episodes with Miss Baker and Old Grannis, which have long been the subject of critical disapproval, supply a counterpoint to these plots by presenting figures who are not governed by the fiscal impulses that dictate the actions of the other couples.<sup>48</sup> Rather than centering their lives on acquisition and prioritizing wealth, Grannis and Miss Baker focus on obtaining necessary commodities, and currency thereby serves as a means to an end rather than the objective in itself. She does not raid the bargain counters of the large department stores and instead buys only what she needs to live with some degree of comfort. Grannis offers an even stronger contrast in that he purchases the McTeagues' wedding photograph from the auction as a present for them, which indicates that he sees a greater worth in compassion than in the purely monetary valuation that Trina places on her former possessions. Norris clarifies the function of Grannis when he sells his book-binding apparatus and disrupts his ordered routine with Miss Baker. The narrator states that the elderly man "had sold his happiness for money; he had bartered all his tardy romance for some miserable bank notes" (178). His regret over this sale reflects the broader economic tensions responsible for the destruction of the other characters; however, this transaction enables Grannis to attain a deeper degree of intimacy with Miss Baker, and he is not motivated solely by financial gain. As such, this subplot highlights the values that have been superseded by the focus on accumulation and would provide a more beneficial model for life. The example of Grannis and Miss Baker further reveals that money need not necessarily serve a destructive function. Rather, the importance that the other characters place on capital and the role of such perspectives in governing conduct contribute to negative outcomes.

The novel further displays the alternatives to this focus on acquisition through juxtaposing McTeague's existence with Trina against his fishing trips, which convey his desire for more expansive spaces and anticipate his eventual flight to the mines. Describing these excursions, the narrator states that the protagonist "liked the solitude of tremendous, tumbling ocean; the fresh, windy downs; he liked to feel the gusty Trades flogging his face, and he would remain for hours watching the roll and plunge of the breakers with the silent, unreasoned enjoyment of a child" (183). This account of the natural world recalls McTeague and Trina's courtship at the Oakland estuary, yet the absence of his wife from this scene indicates their growing estrangement. The reference to the "unreasoned enjoyment of a child" offers an important connection to the heroine since the narrator employs this phrase earlier in relation to her hoarding. This repetition reinforces that Trina's attachment to her money denies McTeague the ability to live with a measure of dignity, which provides the impetus for his movement toward surroundings free from the constraints that now characterize his existence. The narrator combines these elements through McTeague's fishing, an act that enables him to meet his basic requirements and also causes him to remember "how often he used to do this sort of thing when he was a boy in the mountains of Placer County, before he had become a car-boy at the mine. . . . The instincts of the old-time miner were returning. In the stress of his misfortune McTeague was lapsing back to his early estate" (183). While McGlynn views this scene in terms of a broader conflict between the city and the country, one that precedes the dentist's "desire to own and possess the frivolous objects of the city, and in which his romantic sensibilities are expanded," Norris does not seem to be operating within this binary framework.<sup>49</sup> This shift to the perspectives and activities of McTeague's youth suggests his inability to transcend this environment, the influence of which has always lurked beneath the surface of his apparent



prosperity and prefigures the return to his “early estate.” Norris develops this theme through following the visit to this setting with a return to Trina and the economic pressures that govern their lives. Most notably, the end of the chapter involves McTeague selling the gilded molar that once embodied his professional ambitions as this object has become a mockery of these aspirations through its placement within Zerkow’s squalid flat.

McTeague’s murder of Trina operates in this economic context, and Norris emphasizes this framework by reiterating the motifs that have characterized their relationship. After Trina does not aid McTeague, he states, “I – I – wouldn’t let a *dog* go hungry,” which articulates a measure of compassion that contrasts his wife’s avarice (199). Further, the impetus for the killing is the sale of her estranged husband’s “beloved concertina, that he had had all his life” (203). This passage alludes to the couple’s fundamental disagreement during the disposal of their household goods after the loss of McTeague’s profession, with the dentist viewing his possessions as records of his experiences, while Trina attributes only monetary value to these objects. These components of the text situate McTeague’s actions within a clearly-demarcated monetary context that the narrator reinforces when Trina does not assist her starving husband. When she refuses to give McTeague “every nickel” of her money, he states, “you ain’t going to make small of me this time” (205). This statement appears repeatedly throughout the novel: in response to the Orpheum ticket agent in Chapter 6, following the fight with Marcus in Chapter 8, after he has lost his ability to practice in Chapter 13, in reply to the other dentist’s offer for the gilded molar in Chapter 14, and prior to his initial beating of Trina in Chapter 15. In these instances, the declaration has reflected McTeague’s urge to assert his worth in a hostile and complex environment that he seems powerless to alter. When directed at Trina, this expression takes on a broader significance by demonstrating a desire to recapture the dignity that has been

lost as a result of his poverty and desperation. Through the context that sets up the homicide, the narrator illustrates the consequences of greed, which gain further credence through Zerkow's slaying of Maria since this act is informed by a similar set of financial concerns.

McTeague's subsequent flight to the Sierra Nevada Mountains provides a further illustration of the economic forces that govern the world of the text and indicates the protagonist's inability to transcend his social position. The narrator develops this point through the operations of the Big Dipper Mine, observing that

one heard the prolonged thunder of the stamp-mill, the crusher, the insatiable monster, gnashing the rocks to powder with its long iron teeth, vomiting them out again in a thin stream of wet gray mud. Its enormous maw, fed night and day with the car-boy's loads, gorged itself with gravel, and spat out gold, grinding the rocks between its jaws, glutted, as it were, with the very entrails of the earth, and growling over its endless meal, like some savage animal, some legendary dragon, some fabulous beast, symbol of inordinate and monstrous gluttony. (209)

This passage contextualizes the imagery of consumption that undergirds the novel, locating these motifs within the general framework of acquisition. The machinery practices on a large-scale what the central characters have performed on a smaller one through their attempts to extract gold from their surroundings heedless of the effects on their fellows. The narrator explicitly connects McTeague to the processes of the stamp mill: the "long iron teeth" suggest his former occupation as a dentist, and the acts of "grinding the rocks between its jaws" and gnashing "the rocks to powder" recall his preferred torture of Trina by biting her fingers. The sheer strength and power of the equipment also correlates to McTeague since these terms are frequently associated with him. Further, the section about the car boys feeding the apparatus expresses

McTeague's role within this environment, one that shaped him physically, emotionally, and ideologically. Norris further highlights the relationship between McTeague's former life in San Francisco and his return to Placer County through the description of the office at the Big Dipper Mine. The mention of the telephone alludes to the complex urban realm McTeague has fled, while the revolver and cartridge belt refer back to the rifle manufacturer's calendar in his dental parlors and anticipate the final confrontation with Marcus. Most importantly, the handgun hangs from a nail that also holds a bag of gold dust, which further links the violence in the work to a desire for financial gain, and a chromolithograph of Jean-François Millet's *Angelus*, a representation of the pastoral world that has been superseded by the emergent industrial order.<sup>50</sup> The presence of these three elements underscores the outcomes unleashed by emphasizing wealth over any broader belief system and reinforces the deadly consequences of this transformation as revealed by the gun.

The final chapters of *McTeague* offer a parallel illustration of the forces that have circumscribed the protagonist's possible mobility and establish a dialectic between the imperatives of dominant society and the need for self-preservation. While numerous critics have argued that the conclusion deviates from the primary orientation of the narrative, Norris insisted that the ending was appropriate and responded to Howells that "I agree in every one of your criticisms always excepting the anti-climax, the 'death in the desert' business. I am sure that it has its place."<sup>51</sup> The ending serves an important structural function by reinforcing the economic themes of work within a final summation of the causative pressures contained therein. Norris continues the focus on gold that has animated the rest of the novel through the introduction of Cribbens and the discovery of a claim that would enable McTeague to transcend his earlier fiscal instability. The narrator, however, juxtaposes this find with the development of McTeague's

sixth sense, which signifies his further reversion to the instincts of his primitive forebears as an adaptation to his new surroundings. The narrator states that “McTeague felt the mysterious intuition of approaching danger; an unseen hand seemed reining his head eastward; a spur was in his flanks that seemed to urge him to hurry, hurry, hurry” (227). These impulses are not merely the product of his animal inheritance; instead, these elements again emerge in relation to the dictates of environment.

Norris clarifies this point through the reappearance of Marcus Schouler, who continues to be motivated by pecuniary concerns that culminate when he apprehends McTeague in order to secure Trina’s five-thousand dollars, a sum that Marcus claims “belongs to me by rights” (237). The centrality of wealth shapes the interactions between these men during the last section of *McTeague*, highlighting both the possibility for renewal that emerges outside of monetary framework and the inevitable tragedy that results from an exclusive interest in financial gain. After the mule carrying the last of their water makes his escape, “the sense of enmity between the two had weakened in the face of a common peril,” and they join in pursuit of the animal, realizing that their possibility for survival depends on this collective endeavor (241). This tension mirrors McTeague’s earlier flight from his strike, which has less value than his continued existence, and suggests that fiscal considerations are of little importance next to their desire to live. Norris reiterates the underlying basis of the conflict between these characters when they stand over the mule that Marcus has killed with his final bullet: in “an instant the eyes of the two doomed men had met as the same thought simultaneously rose in their minds. The canvas sack with its five thousand dollars was still tied to the horn of the saddle” (242). The renewed emphasis on Trina’s money reflects the tensions that have framed the text, and Marcus’s violent death coupled with McTeague’s certain demise provide a further representation that one cannot

escape the confines of the Deterministic world, a theme that Norris intensifies through the closing image of the canary in his gilt prison.

Rather than offering an illustration of biological Determinism in accordance with antiquated theories that lack a sound empirical basis, *McTeague* reflects on a conception central to the American experience through its examination of the extent to which citizens can shape their material circumstances.<sup>52</sup> Through its representation of the forces that limit opportunities for economic advancement, the narrative indicates that an inability to realize such progress often stems from not the failings of the individual but structures rooted within one's environment, elements that impose significant barriers to achievement. As such, the novel contextualizes the experiences of those who do not attain social mobility and communicates the need to alter the conditions that engender such outcomes in order to create a nation where people can develop in accordance with their capabilities.

Norris further develops this treatment of the Deterministic agents that limit advancement in *The Octopus*, which portrays the hazards of monopoly ownership on California. In representing this conflict, Norris drew on the particulars of the Mussel Slough Tragedy, a pivotal incident in the struggle with the Southern Pacific. This clash originated from the expansion of railroads in this state: the federal government financed construction through grants that gave the company alternating areas of land as capital incentives, while the other sections were for sale.<sup>53</sup> The corporation encouraged settlement on its own holdings as well, even before laying the tracks necessary to claim possession, and people began to improve these properties based on the understanding that they could later buy acreage at fixed prices.<sup>54</sup> After the settlers had turned a valueless desert into profitable farms, Jerome Madden, the land agent for the Southern Pacific, announced that anyone could purchase these tracts for rates between 150% to 350% higher than

the earlier figure.<sup>55</sup> In response, the farmers called a mass meeting and formed the Grand Settlers' League to promote their interests. After a series of legal challenges, including an appeal pending before the Supreme Court, a Federal Marshal's attempt to evict the inhabitants led to a shootout that killed seven men.<sup>56</sup> The parameters of the Mussel Slough Tragedy provide the basic structure of the plot, and Norris's handling of this event coheres with the press coverage in the *Chronicle* and *Examiner*. However, critics have devoted little attention to these sources or their role within Norris's representation of economic Determinism.<sup>57</sup> This episode and the later practices of the Southern Pacific supplied him with raw materials to depict the calamities that monopolies engender for the general population.<sup>58</sup> *The Octopus* highlights the institutional forces that impede the development of the central characters and shape the perspectives of individuals at all levels of society. While the ranchers are hardly innocent victims since they are motivated by the same monetary concerns as the railroad executives, the novel indicates the broader culpability of the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad, which manipulates market conditions to protect its profit margins regardless of the consequences for landowners.

In March of 1899, Norris first announced his planned Epic of Wheat in a letter to William Dean Howells. Norris wrote:

I have the idea of a series of novels buzzing in my head these days. I think there is a chance for somebody to do some great work with the West and California as a background, and which will be at the same time thoroughly American. My Idea [sic] is to write three novels around the one subject of *Wheat*. First, a story of California, (the producer), second, a story of Chicago (the distributor) third, a story of Europe (the Consumer) and in each to keep to the idea of this huge, Niagara of wheat rolling from West to East. I think a big Epic Trilogy could be

made out of such a subject, that at the same time would be modern and distinctly American.<sup>59</sup>

Norris underscores the literary value of California, reinforcing his earlier claims from “An Opening for Novelists” yet extending this argument to emphasize the representative quality of the state, which would provide a framework for examining the social, economic, and political forces that shape the United States. From this central idea about the role of grain, he discovered his topic for the first volume: a narrative about the conflict between wheat ranchers and the Southern Pacific, a subject so vast that he would be able “to get at it from every point of view, the social, agricultural, & political,--Just [*sic*] say the last word in the R. R. question in California. I am going to study the whole thing *on the ground*, and come back here in the winter and make a novel out of it.”<sup>60</sup> This emphasis reflects Frederic Tabor Cooper’s call for Norris “to confine himself to depicting the hourly struggle of man against man in the social and industrial world” in order to become “an enduring figure in the development of a representative American fiction.”<sup>61</sup> This focus on the West enabled Norris to represent the very issues that Cooper enumerates as the basis for a literature that would reveal the nature of American life.

This focus on economic life in the West enabled Norris to examine the trusts that had come to dominate American life in the late nineteenth century. In a letter to Lilla Lewis Parks, who had proposed that Norris should write a book defending these entities, he responded that

I had already determined to handle this very subject of Trusts in my first novel on wheat, as involved in the problem of transportation. But as the title of this first book – “The Octopus” – suggests I am enlisted on the other side[.] The corporation (wh. is another name for trust) of the Southern Pacific R. R. is a very poignant issue with us in California and from what we know of it there we are not

led to consider it as legitimate or tolerable, and I am afraid the S. P. is only a sample of its breed.<sup>62</sup>

Parks's recommendation that Norris tackle this subject, in addition to Cooper's statement along these lines, reveals the position held by monopolies during this period; however, these institutions had received little previous attention in fiction. Norris's answer is also significant in that it conveys the prominent role of the Southern Pacific in California, which would provide the Deterministic agent in the narrative and illustrate a broader national problem. Norris's choice of a title is also important as reformers called the Southern Pacific "the Octopus" because its reach extended to every corner of the state, and the company had the capacity to defeat any opponent and to impose conditions amenable to its interests. Norris offered a further clue to the work when he noted that "I am very anxious to hear arguments on the other side, and should be glad to know why you, for instance are in favor of the trust," a response indicative of the objectivity that would characterize the novel.<sup>63</sup> This reply to Parks's second epistle introduces another major component of Norris's representation of monopolies through their ability to set rates that maximize earnings yet intensify hardships for growers. Norris wrote that while

trusts are formed to obviate competition I dont [*sic*] see why there should not be competition among rival trusts. The same game would have to be played over again and the final result would be a trust of trusts. The California R. Rs are a case in point. The Santa Fé and S. P. were at one time separate trusts each one having absorbed a number of minor roads. – Now that they have pooled their interests they have only formed another bigger trust.<sup>64</sup>

Norris's interest in the Southern Pacific as the basis of *The Octopus* undoubtedly stems from the emphasis on the firm's practices in California newspapers during the 1890s. In addition, Norris



had a personal connection to the railroad. *The Wave*, which employed Norris from 1894 through 1897, was founded as a publicity outlet for the company's Hotel Del Monte and was a staunch defender of this corporation throughout Norris's tenure.

To explore the historical foundations of the struggles between ranchers and the Southern Pacific, Norris travelled to San Francisco on 10 April and remained in California until the end of summer. Norris discussed his research in a letter to Marcossan, writing that *The Octopus*

is the hardest work I have ever done in my life, a solid year of writing and 4 months of preparation – bar two months – and I think the best thing far and away that I ever did. You have no idea of the outside work on it. I've been in correspondence with all kinds of people during its composition, from the Traffic Manager of a Western railroad to the sub-deputy-assistant of the Secretary of Agriculture at Washington. . . . Well, the thing is done now and I know when it slumps and I know when it strikes and I think the strikes are the most numerous and important. I know that in the masses I've made no mistake.<sup>65</sup>

Once in the city, he rapidly accumulated information from a variety of sources. According to his widow, Jeannette Preston Black, Norris spent many hours at the Mechanics' Institute Library, combing through the files of the *Chronicle* and *Examiner*.<sup>66</sup> The latter periodical contained an abundance of material on the practices of the Southern Pacific as William Randolph Hearst, the owner of the paper, commissioned Ambrose Bierce to monitor the attempts of Collis P. Huntington, who was then head of the corporation, to petition Congress for an indefinite extension of the conglomerate's debt repayment. Norris also studied the undertakings of the company during the 1890s, most notably its manipulation of freight rates. Since the Southern Pacific had little effective competition, its officials arbitrarily changed the short-haul prices to

various terminal points, and numerous articles dealing with this issue are contained in Norris's notes.<sup>67</sup> In addition, he attempted to comprehend all aspects of wheat farming, gleaned various details about the production, transportation, and distribution of grain in relation to the actions of railroad executives, which enabled Norris to understand the complexities of this conflict.<sup>68</sup> After finishing his inquiries in California, he returned to New York and began composing *The Octopus*, working on the manuscript until 15 December 1900 when he dated his prefatory note on this volume's relationship to *The Pit* and *The Wolf*. Due to the length of the novel, which totaled 652 pages in the first edition, Norris was unable to secure serial publication.<sup>69</sup> The book first appeared on April 1, 1901 and had entered its fourth printing by July; by the end of 1902, *The Octopus* had become Norris's most popular work to date with sales of 33,420 copies in the United States.<sup>70</sup>

Norris's research provided the basis for his treatment of the Pacific and Southwestern as the central Deterministic agent, which dictates the actions of the characters through its authority over the infrastructure of California. The narrator highlights this function through S. Behrman, the chief banker of Bonneville and the representative of the monopoly, observing that the

railroad did little business in that part of the country that S. Behrman did not supervise, from the consignment of a shipment of wheat to the management of a damage suit, or even to the repair and maintenance of the right of way. . . . The ranchers of Bonneville knew whom to look to as a source of trouble. There was no denying that fact that for Ostermann, Broderson, Annixter and Derrick, S. Behrman was the railroad.<sup>71</sup>

Behrman is the immediate source of the ranchers' suffering as he manipulates the conditions of production and distribution in Bonneville, evident through his authority over the shipment of

wheat. By controlling the resources on which the farmers depend for their livelihoods, Behrman can shape the terms of economic activity, and the growers are powerless to oppose his practices. Norris furthers this representation of the conglomerate's power through Shelgrim, the president of the Pacific and Southwestern, who directs shipping throughout the state and has a significant presence in the fiscal policies of the nation. Annixter notes that Shelgrim, "owns the courts. He's got men like Ulsteen in his pocket. He's got the Governor of the State in his pocket. He keeps a million-dollar lobby at Sacramento every minute of the time the legislature is in session; he's got his own men on the floor of the United States Senate. . . . He sits in his office in San Francisco and pulls the strings and we've got to dance" (104-05). This dominance over the political, financial, and legal system of California, especially those legislative bodies created to regulate the company, offers the settlers no alternatives to the imperative of the railroad and engenders the violent conflict that serves as the pivotal event of *The Octopus*.

The narrator reinforces the company's control through a description of California railway map, which expresses the detrimental effects of the Pacific and Southwestern on the laboring population. The narrator observes that the

whole map was gridironed by a vast, complicated network of red lines marked P. and S. W. R. R. These centralized at San Francisco and thence ramified and spread north, east, and south, to every corner of the state. . . . The map was white, and it seemed as if all the colour which should have gone to vivify the various counties, towns, and cities marked upon it had been absorbed by that huge, sprawling organism, with its ruddy arteries converging to a central point. It was as though the State had been sucked white and colourless, and against this pallid background the red arteries of the monster stood out, swollen with life-blood,

reaching out to infinity, gorged to bursting; an excrescence, a gigantic parasite  
fattening upon the life-blood of an entire commonwealth. (288-89)

Regarding this passage, Clare Virginia Eby asserts that “the P. and S. W. unifies the people of California, bringing them together. Norris’ corporealization of the map into a system of arteries underscores how thoroughly the railroad connects and, however insidiously, sustains California.”<sup>72</sup> While the tracks integrate the state into a unified whole, Eby attributes an organic existence to the conglomerate, one that sustains itself by exploiting the efforts of others and consuming the resources of the region. The narrator further conveys this parasitic function through the references to blood with the implication that this corporation drains the life from local communities through its domination over the means of transporting essential commodities. Returning to this metaphor later, the narrator refers to the railroad as “the iron-hearted monster of steel and steam, implacable, insatiable, huge—its entrails gorged with the life blood that it sucked from an entire commonwealth, its ever hungry maw glutted with the harvests that should have fed the famished bellies of the whole world” (322). The consequences that the Pacific and Southwestern engenders for California have broader implications in that they interfere with the distribution of necessary foodstuffs and prevent the natural abundance of the area from alleviating human suffering. The image of this monopoly as a vampire intimates that the firm does not serve a beneficent function; instead, it embarks on a course that compromises the survival of the populace in order to maximize profits.

Norris’s incorporation of the Mussel Slough Tragedy develops the representation of these Deterministic forces as this event illustrates the broader consequences engendered by a concentration of property ownership. He provides the exposition for the struggle in Chapter 3, tracing the Pacific and Southwestern’s refusal to honor the agreements that encouraged people to

settle on the acreage granted to the company, and Norris gleaned the background for this occurrence from the San Francisco newspapers. According to the *Chronicle*, the Southern Pacific distributed circulars that stated

the company invites settlers to go upon their lands before patents are issued or the road is completed, and intends in such cases to sell to them in preference to any other applicants, and at a price based upon the value of the land without the improvements put upon them by the settlers. If the settlers desire to buy, the company gives them the first privilege of purchase, at a fixed price, which in every case shall only be the value of the land, without regard to improvements.<sup>73</sup>

The primary emphasis of both the original and Norris's reproduction centers on improving the contested territories that would logically increase their value and foster rates beyond the means of average farmers. Such references occur four times in the *Chronicle*, presumably to alleviate concerns that men would be charged for their labor and that their industry would ultimately be used against them. Norris made only minor changes to this source, substituting the impersonal "its" for "their," an alteration that establishes the corporation as an institution rather than a collection of individuals and thereby anticipates Shelgrim's speech (117). The author also removed the mention of the settlers in the first sentence, and this change minimizes their agency by presenting the improvements to the land in more abstract terms. He further omitted the second sentence, a logical revision since this passage merely restates contractual terms reiterated throughout the pamphlet. However, it is important to note that the documents circulated by the railroad were not formal contracts that would stand up in a court of law; the failure of the ranchers to perceive the reality of the situation reveals their inability to negotiate the complexities of the modern economic arena and further suggests the inevitability of their defeat.

Based on their misapprehension of these documents, both the characters and their historical antecedents began to cultivate and to develop these spaces, which were primarily deserts inhabited by wild cattle that would not be worth the quoted prices. In this context, such efforts denote the parameters of the American Dream and reinforce the possibility for economic expansion associated with California, and the engagement of these laborers with the soil reflected the conventional idea that wealth would stem from diligence, patience, and honest work.

The labor connected with the farmers expresses their role in transforming barren earth into fertile farmland in contrast to the Pacific and Southwestern, which holds its grants for the purposes of speculation. Norris initially highlights this point when Presley observes “Derrick’s main irrigating ditch, a vast trench not yet completed, which he and Annixter . . . were jointly constructing” (14). This reference connects *The Octopus* to the narrative of the Mussel Slough ranchers, who engaged in a similar construction project that greatly increased the worth of the contested spaces. According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the

settlers went peacefully to work, and, as shown by the State Engineer’s report for 1880, by untiring industry against many discouragements, with no aid but three teams, dug ditches and laid out a system of irrigation that, though not perfect, nevertheless sufficed to increase the value of the lands immensely, and out of an arid desert create a fertile farming country.<sup>74</sup>

Such projects were of vital importance in the Central Valley, which Kevin Starr refers to “as a semiarid steppe, with soil baked by the sun to such hardness that it frequently had to be broken with dynamite. For California to become inhabitable and productive in its entirety would require a statewide water system of heroic magnitude.”<sup>75</sup> The settlers, thereby, were involved not only

in the immediate venture of economic expansion but also the broader undertaking of creating the conditions that would give rise to modern California and allow the state to sustain its population. Annixter further defines his connection to his property when he responds to statements by Cyrus Blakelee Ruggles, the land agent for the railroad, about price increases by asking, “who made it worth twenty? . . . I’ve improved it up to that figure. . . . Do you people think that you can hold that land, untaxed, for speculative purposes until it goes up to thirty dollars and then sell out to someone else—sell it over our heads?” (196). Annixter articulates the labor theory of value, which stipulates that the worth of a commodity stems from the effort necessary to produce it. In *Two Treatises of Government*, John Locke associates possession with such practices, stating that whatever one “removes out of that state that Nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labor with it, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property.”<sup>76</sup> This conception has a slightly different application in the novel since Annixter and his fellow growers employ tenants to work in their fields, yet the capital improvements, including the construction of the waterway and Annixter’s barn, operate in the context of this formulation.

*The Octopus* further demonstrates this engagement with the land through Dyke, a former railroad engineer turned farmer, whose hopes to attain mobility through agricultural labor reflect the American Dream. Dyke articulates his desire for material progress by noting that “I’m dead sure of a bonanza crop by now. The rain came *just* right. I actually don’t know if I can store the crop in the barns I built, it’s going to be so big. . . . After I’ve paid off the mortgage . . . I’ll clear big money, m’ son. Yes, sir. I *knew* there was boodle in hops” (343). The bountiful harvest illustrates the promise of the West through a successful interaction with the natural world. The narrator underscores this point by asserting that Dyke “was his own man, a proprietor, an owner of land, furthering a successful enterprise. No one had helped him; he had followed no man’s

lead. He had struck out unaided for himself, and his success was due solely to his own intelligence, industry, and foresight” (344). For Dyke, the productive act of labor supplies a framework for self-sufficiency, and prosperity has a practical purpose, evident through his desire to pay off his debts, to enroll his daughter in the seminary, and to expand his enterprise. The company, however, does not view wealth in such terms as its officials pursue capital accumulation heedless of consequences. The narrator’s invocation of the national success story signifies that these conventional approaches to advancement are not applicable to the era of monopolies as even diligent labor and the foresight to anticipate conditions favorable for a bonanza crop do not offer the means for advancement due to the institutions that control the economic system.

While Dyke reflects attributes of the original Mussel Slough settlers, Norris replaces the small farmers that participated in this conflict with large landowners, an alteration that provides a more objective treatment of his major themes. The individuals involved in the actual dispute worked farms that averaged about 600 hundred acres; however, Norris’s ranchers control vast estates tilled by an itinerant labor force. Norris’s growers have little engagement with the soil, which they view not as a means to self-sufficiency and gradual economic progress but as a source of wealth to be exploited mercilessly.<sup>77</sup> Developing this point in relation to Magnus Derrick, the narrator states that it

was the true California spirit that found expression through him, the spirit of the West, unwilling to occupy itself with details, refusing to wait, to be patient, to achieve by legitimate plodding; the miner’s instinct of wealth acquired in a single night prevailed, in spite of all. It was in this frame of mind that Magnus and the multitude of other ranchers of whom he was a type, farmed their ranches. They



had no love for their land. They were not attached to the soil. They worked their ranches as a quarter of a century before they had worked their mines. . . . To get all there was out of the land, to squeeze it dry, to exhaust it, seemed their policy. When, at last, the land was worn out, would refuse to yield, they would invest their money in something else; by then, they would have made their fortunes.

(298-99)

This perspective suggests the shift in the American Dream as a result of the Gold Rush from an emphasis on riches as a reward for diligence and initiative to the primary focus of existence. With the earth reduced to a disposable commodity, the destruction of these resources are of little consequence to Derrick and his associates, who simply wish to extract every ounce of profit from their holdings like their predecessors destroyed the mining regions to remove the mineral deposits contained therein. As a result of this outlook, these characters operate in the same context as the Pacific and Southwestern, fighting for their right to maximize earnings against the impulses of the company to do the same.<sup>78</sup> Through this process, Norris indicates that capitalism corrupts individuals at all levels of the social order and offer alternatives for development that are similar to the structures they seek to eradicate, which the narrative develops through the bribery scheme advanced by the League.

Although the ranchers in *The Octopus* differ from the Mussel Slough settlers, Norris accurately presents important developments in California following the Gold Rush. He draws on this event through Magnus, who came West in search of a fortune and then adapted to changing conditions after the 1850s. The narrator states that Derrick

had been as lucky in his mines as in his gambling, sinking shafts and tunneling in violation of expert theory and finding “pay” in every case. Without knowing it,

he allowed himself to work his ranch much as if he was still working his mine.

The old-time spirit of '49, hap-hazard, unscientific, persisted in his mind.

Everything was a gamble—who took the greatest chances was most apt to be the greatest winner. (65)

The primary attributes of Derrick, the gambling instinct, his selfish pursuit of financial gain, his willingness to exploit resources heedless of long-term effects, evoke the central imperatives of the Gold Rush and its role in determining his perspective on the land. Magnus's movement from miner to farmer followed the trajectory of many who ventured west to find riches and then shifted their focus to cultivating grain, which had replaced bullion as the primary source of prosperity in the state by the 1870s. According to John J. Powell, gold, after reaching its peak of \$57,331,034 in 1853, declined to an annual output of between fifteen and twenty million dollars by the 1870s.<sup>79</sup> Agriculture, in fact, had far outstripped precious metals, increasing from seventy-five million dollars in 1872 to one-hundred million in 1873.<sup>80</sup> Although farming in California was quite varied, the principal crop was wheat, with a yield of 25 million bushels per year.<sup>81</sup> The extent of agricultural production and its resulting wealth produced a view of the land that differed from earlier versions of the American Dream.

Norris augments the land dispute between the railroad and the ranchers by combining this struggle with the company's manipulation of freight rates, which presents the activities of the Pacific and Southwestern within a broader pattern of abuses. Ulsteen's decision provides an illustration of the corporation's ability to control the economic framework that governs the central characters. For the details of this episode, Norris incorporated clashes between the Southern Pacific and the California Railroad Commission, which created a rate schedule in 1895 that reduced prices by 8%. Joseph McKenna, a District Court Judge who became Attorney

General in 1897 and a Supreme Court Justice in 1898, granted a temporary injunction against this order, deciding after a protracted hearing that “a tariff of rates is not reasonable which barely omits confiscation. . . . To be reasonable, it must reimburse charges and expenses and give, besides, an adequate return to investment” and continued the injunction against the reduced cost.<sup>82</sup> This conflict manifests in *The Octopus* as McKenna’s judgment reflects that attributed to Ulsteen in the narrative. Magnus gives Ulsteen’s perspective by observing that “grain rates as low as the new figure would amount to confiscation of property, and that, on such a basis, the railroad could not be operated at a legitimate profit. As he is powerless to legislate in this matter, he can only put the rates back at what they were before the commission made the cut, and it is so ordered” (11). Norris indicates that the political system does not function impartially for the benefit of both producers and shippers; instead, this legislative apparatus supplies the conglomerate with a means to safeguard its interests at the expense of the farmers. Clarifying this point, Harlan Derrick notes that the return to the old figure was the work of S. Behrman, who was

in the city the whole time the new schedule was being drawn, and he and Ulsteen and the Railroad Commission were as thick as thieves. He had been up there all this week, too, doing the railroad’s dirty work, and backing Ulsteen up. . . . Can we raise wheat at a legitimate profit with a tariff of four dollars to the ton for moving it two hundred miles to tide-water, with wheat at eighty-seven cents? Why not hold us up with a gun in our faces, and say, ‘hands up,’ and be done with it? (11)

The reference to being held up at gunpoint suggests that the actions of the company are based on expropriation, yet these practices do not constitute theft since they originate within the structure of a legal system that serves the predatory inclinations of the Pacific and Southwestern.<sup>83</sup>

Norris further illustrates the power of the railroad and its manipulation of land prices during Annixter's party, which juxtaposes the belligerence of the characters with the aggression of the company and prefigures their final confrontation. The scene initially focuses on the fight between Annixter and Delaney, and Norris employs Deterministic imagery to present the circumstances surrounding this quarrel. Describing the responses to the hostilities, the narrator observes that it "was sand blown off a rock; the throng of guests, carried by an impulse not was not to be resisted, bore back against the sides of the barn, overturning chairs, tripping upon each other, falling down, scrambling to their feet again, stepping over one another, getting behind each other" (256). The tranquility during the earlier stages of the gathering contrasts this chaos, which developed through Annixter's jealousy in his pursuit of Hilma and the resulting termination of Delaney. This scene is of further importance as it serves to anticipate the climactic gun battle. This episode also relies on a sudden outbreak of violence amid an otherwise festive occasion, the rabbit drive and barbeque, and the account of people fleeing when Annixter and Delaney open fire mirrors the behavior of the animals once they have been caged before their extermination. The connection between the creatures and the party guests, including those who will die in the shootout, highlights their lack of agency and indicates that their actions stem from a desire for self-preservation. Norris also situates the barn dance within the representation of economic Determinism through the arrival of notices that state the new costs for the property they have occupied. Recounting the ranchers' reactions, the narrator notes that the

sense of wrongs, the injustices, the oppression, extortion, and pillage of twenty years suddenly culminated and found voice in a raucous howl of execration. For a second there was nothing articulate in that cry of savage exasperation, nothing even intelligent. It was the human animal hounded into its corner, exploited harried to its last stand, at bay, ferocious, terrible, turning at last with bared teeth and upraised claws to meet the death grapple. (272)

The juxtaposition of Annixter and Delaney's fight with the announcement of the new rates conveys a battle with more serious repercussions than the interpersonal conflict that has just transpired. The first merely involves two men and ends with a minor injury; the second comprises the settlers in a larger struggle against a corporate monopoly that controls an entire state. This resulting clash culminates in the deaths of seven men, the loss of the others' means of subsistence, and the end of the lives they had built. Norris's presentation of this theme expresses the reduction of the farmers to mere beasts hounded by the railroad and suggests that their deeds emerge due to those of the Pacific and Southwestern with bloodshed as the necessary consequence of these practices.

In portraying these tactics, Norris incorporated the Southern Pacific's deviations from the provisions in its circulars for the sale of the land grants. The corporation began grading these holdings, first under the direction of the aptly named Mr. Crooks, whose quotes were far higher than those initially given by the railroad, and then under the direction of William H. Clark, who arrived at monetary figures that the farmers deemed to be outrageous.<sup>84</sup> In 1878, Madden announced that the cost per acre would now be \$22 to \$27, which is the amount stated in the correspondence to Magnus.<sup>85</sup> As in the novel, the company notified the current inhabitants of the new prices through letters from Madden, who also wrote that the properties would be

available for purchase by anyone, with the implication that the ranchers would be evicted if they did not pay the specified rates.<sup>86</sup> In their appeal to the general population, the settlers stated that “many hundreds of our people stood aloof from this trouble and would take no hand in it, but would rather recognize the rights of the company and buy of them, believing that they would live up to their promises and so believed until they had built this branch of their road and received patents for these lands and sent their graders in here to grade them.”<sup>87</sup> The Southern Pacific responded to such claims by attributing this increase to the value produced by the laying of tracks, and Charles Crocker asserted that the circulars only said \$2.50 and upwards, terms that imposed few constraints on what the conglomerate could charge.<sup>88</sup>

In response to Madden’s notices, the farmers called a mass meeting in Hanford, then in Tulare County and six miles to the southeast of Mussel Slough, forming the Grand Settlers’ League to represent its interests. This organization resolved that “we are not willing, and we look upon it as a case of injustice without parallel in the United States that we should have to pay the enhanced value made by our industry and toil.”<sup>89</sup> This group concerned itself primarily with challenging the Southern Pacific in the State Legislature, U. S. Congress, and the Supreme Court, contesting the company’s claim to these properties and its right to raise rates from those stated in its handbills.<sup>90</sup> These avenues offered limited chances for success since the Supreme Court in *Schulenburg v. Harriman* (1874) nullified the provisions in land grants that required companies to meet certain requirements in order to claim title, a decision that applied to all cases involving railroads.<sup>91</sup> The settlers suffered a crucial defeat when Judge Lorenzo Sawyer, who had shares of Southern Pacific stock, ruled in *Southern Pacific v. Orton* (1879) that the corporation still owned the tracts in question, which it could reclaim without compensation.<sup>92</sup> The League also appealed directly to President Rutherford B. Hayes when he visited San

Francisco in 1880, presenting him with a petition that read, “through sheer energy and perseverance by the investment of our means, by excessive toil and privation continued through the best years of our lives, and relying firmly upon the rights we had acquired as American citizens, and upon the pledges of the Southern Pacific Railroad Company, we converted a desert into one of the garden spots of the State.”<sup>93</sup> These legal challenges provided no redress for the ranchers’ grievances and affirmed the right of the conglomerate to sell its holdings at whatever price the market would bear to any interested party.

Norris deviated significantly from the particulars of the League, which reinforces his representation of the Deterministic forces. While the fictional organization seeks legal redress in cases that parallel those of their historical antecedents, Norris devotes little attention to these maneuvers. Instead, the novel focuses on the settlers’ attempts to elect a Railroad Commission conducive to their interests, a development that causes Derrick and his associates to embrace tactics they deplore in the Pacific and Southwestern. There is no evidence that the actual ranchers resorted to bribery or that producers employed similar practices during the struggle over freight rates.<sup>94</sup> Norris’s inclusion of this subplot expresses a refusal to present an overly-simplistic narrative with righteous farmers struggling against the villainous railroad and further highlights the consequences of straying from the principles that once governed the American experience. Norris develops this theme primarily through Magnus Derrick, a figure of “honesty, rectitude, uncompromising integrity,” whose initial refusal to enter the scheme represents a final stand against “the devious manœuvring, the evil communications, the rotten expediency of a corrupted institution” (114). The rejection of such practices conveys the fundamental honesty and integrity of Magnus, who once resigned from an active life in politics to preserve these values, yet he abandons from these virtues as a result of broader economic pressures.

This tension between monetary concerns and ethical behavior governs Magnus's undertakings for the remainder of *The Octopus*, and Norris locates this development within the Gold Rush and its subsequent impact on the American experience. When Derrick considers the bribery plot, the narrator refers to the character's reputation as "the most redoubtable poker player in El Dorado County," a reference that denotes a mining district in California and emphasizes financial gain severed from productive labor (185). The perspective fostered through these experiences, one that values "achievement, fame, influence, prestige, possibly great wealth" supersedes his "cherished, lifelong integrity, the unstained purity of his principles" as his position within the League will enable him to potentially attain the former but only through the sacrifice of the latter (185). Norris further develops the conflict between economics and ethics through the use of conventional Deterministic imagery when the narrator observes that Magnus "was entangled, already his foot was caught in the mesh that was being spun" (188). This passage suggests that the rancher is at the mercy of both his earlier ambitions and the Pacific and Southwestern; as a result of these influences, his actions are no longer in alignment with his principles. The narrator extends the meaning of this reference after Magnus acquiesces to Broderson's plans, noting again that Derrick "was hopelessly caught in the mesh. Wrong seemed indissolubly knitted into the texture of Right. He was blinded, dizzied, overwhelmed, caught in the current of events, and hurried along he knew not where" (291-92). This repetition compounds the agents arrayed against the settlers, indicating that he is animated by internal and external forces to the extent that he no longer operates in accordance with his free will. This process culminates when the crowd at the Opera House confronts him about the scheme to elect the Railroad Commissioners, and when Magnus attempts to challenge his opponents, he learns that it "was gone – that old-time power of mastery, that faculty of command. The ground



crumbled beneath his feet. Long since it had been, by his own hand, undermined. Authority was gone. . . . His own honour had been prostituted” (559). This connection between integrity and identity articulates Magnus’s broader tragedy, one fostered by placing pecuniary aspirations over proper conduct, and expresses the need for a return to the values that have been betrayed within a changing social order.

In further explicating the forces aligned against the central characters, Norris returned to the ability of the Pacific and Southwestern to manipulate freight costs through Lyman Derrick’s betrayal of the ranchers. In this section, Norris again incorporated the tactics of the Southern Pacific, which employed the California Railroad Commission, an agency that ostensibly functioned to regulate the company, to its advantage. An article in Norris’s surviving notebook titled “Gold Brick Grain-Rate Reduction” focuses on the formulation of a new schedule that offered an apparent price decrease by lowering charges between points with little rail activity yet making no changes in high-traffic destinations. The anonymous writer observed that the

great victory for the Southern Pacific lies in the fact that it has got rid forever of the real reductions made by the old Board, and has in its place a tariff in which no reductions are made between important wheat-shipping points, but a bogus average of 10 per cent reduction is shown on paper by changes in rates from stations where no wheat is ever shipped.<sup>95</sup>

By implementing cuts to areas where people did not cultivate wheat and maintaining previous fees where growers produced and transported grain, the Commission provided a semblance of progress within a structure that favored the railroad. Norris bracketed this passage, underlined the phrase about the appearance of lowered rates, and integrated this idea into the narrative through Lyman’s proposal, one that relies on superficial reductions that do not address shipping

in the San Joaquin Valley. This material highlights the principals' inability to protect themselves from the Pacific and Southwestern, which has infiltrated regulatory bodies to the extent that the settlers cannot safeguard their interests through the existing legislative framework. Norris underscores the broader consequences of these Deterministic agents through Lyman's role in subordinating the farmers, including his father and brother, as the individual elected through the bribery scheme sells out the ranchers to further his political ambitions.

Norris further illustrates the predatory tactics of the company through the fate of Dyke, whose exploitation by the Pacific and Southwestern and his recourse to violence anticipate the bloody denouement of *The Octopus*. After crop failures throughout the nation increased the demand for California hops, the conglomerate raises its shipping charges from two cents a pound, which would have meant a fortune for Dyke, to five, a figure that conditions his ruin. When he protests this increase, the clerk explains that "the freight rate has gone up to meet the price. We're not doing business for our health" (349). This manipulation enables the monopoly to drain all potential profit from others' labor, and the clerk's reply indicates that economic imperatives supersede any concern for the consequences of railroad policies. When Dyke asks Behrman to clarify the basis for calculating rates, the agent states, "all—the—traffic—will—bear" (350). This response, outlining a practice of charging the most money that people will spend, presents the dominance of the corporation as its officials can set prices that absorb the value of crops, and farmers are obliged to pay due to a lack of any alternative means to sell their produce. Reflecting on the character's defeat, the narrator observes that Dyke "had merely been the object of a colossal trick, a sordid injustice, a victim of the insatiate greed of the monster, caught and choked by one of those millions of tentacles suddenly reaching up from below, from out the dark beneath his feet, coiling around his throat, throttling him, strangling him, sucking his

blood” (352-53). Dyke’s attempt to beat the Pacific and Southwestern through a successful harvest represents his final undoing since the contest that has been rigged against him due to the firm’s control of the state, its legal apparatus, and shipping lines, evident through the references to the tentacles of the octopus.

In this context, the train robbery is the logical result of the procedures employed by the Pacific and Southwestern and suggests that violence serves as a predictable response to exploitation in the absence of any alternatives. An article in Norris’s scrapbook for *The Octopus* reflects the climax of Dyke’s narrative: the anonymous author of “Train Hold-up in Arizona” stated that a “Wells Fargo express car safe was broken into by dynamite and looted of at least \$10,000.”<sup>96</sup> This act parallels Dyke’s transgression as both center on monetary gain, and the culprits were only interested in the safe rather than the federal mail or any other valuables. Norris, however, deviates from this source, which noted that the deed was “perpetrated by two men and was accomplished without firing a shot.”<sup>97</sup> By substituting an individual for the two robbers, Norris expresses Dyke’s isolation and the insignificance of his attempt to combat the conglomerate. In addition to reducing the sum to \$5,000, Norris also invented a murder since no one was injured in the actual crime. This alteration indicates that economic injustice has broader human consequences and locates bloodshed within the context of financial pressures. Annixter advances a similar interpretation, stating that the corporation “drove Dyke from his job because he wouldn’t work for starvation wages. Then you raised freight rates on him and robbed him of all he had. . . . He’s only taken back what you plundered him of” (423). This attempt to strike back at the monopoly through targeting its wealth reflects the pattern of abuse that he has suffered, which limits his broader culpability. Norris develops this point through the use of indirect discourse that represents the public’s perception of Dyke’s offense when the narrator

notes “he was not so much to blame; the railroad people had brought it on themselves. But he had shot a man to death. Ah, that was a serious business” (424). The killing highlights the detrimental effects of the company’s business practices, culminating in the death of an innocent man who was merely attempting to do his job and setting up the final confrontation between the ranchers and the railroad.

For the gunfight, Norris used the basic structure of the Mussel Slough Tragedy, and these elements illustrate the power of the railroad and the consequences for the general population. While residents were assembled at a barbeque on May 11, 1880, U. S. Marshal Alonzo W. Poole attempted to evict settlers from the disputed land and to install the new owners, former station agent Mills D. Hartt and Walter J. Crow, who were commonly believed to be dummy buyers for the company like Delaney and Christian.<sup>98</sup> After dispossessing William Braden, the assemblage traveled to the home of Henry Brewer to remove his partner, John Storer, from property owned by the Southern Pacific, a movement that parallels the seizure of Annixter’s Quien Sabe and the attempt to reclaim Magnus’s Los Muertos.<sup>99</sup> While negotiating the ownership of crops already in the ground, the men were interrupted by a group led by James N. Patterson that sought to prevent the evictions. Few of these individuals were armed, and they desired a peaceful resolution in line with the positions of Annixter and Magnus.<sup>100</sup> The ranchers asked Poole to surrender his revolver; he refused but pledged to leave his weapon holstered.<sup>101</sup> As Patterson and Poole were speaking, ranchers surrounded the marshal and his associates, which led to a quarrel between Crow and James Harris, and gunfire commenced after one of the horses struck Poole with its hoof and knocked him to the ground.<sup>102</sup> Press reports advanced a range of arguments about who began shooting first. A correspondent for the San Francisco *Call* asserted that Harris and Crow opened fire simultaneously, another in the *Chronicle* advanced the position that

“statements point to [the shots] having been discharged by Crow or Hartt, the men in the company of the Marshal,” and a writer for the *Examiner* claimed that it “is not known who commenced the firing.”<sup>103</sup> Although these accounts differed, the aftermath was clear: the ensuing fight claimed the lives of five farmers: Harris, Archibald McGregor, John E. Henderson, Daniel Kelly, and Iver Knutson. Hartt was also killed at the scene, and Crow fled only to be murdered by an unknown assailant.<sup>104</sup> The dead and wounded were taken to Brewer’s house, a sight that a reporter for the *Call* termed “a sickening spectacle” with “the bloody and lifeless remains” of the combatants on the porch.<sup>105</sup> The suffering of the injured men inside revealed “a no less ghastly spectacle” intensified by the “piercing shrieks and heartrending cries” of the victims’ families, which Norris incorporated into the beginning of Chapter 7.<sup>106</sup>

*The Octopus* follows the basic outline of the Mussel Slough Tragedy, yet Norris made several deviations from his sources that reinforced the central themes of the work. Norris deemphasizes the negotiations with the Marshal, situating this episode from the perspectives of the other settlers rather than Magnus, who was involved in the efforts to broker a tentative peace. This obfuscation conveys the inevitability of the gunfight, an incident that serves as the logical culmination of the struggle depicted through the text. In both this skirmish and its historical antecedent, hostilities commence by accident due to the panicked horse that throws Garnett and the animal that knocked over Marshal Poole. These incidents reflect the operations of chance, which seems to exist outside a Naturalistic worldview and compromises the possibility of an unavoidable outcome; however, this concept does not mean that one has the ability to either win or lose since his Fate has already been decided. The characters have no means to alter their destinies, and a random occurrence facilitates the movement toward a preordained conclusion. In this context, Norris deviated from newspaper reports in terms of the events preceding the

fight. In *The Octopus*, Derrick and the Marshal are surrounded by men from the latter's party, yet farmers advanced on Patterson and Poole in actuality.<sup>107</sup> This alteration intensifies the obstacles facing Norris's principals, who are outnumbered by individuals aligned with the most powerful institution in California, conditions that necessitate a violent response. Norris also attributes the first shot to Hooven, whereas press accounts of the Mussel Slough Tragedy did not claim that a rancher fired first. This change highlights the growers' inability to accurately perceive what has transpired as they "misinterpret" Garnett's fall as an act of aggression against them (521). This development seems to engender a broader responsibility for the drastic consequences unleashed by Hooven's deed, but the shooting is the necessary result of circumstances that have been brought about by a confrontation with a stronger force, which could only have been avoided if the men were motivated by concerns other than financial gain. Norris underscores this point after the shootout when the "horror of that dreadful business had driven all other considerations from the mind. The sworn foes of the last hour had no thoughts of anything but to care for those whom, in their fury, they had shot down" (528). This emergence of a collective consciousness, one that allows the survivors to view their fellows in terms of a common humanity, signifies the potential for development when freed from the economic considerations that had governed the actions of the principals. This ironic commentary heightens the tragedy of the narrative since this realization has come too late to prevent bloodshed.

The final chapters of *The Octopus* express the limitations of the American Dream through adopting the perspective of Presley, who advances ideas of progress despite the absence of any evidence to support his view. Many critics have construed the conclusion as an illustration of Norris's Transcendentalism, yet such readings confuse Presley's interpretation of events with

that of the writer.<sup>108</sup> This conflation of the author and his character does have some merit as Norris assigns some of his attitudes to Presley through the poet's hostility toward aestheticism, which mirrors Norris's position in "An Opening for Novelists," and the fact that both are trying to fashion literature out of the West. However, as McElrath notes, Presley ignores these raw materials to base his work on the models of others and thereby reflects tendencies that Norris condemned.<sup>109</sup> Throughout the novel, Presley is separated from the realm of action: while the farmers are involved in a physical struggle for survival, Presley's battle is limited to the composition of verse until his convoluted speech and failed attempt to assassinate Behrman. When Presley is not searching for inspiration for his epic, he is a passive observer who simply listens to the ranchers' discussions, takes a peripheral role in the coming conflict, and even bases his poem on Millet's *The Man with the Hoe* rather than the settlers' experiences.<sup>110</sup> Shelgrim makes this point when he states that the painting "leaves nothing more to be said. You might have well kept quiet. There's only one best way to say anything. And what has made the picture of 'The Toilers' great is that the artist said in it the *best* that could be said on the subject" (574). Presley's text is merely a copy of one drawn from life, a facsimile that offers no original contribution to the fight against the railroad. This approach differs from that of Norris, who transforms the Mussel Slough Tragedy into a representation of a principal source of injustice and fashions its participants' plight into a novel that challenges the economic elite.

The representation of Presley further undermines the plausibility of assertions that he serves as Norris's spokesman as the narrator highlights both the limitations of the poet's perceptions and his tendency to adopt the perspectives of the people around him. Norris stresses these elements in his sketch of Presley, writing that he is "easily impressed—impressionable," possesses "an unbalanced mind," and "could easily go insane."<sup>111</sup> This disordered mind does not

seem to be the logical repository for Norris's attitude toward his material and instead denotes the broader separation between the novelist and his character. The narrator advances the problematic nature of Presley's observations by noting that he "devoured, rather than read, and emerged from the affair, his mind a confused jumble of conflicting notions, sick with over-effort, raging against injustice and oppression, and with not one sane suggestion as to remedy or redress" (307-08). Presley's impressions reflect a superficial engagement with the actual struggles of the narrative, and the fact that his thoughts are shaped by an emotional response rather than a rational framework prevents him from seeing these experiences clearly. Since these ideas emerge within the subjectivity of the aesthete, Presley's interpretations should not be elevated to the status of wisdom. Norris further emphasizes the instability of Presley's point of view through his tendency to take on the beliefs and practices of his stronger counterparts: his decision to bomb Behrman's house comes from his interaction with Caraher, and the poet's final pronouncements are an amalgamation of beliefs espoused by Vanamee and Shelgrim, which should not be confused with the underlying themes of *The Octopus*.

In this context, Presley's perspective in the final chapters illustrates concepts that do not cohere with experience, ones that trivialize oppression by grafting ideas of progress to narratives of failure and destruction, which manifest through his interactions with the president of the Pacific and Southwestern. Norris highlights the falsity of Shelgrim's assertions by filtering them through Presley's unreliable point of view, evident through his perceptions of the boss's charitable act. The narrator states that Presley "had been prepared to come upon an ogre, a brute, a terrible man of blood and iron, and instead had discovered a sentimentalist and an art critic. No standards of measurement in his mental equipment would apply to the actual man" (574). The apparent compassion of the railroad magnate does not match Presley's initial interpretation



because he perceives life through simplistic oppositions and cannot separate the executive's interpersonal conduct from his business undertakings. This context frames Shelgrim's claim that

you are dealing with forces, young man, when you speak of Wheat and the Railroads, not with men. There is the Wheat, the supply. It must be carried to feed the People. There is the demand. The Wheat is one force, the Railroad, another, and there is the law that governs them—supply and demand. Men have only little to do in the whole business. Complications may arise, conditions that bear hard on the individual—crush him maybe—*but the Wheat will be carried to feed the people* as inevitably as it will grow. If you want to fasten the blame of the affair at Los Muertos on any one person, you will make a mistake. Blame conditions, not men. (576)

While Shelgrim contends that actions result from abstract laws of exchange divorced from human agency, he obscures the essential truth that the circumstances governing the marketplace stem from men. The analogy of the wheat is appropriate, yet it demonstrates a different position since the grain would not have grown without the ranchers creating a system of irrigation, planting the crops, tending them, and harvesting these commodities. The socio-economic conditions that determine the fates of the farmers are likewise the products of individuals: company officials have manipulated supply and demand by fixing the price of land and arbitrarily setting freight rates in accordance with their financial interests. This control over the social order engenders a broader sense of culpability because these executives orchestrated the practices that have caused such drastic consequences. Norris further suggests the specious nature of Shelgrim's position when the narrator remarks that "Presley regained the street stupefied, his brain in a whirl. This new idea, this new conception dumbfounded him. Somehow, he could not

deny it. It rang with the clear reverberation of truth” (576-77). The narrator reiterates one of the common motifs associated with Presley’s instability, which gains credence through his earlier admission that he has suffered a nervous breakdown. These references cast doubt on the validity of Shelgrim’s contentions, indicating that they possess “the clear reverberation of truth” only for people whose engagement with reality is based on emotion rather than reason and who search aimlessly for a theory to govern existence rather than attempting to understand the world around them.

The juxtaposition of the opulence at the Gerards’ party and the starvation of Mrs. Hooven further undermines Shelgrim’s position, illustrating the extremes of wealth and poverty that emerge as a result of the practices employed by the Pacific and Southwestern. This episode also has its basis in Norris’s research. One of the articles in his notebook for *The Octopus*, “John Miller/ A Suicide,” provides a description of a lavish dinner:

The wines were of the rarest vintages. The service was irreproachable, the viands fit for a Roman orgie [*sic*] in the days of decadence. The magnates clinked glasses with John Miller. They responded to toasts with flattering allusions to his ability and faithful service. They complimented him on his home, its furnishings, his pictures, statuary, servants, his dinner. None was more fulsome in flattery than old Collis P. Huntington, none more gracious. But all dinners end.<sup>112</sup>

The magnificence of the scene, with its attention to the fine wine and attentive service, reflects Norris’s emphasis in his description of the Gerards’ banquet. The party also reflects the Roman “days of decadence” as the guests are so preoccupied with their possessions, amusements, and luxuries, most notable in Mrs. Gerard’s refusal to eat asparagus that has not been freshly cut, that they are blissfully unaware of the coming social upheaval when “the Man in the Street, grimed

with powder smoke, foul with the gutter” would burn the imposing house to its foundations (609). The use of John Miller as a potential source is even more significant given that he was an executive who stole more than a million dollars from the Southern Pacific Contract and Finance Company. This allusion underscores the duplicity of the railroad officials and indicates that such luxury and ease are the result of fleecing others, which parallels the Pacific and Southwestern’s usurpation of the land improved by the settlers.

The fate of Mrs. Hooven conveys the consequences of such practices, and this character’s downfall also has its basis in Norris’s research. Another piece in his notebook, “Mother Starves to Death,” presents a woman’s demise on the streets of New York after being refused admittance to an almshouse because she did not meet the requirements for aid.<sup>113</sup> While Norris omitted the poorhouse and substituted Mrs. Hooven’s interactions with the police officer who prevents her from sleeping in the park, the author preserves the tenor of the article as Mrs. Hooven finds no relief aside from whatever she is able to beg. Norris augments this material through Mrs. Hooven’s failure to negotiate the urban space after her husband’s death in the gunfight, an alteration that reinforces the effect of environment on the individual and her inability to adapt to changed circumstances. The juxtaposition between the abundance at the dinner party and the starvation of Mrs. Hooven expresses a fundamental relationship between these episodes: the affluence of those assembled at the former stems from the poverty of people like the latter. Presley advances a similar interpretation when he reflects that “years of extortion and oppression had wrung money from all San Joaquin, money that had made possible this very scene in which he found himself” and concludes that “because the farmers of the valley were poor, these men were rich” (608). The fact that Norris situates this interpretation within Presley’s consciousness denotes its problematic nature as there is not a literal correlation between the banquet and the

deaths of the ranchers. Norris further destabilizes Presley's conclusion through his overstatement: the guests do not literally "fatten on the blood of the People, on the men who had been killed at the ditch," and the women at the table are not "harpies tearing human flesh" (608). Rather than establishing a connection between the events of the narrative and the present scene, the use of Presley's perspective invites a broader interpretation of the causes of such tragedies, one that locates the killing of the settlers within a broader pattern of abuses and identifies such outcomes as the predictable result of an emphasis on capital accumulation over basic human need, which Norris illustrates in bold relief through Mrs. Hooven's death.

This context illuminates Presley's position at the end of the novel, which provides a critique of viewpoints that neglect immediate economic reality and obscure suffering in order to graft ideas of progress on to experience.<sup>114</sup> Norris again uses indirect discourse to reflect Presley's perspective as the narrator prefaces the concluding paragraphs with the statement that "Vanamee's words came back to [Presley's] mind," a reference that attributes the following material to the character rather than to the narrator or author (651). In the closing section, Presley observes that

men—motes in the sunshine—perished, were shot down in the very noon of life, hearts were broken, little children started in life lamentably handicapped; young girls were brought to a life of shame; old women died in the heart of life for lack of food. In that little, isolated group of human insects, misery, anguish, death, and anguish spun like a wheel of fire. (651)

Presley echoes Shelgrim through the emphasis on the insignificance of men, evident through the reference to "human insects." The focus on the Hoovens for the principal illustrations of this inexorable fate, however, highlights the fact that these outcomes resulted from policies instituted

in society rather than the operation of abstract laws. Presley evades such concerns through his reflections on the natural world and its power, noting that “*the WHEAT remained. Untouched, unassailable, undefiled, that mighty world-force, that nourisher of nations, wrapped in Nirvanic calm, indifferent to the human swarm, gigantic, resistless, moved onward in its appointed groves*” (651). As these meditations occur aboard a vessel transporting grain to relieve a famine, Presley focuses on the potential benefits to emerge out of the tragedy, viewing the wheat as an elemental force that operates in line with Shelgrim’s earlier assertions, while the broader argument has its origins in Vanamee’s claims about the ultimate triumph of good. This Machiavellian argument contradicts the majority of *The Octopus* with its emphasis on the process of labor necessary to generate this commodity as it moves only in the “appointed grooves” made by the people who control production and distribution, which thereby suggests that need for human agency to remedy the injustices presented throughout the book. Presley further develops his contention that everything trends inevitably toward the good, positing that

falseness dies; injustice and oppression in the end of everything fade and vanish away. Greed, cruelty, selfishness, and inhumanity are short-lived; the individual suffers, but the race goes on. Annixter dies, but in a far distant corner of the world a thousand lives are saved. The larger view always and through all shams, all wickedness, discovers the Truth that will, in the end, prevail, and all things, surely, inevitably, resistlessly work together for the good. (651-52)

While this logic appeals to Presley after his nervous breakdown, the ideas are the product of Vanamee, who is even more mentally unstable than Presley, and this connection further undermines his outlook with a demonstration of how his opinions are formed by others. The narrative does not advance a philosophy that justifies widespread suffering; instead, the

conclusion provides a critical framework for examining positions that trivialize the fates of individuals, and Norris indicates that this viewpoint should not be taken seriously since it is completely divorced from the central events of the work.

The representation of the natural world also challenges Presley's position, conveying the need to change the practices that govern the economic system, policies that have engendered a broader conflict between men and their surroundings in the desire for acquisition. Early in *The Octopus*, the narrator describes the land through imagery associated with birth and notes that "the earth, after its period of reproduction, its pains of labor, had been delivered of the fruit of its loins, and now slept the sleep of exhaustion" (14). The personification of the environment highlights its potential role in shaping conditions to propagate the species; however, the majority of *The Octopus* illustrates that financial concerns interfere with the ability of the earth to perform this function. Norris dramatizes these consequences when Harran sees a sidecar carrying the plows necessary to plant wheat at Los Muertos, yet while the devices are already in Bonnevill, they must be sent to San Francisco and then back. The Pacific and Southwestern, despite providing the essential service of transporting goods, impedes the process of cultivation and production. By shipping in this manner for an increased rate of eleven cents per ton, the company prevents the ranchers from planting their fields and thereby interferes with the growing cycle. This scene parallels the broader monetary struggle in *The Octopus* and expresses the forces that undermine the potential of the soil: the ranchers are principally concerned that such actions will jeopardize their earnings since the settlers focus solely on the high prices for grain. Likewise, the railroad executives are not concerned with what a bumper crop portends for the hungry and instead view the harvest as a means to raise rates and to maximize earnings. Since such

perspectives dominate the market and influence human interactions, the benevolence of nature will not magically emerge but instead must stem from the work of men to foster such outcomes.

Norris also destabilizes this beneficence through human efforts to master the natural world, which further undermines the optimistic perspective that Presley adopts at the end of the novel. Annie Derrick observes that hospitality of the earth manifests only when “the human ant-swarm was submissive to it, working with it,” yet when people “strive to make head against the power of this nature, and at once it becomes relentless, a gigantic engine, a vast power, huge, terrible; a leviathan with a heart of steel, knowing no compunction, no forgiveness, no tolerance; crushing out the human atom with soundless calm, the agony of destruction never sending a jar” (180). This hostility results from attempts to bend the environment to the interests of men and a general failure to act in accordance with the precepts of their surroundings, which would provide for the continuation of the species and an alleviation of suffering. While the narrative seems to corroborate Presley’s view through the representations of Mrs. Cedarquist’s relief organization and the death of S. Behrman, these episodes challenge the position that the nature will serve a benevolent function without concrete actions taken by individuals to promote this end. Despite the promise offered by the shipment of grain, Norris gives few details about this act of charity and focuses primarily on how it enables Behrman to maximize profits as he will sell the crops he now owns through the dispossession of Magnus to the committee, controlling all aspects of the process of distribution (618-19). Further, Behrman’s subsequent demise as a result of drowning in an avalanche of wheat is not a form of Divine justice and instead emanates from the processes he has created.<sup>115</sup> The use of a chute to load the vessel comes from a desire for maximum efficiency and profitability, allowing for fewer laborers and indirectly sealing Behrman’s fate since no one will be able to help him due to this decision. The narrator’s statement that “the

grain seemed impelled by a force of its own” is contextualized by a reference to Behrman’s labor-saving techniques, and this information reinforces the idea that his fate stems from his greed (641). The tension between the practices of man and the potential of the land suggests that the latter cannot be realized in a meaningful sense without alterations of the former, which further subverts Presley’s position.

Norris offers an alternate course of action through Annixter, who expresses the “larger view” that Presley cannot attain and indicates the potential for growth when people deviate from pursuits based on self-interest.<sup>116</sup> Annixter progresses from an exclusive focus on his requirements to an outlook that situates these impulses within a clear social context, one that does not reduce suffering to a necessary step toward a better future. Initially, Annixter is a misanthrope whose interactions are characterized by cruelty, yet his attitude changes through his love for Hilma Tree, which enables him to broaden his perspective. After she flees instead of becoming Annixter’s mistress, the narrator observes that

the idea of the self dwindled. Annixter no longer considered himself; no longer considered the notion of marriage from the point of view of his own comfort, his own wishes, his own advantage. He realized that in his new-found desire to make her happy, he was sincere. There was something in that idea, after all. To make some one happy—how about that now? It was worth thinking of. (367)

This relationship contrasts operation of the main plot and provides further commentary on the undertakings of the ranchers and railroad officials, who have allowed the desire for financial gain to dictate their activities. Eventually, Annixter’s consciousness expands from Hilma to embrace humanity as he realizes that the conditions confronting one reflect those facing others. Contemplating this development, Annixter asserts that



I began to see that a fellow can't live *for* himself any more than he can live *by* himself. He's got to think of others. . . . I've got a whole lot of ideas since I began to love Hilma, and just as soon as I can, I'm going to get in and *help* people, and I'm going to keep that idea for the rest of my natural life. That ain't much of a religion, but it's the best I've got. (467-68)

Annixter's position mirrors those of Stephen Council from Garland's "Under the Lion's Paw" and Jim Casy from Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, all of whom emphasize collective interests in relation to those of the individual, who must realize his place within the broader human family and act accordingly. Despite the fact that Annixter does not develop this philosophy to the extent of Council and Casy, he does engage in acts of charity comparable to those of the former through his support of Mrs. Dyke and Sidney. The narrator also reveals the potential for further development, stating that Annixter's perceptions "had broadened to enfold another child and another mother bound to him by no other ties than those of humanity and pity. In time, starting from this point it would reach out more and more till it should take in all men and women" (498). The sense of social justice provides a framework to examine the broader financial imperatives that play a leading role in American life and posits the need for a set of values more conducive to the majority. Annixter's death prevents the complete realization of this point of view, which heightens the tragedy of the narrative through the demise of the only character who attempted to remake himself based on such insight.

Contrary to Presley's grandiose pronouncements at the end of *The Octopus*, Annixter's transformation supplies a more logical response to the institutional forces that facilitate such drastic consequences. His shift to a perspective that incorporates the needs of the collective highlights the necessity of a change in consciousness as a prelude to transforming society, and

this conception plays a central role in Norris's fiction. Although he refrained from proposing specific remedies for social ills, claiming that the "novelist—by nature—can hardly be a political economist; and it is to the latter rather than to the former that one must look for a way out of the 'present discontents,'" *McTeague* and *The Octopus* offer avenues for the critical reflection necessary to address the causes of suffering within the current economic system.<sup>117</sup> In these portrayals of the tragedies that emerge from privileging financial gain over basic requirements, Norris articulates the need for an alternate set of values to govern the human enterprise in order to prevent the outcomes represented in these novels and to allow a greater range of development for the working class.

## Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., *Frank Norris Revisited* (New York: Twayne, 1992), 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Berthoff, *The Ferment of Realism: American Literature, 1884-1919* (New York: Free Press, 1965), 225; and Donald Pizer, *The Novels of Frank Norris* (1966; repr., New York: Haskell House, 1973), 179.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Norris to Isaac F. Marcosson, November 22, 1899, in *Frank Norris: Collected Letters*, ed. Jesse S. Crisler (San Francisco: Book Club of California, 1986), 93.

<sup>4</sup> Despite his year in France and his fluency in the language, Norris did not appear to have discovered the fiction of Emile Zola until after his return to the United States and his enrollment in the University of California in 1889. Norris did not encounter Zola through his coursework at the university as his courses on French literature omitted this author (Joseph R. McElrath, R. and Jesse S. Crisler, *Frank Norris: A Life* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006], 109-10). Some of Norris's classmates, however, recalled seeing him about campus "with a French paper edition of Zola under his arm" and noted that he "was always ready to stop and defend the novelist, who to him embodied strength and truth but to most of them was of interest chiefly because of his obscenity" (quoted in McElrath and Crisler, 151). For further discussion, see Christine Harvey, "Dating Frank Norris' Reading of Zola," *Resources for American Literary Study* 24 (1998): 187-206.

<sup>5</sup> Frank Norris, "Zola's *Rome*: Modern Papacy as Seen by the Man of the Iron Pen," *Wave* 15 (6 June 1896): 8; repr. in *The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris*, ed. Donald Pizer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 163.

<sup>6</sup> Norris, "Zola as Romantic Writer," 72.

<sup>7</sup> Frank Norris, "A Plea for Romantic Fiction," *Boston Evening Transcript* (18 December 1901): 14; repr. in *The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris*, 76.

<sup>8</sup> Norris, "A Plea for Romantic Fiction," 78.

<sup>9</sup> Frank Norris, "A Problem in Fiction: Truth Versus Accuracy," *Boston Evening Transcript* (6 November 1901): 20; repr. in *The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris*, 58.

<sup>10</sup> Norris, "A Plea for Romantic Fiction," 75-78.

<sup>11</sup> Frank Norris, "Frank Norris' Weekly Letter," *Chicago American* (3 August 1901): 5; repr. in *The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris*, 75.

<sup>12</sup> Norris, "The Novel with a 'Purpose,'" 90.

<sup>13</sup> Norris, "The Novel with a 'Purpose,'" 91.

<sup>14</sup> Frank Norris, "The Responsibilities of the Novelist," *Critic* 41 (December 1902): 537-40; repr. in *The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris*, 97.

<sup>15</sup> Isaac Frederick Marcossan, "The Story of McTeague," *Louisville Times* (13 March 1899): 6; repr. in *Frank Norris: The Critical Reception*, ed. Joseph R. McElrath, Jr. and Katherine Knight (New York: Burt Franklin, 1981), 33; and Charles F. Lummis, "Another California Novel," *Land of Sunshine*, 11 (July 1899): 117; repr. in *Frank Norris: The Critical Reception*, 52.

<sup>16</sup> Frank Norris, "An Opening for Novelists: Great Opportunities for Fiction Writers in San Francisco," *The Wave* 16 (22 May 1897): 7; repr. in *The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris*, 30.

<sup>17</sup> Norris, "An Opening for Novelists," 30.

<sup>18</sup> Frank Norris, "'The Literature of the West': A Reply to W. R. Lighton," *Boston Evening Transcript* (8 January 1902): 7; repr. in *The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris*, 106.

<sup>19</sup> Norris, “‘The Literature of the West,’” 107.

<sup>20</sup> McElrath, *Frank Norris Revisited*, 36.

<sup>21</sup> Lawrence E. Hussman, *Harbingers of a Century: The Novels of Frank Norris* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 29.

<sup>22</sup> For discussions of Determinism in *McTeague*, see Pizer, *The Novels of Frank Norris*, 59-85; Lewis Fried, “The Golden Brotherhood of *McTeague*,” *Zeitschrift Für Anglistic und Amerikanistik* 23 (1975): 36-40; George M. Spangler, “The Structure of *McTeague*,” in *Critical Essays on Frank Norris*, ed. Don Graham (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980), 88-98; Thomas C. Ware, “‘Gold to Airy Thinness Beat’: The Midas Touch in Frank Norris’s *McTeague*,” *Interpretations* 13 (1981): 39-47; David McGlynn, “*McTeague*’s Gilded Prison,” *Rocky Mountain Review* (Spring 2008): 25-44; and Mohamed Zayani, “When Culinary Desire Meets Pecuniary Desire: Passions for Drinks, Appetites for Food, and Orgies of Gold in Frank Norris’ *McTeague*,” *Excavatio* 12 (1999): 207-15. The prevailing discussions of *McTeague* have centered on biological Determinism, most notably in the formulations of Pizer and Spangler. In his influential study of Norris, Pizer argues that “Norris’s theme is that man’s racial atavism (particularly his brute sexual desire) and man’s individual family heritage (alcoholic degeneracy in *McTeague*’s case) can combine as forces toward reversion, toward a return to the instincts and emotions of man’s animal past” (16). While such readings have expanded the range of ideas associated with *McTeague*, the animal impulses identified by Pizer and Spangler are triggered by pressures rooted within the characters’ immediate environment, which serve as the primary cause of their deterioration. Fried, McGlynn, Ware, and Zayani focus largely on the economic forces operating in the narrative. McGlynn examines *McTeague*’s imprisonment within the material drives of middle-class environment of Polk Street, for which the canary in its gilded cage

provides an apt symbol, and builds on the earlier arguments of Richard Chase and George K. Johnson in tracing the corrupting influence of urban life. Zayani argues that the correlation between the desire for food and that for gold reveals the socio-economic structure around which Norris centers the text, highlighting the insatiability of these impulses as they foster a greater appetite for the immediate object.

<sup>23</sup> “Slashed to Death,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (9 October 1893): 5.

<sup>24</sup> “Twenty-Nine Fatal Wounds,” *San Francisco Examiner* (10 October 1893): 12.

<sup>25</sup> “Collins’ Shirt Found,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (12 October 1893): 4.

<sup>26</sup> “He Was Born for the Rope,” *San Francisco Examiner* (14 October 1893): 8.

<sup>27</sup> “He Was Born for the Rope,” 8.

<sup>28</sup> “He Was Born for the Rope,” 8.

<sup>29</sup> “He Was Born for the Rope,” 8.

<sup>30</sup> While critics have disagreed about the composition history of *McTeague*, Norris wrote to Charles Fletcher Lummis that he started the novel in 1895 (*Collected Letters*, 108). See Robert D. Lundy, *The Making of “McTeague” and “The Octopus,”* Ph.D. dissertation (Berkeley: University of California, 1956), 38,101; Warren French, *Frank Norris* (New York: New Haven: College and University Press, 1962), 62; and James Childs, “The First Draft of *McTeague*, 1893,” *American Notes and Queries* 3 (1964): 37-38.

<sup>31</sup> Frank Norris, *A Novelist in the Making: A Collection of Student Themes and the Novels “Blix” and “Vandover and the Brute,”* ed. James D. Hart (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 88-89.

<sup>32</sup> Norris, *A Novelist in the Making*, 79.

<sup>33</sup> Norris, *A Novelist in the Making*, 81.

<sup>34</sup> Norris, *A Novelist in the Making*, 84-87.

<sup>35</sup> Frank Norris, *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, ed. Donald Pizer (1899; repr., New York: Norton, 1997), 5-6. All further quotations from this edition will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>36</sup> Hugh Dawson, "McTeague as Ethnic Stereotype," *American Literary Realism* 20, no.1 (1987): 34-44.

<sup>37</sup> For a further discussion of the patterns of imagery in *McTeague*, see Suzy Bernstein Goldman, "McTeague: The Imagistic Network," *Western American Literature* 7 (1972): 83-99.

<sup>38</sup> Keith S. Sheppard, "A New Note for McTeague's Canary," *Western American Literature* 9 (1974): 217.

<sup>39</sup> Nan Morelli-White, "The Damnation of *McTeague*: Frank Norris's Morality Play," *Frank Norris Studies* 13 (1992): 5.

<sup>40</sup> McGlynn, 26.

<sup>41</sup> Norris found the inspiration for this object in the large gilded molar that hung outside the offices of Dr. L. A. Teague, a prominent dentist in San Francisco who practiced at the corner of Geary and Kearney during the 1890s. For identifications of other elements of San Francisco that Norris incorporated into the novel, see Lundy, 145-53; and Jesse S. Crisler, *A Critical and Textual Study of Frank Norris's "McTeague,"* Ph.D. dissertation (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1973), 39-62.

<sup>42</sup> Spangler, 88-89.

<sup>43</sup> For further discussion of the lottery, see Fried, 38-39.

<sup>44</sup> Don Graham, *The Fiction of Frank Norris: The Aesthetic Context* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1978), 57.

<sup>45</sup> Norris reinforces these themes through the representation of the home that the McTeagues consider purchasing. The narrator states that it “was a wooden two-story arrangement, built by a misguided contractor in a sort of hideous, Queen Anne style, all scrolls and meaningless millwork, with a cheap imitation of stained glass in the light over the door” (114). Rather than merely serving as an indictment of Gilded Age architecture, this passage encompasses the period itself rather than merely its aesthetic sensibilities. The structure suggests the fraudulent values of the era that stem from manufacturing the illusion of wealth and progress based on outward forms that are ultimately inauthentic. This concern with fraudulence manifests throughout the novel from the workers who carry “lunch baskets painted to imitate leather” (8); Trina’s belt of “imitation alligator skin” (39); the labels reading “Made in France” that she plasters on her Noah’s ark animals (78); pictures “framed in imitation beaten brass,” which mirror the imitation stained glass of the house (91); and McTeague’s sham dental practice, advertised through the enormous gold tooth. For further analysis of artifice in the novel, see Clare Eby, “Of Gold Molars and Golden Girls: Fitzgerald’s Reading of Norris,” *American Literary Realism* 35, no. 2 (2003): 130-58. Eby traces the interrelation between *McTeague* and *The Great Gatsby*, observing that both works emphasize markets and consumer culture in relation to identity.

<sup>46</sup> Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), 84.

<sup>47</sup> For contrasting viewpoints, see Mary B. Werner, “‘A Vast and Terrible Drama’: Frank Norris’s Domestic Violence Fantasy in *McTeague*,” *Frank Norris Studies* 19 (1994): 1-4; Maria F. Brandt, “‘For His Own Satisfaction’: Eliminating the New Woman Figure in *McTeague*,” *American Transcendental Quarterly* 18 (2004): 5-23; and Denise H. Long, “A Dentist No More:



The Destruction of Masculinity in *McTeague*,” *Midamerica* 32 (2005): 67-77. Werner views the narrative as an indictment of domestic violence and claims that “Norris illustrates what happens to men who beat women” through the fates of Zerkow and McTeague (3). Long sees McTeague’s reliance on Trina for financial support as the source of the diminution of masculine ego and observes that when “his words fail to quash Trina’s assertiveness, McTeague resorts to the threat of violence” (74). Brandt argues that the abuse directed toward Trina is a response to “a nativist order threatened by its suddenly perceived loss of ability to describe its most progressive, modern women” in an effort to reinforce “a white, middle-class, masculine order” (8). While such readings introduce an important range of concerns into discussions of the novel, they obscure the extent to which Norris situates McTeague’s actions within an economic context rather than an inversion of conventional gender roles.

<sup>48</sup> In his early review of *McTeague*, Howells argued that Norris’s “one folly is the insistence on the love-making of those silly elders” (“A Case in Point,” *Criticism and Fiction and Other Essays*, ed. Clara Marburg Kirk and Rudolf Kirk [New York: New York University Press, 1959], 282), an argument seconded by Pizer, who finds this episode to be “thematically and dramatically weak” (*The Novels of Frank Norris*, 74). For further discussion of this subplot, William B. Dillingham, “The Old Folks of *McTeague*,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 16, no. 2 (1961): 169-73; Leonard Cassuto, “‘Keeping Company’ with the Old Folks: Unraveling the Edges of *McTeague*’s Deterministic Fabric,” *American Literary Realism* 25, no. 2 (1993): 46-55; Donna M. Campbell, “Frank Norris’ ‘Drama of a Broken Teacup’: The Old Grannis-Miss Baker Plot in *McTeague*,” *American Literary Realism* 26, no. 1 (1993): 40-49; and Hussman, *Harbingers of a Century*, 70-74

<sup>49</sup> McGlynn, 34.

<sup>50</sup> Graham, 61-62. Graham devotes primary attention to the lithograph and its reflection of a traditional world in the context of his discussion of Norris's aesthetic sensibilities with only a secondary emphasis on the other elements in relation to the broader economic themes of the novel.

<sup>51</sup> Frank Norris to William Dean Howells, 28 March 1899, *Collected Letters*, 73. For discussions of the ending of *McTeague*, see Charles S. Watson, "A Source for the Ending of *McTeague*," *American Literary Realism* 5, no. 2 (1972): 173-74; George K. Johnson, "The Frontier behind Frank Norris's *McTeague*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 26 (1962): 91-104; and William J. Hug, "*McTeague* as Metafiction? Frank Norris' Parodies of Bret Harte and the Dime Novel," *Western American Literature* 26, no. 3 (1991): 219-28. For explanations as to how the concluding chapters operate within the context of the structural patterns of the novel, see Graham, 60-65; Pizer, *The Novels of Frank Norris*, 81-82; and Hussman, 75-79.

<sup>52</sup> See Donald Pizer, "The Biological Determinism of *McTeague* in Our Time," *American Literary Realism* 29, no. 2 (1997): 27-32. Pizer argues that recent scholarship in biology and the social sciences offers a partial confirmation of Norris's view in *McTeague*. Pizer effectively addresses the issue of *McTeague*'s inherited alcoholism, examining research that found a hereditary influence to such behavior (28). Pizer's claims are less effective in his discussion of the "born criminal." While he cites quite a few studies that discern a genetic link to crime, two of these stress the role of environmental factors in shaping the actions of the individual, which seems to discredit a biological interpretation of criminality (28-29).

<sup>53</sup> J. L. Brown, *The Mussel Slough Tragedy* (n. p., 1958), 21-30.

<sup>54</sup> "A Collision," *San Francisco Chronicle* (12 May 1880): 3.

<sup>55</sup> "The Settlers vs. The Railway," *San Francisco Chronicle* (13 May 1880): 3.

<sup>56</sup> “The Tulare Feud,” *San Francisco Examiner* (12 May 1880): 1; and “A Collision,” 3.

<sup>57</sup> Many of early reviews of *The Octopus* identify the Mussel Slough as the primary historical source of *The Octopus*. See, for instance, George Hamlin Fitch, “Books for Spring,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (7 April 1901): 28; I. F. Marcossan, “The Epic of the Wheat,” *Louisville Times* (13 April 1901): 13; and The Bookworm, “World of Letters: A Great Novel,” *Town Talk* 9 (20 April 1901): 25-26. While most studies of the work include a cursory overview of the Mussel Slough Tragedy, this subject has seldom been the topic of sustained discussion. For some notable exceptions, see McElrath and Crisler, *Frank Norris*, 347-55; and Lundy, 203-30. For readings that devote primary attention to the social themes of the novel, see George Wilbur Meyer, “A New Interpretation of *The Octopus*,” *College English* 4 (1943): 351-59; James K. Folsom, “Social Darwinism or Social Protest? The ‘Philosophy of *The Octopus*,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 8 (1963): 393-400; Richard Allan Davison, “Frank Norris and the Art of Social Criticism,” *American Literary Realism* 14, no. 1 (1981): 77-89; and Clare Virginia Eby, “*The Octopus*: Big Business as Art,” *American Literary Realism* 26, no. 1 (1994): 33-51. Meyer argues that Norris juxtaposes the immutable world of nature with the excesses of capitalism and highlights the need for reform to create a society that does not violently clash with the natural world. Eby, by contrast, asserts that the narrative reaches toward an aesthetic informed by, and not opposed to, the present economic system. Eby examines the scene mostly commonly employed to illustrate the anti-capitalist stance of the book, Shelgrim’s speech, to reveal the competing ideological positions in *The Octopus*, yet she persists in identifying Presley with Norris and the poet’s perspective with that of the novelist (36).

<sup>58</sup> For analyses of Norris’s treatment of the Mussel Slough Tragedy, see William Deverell, *Railroad Crossing: Californians and the Railroad, 1850-1910* (Berkeley: University of

California Press, 1994), 137-148; and Richard J. Orsi, *Sunset Limited: The Southern Pacific Railroad and the Development of the American West, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 92-105. Deverell states that the “novel’s depiction of the circumstances surrounding the outbreak of violence at Mussel Slough is woefully inadequate as history, and it is both unfair and misleading to term the novel a history of that particular conflict” (142), and Orsi asserts that *The Octopus* is “a fanciful, fictional account that bears virtually no resemblance to the actual event” (92). Deverell offers no evidence to substantiate his claims about factual issues in Norris’s handling of the event, and his argument is marred by numerous misreadings of the text. Orsi provides a more sophisticated account of Mussel Slough, challenging the conventional assumptions about this episode with Norris as a mere spokesman for anti-railroad sentiment. However, Orsi bases his argument almost exclusively on documents from executives at the Southern Pacific that were unavailable to Norris and present the actions of the company in the most favorable light in stark contrast to coverage in the *Chronicle* and *Examiner*. While Norris deviated from his source materials, compressing the time frame of the narrative and radically altering the geography of the San Joaquin Valley, his representation of the Mussel Slough Tragedy coheres with reports published in the San Francisco newspapers. It is also important to note that Norris was not the first author to write a novel that centered on this conflict, which was also the subject of four other works: William C. Morrow’s *Blood Money* (1882), Charles Cyril Post’s *Driven from Sea to Sea* (1884), Josiah Royce’s *The Feud of Oakville Creek: A Novel of California* (1887), and May Merrill Miller’s *First the Blade* (1938). For discussion of these works, see Terry Beers, Introduction to *Gunfight at Mussel Slough: Evolution of a Western Myth* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2004), 1-35.

<sup>59</sup> Norris to Howells, *Collected Letters*, 73.

<sup>60</sup> Frank Norris to Harry Manville Wright, 5 April 1899, *Collected Letters*, 75.

<sup>61</sup> Frederic Tabor Cooper, "Frank Norris, Realist" *Bookman* (November 1899): 234-238; repr. in *Frank Norris: The Critical Reception*, 86.

<sup>62</sup> Frank Norris to Lilla Lewis Parks, 16 October 1899, *Collected Letters*, 89.

<sup>63</sup> Norris to Parks, *Collected Letters*, 89.

<sup>64</sup> Frank Norris to Lilla Lewis Parks, 9 November 1899, *Collected Letters*, 90.

<sup>65</sup> Frank Norris to Isaac Frederick Marcossan, 13 September 1900, *Collected Letters*, 123.

<sup>66</sup> McElrath and Crisler, 341.

<sup>67</sup> "I. Notes," Frank Norris Collection of Papers and Related Materials, BANC MSS C-H 80, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. "Gold Brick Grain-Rate Reduction," "Stockton and Port Costa Differential," and "Are Doctoring a Grain Tariff" all deal with the manipulation of freight rates.

<sup>68</sup> While in California, Norris also interviewed participants in the struggle that he would represent in the novel. According to Jeannette Norris Black, Seymour Waterhouse had been able to arrange luncheons with officers of the Southern Pacific, and John O'Hara Cosgrave, his former editor at *The Wave*, arranged a meeting with Huntington (McElrath and Crisler, 343). While Norris's papers contain no record of this appointment, it is a logical assumption that this encounter served as the basis for Presley's interaction with Shelgrim, the fictionalized version of Huntington. After leaving San Francisco, Norris traveled to the Santa Anita Rancho owned by Gaston Ashe and his wife Dulce near Hollister. Lundy asserts that Mrs. Ashe, with literary tastes for Walter Pater and Robert Browning, was the model for Annie Derrick, and his visit to the ranch provided numerous ideas for *The Octopus* from a neighboring barn dance that provided the inspiration for Annixter's party to the nearby San Juan Bautista mission, which Norris

transported to his fictional Bonneville (212). Further, Norris incorporated material from his earlier journalistic output, most notably “Man-Hunting: The Coast Range as a Refuge for Bandits,” *The Wave* 15 (13 June 1896): 8; “A Strange Relief-Ship,” *The Wave* 16 (12 June 1897): 7; and “From Field to Storehouse,” *The Wave* 16 (7 August 1897): 6-7.

<sup>69</sup> Frank Norris to Paul Revere Reynolds, 17 December 1900, *Collected Letters*, 134. *The Octopus* finally appeared as a serial in *The San Francisco Call* after Norris’s death.

<sup>70</sup> Franklin Walker, *Frank Norris: A Biography* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1932), 286.

<sup>71</sup> Frank Norris, *The Octopus: A Story of California* (1901; repr., New York: Penguin, 1986), 67. All further quotations from this edition will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>72</sup> Eby, “*The Octopus*: Big Business as Art,” 42. For further discussion of Norris’s use of maps in the narrative, see Leigh Ann Litwiller Berte, “Mapping *The Octopus*: Frank Norris’ Naturalist Geography,” *American Literary Realism* 37, no. 3 (2005): 202-24.

<sup>73</sup> “A Collision,” 3.

<sup>74</sup> “A Collision,” 3.

<sup>75</sup> Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2005), 167.

<sup>76</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Civil Government* (1690; repr., London: J. M. Dent, 1991), 129.

<sup>77</sup> For further discussions of the ranchers, see Hamlin Garland, “The Work of Frank Norris,” *The Critic* 42 (1903): 216-18; Meyer, 353-55; Pizer, *The Novels of Frank Norris*, 140-41; and McElrath, “Frank Norris’s *The Octopus*: The Christian Ethic as Pragmatic Response,” in *Critical Essays on Frank Norris*, ed. Don Graham (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980), 140-43.

<sup>78</sup> Norris differentiates Derrick from his fellow ranchers. Annixter, for instance, advances an alternate conception of nature than Magnus, critiquing his view of the soil as a commodity to be exploited in the service of maximizing returns. Annixter states that Magnus “thinks he’s still running his mine, and that the same principles will apply to getting grain out of the earth as to getting gold. . . . Get the guts out of your land; work it to death; never give it a rest. Never alternate your crop, and the when your soil is exhausted, sit down and roar abut hard times” (29). Annixter highlights the problems posed for the land as a result of the perspectives engendered by the Gold Rush that reduce the value of earth to the profits that one can extract from it heedless of the long-term consequences engendered by such undertakings. This passage highlights the need for a reciprocal relationship with the soil, one based on the preservation of resources to engender their continued fertility and growth.

<sup>79</sup> John J. Powell, *The Golden State and Its Resources* (San Francisco: Bacon & Company, 1874), 76-77

<sup>80</sup> Powell, 36.

<sup>81</sup> Powell, 35.

<sup>82</sup> California Public Utilities Commission, *Biennial Report of the Board of Railroad Commissioners of the State of California* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1896), 378.

<sup>83</sup> The is representation also has its basis in Norris’s research as one of the articles in his notebook contains the information that “a corps of Southern Pacific freight clerks made out the new figures for rates, and were very busy in doing so the past five or six weeks” (“Gold Brick Grain-Rate Reduction,” 8).

<sup>84</sup> Brown, 54.

<sup>85</sup> “An Appeal to the People,” *Visalia Weekly Delta* (7 May 1880): 2.

<sup>86</sup> “A Collision,” 3.

<sup>87</sup> “An Appeal to the People,” 2.

<sup>88</sup> McElrath and Crisler, 348.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Brown, 42.

<sup>90</sup> Members of the League were also accused of using intimidation and threats of violence toward those who attempted to gain control over the disputed land. The League and the San Francisco papers denied such claims with a writer for the *Chronicle* asserting that several “parties who have been thought unfriendly to the interests of the settlers have left for fear that their lives are not safe; but there is no good evidence to show that the Settlers’ League, as an organization, has warned any one of them to leave, though irresponsible persons may have done so” (“Gloom in Tulare,” [14 May 1880]: 3). Regarding these allegations, the anonymous correspondent observes that representatives of the League “think that it was the work of those who wished to create public sentiment against the organization and to misrepresent its purpose” (3).

<sup>91</sup> Brown, 55.

<sup>92</sup> “Tulare and Fresno Settlers,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (16 December 1879): 4.

<sup>93</sup> “Tulare Settler,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (12 September 1880): 5.

<sup>94</sup> Norris wrote to Marcosson about the particulars of the how settlers could potentially rig the election of Railroad Commissioners amenable to their interests. Norris referred to the bribery plot in a manner similar to its treatment in the novel, describing “a certain group of farmers who, despairing of ever getting fair freight rates from the Railroad or of electing a board of Railroad Commissioners by fair means themselves, set about gaining their ends by any means



available. What they want to is to cause the nomination and election of railroad commissioners of their own choosing, with the idea that these commissioners will make proper reductions in freight rates. They are prepared to spend a very large amount of money to accomplish this” (*Collected Letters*, 93). Norris then asked, “can you tell me just about how they would go about to get their men in? Do you think it *could* be done at all?” (*Collected Letters*, 93). Since Norris had to pose questions about the possibility of such an occurrence, it is reasonable to conclude that he did not find any evidence of a similar scheme in his research. The studies on the Mussel Slough Tragedy do not mention the settlers offering bribes, and a survey of periodical accounts about freight rates in the 1890s revealed no discussion of such undertakings.

<sup>95</sup> “I. Notes,” 7.

<sup>96</sup> “I. Notes,” 1. Norris may also have drawn on the actions of John Sontag, a former railroad brakeman, and Chris Evans, who were notorious train robbers during the late 1880s and early 1890s. Like Dyke, they were embittered toward the Southern Pacific, dynamited trains, and evaded capture in the surrounding mountains before being apprehended by a posse.

<sup>97</sup> “I. Notes,” 1.

<sup>98</sup> “The Deadly Feud,” *The Morning Call* (13 May 1880): 3.

<sup>99</sup> “Tulare’s Troubles,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (13 May 1880): 3.

<sup>100</sup> “Tulare’s Troubles,” 3.

<sup>101</sup> “The Deadly Feud,” 3.

<sup>102</sup> “The Tulare Tragedy,” *San Francisco Examiner* (13 May 1880): 3.

<sup>103</sup> “The Deadly Feud,” 3; “Tulare’s Troubles,” 3; and “The Tulare Feud,” 3.

<sup>104</sup> “The Deadly Feud,” 3.

<sup>105</sup> “The Deadly Feud,” 3.

<sup>106</sup> “The Deadly Feud,” 3.

<sup>107</sup> “The Tulare Tragedy,” 3.

<sup>108</sup> French claims that *The Octopus* reveals “a transcendent romantic faith in the grand design of a benevolent nature” and that the characters suffer “because of their selfish efforts to thwart nature’s benevolent intentions” (*Frank Norris* 9), and Pizer views the work in the context of evolutionary theism as an illustration of the idea that evil “was therefore an inevitable but negligible and transient factor if one kept in view the larger cosmic movement toward good” (“The Concept of Nature in Frank Norris’ ‘The Octopus,’” *American Quarterly* 14 [1962]: 74). For further discussions of these points, see Walcutt, 136-154; French, *Frank Norris*, 89-106; and Pizer, *The Novels of Frank Norris*, 127-154. For readings that conflate Norris with Presley, see H. Willard Reninger, “Norris Explains *The Octopus*: A Correlation of his Theory and Practice,” *American Literature* 12 (1940): 218-27; Edward Recchia, “Naturalism’s Artistic Compromises in *Sister Carrie* and *The Octopus*,” *Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 5 (1972): 277-85; Charles L. Crow, “The Real Vanamee and His Influence on Frank Norris’s *The Octopus*,” *Western American Literature* 9 (1974): 131-39; Torsten Pettersson, “Deterministic Acceptance Versus Moral Outrage: A Problem of Literary Naturalism in Frank Norris’s *The Octopus*,” *Orbis Litterarum* 42 (1987): 77-95; and Thomas Austenfeld, “A Happy Naturalist? Jeremy Bentham and the Cosmic Morality of *The Octopus*,” *Studies in American Naturalism* 2 (2007): 33-45. These readings largely overlook Norris’s use of indirect discourse and the representations of Presley’s instability.

<sup>109</sup> McElrath, *Frank Norris Revisited*, 100.

<sup>110</sup> See Graham, *The Fiction of Frank Norris*, 97-104; Davison, 77-82; Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., “Edwin Markham in Frank Norris’s *The Octopus*,” *Frank Norris Studies* 12

(1992):10-11; and Steven Frye, "Presley's Pretense: Irony and Epic Convention in Frank Norris' *The Octopus*," *American Literary Realism* 39, no. 3 (2007): 213-21.

<sup>111</sup> "Character Sketches," Frank Norris Collection of Papers and Related Materials, BANC MSS C-H 80, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 8.

<sup>112</sup> "I. Notes," 3.

<sup>113</sup> "I. Notes," 17.

<sup>114</sup> For further discussion of Presley, see Donald Pizer, "Another Look at 'The Octopus,'" *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 10, no. 3 (1955): 217-24; and Charles Duncan, "'If Your View Be Large Enough': Narrative Growth in *The Octopus*," *American Literary Realism* 25, no. 2 (1993): 56-66.

<sup>115</sup> For an alternate viewpoint, see French, *Frank Norris*, 103-04; and Pizer, *The Novels of Frank Norris*, 144.

<sup>116</sup> For a related discussion of Annixter, see McElrath, "Frank Norris's *The Octopus*: The Christian Ethic as Pragmatic Response," 144-48. McElrath primarily focuses on the character's development in the context of the Sermon on the Mount with the social significance of this transformation as a secondary concern.

<sup>117</sup> Frank Norris to George Henry Sargent, 9 June 1901, *Collected Letters*, 157-58.

### CHAPTER 3

#### WAGE SLAVES AND REBELS: CLASS CONFLICT IN JACK LONDON'S SOCIAL WRITINGS

While Jack London has been the subject of extensive scholarship, these appraisals have centered largely on his adventure narratives, which emphasize the effects of hostile environments on individuals in the Arctic or the South Seas. His social writings, however, have received relatively little attention. Reflecting on the importance of these works, Philip S. Foner asserts that “it was Jack London more than any other writer of his day, who broke the ice that was congealing American letters and brought life and literature into a meaningful relation with each other.”<sup>1</sup> The engagement between fiction and lived experience in “The Apostate,” *Martin Eden*, *The Iron Heel*, and “The Dream of Debs” manifests through London’s representations of the institutional forces that govern his characters’ actions, depictions that call into question the extent to which people control their destinies. Further, London plays a significant role in the development of American Naturalism. Jeanne Campbell Reesman and Leonard Cassuto observe that “London’s work provides a rich ground for the probing examination naturalism has undergone as its boundaries have become more permeable, and the study of London’s writing enriches both humanistic and deterministic reevaluations of naturalism.”<sup>2</sup> Rather than stressing his protagonists’ inevitable deterioration due to elements rooted within their surroundings, London presents a more nuanced treatment of Determinism. While he highlights the

consequences of broader economic forces, these works, most notably *The Iron Heel* and “The Dream of Debs,” express the potential to modify these constructs and to further human progress when workers act in concert with their fellows.

The American Dream appears throughout London’s fiction, and this thematic concern suggests elements of his own advancement.<sup>3</sup> London, the illegitimate son of astrologer William Chaney and spiritualist Flora Wellman, was born into poverty, and the financial prospects of the family only marginally improved through his mother’s marriage to John London, whose business ventures ended in failure and intensified the family’s hardships. As a result, Jack began working at an early age to supplement his parents’ meager income, laboring first at the R. Hickmott Canning Company before becoming an oyster pirate; a deputy of the Fish Patrol; a sailor; and an employee of the Oakland, San Leandro, and Hayward Electric Railway. Regarding these experiences, London wrote that

I still believed in the old myths which were the heritage of an American boy when I was a boy. . . . A canal boy could become a president. Any boy, who took employment with any firm, could, by thrift, energy, and sobriety, learn the business and rise from position to position until he was taken in as a junior partner. After that the senior partnership was only a matter of time.<sup>4</sup>

London reflects the conventional idea that one can rise in the ranks through initiative and diligence since America is an open society governed by fair rules applicable to all. London had already demonstrated these traits at the cannery and aboard the *Sophia Sutherland* without any commensurate increase in his earning power, and he found that his job for the streetcar company reduced him to “a proper work beast. I worked, and ate, and slept while my mind slept all the time,” a motif that he developed in “The Apostate” and *Martin Eden*.<sup>5</sup> As James L. Haley

observes, London did not object to strenuous labor but to “the pointlessness and drudgery of it, the idea of slaving at a pittance of a wage for a class of owners and investors who lived like lords and took their sense of entitlement for granted.”<sup>6</sup> This realization illustrated the nature of an economic system that offered the potential for material progress and yet imposed significant barriers that prevented many workers from improving their lives.

London responded to these experiences by rejecting industrial capitalism and embarking on a period as a tramp, which brought him into contact with those who had been cast aside by their employers. Reflecting on this time, London observed that

I found all sorts of men, many of whom had once been as good as myself and just as *blond-beastly*; sailor-men, soldier-men, labor-men, all wrenched and distorted and twisted out of shape by toil and accident and hardship and accident, and cast adrift by their masters like so many old horses. I battered on the drag and slammed back gates with them in box cars and city parks, listening all the while to life-histories which began under auspices as fair as mine, with digestions and bodies equal to and better than mine, and which ended there before my eyes in the shambles at the bottom of the Social Pit.<sup>7</sup>

These circumstances indicated London’s probable fate if he continued to rely on his physical strength to attain financial success: he would be unable to find any position after outliving his productivity, and this process would reduce him to the same status of degradation that he noted in his companions. When he returned to California, London determined that he would keep himself out of the abyss, asserting that “my new concept was that manual labor was undignified, and that it didn’t pay. . . . Brains paid, not brawn, and I resolved never again to offer my muscles in the brawn market. Brain, and only brain would I sell.”<sup>8</sup> Toward this end, London began the

course of intellectual improvement and furious labor that he describes in *Martin Eden*, striving first to escape the social pit through education and then through fiction after arriving home from the Yukon in 1897 with \$4.50 in gold dust in his pockets.<sup>9</sup> London published his first collection of short stories, *The Son of the Wolf*, in 1900; cemented his fame with *The Call of the Wild* in 1903, for which he received \$750 from *The Saturday Evening Post* and \$2,000 from Macmillan; and became one of the highest-paid writers in America after the success of *The Sea Wolf*.<sup>10</sup> At his peak, London purchased an immense ranch in Glen Ellen, financed the construction of a yacht to sail around the world, and attained a standard of living that would seem to validate the precepts of the American Dream.

While London was able to improve his financial position significantly, the circumstances of his early life convinced him that such development was atypical in America, a perspective that stems from his Socialist beliefs and shapes his representations of economic injustice. Based on his experiences as a tramp and the recognition of his proximity to the bottom of the social pit, London joined the Socialist Labor Party in April 1896 and became a member of the Socialist Party of America in 1901, in which he would remain until early 1916. During these years, London co-founded and served as the first president of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, lectured throughout the country advocating the necessity of revolutionary change, and published widely on the cause of labor. Defining his ideology in 1913, London stated that “Socialism should strive to eliminate the capitalist class and wipe away the private ownership of mines, mills, factories, railroads and other social needs” and that the workers “should take upon themselves the task of doing away with the robbing capitalist system, do away with the profit system and place the workers in possession of the industries.”<sup>11</sup> London’s position centered on a

conviction that the collective control of industry, managed with the aim of meeting human need rather than maximizing profit, could better suit the interests of the general population.

London's indictment of capitalism resulted from what he deemed to be the owners' irrational administration of society and the ensuing consequences for labor. He asserted that the capitalist class, blind and greedy, grasping madly, has not only not made the best of its management, but made the worst of it. . . . In face of the facts that modern man lives more wretchedly than the caveman, and that modern man's food- and shelter-getting efficiency is a thousandfold greater than the caveman's, no other solution is possible than that the management is prodigiously wasteful.<sup>12</sup>

London returns to this point from *The People of the Abyss* (1903) to "The Dream of Debs," critiquing the owners' inability to arrange production in a manner that would benefit the industrial workforce. London, however, did not object to fortunes gained through honest effort since he owed his rise to such exertions; instead, he opposed the consolidation of wealth that limited such progress for the majority as he noted that "gateway of opportunity after opportunity has been closed, and closed for all time. . . . These doors will not open again, and before them pause thousands of ambitious young men to read the placard: NO THOROUGH-FARE."<sup>13</sup>

Although London's most active period as a Socialist had largely ended by 1908, he remained a militant revolutionary until the end of his life when he resigned from the party due to its emphasis on achieving reform through legislative means and its abandonment of the class struggle.<sup>14</sup> Explaining his decision, London wrote that "the working class, by fighting, by never fusing, by never making terms with the enemy, could emancipate itself" yet claimed that "the whole trend of Socialism in the United States during recent years had been one of peaceableness and compromise."<sup>15</sup> This note highlights the fundamental concern of his ideology: the need for



laborers to manage industry in a manner that would allow individuals to develop in accordance with their potential.

This desire for an alternate socioeconomic order informs London's Naturalism, which expresses the possibility for development through modifying environmental pressures. Even though he presents people victimized by institutional forces seemingly beyond immediate control, London suggests that these outcomes result from the practices of men and that these circumstances can be changed by human action. Writing to George Wharton James about *White Fang*, London asserted that

I am an evolutionist and therefore a broad optimist, hence my love for the human (in the slime though he be) comes from my knowing him as he is and seeing the divine possibilities ahead of him. . . . Every atom of life is plastic. The finest specimens now in existence were once all pulpy infants capable of being moulded this way or that. Let the pressure be one way and we have atavism – the reversion to the wild; the other domestication, civilization. I have always been impressed with the awful plasticity of life and I feel that I can never lay enough stress upon the marvelous power and influence of environment.<sup>16</sup>

The reference to creatures being molded by their surroundings anticipates “The Apostate” and *Martin Eden*, in which London employs similar descriptions of his protagonists, whose experiences reflect “the marvelous power and influence of environment.” Further, this emphasis on “the awful plasticity of life” conveys the nature of London's Determinism. By endowing his characters with a range of potentialities and connecting the emergence of certain elements to environmental causes, London indicates that an alteration of the conditions that have engendered these effects will allow other aspects of the individual to emerge. As a corollary, London places

the blame for his principals' fates on the social order that has produced them and that must be altered to prevent such tragedies.

London dramatizes these ideas in "The Apostate," which first appeared in the *Woman's Home Companion* (September 1906) and was republished in *When God Laughs and Other Stories* (1911). The narrator invokes the national success story in his representation of Johnny, whose exertions lead not to advancement but to the effacement of his humanity, and only his removal from the factory reawakens the elements of his identity that have been subordinated in his employment. Most critics, however, view the narrative in the context of prevalent reformist movements of the era. James I. McClintock argues that the work is simply "a muck-raking story attacking the inadequacy of child-labor legislation and an irreverent social commentary that it is preferable to be a tramp than a work beast," and Reesman observes that the text provides "a depressing portrait of the life-numbing reality of child labor as well as a romantic American escape from such slavery."<sup>17</sup> "The Apostate" does not merely offer an indictment of a particular injustice; rather, the central character's experiences illustrate the broader consequences of industrial capitalism, delineating the institutional forces that undermine human progress and emphasizing the need for social change to facilitate the mobility that characterizes the American Dream. London reinforces these themes through Johnny's mechanization coupled with the deterioration of his mental life in relation to the increase in his productive capacity, and the necessity of the protagonist's flight from his workplace signifies that his development is not possible within the existing economic framework.

The immediate impetus for "The Apostate" came from London's inability to accept an invitation to investigate conditions in southern textile mills; instead, he created a narrative that dramatized such injustices through the fate of the protagonist, whose experiences have their

origins in the author's employment as a factory worker beginning in 1891.<sup>18</sup> Discussing his job at the R. Hickmott Canning Company, London wrote "I was up and at work at six in the morning. I took half an hour for dinner. I took half an hour for supper. I worked every night till ten, eleven, twelve o'clock. My wages were small, but I worked such long hours that I sometimes made as high as fifty dollars a month."<sup>19</sup> The time spent at his machine prevented London from exploring the Oakland Estuary and reading the books set before him by Ina Coolbrith, a librarian at the Oakland Free Library and later the poet laureate of California.<sup>20</sup> Reflecting on this period, London observed that "I asked myself if this were to be the meaning of life—to be a work beast? I knew of no horse in the city of Oakland that worked the hours I worked. If this were living, I was entirely unenamored of it. . . . There was only one way to escape my deadening toil. I must get out and away on the water."<sup>21</sup> His focus on this "bestial life at the machine" suggests an opposition between the desire for intellectual growth and the deadening routine of industrial production motivated by the need for survival.<sup>22</sup> London augmented these autobiographical elements with evidence drawn from contemporary accounts of child labor, and his files at the Huntington Library feature numerous articles on this issue that anticipate the central themes and motifs of "The Apostate" in addition to supplying many of its concrete details.<sup>23</sup>

These sources and experiences provide the empirical foundation of the narrative, which inverts the traditional contours of the American Dream as Johnny's exertions do not engender mobility but instead lead to his dehumanization. The narrator links "The Apostate" to the national success story by noting that the protagonist's

earlier years had been full of dreaming. Once he had been in love. It was when  
he first began guiding the cloth over the hot roller, and it was with the daughter of

the superintendent. . . . On the surface of the cloth stream that poured past him, he pictured radiant futures wherein he performed prodigies of toil, invented miraculous machines, won to the mastership of the mills, and in the end took her in his arms and kissed her soberly on the brow.<sup>24</sup>

The contours of Johnny's vision allude to the works of Horatio Alger, whose formulaic novels of advancement emphasized the possibility of economic security or even affluence as a result of hard work, luck, and the intervention of a wealthy gentleman.<sup>25</sup> The first aspect manifests through the central character's mental picture of ascending to the ownership of the mill through his "prodigies of toil." However, London omits the final two components from his character's vision since these superlatives find no outlet in Johnny's world: chance does not apply in the factory, outcomes do not seem to change as a result of individual initiative, and benevolence seldom governs relations between labor and capital. London underscores these elements through the representation of the image on the cloth that winds endlessly through the machine, ironically presenting his labor as a means toward prosperity when it instead furthers his subordination.

Within the parameters of the American Dream, "The Apostate" develops an indictment of the excesses possible under the free enterprise system due to its human consequences and the limitations this framework imposes for the poor. London formulates this theme through Johnny's role within the industrial order, which becomes his primary standard to measure his life. The narrator observes that when the protagonist

was fourteen, he went to work on the starcher. It was a colossal event. Something at last had happened that could be remembered beyond a night's sleep or a week's payday. It marked an era. It was the machine Olympiad, something

to date from. “When I went to work on the starcher,” or, “after,” or “before I went to work on the starcher,” were sentences often on his lips. (233-34)

The reference to an Olympiad, the interval of four years between the Olympic Games that the Ancient Greeks used to date events, highlights the impact of Johnny’s labor since the milestones of his development are governed through his position within the workforce. Further, the use of a term that denotes important occurrences from the founding of Rome to the birth of Jesus Christ conveys the extent to which that the boy’s immediate environment has shaped his consciousness. While this passage evokes the potential for mobility in America, London undercuts this assumption through the contours of Johnny’s employment history: at seven, he started at a jute mill, began weaving cloth the following year, proceeded to a glass plant during his teenage years before returning to the first factory. The circularity of central character’s experiences reveals his limited options as even his most diligent exertions prevent him from moving past his initial point for a significant period of time, and every slight progression results in a swift descent as a consequence of the illnesses caused by his work and a lack of proper nutrition.

The opening of “The Apostate” dramatizes the plight of the working class, indicating that the conditions governing Johnny’s life do not provide any meaningful possibility of advancement and that his fate is a predictable outcome for one of his station. The first line of the story, “If you don’t git up Johnny, I won’t give you a bite to eat” (222), alludes to Alger’s *Ragged Dick* (1868), a novel that begins with “WAKE up there, youngster . . . I suppose you’d lay there all day if I hadn’t called you.”<sup>26</sup> This connection heightens London’s ironic inversion of the Alger archetype as the protagonist does not find a reprieve from his toil nor attain some measure of security through his exertions. By contrast, his ceaseless labor and privation confine him to the economic position of his birth. The narrator expresses these constraints through his emphasis on

the repetitive quality of Johnny's daily routine. When his mother forces him out of bed to go to work, the boy uttered "a bestial cry, as of a soul in torment, filled with infinite protest and pain" (222). This imagery suggests that the central character is animated by the dominant interest in his animal comforts amid the struggle for survival, and sleep serves as an alternative to the family's squalid environment. This narrator conveys the nature of these surroundings when he refers to Johnny's attempts to clean himself and observes that "a sink should smell was to him part of the natural order, just as it was part of the natural order that the soap should be grimy with the dishwater and hard to lather" (223). London employs a conventional depiction of the unsanitary habits of the poor yet contextualizes this rhetoric as a logical consequence of their milieu. The narrator intensifies this point through the child's meager breakfast of cold pork, thin slices of bread, and a "hot and muddy liquid" that he confused with good coffee, which heightens the representation of the family's poverty since they cannot obtain sufficient nourishment (224). Further, the compression of time, with the implication that this scene plays out every morning without variation, illustrates the monotony of Johnny's days and his confinement within a system that he cannot alter.

Johnny's limited opportunities for development are augmented by the physical consequences of his labor, which compromise his health and further blunt his potential. The impetus for this representation seems to originate from an article in London's files titled "The Modern Slaughter of the Innocents" by Owen R. Lovejoy. London circled the following passage:

The little boy who can sit for ten hours a day on a low stool bent over his work and with lightning fingers tie three hundred dozen glass stoppers into their bottles in the ten hours, is a marvel of mechanical efficiency. But the nervous twitch of

the muscles at rest, the sunken chest and feeble lungs, the bent back and drooping shoulders, the sallow face and expressionless eyes foretell the curse which outraged Nature is already writing with his life blood against the race.<sup>27</sup>

These maladies manifest in “The Apostate” as the chronic illnesses that cost Johnny each of his jobs, and London also incorporates the precise quota for production. These elements ground the narrative in its immediate historical context and indicate that the protagonist’s tasks in the factory are responsible for his ailments. The inspector who examines the child articulates the detrimental effects resulting from this occupation by noting that the “boy’s got the rickets—incipient, but he’s got them. If epilepsy doesn’t get him in the end, it will be because tuberculosis gets him first” (227). These diseases stem from not any inherent infirmity but the unsanitary and unhealthful conditions of the central character’s labor, the absence of sunlight, and the lack of adequate nutrients, issues that leave him with no apparent avenue toward prosperity or even survival with a modicum of human decency.

“The Apostate” further highlights the consequences of Johnny’s exertions through the physical effects of his repetitive movements. His employment governs all aspects of his existence, preventing the possibility of escaping from his present station. This point becomes apparent when Johnny ties weaver’s knots in his sleep, a representation that London gleaned from an article in his files. In “Child Labor Legislation,” the anonymous writer quotes Lovejoy referring to a young worker and noting that “as the precursor of a healthy man he is a failure. He has been reduced to a bundle of quivering nerves and can doubtless tie knots at lightning speed easier than he can sit still.”<sup>28</sup> This material reinforces the relationship between such practices and detrimental results for laborers through the physical stresses on the operative, whose potential has been circumscribed by his position in the factory. London suggests his debt to this

work when the narrator states that there “was nothing difficult about the weaver’s knots. He once boasted that he could tie them in his sleep. And for that matter, he sometimes did, toiling centuries long in a single night at tying an endless succession of weaver’s knots” (225). The final reference and Johnny’s inability to sit still even at rest demonstrate the connection to this source, and London extends its implications through his depiction of the protagonist’s deterioration, which originates from another piece in the author’s possession titled “To Protect Childhood.” The unnamed journalist states that the boy’s “working power, however, was about exhausted and, at 16, the time when the normal laborer might just begin his task, he was broken down in health, impoverished in mind and possessed of the bitterness of an old man.”<sup>29</sup> In “The Apostate,” the unsustainable nature of such labor emerges through the central character’s unnaturally aged appearance, with the implication that he has given his most productive years to his employers and destroyed the attributes that would have enabled him to chart an alternate course of development.

London extends his treatment of these limited opportunities by examining the role that Johnny’s employment plays in undermining his humanity as his efforts at the factory strip him of his individuality and reduce him to a machine. The impetus for this representation also seems to be “Child Labor Legislation,” in which London circled the following passage:

The proprietor of a successful glass house recently with pride brought me to a small boy who sat on a low stool tying glass stoppers into small bottles. He sat bent over his work, the bottles held between his knees and the bundle of string at his hip, his body thrown forward and his chest contracted, HIS THIN ARMS FLYING WITH THE SWIFT AND ACCURATE MOTION OF A PERFECT



MACHINE, AS HE HUMMED IN HIS LABOR FOR TEN HOURS A DAY.

Three knots were made for each and the daily task was 300 dozen bottles.<sup>30</sup>

From this source, London obtained the details of Johnny's occupation performing piecework at the glass plant, employing a similar description of his daily tasks, stressing the resulting physical consequences due to the posture he must adopt, and incorporating the precise quota for production. The reference to the unnamed operative as a "PERFECT MACHINE" anticipates London's emphasis on the protagonist's dehumanization as a result of his labor, and the narrator clarifies this idea when he states that the boy "excelled, because the clay of him had been moulded by the mills into the perfect machine" (234). The reference to the central character as "clay" formed by his milieu reinforces London's conception that people are capable of either positive or negative development and that these outcomes originate from environmental pressures, the modification of which would create an alternate range of potential.

Johnny's industrial surroundings, however, limit his possible advancement as he gradually takes on the attributes of the machines he tends, a development that culminates in his dehumanization. The narrator introduces the boy's occupation at the jute mill by noting that he "worked mechanically" (225). At this stage, the speaker focuses on the protagonist with the modifier reflecting the nature of his tasks, and this function suggests the detrimental effects that will result from his employment. This point gains credence through the subsequent references to machinery, which indicate that these objects shape Johnny and reduce him to an automaton who is defined by his labor. The narrator observes that from "the perfect worker he had evolved into the perfect machine. When his work went wrong, it was with him as with the machine, due to faulty material. It would have been as possible for a perfect nail-die to cut imperfect nails as for him to make a mistake" (226). The pair of similes establishes a fundamental connection between

the central character and the equipment he operates, expressing that the former has gradually been absorbed into the latter, which the narrator conveys through the shift from the child to his mechanized state in the first sentence. Further, the comparison of Johnny to the nail-die signifies that he exists only in relation to the value he produces for the company. The narrator locates this transformation within the economic framework that governs the factory and states that the “superintendent was very proud of [Johnny] and brought visitors to look at him. In ten hours three hundred dozen bottles passed through his hands. This meant he had attained machine-like perfection. All waste movements were eliminated. Every motion of his thin arms, every movement of a muscle in the thin fingers, was swift and accurate” (231). The narrator’s emphasis on the young man’s efficiency demonstrates the qualities that make him a model worker: his accuracy and the absence of excess movement foster an increase in his output and enable him to generate higher profits for ownership, which engenders the superintendent’s approval. This diligence, however, sets in motion the elements that engender Johnny’s decline, stripping him of the attributes that informed his humanity and turning him into another component in the process of production.

Johnny’s dehumanization manifests further through the deterioration of his intellect, which occurs in direct relation to an increase in his efficiency. The narrator establishes this connection when he observes that the “machinery ran faster than when [Johnny] had first gone to work, and his mind ran slower. He no longer dreamed at all” (232). For this aspect of the story, London drew on another important source that depicted the consequences of such labor for both the protagonist and those individuals employed under these conditions. In “Turning Children into Dollars,” published in the January 1906 issue of *Success Magazine*, Juliet Wilbor Tompkins describes the plight of female textile workers and asserts that

no doubt the task of a boy in a neighboring factory seems enviable by contrast: he sat all day in a closet lighted by a gas jet, with a little stick in his hand, watching a great stream of cloth that poured down from above and passed over a hot roller that ironed its surface, his business being to guide the cloth if it showed a tendency to swerve to the right or to the left from the roller. It was easy work—horribly, wickedly easy. Not a muscle of his body was getting proper development; his mind slept undisturbed as his eyes dully watched the cloth stream.<sup>31</sup>

London bracketed this passage, incorporating the first sentence into the description of Johnny's occupation at the mill, while also stressing the weakening of his cognitive faculties due to the absence of any stimulation. The narrator develops these detrimental effects through the contrast between the boy's current state and his earlier perspective, noting that he "was very happy at that job, in spite of the moist heat, for he was still young and in possession of dreams and illusions. And wonderful dreams he dreamed as he watched the steaming cloth streaming endlessly by. But there was no exercise about the work, no call upon his mind, and he dreamed less and less, while his mind grew torpid and drowsy" (231). This lack of intellectual challenges turns the youth into "part of the mechanism," and London alludes to Tompkins's article through the reference to Johnny's brain becoming "torpid and drowsy," which evokes the statement that the young operative's "mind slept undisturbed." London extends the ramifications of his source through the loss of the central character's ability to dream. The loss of this capacity illustrates his decline, one that originates from his employment as it precludes the possible attainment of such desires. The narrator highlights this outcome by stating that the "rest of the time he worked, and his consciousness was machine consciousness. Outside that his mind was a blank.

He had no ideals, and but one illusion; namely that he drank excellent coffee. He was a work-beast. He had no mental life whatsoever” (234). Through the decay of his capability to think and dream, Johnny has lost what separates humans from lower life forms. However, this regression does not reduce him to status of an animal, which still exists within nature, but a “work beast,” an abnormal creature that violates the patterns of the natural world.

The references to food throughout “The Apostate” also illustrate these intellectual consequences by supplying additional indications of Johnny’s deterioration. In the opening scene, he states that he does not mind a longer walk to work since the dollar saved on rent “means more grub” and that “I’d sooner do the walkin’ and get the grub” (224). London expresses the central role that the desire for sustenance plays in shaping the child’s actions when the narrator observes that “two dollars represented the difference between acute starvation and chronic underfeeding” (231). Despite his diligent efforts, Johnny cannot earn enough money to satisfy his physical requirements, apparent through the distinction between two forms of insufficient caloric energy, which alludes to the meager meal that he consumes at the beginning of the narrative. The narrator accentuates the prominent position that eating occupies in the boy’s consciousness by noting that there “had been several great events in Johnny’s life. One of these had been when his mother bought some California prunes. Two other had been the two times when she cooked custard” (232). This passage reflects the extent of the protagonist’s deprivation, which is so acute that he connects the most noteworthy events in his life to consumption since these are the only instances when he has experienced what amount to luxuries. This context clarifies the structural and thematic significance of the floating island, a French confection consisting of meringue in *crème anglaise*, as a representation of Johnny’s decline. When his mother finally makes this treat, one that he had relegated “to the limbo of

unattainable ideals” (232), he takes no apparent interest in it as he is engaged in the task of “mechanically eating what was before him” (234). The modifier reiterates that the central character’s current state stems from his mechanization, and this development prevents him from obtaining any enjoyment from his existence as evident through his disinterest in his dessert. Further, this episode establishes the foundation for his relative transformation at the end of “The Apostate” through providing the initial manifestation of the illness that causes his flight.

Johnny’s decline also stems from the lack of any nurturing influences as apparent through his estrangement from his family, developments that have their origins within the economic framework that shapes his existence. London highlights these elements when the youth watches his siblings playing outside, and the narrator states that Johnny lacked “patience with their excessive and amazing juvenility. He did not understand it. His own childhood was too far behind him. He was like an old and irritable man, annoyed by the turbulence of their young spirits that was to him errant silliness” (228). The protagonist’s inability to understand the actions of his brothers and sisters results from the fact that he has not shared any similar experiences since he adopted an adult role when he first went to work at age seven. Further, Johnny’s hostility emerges from both the lack of a normal upbringing and the realization that his labor has afforded Will the potential for a brighter future. The narrator clarifies this point through contrasting the physical appearances of the boys and observing that

Will seemed to show the benefit of this giving over and giving away. He was well-built, fairly rugged, as tall as his elder brother and even heavier. It was as though the lifeblood of the one had been diverted into the other’s veins. And in spirits it was the same. Johnny was jaded, worn out, without resilience, while his younger brother seemed bursting and spilling over with exuberance. (229)

This comparison reflects the causative role of each character's environment: the factory has turned Johnny into a sickly automaton whose fate has been sealed by his exertions; Will, on the other hand, has the opportunities afforded by education and good health that will seemingly enable him to attain prosperity. This relationship indicates that while mobility might be possible for some, such advancement comes at the expense of another who produces the conditions that contribute to such successes.

This sense of alienation also governs Johnny's relationship with his mother, whom many critics have identified as the villain in the story; however, such readings ignore how her acts are prefigured by the same forces that dictate the opportunities available to her eldest child. Joan Hedrick asserts that Johnny's mother "is also the immediate agent of Johnny's oppression, in that it is she who wakes him up and insists he hurry or else 'be docked'," and Stephen T. Dhondt contends that the "degenerate condition of the working class is not entirely the result of injustices on the part of the ruling class. Some of the blame must fall on the ignorance of the uneducated, inept people of the proletariat."<sup>32</sup> While the boy's mother plays a role in his plight, she is not the agent of his oppression. Instead, she merely reflects the fiscal reality that victimizes her in addition to her offspring and has caused her to send Johnny into the factory so that his siblings might experience more positive outcomes. Within these confines, she does attempt to mitigate the severity of her actions by giving the protagonist part of her meager breakfast to provide him more nourishment, and this undertaking exhibits a maternal concern for his wellbeing. Further, the mother's denial of agency through the declaration that "it wasn't my fault. I do the best I can" reveals the limitations imposed by her class position, her lack of an education, and the absence of her children's father, elements that have required her to sacrifice Johnny for the prospects of his brothers and sisters (230). This impact on the natural bonds within families

further informs London's indictment of an economic system that often necessitates greater hardships for some individuals so that others may eventually prosper.

These extreme consequences for Johnny suggest more than an exposé of child labor in the United States, and "The Apostate" instead advances a critique of the fiscal context that conditions such abuses. While the first Federal law prohibiting such employment was not upheld until the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938, many states had imposed restrictions on underage employees, beginning with a measure adopted in Massachusetts in 1836. However, these legislative actions were largely ineffective since they did not ameliorate the economic need that forced parents to take their progeny out of school, to send them into the workforce at an early age, and to limit their future prospects. London clarifies this point through the episode with the one-legged boy as the presence of the inspector who discharges the youth signifies that policies to keep children out of the factories were already in place. This incident has its origins in Tompkins's article, from which London incorporated both the boy's statement that "please, inspector, two babies died on us, and we're awful poor," adding only the formal designation "Mr.," and the fact that the inspector has discharged the child from three factories in the past year (228).<sup>33</sup> Reflecting on the conditions that forced this young man to get a job, Tompkins writes that the "boy, with the helpless loyalty of downtrodden childhood, is paying the rent and has been paying it for two years; all he asks is to go on paying it until the rest of him follows his lost leg into uncomplaining dust. That is all his parents ask of him."<sup>34</sup> London's borrowings from this source contextualize the experiences of people like Johnny in the early twentieth century, indicating that their labor stems from poverty and the limited options for survival available to many families.

The conclusion of "The Apostate" reinforces the need for systemic social change by heightening the power of Johnny's environment yet also signifying that a modification of this framework can engender a broader range of potential for the protagonist. The ending of "The Apostate" seems incompatible with the conventions of Naturalism since Johnny evidences self-awareness and possesses a measure of agency often denied to the principals within this movement. However, this representation is consistent with the influence of milieu on the individual. The reemergence of the youth's intellectual capabilities manifests through his removal from the factory as the change in his surroundings from the industrial arena to the natural world allows dormant aspects of his character to reassert themselves. In the early stages of the story, the boy's engagement with the outdoors is regulated by the temporal scheme of his workplace. The narrator observes that when Johnny "entered the factory gate the whistle blew again. He glanced at the east. Across a ragged sky-line of housetops a pale light was beginning to creep. This much he saw of the day as he turned his back upon it and joined his work-gang" (235). Man-made structures, evident through the whistle that standardizes employment, have displaced the natural cycle of life, and this development expresses Johnny's estrangement from the normal patterns of existence, which he can only recapture outside the limitations of the mill.

Additional references to the natural world as a sustaining, hospitable environment indicate the potential for awakening the higher elements of Johnny's character that would enable an alternate course of development. The narrator observes that while the protagonist labored, "the sun had made a golden ladder of the sky, flooded the world with its gracious warmth, and dropped down and disappeared in the west behind a ragged sky-line of housetops" (228). London's language offers a departure from the stark prose of the work, a rhetorical move that distinguishes this passage from the rest of the narrative and further establishes the significance of



what the youth lacks. Further, this description contravenes the hostility of nature that characterizes American Naturalism with the “golden ladder” and “gracious warmth” suggesting the possibilities for change outside the factory and the economic relations it embodies. Reinforcing this point, the narrator notes that while Johnny was recuperating, he

was greatly absorbed in the one tree that grew across the street. He studied it for hours at a time and was unusually interested when the wind swayed its branches and fluttered its leaves. Throughout the week he seemed lost in a great communion with himself. On Sunday he laughed aloud, several times, to the perturbation of his mother, who had not heard him laugh in years. (236)

This examination of the tree contrasts with the episode when he sits on the front stoop and “did no thinking. He was just resting. So far as his mind was concerned, it was asleep” (229). The outdoors, once unnoticed by the young man, supply the framework for his contemplation of the constraints that have governed his existence, and the “communion with himself” conveys the reemergence of the individuality that industrial processes had displaced. Johnny’s laughter provides another important counterpoint to the earlier scene as his mirth differs from his former taciturn demeanor when he responds to the exuberance of his siblings with curses and violence. This alteration reflects his capacity for growth when removed from the causative agents that have previously framed both his perspective and his actions.

The juxtaposition of this development with the financial reality that has governed Johnny indicates that his subsequent flight is not merely a rejection of his family but an indictment of the institutional framework that has determined their actions. This point becomes evident when the foreman visits the central character during his convalescence, stating that he is “the best weaver in the room. . . . His job would be held for him. He could come back to work a week from

Monday” (235). This designation of Johnny’s aptitudes expresses the rationale underlying the decision to hold his job: his efficiency makes him a vital component of the mechanism, one that cannot be replaced as easily as the other moving parts, such as the one-legged boy, and the supervisor’s declaration provides another illustration of the young man’s dehumanization. He highlights these consequences by articulating the object of his contemplation and noting that “I ain’t made one move in hours an’ hours. I tell you it was swell, jes’ settin’ there, hours and hours, doin’ nothing. I ain’t never been happy before. I never had any time. I’ve been moving all my time. That ain’t no way to be happy” (238). His current state stands in opposition to the constant movement that characterized his employment, and these new conditions allow him to observe the problematic nature of the economic relations that have shaped his life. Johnny’s escape further informs London’s examination of the American Dream when the protagonist declares “I know, Ma, what you’ve been planning for Will—keepin’ him in school to make a bookkeeper out of him. But it ain’t no use, I’ve quit. He’s got to go to work” (238). While this statement would seem to offer a critique that extends merely to Johnny’s mother sacrificing his future for the potential advancement of his brother, the reference to Will communicates the broader ramifications of protagonist’s departure as a repudiation of a social order that connects the ability of one to rise in the ranks to the denial of such a possibility for others.

While the conclusion of “The Apostate” portends a possibility for Johnny’s eventual progress, the implications of the youth’s toil complicate this optimistic reading and indicate that all options for development may be closed to him. The narrator conveys this point through the uncertainty of Johnny’s future: the story ends with him smiling as he leaves his immediate environment aboard a freight train without any indication of his fate. As Cassuto observes, the protagonist has no destination in mind, no clear objectives to shape his actions, and no apparent

means to embark on a life that differs from the one he has led.<sup>35</sup> The context preceding his departure further undermines his prospects as the narrator asserts that Johnny “did not walk like a man. He did not look like a man. He was a travesty of the human. It was a twisted and stunted and nameless piece of life that shambled like a sickly ape, arms loose-hanging, stoop-shouldered, narrow-chested, grotesque and terrible” (238-39). This description highlights the tragedy of the work through representing the wasted life of one who has seen his potential blunted by seemingly insuperable forces that have restricted his opportunities regardless of where he travels. Despite Johnny’s attempts to alter the conditions of his existence, he has been marked by his labor to the extent that it has effaced his basic humanity, evident through London’s use of animal imagery coupled with the shift in sentence subjects. As a result of these consequences, compounded by the central character’s lack of education or any skills that would qualify him for any other occupation, his transformation may have occurred too late to make any difference. However, the reduction of the boy to “a travesty of the human” provides a powerful indictment of London’s America and suggests the necessity of social change to minimize such outcomes.

*Martin Eden* also centers on the American Dream, shifting to an illustration of an aspiring individual who attains advancement. This novel has long produced mixed reactions among critics: Franklin Walker presents both extremes when he asserts that although the narrative is “uneven in structure, sometimes clumsy in expression, at times mawkish in tone[,] it possesses great lasting power, having more vitality today than it did the day it issued from the press.”<sup>36</sup> Contrary to the first half of this assessment, *Martin Eden* is complex and tightly-patterned work, and its continuing significance stems from its engagement with a fundamental concept of American life that manifests through Martin’s movement from the lower class to the

bourgeoisie. While he triumphs as a result of his diligent labor and tireless initiative, he cannot escape the confines of success imposed by commercial society, which defines such developments in materialistic terms rather than the desire for love and intellectual growth that he privileges.<sup>37</sup> Thus, his advancement reflects problematic nature of progress even for the rare person who improves his position since this ascension necessitates his estrangement from the working-class community that might have sustained him in exchange for people who prioritize his financial holdings, and Martin's subsequent suicide signifies his rejection of a framework that values only wealth, an insufficient reward for what he has relinquished.

London had long contemplated writing a novel about his formative period as a writer and his relationship with Mabel Applegarth, and his papers contain several sketches that reflect the main currents of *Martin Eden*. In "Novel on Literary Struggles" from his Post-Klondike Notebook, London describes a man who experiences "the gradual loss of his art and prostitution of his talent to meet present literary demands, insensibly this works on his ideals and he sees the horny side too much; becomes cynical, pessimistical."<sup>38</sup> This sketch provides the earliest version of the ideas that would coalesce in the book, and London stresses the conflict between the commercial concerns of dominant society and the protagonist's artistic aspirations, focusing on the emptiness of his goals. In "Sociological Study," London develops his theme of economic mobility and states that the hero was an

efficient, rising from the dregs—with all the bitterness. And after all, is it worth the candle? Show the rectitude of purpose of the young man—the bitter, bitter struggle—the empty success. . . . Burned the midnight oil—shut his ears to the sound of joy—lived an anchorite's existence in the midst of the city's pleasures. Liked pleasure, but crucified himself that he might have greater pleasure. The

isolation he suffered during the struggle—the isolation when success was obtained.<sup>39</sup>

This document highlights London's focus on the narrative as a reflection of the American Dream by emphasizing the central character's efforts to attain advancement. This source is also significant in that it refers to the young writer's suicide, yet this course of action stems only in part from his sense of isolation; instead, he kills himself after realizing that the woman he loves is serving a life sentence for murder.

London returned to these ideas in "PLOT FOR PLAY/ TRAGEDY," which further refined the central themes and episodes of *Martin Eden*. In an outline, he detailed a first act that would focus on a young novelist's attempts to enter the literary marketplace, portraying him in "the noblest throes of creation" and laboring under the assumption that everything of value resided in the "upper strata of society to which he intends fighting his way."<sup>40</sup> London also juxtaposes the world of the affluent with this individual's "pitiful and sordid" early life that lacks "the right kind about him, the kind he dreamed of having about him."<sup>41</sup> These elements feature prominently in *Martin Eden*, most notably in the contrast of Morses' environment with that of the eponymous hero in Chapters 1 through 3. The second act of the play would center on the writer's "complete success. Culmination of success, in love, in everything," with the conclusion involving his disillusionment and culminating with his suicide, which reflects the contours of Chapters 41 through 46.<sup>42</sup> Further, London also introduces a number of characters who serve important functions in the book. The author refers to a rich uncle, an archetype from the novels of Horatio Alger, "who will not tolerate [his nephew's] writing, but will give him a good job; otherwise will not allow him to come into his house," which anticipates the actions of Bernard Higginbotham.<sup>43</sup> This text also features a partial model for Russ Brissenden and develops

Martin's rejection of Ruth, an event that also occurs in "Novel on Literary Struggles" when the girl, "in her hour of weakness, would surrender all" to the protagonist.<sup>44</sup>

London further developed the central themes that would appear in *Martin Eden* in "What Life Means to Me," which clarifies the autobiographical basis of the novel yet establishes important distinctions between the author and his protagonist. London presents his initial view of the bourgeoisie as exalted beings characterized by "unselfishness of the spirit, clean and noble thinking, keen intellectual living" instead of the "sordidness and wretchedness" of his lower-class existence, and this perspective reflects Martin's impressions of the Morses' environment compared to his own.<sup>45</sup> London's experiences among the privileged undermined these perceptions: instead of people guided by lofty principles, he found individuals "who invoked the name of the Prince of Peace in their diatribes against war, and who put rifles in the hands of Pinkertons with which to shoot down workers in their own factories" and a man who funded foreign missions yet "worked his shop girls ten hours a day on a starvation wage and thereby directly encouraged prostitution."<sup>46</sup> These superficial forms of protest reveal the moral hypocrisy of the affluent as their rhetoric masks the practices that have engendered their wealth, yet Martin's critique of this group centers on a belief that they had squandered their opportunities and wasted their educations rather than on the human consequences of their business dealings. In "What Life Means to Me," London further juxtaposes the elite with other men and women "who exalted flesh and spirit over dollars and cents," applying the ideals that the rich only invoke in theory, which reflects Martin's encounters with Brissenden and the working-class intellectuals gathered at Kreis's apartment.<sup>47</sup> This element, however, deviates significantly from London's life in that he found a sense of fellowship with these radicals motivated by their faith in social change, whereas Martin has a limited engagement with his fellows.

London's notes for *Martin Eden* further illustrate the germination of the novel, expanding its cast of characters and central ideas. For the first time, he describes Charles Butler, who exemplifies the contours of the American Dream and whose self-denial offers a model for Martin's progression despite their different objectives.<sup>48</sup> London further sketches the aesthete named George who would become Brissenden, which suggests that the author based this figure on his friend George Sterling.<sup>49</sup> This document also elaborates on themes from the earlier sketches, developing Martin's critique of the elite through the process that engenders his disillusionment. London observes that the young author "looked up at all above him and accepted. Superior Court Judge – a nincompoop, he listened to his utterances and disciplined himself to accept them. But always afterward, his reason kept compelling him to reject. His studies led him to radicalism. He read the great economists, & found that the bourgeoisie did not read them."<sup>50</sup> His contact with the privileged does not conform to his conviction that they are among the best, the brightest, the noblest; instead, they are petty creatures who hide behind their lofty positions to mask their ignorance. London connects this limited ability to accurately perceive the nature of existence to Martin's relationship with Ruth, who embodies the false virtues of dominant society plus its materialistic definition of success, and his renunciation of her reflects a broader rejection of the values that animate her milieu. London writes that "she proceeds to try to remodel his life, a little, bourgeois, two by four scheme. No place in it for his large generousness + easy tolerance."<sup>51</sup> London's preliminary notes indicate the thematic concerns of *Martin Eden*, highlighting the protagonist's rejection of the bourgeois world, which thwarts his ultimate ambitions and denies the attributes that define his life.

After sketching out these details, London began drafting *Martin Eden* during the summer of 1907, composing the first half in Honolulu and the remainder aboard the *Snark*.<sup>52</sup> Charles N.

Watson, Jr. observes that London had completed Chapter 7 by August 27 and produced nearly three quarters of the novel when he arrived in the Marquesas on December 6.<sup>53</sup> He had finished Chapter 40 before sailing to California on January 13; however, pressing financial concerns and illness prevented him from working on the manuscript during his stay, and he informed his publisher, George P. Brett, that the final chapter and a half were not yet done, a task that London accomplished on February 24.<sup>54</sup> Three days later, he notified Brett that he “will shortly receive, by express, the manuscript of my new novel. It is some 142,000 words long. In case *Success* is already a copyrighted title, I give you herewith three titles which I prefer in the following order: (1) *Success* (2) *Star-Dust* (3) *Martin Eden*.”<sup>55</sup> London’s original title exhibits the fundamental irony of the narrative, with its juxtaposition of accomplishments defined by economic values against Martin’s romantic and aesthetic aims. London further noted that “I don’t know what you will think of this novel; I don’t know what to think of it myself. But at any rate, I think you will find it fresh and original.”<sup>56</sup> Charmian’s aunt, Ninetta Eames, arranged for the serialization of *Martin Eden* in the *Pacific Monthly* from September 1908 to September 1909, when Macmillan published the book.

The early chapters of *Martin Eden* reflect the American Dream through Martin’s introduction to the realm of the privileged, which appeals to his finer aptitudes and demonstrates the role of milieu in shaping the individual. In representing these themes, the narrator initially describes the protagonist through nautical imagery that forms a consistent pattern throughout the work. For instance, the narrator notes that when Martin first enters the Morse home, he “wore clothes that smacked of the sea,” and he feels that the “level floors were tilting up and sinking down to the heave and lunge of the sea.”<sup>57</sup> These descriptions refer to both his previous experiences as a sailor and his uncertain position among the affluent, which the narrator



reinforces by observing that the “wide rooms seemed too narrow for his rolling gait, and to himself he was in terror lest his broad shoulders should collide with the doorways or sweep the bric-a-brac from the low mantel” (31). While the central character’s “rolling gait” and “broad shoulders” have been created by his earlier life at sea, they are not suited to his current setting as evident through the juxtaposition of these attributes with the restrictive space of the Morses’ parlor and his fear of damaging the beauty he sees around him. The strength, health, and vitality that have allowed him to survive aboard ship are antithetical to his present circumstances, yet he looks about him for some tangible link between these worlds, a connection that he finds in an oil painting of a schooner.<sup>58</sup> The narrator states that there “was beauty, and it drew him irresistibly. He forgot his awkward walk and came closer to the painting, very close. The beauty faded out of the canvas” (33). Martin’s response displays his aesthetic sensibilities; however, his impression of the image as an illusion further exhibits the impact of his surroundings in that his perceptions stem from his limited exposure to art. Further, this view suggests that his latest environment, despite its appeal to his higher nature in contrast to the recollections of his previous existence, is similarly deceptive since he is not familiar with its codes and lacks the means, at this stage of his development, to interpret it accurately.

These concerns manifest in the first encounter with Ruth Morse, whose introduction follows Martin’s assessment of the painting, which complicates the ideal that she represents and signifies the problematic nature of their coupling. Employing indirect discourse to reflect the protagonist’s perspective, the narrator states that this woman “was a spirit, a divinity, a goddess; such sublimated beauty was not of the earth. Or perhaps the books were right, and there were many such as she in the upper walks of life. She might well be sung by that chap Swinburne. Perhaps he had had somebody like her in mind when he painted that girl, Iseult, in that book

there on the table” (35). The connection between Ruth and the depiction of the ship, with their illustrations of Martin’s responses to beauty, implies that she bears as little resemblance to the image she represents as the picture, when scrutinized, exhibits a vessel amid stormy seas. The allusion to Algernon Charles Swinburne’s “Tristram of Lyonesse” reinforces this impression while establishing a contrast between Iseult and the heroine, who lacks the emotional depth of her mythic counterpart.<sup>59</sup> Further, Ruth’s subsequent discussion of the poem as “indelicate” with “a great many lines that could be spared” expresses the restrictive moral standards of her milieu that will destabilize their union (41). This initial conversation also illustrates the limitations of the central character’s perceptions since he views this young lady as an exalted being based on her supposed possession of culture and refinement, whereas she merely parrots the conventional positions of others. At this point, Martin cannot apprehend her intellectual limitations; instead, the narrator states that she “lent wings to his imagination, and great luminous canvases themselves before him, whereon loomed vague, gigantic figures of love and romance, and heroic deeds for woman’s sake” (40). This intelligence and grandeur make her an unattainable ideal divorced from his common range of experience, evident through his recollections of the other women he has known. As a result, this desire for the traits seemingly embodied by Ruth engenders Martin’s attraction to her and frames his subsequent attempts to improve his social position so that he might be worthy of such a creature.

London heightens these concerns in the next chapter, stressing Martin’s insecurity in an unfamiliar environment, and the qualities associated with these surroundings engender his desire for advancement. The narrator notes that when the protagonist sits down to dinner, he “realized that eating was more than a utilitarian function. . . . He was feasting his love of beauty at this table where eating was an aesthetic function. It was an intellectual function, too” (48). These

efforts to acclimate himself to the Morses' routine convey his mental aptitudes through his deft attempts to examine the codes and constructs of the bourgeoisie. Martin's emphasis on observing these proprieties also reflects his broader desire for knowledge, which the narrator initially describes through language of hunger and thirst: when the young man enters the house, he "drank in the beauty," and when he sees a book of poetry, he is like "a starving man at the sight of food" (33-34). This focus suggests that his interest in improving himself is predicated on intellectual and aesthetic grounds, yet the narrator indicates the potential limitations to Martin's development when he tries to converse with the Morses. The narrator states that the hero "was oppressed by the consciousness that his carefulness of diction was making a booby of him, preventing him from expressing what he had in him" (49). This tension between the desire to articulate his thoughts and the need to do so within the discourse of polite society highlights the strictures of the bourgeois world, which confine Martin's strength of character and create a conflict between his actual identity and the façade he wishes to present for the affluent.

The protagonist's difficulty in speaking further conveys the restrictive nature of his new environment and represents his struggle to master the outward forms of decorum necessary within these surroundings. These constructs, which have a parallel in Martin's constrictive collar, indicate the gulf that he must cross in order to realize his ambitions while revealing his facility for storytelling and his ability to respond to sensory impressions, aptitudes that will make this progress possible. When the young man attempts to mediate the niceties of proper syntax and relays his adventures to the Morses, the narrator states that Martin "selected from the vast mass of detail with an artist's touch, drawing pictures of life that glowed and burned with light and color, injecting movement so that his listeners surged along with him on the flood of rough eloquence, enthusiasm and power" (52). This control of narrative enables the aspiring individual

to fight through the conventional grammatical strictures with a grace unbefitting his vulgar language and previous training, and while Ruth perceives his words as “an insult to her ear” and his experience as “an insult to her soul” (53), she is able to observe “a great soul looking forth, inarticulate and dumb because of those feeble lips that would not give it speech” (56). This realization animates a primary tension in the work: the extent to which Martin’s training in the structures of polite society will develop his higher self or whether such attempts to elevate his station will compromise the integrity of these attributes.

London reinforces the gulf between Martin’s working-class origins and his aspiration to enter the bourgeoisie through contrasts that reflect the difficulty of his progression due to restrictions within his present environment. A policeman, who assumes that the protagonist is intoxicated, removes him from his reveries over his introduction to circles of privilege, and this encounter reflects his place in the social hierarchy. The officer views Martin’s behavior in accordance with conventional expectations for the poor, denies his individuality, and cannot understand the forces that animate his actions, which anticipate the perspectives that the Morses adopt toward him for the remainder of the narrative. The young man’s perceptions of the college students on the streetcar reinforce his alienation from Ruth’s mode of existence as they have access to the life of the mind, “could know her, could see her every day if they wished” (60). Martin, however, views these individuals through his experiences, speculating how they would operate as sailors, and these reflections produce a sense of superiority since the youths “have been studying about life from books, while he had been busy living life” (61). The realization that he could acquire the students’ knowledge, but they could not obtain his, strengthens the central character’s resolve to improve his social standing as these men who would seem to be his

superiors owed their attainments to their class positions rather than to specific intellectual or physical endowments.

London continues these contrasts when Martin arrives at the home of Bernard Higginbotham, who reflects the trajectory of the self-made man since he has progressed from humble origins to a position of economic independence due to individual initiative. The narrator reinforces this point by noting that “such a dinner was advertisement of his worldly achievement and prosperity, and he honored it by delivering platitudinous sermonettes upon American institutions and the opportunity said institutions gave to any hard-working man to rise” (125-26). This advancement frames his outlook to the extent that he thinks others can experience similar outcomes just because he did. This ascension, however, has negative effects for those brought into his sphere. The narrator observes that Higginbotham “effaced himself in the store, reserving for the evening, with his family, the privilege of being himself,” a shift that entails abusing his family as a means of redress for his subservience, and this burden falls chiefly on his wife, who “was always tired from the burdens of her flesh, her work, and her husband” (63). The restrictions of this environment, and its emphasis on monetary rewards over other concerns, contrast with the milieu of the Morses, where financial security enables the pursuit of the finer aspects of life. Martin reflects that “the whole thing, the very air he breathed, was repulsive and mean. How different, he thought, from the atmosphere of beauty and repose of the house wherein Ruth dwelt. Here it was all material, and meanly material” (72). This emphasis on wealth runs contrary to the impulses that govern the protagonist’s desire for mobility, which involves an attempt to distance himself from his current surroundings in an effort to reach the Morses’ realm.

This economic context further complicates Martin's ability to realize his ambitions due to the absence of any structure of support. These class distinctions manifest in his reflections about Ruth's hands, which were "cool as soft as a snowflake," and the young man

saw the aristocracy of the people who did not labor. It towered before him on the wall, a figure in brass, arrogant and powerful. He had worked himself; his first memories seemed connected with work, and all his family had worked. . . . But her hands were soft, and her mother's hands, and her brothers'. This last came to him as a surprise; it was tremendously indicative of the highness of their caste, of the enormous distance that stretched between her and him. (69-70)

This contrast highlights the altered circumstances that shape the lives of the affluent and the poor: the former have a financial security that does not compel them to work, whereas the latter must sell their labor in order to survive. This difference expresses that Ruth will never comprehend the impulses that animate Martin's existence and conveys the nature of the gulf that he must face in order to win her affections. The narrator indicates that this divide is exacerbated by forces rooted within the protagonist's environment and states that he "was appalled by the problem confronting him, weighed down by the incubus of his working-class station. Everything reached out to hold him down—his sister, his sister's house and family, Jim the apprentice, everybody he knew, every tie of life" (76-77). Martin's desires to acquire knowledge and to become a writer are foreign to the aspirations of those around him, who are preoccupied with basic monetary needs and the gratification of their animal impulses, and the central character's deviation from these concerns engenders his growing alienation from individuals within his community.

London links Martin's quest for advancement to acquiring an education, a development that would permit him to operate within Ruth's world while also making him worthy of her love. The narrator, however, indicates the monumental nature of this quest when Martin enters the public library and finds that from "every side the books seemed to press upon him and crush him. He had never dreamed that the fund of human knowledge bulked so big. . . . How could his brain master it all?" (77-78). Since he was forced into the workforce at an early age and had little formal schooling, the protagonist has had limited access to the avenues of culture, which take on oppressive attributes due to their unfamiliarity, yet he has the necessary aptitudes to meet this challenge. The burgeoning of his intellect correlates to an inner life of thoughts and sensations that have found few outlets in his previous environment as the narrator notes that the young man "remembered that he had already led a secret life in his thoughts. These thoughts he had tried to share, but never had found a woman capable of understanding – nor a man. He had tried, at times, but only puzzled his listeners" (87). The attainment of knowledge enables Martin to situate his experiences within the grand sweep of intellectual history, a progression that will allow him to approach Ruth as an equal rather than as a subordinate. The central character connects this desire to the broader goal of mobility when he states that "I want to make my way to the kind of life you have in this house. . . . I am willing to work my passage, you know, and I can make most men sick when it comes to hard work. Once I get started, I'll work night and day" (97). Martin invokes the language of the American Dream through his emphasis on individual initiative and diligence as the means of progress. Further, the declaration that he will "work his passage" locates this new pursuit in the context of his earlier existence since this phrase has its origins in sailing, and it also suggests the lengths that he must transverse to realize his objectives. The narrator further establishes the contrast between Martin's squalid origins and

his aspirations by observing that down “below where he lived was the ignoble, and he wanted to purge himself of the ignoble that had soiled all his days, and to rise to that sublimated realm where dwelt the upper classes” (103). This language of degradation reflects conventional assumptions about the common people, which are strengthened by the fact that these constructs emanate from a member of the proletariat, who has internalized the belief that erudition is the exclusive property of the bourgeoisie and that he will only find the kinship he seeks among members of Ruth’s class.

While Martin views Ruth as the embodiment of erudition and beauty, London represents her interest in the protagonist through ideas of sexual Determinism, which supersedes the directives of her conscious mind and influences her conduct contrary to conventional models of propriety.<sup>60</sup> The narrator states that the young man’s “fire warmed her. . . . She wanted to lean toward this burning, blazing man that was like a volcano spouting forth strength, robustness, and health. She felt that she must lean toward him, and resisted by an effort” (53). London establishes a contrast between physical desire as denoted by the references to fire and the restrictions of the bourgeois world, evident through Ruth’s attempts to resist her attraction to Martin. The conflict shapes her perspective for the remainder of the novel, and the narrator continues to emphasize the impulses that animate human behavior beyond the governance of the will. He observes that Ruth “was drawn by some force outside herself and much stronger than gravitation, strong as destiny. . . . But she had become an automaton. Her actions had passed beyond the control of her will – she never thought of control or will in delicious madness that was upon her” (225). This emphasis on basic drives common to all humanity illustrates the arbitrary nature of social hierarchies through establishing a commonality of experience irrespective of class boundaries. The narrator notes that the “same pressures and caresses,



unaccompanied by speech, that were efficacious with the girls of the working class, were equally efficacious with the girls above the working class. They were all of the same flesh, sisters under their skins” (229). This realization complicates Martin’s impression of the heroine as an exalted being since her actions reflect the same forces that affect her working-class counterparts with Ruth’s refinement and culture as outward forms to mask these urges. This tension manifests through the fact that she is repulsed by yet attracted to the central character’s strength and vitality despite her prior training.

Ruth’s perceptions further originate within her milieu, and these constructs become evident through her endeavors to shape Martin in accordance with middle-class values irrespective of his interests and identity.<sup>61</sup> Discussing these efforts, the narrator asserts that “it was the first time she had ever had a human soul to play with, and the plastic clay of him was a delight to mold; for she thought she was molding it, and her intentions were good” (107). The reference to Martin as “clay” reinforces his adaptability to the dictates of his surroundings, yet this passage further underscores the couple’s inequitable relationship in that Ruth views him in terms of an ideal that negates his actuality. While playing with a human soul implies a measure of agency, her actions have their basis within her environment. The narrator develops this point when he posits that the heroine’s “own limits were the limits of her horizon; but limited minds can recognize limitations only in others” (111). Ruth thinks that she is superior to Martin and thereby is eligible to mold him in accordance with her wishes; however, this resulting model reflects her prior training, which causes her to perceive her partner in accordance with archetypes that betray a fundamental ignorance of his motives and inclinations. The narrator notes that “Ruth measured his thoughts by comparison of externals and in accordance with her belief in the established. . . . She was too firmly entrenched in the established to have any sympathy with

revolutionary ideas” (257). These impressions stem from her education and her reliance on the other people’s ideas, a practice that emerges when she repeats parts of a former professor’s lecture in response to Martin’s arguments about the opera. This exchange conveys her general condescension toward the central character, whose intellectual equipment she still regards dismissively, operating under the assumption that his knowledge is far inferior to her own as a result of her degree. She clarifies the nature of these attempts to reformulate the protagonist when she tells her mother that “it seems that he is a bulldog I have taken for a plaything like some of the ‘frat’ girls, and he is tugging hard, and showing his teeth, and threatening to break loose” (211). Ruth’s use of animal imagery expresses her view that Martin is a brute who must learn obedience, apparent through her choice of a dog struggling against his confinement as the young man will soon rebel against the vision imposed on him.

London reinforces the effects of the heroine’s prior training through the figure of George Butler, whom she invokes as the protagonist’s model for advancement, yet this character further highlights the restrictions of the bourgeois milieu and develops the conflict between the couple’s differing views of success. Narrating Butler’s experiences to guide Martin’s pursuit of mobility, Ruth states that her father’s lawyer “went to work in a printing office – I have heard him tell of it many times, – and he got three dollars a week, at first. His income today is at least thirty thousand a year. How did he do it? He was honest, and faithful, and industrious, and economical. He denied himself the enjoyments that most boys indulge” (108). The circumstances that enabled Butler’s ascension exhibit the conventional features of the Puritan Dream based on prudence, industry, and thrift as the cornerstones of individual progress. London reinforces this vision through allusions to Benjamin Franklin, who also began his rise from humble origins in a printing office, while evoking the virtues central to the American

experience as construed by Ruth. Franklin's later life also manifests in the arc of Butler's progress as each man emphasized the value of education, evident through the latter attending night school and later taking his law degree, to facilitate his elevation to positions of prominence: Butler has refused nomination to the United States Senate, and Ruth asserts that he "could become a justice of the Supreme Court any time a vacancy occurs, if he wants to" (111). This reference further situates Butler within the framework of the American Dream, displaying the possible gains for those who exert themselves in a comparable manner.

Butler serves another important function by providing a counterpoint to Martin's quest for advancement, which has entirely different origins. The narrator states that the protagonist

could not find an adequate motive in Mr. Butler's life of pinching and privation.

Had he done it for the love of a woman, or for the attainment of beauty, Martin would have understood. God's own mad lover should do anything for the kiss but not for thirty thousand dollars a year. He was dissatisfied with Mr. Butler's career. There was something paltry about it, after all. Thirty thousand a year was all right, but dyspepsia and the inability to be humanly happy robbed such princely income of all its value. (112)

Martin's impulses are not limited to the economic objectives of his predecessor; instead, the young man's aspirations stem from a broader pattern of values that have been displaced by the monetary conception of the national success story. The narrator connects these meditations to the juxtaposition with Butler through the central character's urge to write, observing that the "men of literature were the world's giants, and he conceived them to be far finer than the Mr. Butlers who earned thirty thousand a year and could be Supreme Court justices if they wanted to" (115). Martin's emphasis on mobility centers on eternal qualities that he feels should be the

focus of the human enterprise rather than the material concerns that animate the actions of many members of society. This perspective further illustrates the gulf separating the couple, which the narrator underscores by asserting that what “was great and strong in him, she missed, or worse yet, misunderstood. This man, whose clay was so plastic that he could live in any number of pigeonholes of human existence, she thought willful and almost obstinate because she could not shape him to live in her pigeonhole, which was the only one she knew” (251). Through the restrictions of her early training, Ruth cannot perceive Martin’s underlying merit, judging him against her models of noble behavior, who are also constrained by their environment and cannot see past its limited field of vision.

This emphasis on Butler as a proper model for advancement reinforces the Deterministic forces operating on Ruth, whose views have been determined by the perspectives of her class and dictate her engagement with Martin’s ambitions. London presents Butler’s pivotal role in Ruth’s conception of attainment when she urges the protagonist to practice “renunciation, sacrifice, patience, industry, and high endeavor,” with the narrator observing that “such abstractions being objectified in her mind by her father, and Mr. Butler, and by Andrew Carnegie, who, from a poor immigrant boy had arisen to be the book-giver of the world” (209). The reference to Carnegie, another potent figure of individual progress, further situates the narrative within the parameters of the American Dream, yet the narrator’s focus on Butler’s rise chiefly in financial terms conveys a fundamental shift to wealth from the spiritual centering of the Puritan vision. In this context, the heroine’s subsequent efforts to train Martin reveal the conditioning of her early expectations as she attempts to refashion the young man within her middle-class beliefs and sense of propriety, which conflict with what he has encountered in his reading. The narrator states that Ruth’s “disappointment lay in that this man she had taken to mold, refused to be

molded. To a certain extent she had found his clay plastic, then it had developed stubbornness, declining to be shaped in the image of Mr. Butler or her father” (251). This equation of success with the financial values embodied by Mr. Morse and his trusted lawyer neglects the aesthetic and romantic concerns that frame Martin’s desire for mobility. These impulses exist only as abstractions to Ruth, apparent through her endeavors to force the central character into conventional paths to respectability at her father’s office in the image of Mr. Butler. Reflecting on these developments, the narrator asserts that “it was clear to [Martin] that he had been handicapped by his early environment, so now he perceived that she was similarly handicapped. She had not had a chance to expand” (310-11). These contemplations broaden the scope of American Naturalism by highlighting how all individuals are shaped by their immediate environments, and while the affluent have alternatives to their actions as a result of their wealth, their lives are still influenced by the prevailing constructs of their milieu.

This tension manifests through Ruth’s hostility toward her partner’s art, which causes him to deviate from the path to progress as embodied by Mr. Butler. When Martin reads “The Pot” aloud, Ruth states that it is “degrading! It is not nice! It is nasty” and later asks, “Why don’t you select a nice subject? . . . . We know there are nasty things in the world, but that is no reason—” (167-68). The first response evokes her initial remarks on Swinburne in Chapter 2 with her emphasis on restrictive moral standards that separate life from literature, and she prioritizes surface-level elements of form as opposed to the broader picture of life that involves the interplay of universal forces amid the beauty and suffering of existence. The heroine’s second comment alludes to the reaction of Martin’s sister to his writing when she declares that there “are too many sad things in the world anyway. It makes me happy to think about happy things” (135). The connection between these positions further undermines Ruth’s perspective by

associating comparable sentiments with one who has not possessed her advantages yet makes a statement that conveys a similar lack of knowledge. This correlation indicates that the protagonist's aspirations will find a limited outlet among the bourgeoisie as Ruth utilizes the constructs of her class to perceive his ambitions. Her chief objection to Martin's vocation stems from the fact that his stories, by not adhering to established structures and themes, will not enable him to attain mobility or make him eligible to marry. Presenting Ruth's perspective, the narrator states that this "desire to write was, after all, a little weakness which he would grow out of in time. Then he would devote himself to the more serious affairs of life. And he would succeed, too. . . . He was so strong that he could not fail—if only he would drop writing" (173). The central character's actions do not adhere to his intended's definition of success since she assumes that literary expression is beyond the means of the common people, and her focus on "the more serious affairs of life" through a respectable career demonstrates her inability to recognize the impulses that govern Martin's desire for advancement.

While the protagonist rejects the impulses behind Butler's development, the former adopts many of the latter's practices and sacrifices all pleasure in order to attain mobility. Reflecting on Martin's efforts to improve his social position, the narrator states that there "were twenty-four hours in the day. He was invincible. He knew how to work, and the citadels would go down before him. He would not have to go to sea again – as a sailor; and for the instant he caught a vision of a steam yacht. There were others writers who possessed steam yachts" (115). This emphasis on diligent effort reinforces the conventional arc of the American Dream and situates Martin's quest within the context of his previous experiences, contrasting his time as a sailor with the prosperity that awaits him. However, the reference to the yacht portends a different future in that it anticipates the central character's eventual suicide due to his

estrangement from his conventional patterns of life and the enjoyments of his former world. The narrator devotes considerable attention to Martin's toil when he attempts to provide himself with the intellectual equipment necessary to write and to make himself worthy of Ruth, completing in one day "the equivalent to a week's work of the average successful writer" and living on less than five hours of sleep per night, which keeps him in a perpetual state of nervous exhaustion that culminates in his illness (137). To sustain himself while writing, he pawns nearly all of his possessions, including his bicycle and best suit, acts of self-denial that further separate him from his fiancée as the conveyance played an important role in their courtship, while the loss of his good clothing prevents Martin from seeing his intended since he no longer has the proper attire to enter her world. He further implements Butler's tactics through the acquisition of an oil-burning stove, which parallels the kerosene one that featured prominently in Ruth's version of the lawyer's rise, a purchase that "especially pleased her" (235) and "won her admiration" (277). This ascetic routine instead creates further distance from the heroine, who is horrified by his cramped, squalid dwelling that reeks of cooking and stale tobacco, a habitation that is unbefitting a man who wishes to become her husband yet one that it is necessary for a person who hopes to win his place in the world through individual initiative.

The episode with Cheese-Face illustrates the attributes necessary for Martin's advancement, showing the lengths he has already come while also exhibiting his ability to adapt to environmental pressures. After his initial efforts to become a successful writer yield nothing more than a pile of rejection slips, the protagonist recalls numerous fights with an antagonist of his youth when each defeat intensified his desire to best his opponent, which offers a parallel to his present struggles to make a living with his pen. Martin tells his image in the mirror, "you licked Cheese-face, and you'll lick the editors if it takes thrice eleven years to do it in. You can't

stop here. You've got to go on. It's to a finish, you know" (183). The connection between these skirmishes and his attempts to support himself through his fiction reflects the central character's desire to put this new pursuit in the context of his previous experiences. Further, he later establishes a precise correlation between these events when he obtains payment from one editor through physical intimidation and relinquishes control of another story after a beating from the staff of *The Hornet*. The memory of the altercations with Cheese-Face gives Martin the determination to continue his endeavors to become an author, revealing that he has defeated stronger foes and that the aptitudes gleaned from these incidents have developed the resolve necessary to win the current conflict. However, the description of the brawl also supplies a glimpse of the young man's earlier life with a representation of his ability to transform himself in accordance with his surroundings. The narrator states that all "the painful, thousand years' gains of man in his upward climb through creation were lost. Only the electric light remained, a milestone on the path of the great human adventure. Martin and Cheese-Face were two savages, of the stone age, of the squatting place and the tree refuge. They sank lower and lower into the muddy abyss, back into the dregs of the raw beginnings of life" (179). The emphasis on this reversion to the instincts of their primitive forebears further demonstrates the influence of milieu amid the plasticity of existence while also indicating Martin's ability to master the forms necessary to survive in both a savage realm and an exalted one.

Martin's experiences at Shelly Hot Springs also illustrate the diligent labor that seems to promise advancement, yet his endeavors in this setting undermine his ability to realize his larger objectives. London devotes three chapters to the young man's drudgery at the laundry, where he must perform long shifts of "nerve-racking, body-destroying toil" (195). His capacity for work parallels his prodigious efforts to become a writer; however, his industry at washing clothes



differs from his exertions at his desk, which stem from his conscious desires rather than financial need. In describing the effects of the protagonist's current job, London returns to the motifs of mechanization from "The Apostate" and the resulting intellectual decline of the protagonist. The narrator notes that "Martin's consciousness was concentrated in the work. Ceaselessly active, head and hand, an intelligent machine, all that constituted him a man was devoted to furnishing that intelligence. There was no room in his brain for the universe and its mighty problems. All the broad and spacious corridors of his mind were closed and hermetically sealed" (194). As in "The Apostate," the nature of this production shapes Martin to the extent that he gradually adopts the attributes of the mechanism. This development comes at the expense of his cognitive capabilities since his repetitive tasks prevent the further cultivation of his higher attributes until he is nothing more than a "machine that thought of itself as once having been Martin Eden" (202). His deterioration is significant because his existence centers on the attainment of knowledge as a means of individual progress, and his degeneration produces a dramatic demonstration of the shaping role of his environment and its broader consequences. Further, the episodes with Cheese-Face and at Shelly Hot Springs widen the gulf between the central character and Ruth, reflecting the elements of life that she cannot incorporate into her worldview and reinforcing her inability to understand his quest for advancement.

This discrepancy between Martin's ambitions and Ruth's perceptions highlights his growing disillusionment with his intended and her milieu, which does not cohere with the ideals he once thought that it embodied. The protagonist clarifies this point when he states that "up here I thought all men and women were brilliant and radiant. But now, from what little I've seen of them, they strike me as a pack of ninnies, most of them, and ninety per cent of the remainder as bores" (297). Martin's exposure to the privileged and powerful has eroded his earlier

impressions of these individuals, who mouth platitudes that reflect great cognitive limitations, have a mastery of surface forms that denote erudition, and cannot delve past these externals to perceive the broader forces that animate existence. While these men and women have clear advantages, they have merely learned to intone the opinions of established thinkers and lack any true engagement with outward reality. The narrator observes that for Martin, “culture and collars had gone together” and that “he had been deceived into believing that college educations and mastery were the same things” (310). The reference to collars indicates the restrictions of the bourgeois world, one predicated on the appearances of higher qualities, yet the people in the Morses’ circle betray a dearth of knowledge unbefitting their exalted rank. Contrasting this group with his previous companions, the central character asserts that “the difference between these lawyers, officers, business men, and bank cashiers he had met and the members of the working class he had known was on a par with the difference in the food they ate, clothes they wore, neighborhoods in which they lived” (311). This distinction between the rich and the poor through opportunities and exterior attributes illustrates that the Morses and their peers have done little to merit their present positions: they have not added to the body of human wisdom and instead rest on the achievements of others, which cause them to live in a comparable state of ignorance to those whom they deem inferior. Martin’s recognition of this intellectual bankruptcy heightens his disenchantment, and the realization that he exchanged his former environment for one that is ultimately without value suggests that he has separated himself from the potential for a meaningful life and thereby prefigures the conclusion of the work.

London heightens Martin’s growing disillusionment through juxtaposing dominant society against an alternate framework provided by Russ Brissenden, who serves an important thematic function since he exists outside the restrictions of the middle class and further develops

the critique of this group.<sup>62</sup> Unlike the affluent characters, he exhibits a broader understanding of the protagonist, recognizing the aesthetic merits of his writing and supplying the financial assistance necessary to sustain him through his struggles to become an author. Brissenden identifies the hazards of Martin's present course by telling him that "you are cutting your throat every day you waste in them trying to prostrate beauty to the needs in magazinedom. . . . Well, what do you . . . want with fame? If you got it, it would be poison to you" (344). While Brissenden realizes the fiscal necessity of the young man's actions, the former notes that the attainment of success would come at the cost of the latter's talent and work, sacrifices that would be too great for the monetary rewards he would earn. This point emerges in the reaction to Brissenden's "Ephemera," which anticipates Martin's demise through the bourgeois appropriation of his art. When the poem is published, the narrator describes its reception by observing that Brissenden "had hated the crowd so, and here all that was finest and most sacred of him had been thrown to the crowd. Daily the vivisection of Beauty went on. Every nincompoop in the land rushed into free print, floating their wizened little egos into the public eye on the surge of Brissenden's greatness" (414). This response illustrates the commodification of literature and the cheapening of beauty to mere economic calculations, which parallels the response to Martin's output and signifies the emptiness of his aspirations.

The chapters with Brissenden also involve Martin's introduction to working-class intellectuals who contrast with the bourgeoisie and further reflect his growing sense of alienation. Describing the people gathered at Kreis's apartment in San Francisco, the narrator asserts that nobody "manufactured their opinions for them; they were all rebels of one variety or another, and their lips were strangers to platitudes. Never had Martin, at the Morses', heard so amazing a range of topics discussed" (373). The reference to platitudes establishes a

counterpoint to the scholars and upwardly-mobile professionals, such as Charlie Hapgood, at the Morses' dinner parties who speak only in such terms as their opinions have been manufactured by polite society. Kreis and his associates, however, are not enthralled by these constructs, instead striving to delve past surface forms to perceive the elements that animate existence. The narrator states that Martin did not hear "the philosophy of the dry, printed word, written by half-mythical demigods like Kant and Spencer. It was living philosophy, with warm, red blood, incarnated in these two men till its very features worked with excitement" (374). For these individuals, knowledge is a vital force in dialogue with human experience, a progression displayed through the narrator's personification of philosophy. These men present the central character with the intellectual companionship that he had been unable to find among the affluent, and the narrator reinforces this point through juxtaposing this scene with the restrictive environment at the Morse home. These constraints manifest through Judge Blount, who merely repeats conventional judgments that demonstrate a fundamental ignorance of Martin's belief system and reveal the "pretense and fraud of those who sat in high places" (386). While the exchanges at Kreis's residence offer the potential for an alternate course of development, the young writer does not initially participate in the discussions, which exhibits his alienation from a community that could have provided the stimulation he required. Further, when Martin does speak at a meeting in Chapter 38, the subsequent press account causes the end of his relationship with Ruth, which intensifies his disenchantment as he has become disconnected from both the exalted realm he attempted to enter and the world he had abandoned, and London underscores this idea when the protagonist declines an offer to return to Kreis's group later in the narrative.

Although critics have asserted that Martin's disillusionment and self-destruction are incompatible with his representation through the novel, London establishes the context for these

developments through unifying the motifs that he has integrated throughout the work and illustrating the emptiness of the hero's objectives.<sup>63</sup> These elements emerge when Ruth ends her union with the protagonist after a newspaper article identifies him as a revolutionary Socialist, which is inconsistent with his actual ideological stance. The heroine's failure to recognize Martin's belief system provides the culmination of their fundamental incompatibility. Further, London presents the rationale for the break up through a discussion of economic and hereditary Determinism. Ruth writes her former fiancée that "I can understand that you are not to be blamed. You could only act according to your nature and your early training. So I do not blame you, Martin. . . . As father and mother have contended, we were not made for each other" (400). This position reflects the central tenets of American Naturalism, yet Ruth's handling of these ideas overlooks the fact that Martin has transcended the constraints of his early training to adapt to new surroundings with an alternate set of societal pressures. While she deemphasizes the causative agents rooted in her environment that have framed the relationship and conditioned its demise, London suggests these components through references to her parents, who have trained their daughter to share their limited standards of value. London parallels this scene with the first instances of the central character's success as a writer, yet his financial advancement is separated from his emphasis on love and the attainment of knowledge, which produces an intellectual and spiritual malaise that robs his achievements of any importance. The narrator states that money "had no meaning to him now except what it would immediately buy. He was chartless and rudderless, and he had no port to make, while drifting involved the least living, and it was living that hurt" (412). The use of nautical imagery both underscores the nature of Martin's progress from the ranks of the working class through referring to the patterns of life that he once knew and anticipates his suicide at sea resulting from this absence of direction.

This growing sense of detachment manifests most profoundly through Martin's realization that he had traded an environment where others truly valued him as an individual for one where people only hold him in high regard due to his wealth and fame. When he attends a picnic in his old neighborhood, the protagonist realizes that he "was a fool to ever have left them . . . and he was very certain that his sum of happiness would have been greater had he remained with them and let alone the books and the people who sat in the high places" (421-22). The young writer engages in the pursuits of his prior existence, yet his efforts at self-improvement and the acquisition of knowledge have separated him from the enjoyments of these activities; he goes through the motions of his former life and feels a momentary sense of recognition, but he cannot recapture the past since he has put himself above his companions. This estrangement is most discernible when he interacts with Lizzie Connolly. Although Martin recognizes the sincerity of the young woman's passion, he tries to remake her in a manner that reflects Ruth's earlier position toward him. Rather than accepting Lizzie on her own terms and recognizing her intrinsic merits, Martin persuades her "to go to night school and business college and to have herself gowned by a wonderful dressmaker who charged outrageous prices," and she complies in order "to make herself of worth in his eyes—of the sort of worth he seemed to value" (436). While he has reservations about these attempts to mold Lizzie into his ideal female, which is a significant departure from Ruth's perceptions of him, his actions originate in the same context: an inability to see the beauty and value of the working class because these attributes take different forms among the privileged. Through these actions, Martin has signaled the gulf that now separates him from his previous companions, a development that the narrator underscores when the central character encounters former acquaintances after his success.

The realization of Martin's aspirations exposes the emptiness of these objectives, and the crystallization of this vision coupled with the recognition that he can no longer return to his former life provide the impetus for his suicide. The narrator states that it

was the bourgeoisie that bought his books and poured its gold into his money-sack, and from what little he knew of the bourgeoisie it was not clear to him how it could possibly appreciate or comprehend what he had written. His intrinsic beauty and power meant nothing to the hundreds of thousands that were acclaiming him and buying his books. He was the fad of the hour, the adventurer who stormed Parnassus while the gods nodded. (441-42)

Though the young man's fortunes have turned, his success is merely a monetary one since those who read his books are interested in them because they have been judged as valuable in relation to the dictates of the marketplace, the same standards that led to Ruth's rejection of his writing and the Morses forcing her to break the engagement. The narrator illustrates the hypocritical nature of this logic through the efforts of those who once rejected Martin to cultivate his favor and exploit his new-found wealth. The characters who once ridiculed his ambitions, from Bernard Higginbotham to Mr. Morse and Judge Blount, now seek to extract whatever they can from his celebrity by inviting him to dinners, requests that they had withheld during his desperate poverty. The narrator observes that these individuals did not want Martin "for himself or for work, but for the fame that was his, because he was somebody amongst men, and—why not?—because he had a hundred thousand dollars or so. That was the way bourgeois society values a man, and who was he to expect it otherwise?" (444). These scenes parallel the attempts of various publishers to secure Martin's fictional output, which they had rejected earlier since it failed to conform to middle-class proprieties. These editors are not concerned with the artistic or

intellectual merits of his poetry and prose. Instead, these men only want to procure the protagonist's works due to his popularity and potential to generate revenue, concerns that override their convictions to the extent that they are willing to pay lavishly for stories from his apprenticeship period that he regards as inferior products.

The culmination of Martin's disillusionment comes through his reunion with the heroine, which heightens the emptiness of his accomplishments. When Ruth attempts to resume her relationship with the protagonist, he connects her impulses to his celebrity, asserting that the people who desire his company "don't want me for myself, for myself is the same old self they did not want. They must want me for something else, for something that is outside of me, for something that is not I . . . It is for the recognition I have received. That recognition is not I. It resides in the mind of others. Then again for the money I have earned and am earning. But that money is not I" (460). This passage reflects the central character's preoccupation with the distinction between his external self, the famous writer whom everyone values, and the actual Martin Eden, who is more than the name attached to best-selling fiction and the sum of his bank balance. The encounter with Ruth provides the most powerful illustration of this theme as the Morses, who opposed their daughter's marriage to an impoverished sailor because of his limited earning power and the "years of licentiousness he has inevitably lived," now impose no obstacles to their coupling due to the young author's improved class position, despite the fact that he is same person as before his success (233). When he walks his former fiancée home after rejecting her advances, he observes her brother Norman, who once threatened to call the police if Martin came near his sister, and states that "these bourgeois! When I was broke, I was not fit to be seen with his sister. When I have a bank account, he brings her to me" (467). This irony conveys the reduction of natural bonds of affection to the economic valuation of the marketplace, which



reveals that the moral strictures of the Morses and their peers are merely justifications for the actions they choose to embrace and which can quickly be discarded to promote their interests. These events reinforce that Martin has exchanged his earlier environment for one that denies his identity in accordance with market forces, and this development completes his alienation from both worlds, setting in motion the events that end in his suicide.

London further contextualizes Martin's suicide through emphasizing the broader malaise that diminishes his will to live. These elements manifest through the weakening of his intellectual abilities, which refers back to his experiences at Shelly Hot Springs and heightens the consequences of his success. The protagonist has become disconnected from his inner life, ceasing to think, read, or write to the extent that his "mind was a blank, save for the intervals when unsummoned memory pictures took form and color and radiance under his eyelids" (456), and his brain eventually becomes "dead to impressions" (468). This decline of his cognitive capabilities reflects the broader results of his disenchantment since he abandons the constructs that have governed his existence and isolates himself from any engagement with the outside world. London juxtaposes these descriptions with Martin's craving for sleep, which "had become to him oblivion, and each day that he awoke, he awoke with regret" (468), and the narrator notes that the central character "realized how much he had slept, and how much he desired to sleep. Of old, he had hated sleep. It had robbed him of precious moments of living" (472). The contrast between Martin's earlier self and his current state expresses the extent of his deterioration, while his longing for oblivion and regret at waking anticipate his death.

London clarifies the impetus for Martin's demise when he boards the *Mariposa* to sail for Tahiti, and his experiences on the ship reinforce his estrangement from his previous way of life and reveal that he has nowhere else to go after his abandonment of the bourgeois world. When

the protagonist tries to befriend the sailors, he “could find no kinship with these stolid-featured, ox-minded bestial creatures. He was in despair. Up above nobody had wanted Martin Eden for his own sake, and he could not go back to those of his class who had wanted him in the past. He did not want them” (477). His attempts to recapture aspects of his time at sea indicate that his intellectual transformation prevents him from ever returning to this earlier mode of existence, which alludes to his alienation from Lizzie and Joe Dawson earlier in the chapter, and that even an escape to Tahiti would not result in the peace he craved since he “found no delight in the old familiar things of life” (478). London brings these elements together when Martin reads Swinburne’s “The Garden of Proserpine.” This reference evokes his first encounter with Ruth when they discuss the poet, a scene that offers the initial presentation of her limited perspective, yet the work does not appeal to the central character’s aesthetic sensibilities or reflect his desire for knowledge. Instead, the poem points to the solution for his disillusionment as the narrator notes that “Swinburne had furnished the key. Life was ill, or, rather, it had become ill—and unbearable thing. ‘That dead men rise up never!’ That line stirred him with a profound feeling of gratitude. . . . When life became an aching weariness, death was ready to soothe away to everlasting sleep” (480). The use of Swinburne unifies the ideas that London has developed throughout *Martin Eden*, providing the culmination of the eponymous hero’s disenchantment while also suggesting a way forward, and his suicide, with its tension between his body’s struggle for survival and his mind’s refusal to acquiesce to these instincts, represents his ultimate rejection of dominant society.

Martin’s suicide reflects the plight of a man who prioritizes his advancement and objectives over the concerns of the majority, a process that disconnects the protagonist from his environment and seals his fate. Reflecting on his central conception in this novel, London wrote

that “Martin Eden died because he was so made. He was an individualist. He was unaware of the needs of others. He worked for himself, for fame, for love, for all self-satisfactions. . . . But had he taken Neal [*sic*] Brissenden’s advice and tied himself to life by embracing socialism, he would have found there were a few million others to live & fight for.”<sup>64</sup> London effectively develops these ideas in *The Iron Heel*, which connects the aspirations of the individual to those of the collective and exemplifies the potential for development when people realize that “there were a few million more to live & fight for” despite the seemingly insurmountable barriers to social progress.

In his treatment of this theme, London highlights the institutional framework that constrains the central characters’ development through the extension of practices prevalent in twentieth-century America into a dystopian future.<sup>65</sup> *The Iron Heel* has received comparatively little scholarly attention due to its overtly political subject matter and concerns about its artistic integrity that stem from the apparent incompatibility between the narrative frame and Avis Everhard’s version of events. Earle Labor and Jeanne Campbell Reesman reflect both perspectives when they refer to *The Iron Heel* as “little more than an ideological treatise cast in narrative form” and opine that Avis’s sentimentality makes the novel seem like “*1984* as it might have been penned by Elizabeth Barrett Browning.”<sup>66</sup> Even critics who are sympathetic to London’s ideology emphasize these elements over the formal and structural properties of the book. For instance, Nathaniel Teich praises the “successful synthesis of his socialistic ideology and novelistic form,” and Paul Stein asserts that the text “provides a synthesis in most concrete and coherent terms of London’s grasp of Marxist ideology and demonstrates the extent of his ability to use literary devices for programmatic purpose.”<sup>67</sup> Rather than serving as a novelization of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’s collected writings, *The Iron Heel* is a complex work of

literature that incorporates elements from London's contemporary society into an indictment of the excesses possible within the free enterprise system and suggests that the bourgeoisie will use the resources at their disposal to perpetuate their power. While the text traces the brutality of the Oligarchy, Anthony Meredith's foreword and footnotes written after the successful revolution signify the transient nature of capitalism due to its internal contradictions and human consequences.

After London had cemented his popularity with *The Sea Wolf* and *White Fang* (1905), he returned to an idea for a book that reflected his Socialism, a project that he had been contemplating for many years. In his Post-Klondike Notebook, London describes plans for "a novel, a la Wells, out of idea of wage-slaves ruled by industrial oligarchs, finally ceasing to reproduce. And either figure out new ways of penetrating the future, or begin far ahead of the actual time of the story, by having the writing dug up by the people of a new and very immature civilization."<sup>68</sup> The reference to H. G. Wells suggests that London may have been indebted to *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899), a utopian novel in which the hero is transported by a mesmeric trance to a world afflicted by a class war, yet London questions the adequacy of this device through his desire to find "a new way of penetrating the future."<sup>69</sup> His statement about setting the work in the future and having the manuscript uncovered by the inhabitants of that society anticipates his approach in *The Iron Heel*, although his "immature" civilization is replaced by a highly-advanced one. The Post-Klondike Notebook also features "Novel—CAPTAINS OF INDUSTRY" that involves "industrial oligarchs controlling the world, terrible struggles of workmen; some big city center of some scene like the Paris Commune."<sup>70</sup> This entry provides a clearer conception of the narrative, denoting the principal conflict between capital and labor that

animates the text while also delineating a central event through the reference to the Paris Commune, which supplies a model for the Chicago Commune in Chapters 22 through 24.

London's conception of the novel was informed by the electoral gains that the Socialist Party made in 1904, an occurrence that portended a peaceful transfer of authority to the working class, and the aborted Russian Revolution of 1905, which complicated the belief that the rulers would willingly cede their power. In the former, Eugene Victor Debs received 402,810 votes, a dramatic increase over the 255,903 cast for Socialist candidates in 1902, the 98,424 in 1900, the 36,275 in 1896, and the 21,512 in 1892.<sup>71</sup> Explaining this phenomena in the *San Francisco Examiner*, London asserted that these developments were part of a movement that "has fastened upon every civilized country in the world, and in no country has it subsided. Not only that, but in every country it is stronger today than ever before, is adding to its strength and constantly gaining a footing in new countries."<sup>72</sup> For London, the rampant inequality and exploitation under capitalism necessitated the revolutionary transformation of society, and the results of the 1904 election seemed to demonstrate that this result could emerge through "a peaceable and orderly revolt at the ballot box, under democratic conditions, where the majority rules."<sup>73</sup> However, London's position, which reflected the sentiments of many Socialists during this period, underwent considerable change after Bloody Sunday when the Imperial Guard of Tsar Nicholas II opened fire on peaceful protestors, killing 130 people and wounding 299 more.<sup>74</sup> In response, 414,000 workers went on strike, university students staged a walkout to protest the lack of civil liberties, and peasants seized large tracts of land throughout the countryside.<sup>75</sup> These incidents caused Nicholas II to issue the October Manifesto, a document that established broader participation in the parliamentary system, basic civil liberties, and freedom of the press, yet the political system was still controlled by the Tsar, who maintained his authority through

imprisoning and executing radicals.<sup>76</sup> Expressing the relevance of these events to America, London noted that there “is a mighty ruling class that intends to hold fast to its possessions. I see years and years of bloodshed. I see the master class hiring armies of murderers to keep the workers in subjection, to beat them back should they attempt to dispossess the capitalists” and that history “shows that no master class is ever willing to let go without a quarrel. The capitalists own the governments, the armies and the militia. Don't you think the capitalists will use these institutions to keep themselves in power? I do.”<sup>77</sup> This vision of a predatory owning class animates *The Iron Heel*, with the violent suppression of labor serving as a cautionary tale of what might transpire if the population expects or attempts to gain control of the economic system through the ballot box.

This novel further has its origins in W. J. Ghent's *Our Benevolent Feudalism* (1902), a work that London reviewed in 1903. Ghent asserts that the

new Feudalism will be but an orderly outgrowth of present tendencies and conditions. All societies evolve naturally out of their predecessors. In sociology, as in biology, there is no cell without a parent cell. The society of each generation develops a multitude of spontaneous and acquired variations, and out of these, by a blending process of natural and conscious selection, the succeeding society is evolved. The new order will differ in no important respects from the present, except in the completer development of its more salient features.<sup>78</sup>

Both Ghent and London present the rise of a capitalist oligarchy as the logical extension of prevalent social conditions, with consolidation replacing the competition of earlier periods through the accumulation of wealth by a few individuals and companies that would then exert tremendous influence over national affairs. As a result of these developments, Ghent posits that

labor would become a dependent class similar to serfs during the Middle Ages, but the bondage to the land would be replaced with servitude to the machine. While this work reflects the dominant characteristics of the rulers in *The Iron Heel*, London's review of *Our Benevolent Feudalism* was lukewarm at best, and his novel focuses on an intensification of the brutality that Ghent insists will be replaced by order and unity, which does not manifest in the Everhard manuscript.<sup>79</sup>

London's notes further illustrate the germination of *The Iron Heel*, explaining its structure and central concerns. In regard to his narrative method, he observes that the foreword "is written by historian after the change – when oligarchy had persisted 3 centuries and been overthrown," which creates a tension with the main chapters and explains why Avis Everhard, despite the historical importance of her time period, focuses her attention on her husband.<sup>80</sup> London's explication of the primary themes locates the book within the contours of Marxian thought, most notably the formulation of dialectical materialism as he writes that the "hero bases his faith, on the generalization that every system contains itself the germs of its own decay. Develop this point of his + have a footnote showing that he was right – only it took longer to decay than he thought."<sup>81</sup> This emphasis conveys London's complex representation of economic Determinism: on one hand, he presents the ruling class as the causative force that shapes the characters' actions and conditions their fates; on the other, Meredith situates these occurrences within a broader historical perspective and demonstrates the victory of labor. The final clause suggests that while the revolution will be the logical outgrowth of the tensions rooted with this social order, the powerful will utilize the resources at their disposal to maintain their rule, interrupting the operation of these evolutionary processes and necessitating human efforts to alter these conditions. Further, London devotes considerable attention to sketching out pivotal scenes

in *The Iron Heel*, especially the episodes involving Jackson, who appears in the notes as Thompson. His experiences provide the impetus for Avis's conversion to Socialism by demonstrating the personal consequences of capitalism and causing her "to see through the appearance + find the frightful realities beneath."<sup>82</sup> In addition, London identifies the principal sources from which he obtained the information in Meredith's footnotes, most notably Ghent's *Mass and Class* (1904), Robert Hunter's *Poverty* (1904), Ernest Untermann's *Science and Revolution* (1905), Henry George's *The Menace of Privilege* (1905), and John Spargo's *The Bitter Cry of Children* (1906). These texts supply the foundation for London's treatment of "capitalism gone mad" and establish the verisimilitude of the work.<sup>83</sup>

London began drafting *The Iron Heel* in the Spring of 1906, first mentioning the book in a letter to Brett on March 26, 1906.<sup>84</sup> In a note to Cloudesley Johns, London described the ideas underlying his new project: it is "a socialistic-capitalistic novel. The Iron Heel is the oligarchy of the master capitalists. The period covered is between 1912 and 1932—the twenty years that began with the Peasant Revolt & the Chicago Commune, and that culminated in the Second Revolt in 1932."<sup>85</sup> By September 18, London had completed 20,000 words, and he informed his agent, Paul R. Reynolds, that *The Iron Heel* would be "at least 100,000 words long, and it is the sort of novel that will not permit of cutting nor condensing. It's the sort of novel that's all or nothing."<sup>86</sup> By the end of the month, London referred to the work as "the most daring book I have ever attempted" and stated that he had finished 32,000 words, which increased to 50,000 by October 16.<sup>87</sup> On December 15, London notified Brett that the manuscript was on its way, writing that "I think from a pseudo-scientific standpoint the situation of *The Iron Heel* is plausible. Practically, from a business standpoint, considering the widespread interest in socialism at the present moment, I think there is a fair chance of *The Iron Heel* making a hit."<sup>88</sup>



Despite London's optimism regarding the commercial potential of the narrative, he was unable to secure serial publication with any of the major magazines or newspapers, and Macmillan published *The Iron Heel* in February of 1908 to a decidedly lukewarm reception. It even received negative reviews from individuals sympathetic to London's ideology as fellow radical John Spargo asserted that the novel "tends to weaken the political Socialist movement by discrediting the ballot and to encourage the chimerical and reactionary notion of physical force, so alluring to a certain type of mind."<sup>89</sup> While London discredits the effectiveness of electoral solutions to pressing social ills, he presents violence not as a preferential alternative but as the logical outcome of the current course of policy.

In developing these themes, London depicts a capitalist oligarchy as the central Deterministic agent, whose power over the institutional structure of the United States enables them to shape the actions of the central characters and establishes the need for a revolutionary transformation of society. In London's dystopian America, the wealthy manipulate the financial system in accordance with their interests and seek to provoke a response by the Socialists that will allow the rich to respond with force. Tracing the conditions that gave rise to the abuses represented in *The Iron Heel*, Avis states that

they alone knew how to reap the whirlwind and make a profit out of it. And such profits! Colossal profits! Strong enough themselves to weather the storm that was largely their own brewing, they turned loose and plundered the wrecks that floated about them. Values were pitifully and inconceivably shrunken, the trusts added hugely to their holdings, even extending their enterprises into many new fields.<sup>90</sup>

This control over the economic order enables the ruling class to dictate the basic terms of existence, while the references to the “storm,” “whirlwind,” and “wrecks” illustrate both the consequences of their practices and the necessity of a coming reaction on the part of labor. However, this broader domination provides the populace with no means of redress and channels dissent into channels that are advantageous to the powerful. This clout manifests through their influence over the media, apparent through the press accounts that precipitate the first Revolt and the suppression of the article about Jackson; the courts, discernible through the cases of Jackson and Dr. Cunningham; and the military, evident through its brutal suppression of the working class. This authority enables the Iron Heel to maintain its command in the face of widespread popular opposition. Further, the absence of any alternatives to the dictates of the bourgeoisie engenders the violent conflict throughout *The Iron Heel*, which is intensified when the rulers organize themselves into a paramilitary order that adopts the counterrevolutionary measures necessary to perpetuate their supremacy.

Meredith’s foreword reinforces these elements by contextualizing the occurrences in the Everhard manuscript yet challenging the central preoccupations of the revolutionaries to produce a more complex representation of economic Determinism.<sup>91</sup> Reflecting on the Iron Heel, Meredith states that other

great historical events have their place in social evolution. They were inevitable.

Their coming could have been predicted with the same certitude that astronomers to-day predict the outcome of the movements of the stars. . . . Primitive communism, chattel slavery, serf slavery, and wage slavery were necessary stepping-stones in the evolution of society. But it were ridiculous to assert that the Iron Heel was a necessary stepping-stone. Rather, to-day, is it adjudged a step

aside, or a step backward, to the social tyrannies that made the early world a hell,  
but were as necessary as the Iron Heel was unnecessary. (320-21)

The narrator employs the conventional language of dialectical materialism, the Marxian conception that society moves through stages when the dominant class is displaced by an emerging one and when existing relations of production no longer correspond to new industrial forces, which Marx viewed as a predictable movement with each stage as a necessary component that would create an egalitarian world. London complicates this concept through the nature of the Iron Heel, a development that interrupts the predicted shift from capitalism to Socialism through the emergence of a brutal state apparatus that serves as a warning to “those rash political theorists of to-day who speak with certitude of social progress” (321). This vision of inevitable change despite prevalent signs to the contrary reflects the perspectives of the Socialists in Avis’s narrative, who insist “that victory could be gained through elections. . . . Ernest could not get them to seriously to fear the coming of the Oligarchy. . . . There was no room in their theoretical revolution for an oligarchy, therefore the Oligarchy could not be” (435-36). The rise of this regime suggests that the desired change will emanate from neither a peaceful transfer of power nor pre-ordained laws since the privileged can adapt their practices to the necessities of the moment.<sup>92</sup> Instead, the fundamental reorganization of the social order depends on committed, organized men and women willing to confront institutions of economic power despite immense personal sacrifice and their inevitable deaths.

The narrative frame develops these ideas by juxtaposing Avis’s tendency to romanticize Ernest’s contributions to the revolutionary struggle with Meredith’s commentary, a strategy that establishes a tension between individual and collective action and provides a more nuanced view of the protagonist. Discussing Avis’s idyllic view of her husband, Meredith posits that she

“lacked perspective. She was too close to events she writes about. Nay, she was merged into the events she has described” and that Ernest “was, after all, but one of a large number of heroes who, throughout the world, devoted their lives to the Revolution” (319). The frame situates such efforts within social evolution, in which the deeds of one person attain significance in relation to the activities of others motivated by the same purpose. This opposition continues throughout the novel as Avis claims that her spouse devoted his life to the revolution as manifested through the Second Revolt, “and for it he gave his life. It was his handiwork. He made it,” while Meredith asserts that “it must be pointed out that Everhard was but one of many able leaders who carried out the Second Revolt, and we, to-day, looking back across the centuries, can safely say that even had he lived, the Second Revolt would not have been less calamitous in its outcome” (323-24). The defeat of the uprising highlights the insufficiency of individual initiative, and hero’s greatest contribution to the movement reflects his powerlessness against the agents of capital. Meredith, however, complicates *The Iron Heel* through his comments on the central character’s analysis of the economic forces underlying injustice and the intensification of these conditions under the Oligarchy, stating that “Everhard’s social foresight was remarkable” (468) and later observing “We cannot but marvel at Everhard’s foresight” (469). The tension between the failure of his immediate objectives and the eventual success of his vision conveys that while one man cannot engender meaningful change, these exertions, along with those of others animated by the same ideals, can contribute to the positive transformation of society.

Meredith’s footnotes also serve an important function in *The Iron Heel* as the device of examining the structural features of twentieth-century America from the perspective of a distant observer enables London to present these elements for critical contemplation, stripped of the rhetorical justifications that obscure their operations. This point is evident when Meredith

explains a transit strike by remarking that “groups of predatory individuals controlled the means of transportation, and for the use of same levied toll upon the public” (342). The reference to “predatory individuals” expresses the impulses underlying the practices of the powerful, which are conducive to the formation of the Iron Heel, and London also indicates the broader problems that emerge when necessary services are operated to maximize profit rather than to meet human need. Meredith emphasizes these themes when he addresses the frequent depressions and recessions during the nineteenth century by noting that under “the capitalist régime these periods of hard times were as inevitable as they are absurd. Prosperity always brought calamity. This, of course, was due to the excess of unconsumed profits that was piled up” (432). Meredith’s explanation buttresses Ernest’s formulation of surplus value in Chapters 8 and 9, while further accentuating the volatility of an economic system characterized by a concentration of wealth that produced dire consequences for the population. The narrator reinforces this idea through his definition of Wall Street, observing that it was “named for a street in ancient New York, where was situated the stock exchange, and where the irrational organization of society permitted underhanded manipulation of all the industries of the country” (434). The ability of the bourgeoisie to manipulate the basic terms of exchange further signifies the instability of the social order, which anticipates the financial calamity that the oligarchs engender in chapter 12 to solidify their control over the nation.

*The Iron Heel* suggests the necessity of social change when Avis investigates Jackson’s case in Chapters 3 and 4, an episode that provides her introduction to the human consequences of capitalism and illustrates how the actions of individuals are dictated by those who preside over the economy.<sup>93</sup> This incident has its origins in an piece published in *The Outlook* that detailed the case of a man whose arm had been mangled when he tried to save a piece of machinery from

destruction, and the perjured testimony, the reporter's questioning, and the silence of the press closely correspond to Avis's account.<sup>94</sup> These raw materials highlight the operation of the Deterministic agents in the narrative, which limit the permissible undertakings for the people since their income and security stem from their service to the wealthy. London develops this point through the foreman who makes false statements in court to protect the company from damages "because it wouldn't a-ben healthy" (354), the superintendent who parrots the same line since it "means hundreds of thousands a year to the stockholders" (355), the corporation lawyers who shape the legal framework in accordance with the dictates of the elite, and the journalist who refuses to print the article as the paper is "all solid with the corporations" (363). These illustrations indicate that everyone is implicated in the fate of this lone individual, including Avis and her father because they own stock in the company that has caused this course of events. While these characters are complicit in Jackson's fate, Ernest attributes primary responsibility to those who direct the financial system by noting that no "man in the industrial machine is a free-will agent, except the large capitalist, and he isn't. . . . You see, the masters are quite sure that they are right in what they are doing. That is the crowning absurdity of the whole situation" (365). All men and women within the framework of production must play a certain role to guarantee the smooth operation of society, and these perspectives are framed by a desire for economic gain that necessitates the use of questionable practices.

This theme manifests through the representation of the affluent, who do not acquiesce to the demands of labor and instead fight to protect their wealth. This point emerges when Ernest addresses the Philomath Club and articulates a desire for the transfer of economic control to the proletariat. The narrator observes "the token of the brute in man, the earnest of his primitive passions. . . . It was the growl of the pack, mouthed by the pack. . . . I realized that not easily

would they let their lordship of the world be wrested from them” (376). After Ernest delivers his indictment of capitalism, an analysis that has its origins in London’s “Revolution” and “What Life Means to Me,” those endowed with social prominence and the surface forms of culture become bestial and violent, and London’s use of animal imagery accentuates the predatory nature of these individuals. Avis reinforces this idea when she notes that these men “were cool captains of industry and lords of society, these snarling, growling savages in evening clothes” (379). Their reserve, their politeness, their erudition vanish in the face of this threat to their authority, which Wickson displays in his final statement to Ernest: when “you reach out your vaunted strong hands for our palaces and purpled ease, we will show you what strength is. In roar of shell and shrapnel and in whine of machine gun will our answer be couched” (384). Rather than consenting to the expropriation of their resources, the rulers employ the means at their disposal to destroy any challenges to their interests. The remainder of the narrative traces out this process, dramatizing the consequences that might emerge from the increasing consolidation of financial and political power.

The strength of the Oligarchy gains clear expression through the narratives of Bishop Morehouse and Dr. Cunningham, whose fates reveal the logical costs for those who challenge capital. Regarding the opportunities for individuals who promote the interests of the ruling class, Ernest asserts that

the professors, the preachers, and the editors, hold their jobs by serving the Plutocracy, and their service consists of propagating only such ideas as are either harmless to or commendatory to the Plutocracy. When they propagate ideas that menace the Plutocracy, they lose their jobs, in which case, if they have not

provided for the rainy day, they descend into the proletariat and either perish or become working-class agitators (439)

This passage encapsulates the experiences of Bishop Morehouse and Dr. Cunningham. Insofar as the former preaches a version of Christianity amenable to the privileged and the latter devotes himself to scientific study divorced from any consideration of social issues, these characters are rewarded with wealth, prominence, and influence. However, after Ernest introduces the minister to the plight of the poor, which causes him to advocate a literal application of the gospels before his affluent congregation, he is institutionalized because his “views were perilous to society, and society could not conceive that such perilous views could be the product of a sane mind” (444). When Cunningham shifts his research to examining how the capitalists controls education, he is stripped of his academic position, his book is suppressed, his holdings in the Sierra Mills are erased from the company records, and a non-existent mortgage provides a pretext for seizing his home. He has no means of redress through legal avenues since the corporation controls the courts, and the “machinery of society was in the hands of those who were bent on breaking him” (439). London prefaces this episode with Wickson’s offer to make Cunningham the president of a college the oligarchs are planning if he repudiates his radicalism, which reinforces the rewards for obedience and supplies another illustration of the methods the economic elite employ to perpetuate their authority.

The fates of Cunningham and Morehouse operate within the Oligarchy’s further efforts to strengthen its power, events that illustrate how this group threatens the ideals underlying the American experience.<sup>95</sup> In tracing the rise of the Iron Heel, London focuses on the sectors of the economy most commonly associated with advancement: the middle class and the agrarian population. To eliminate the first group, the Iron Heel manufactures a fiscal crisis, turning “the



stock market into a maelstrom where the values of all the land crumbled away almost to nothingness. And out of all the rack and ruin rose the form of the nascent Oligarchy, imperturbable, indifferent and sure. . . . Not only did it use its own vast power, but it used all the power of the United States Treasury” (434-35). The ability to control the marketplace reinforces the causative role of the Oligarchy, and London connects their maneuvers to the American Dream as the institutions supposedly responsible for advancement destabilize the very class that represents these gains and completes this process through the manipulation of a financial system associated with prosperity. London reinforces this point through the destruction of the farmers. Avis observes that as a result of the wealthy dictating prices and freight rates in addition to commencing widespread foreclosures, the growers “simply surrendered the land to the farm trust, becoming managers, superintendents, foreman, and common laborers. They worked for wages. They became villeins, in short – serfs bound to the soil by a living wage. They could not leave their masters, for their masters composed the plutocracy” (456). This occurrence expresses an inversion of traditional narratives of progress through engagement with the soil, providing further subordination to landowners, to whom the planters must now sell their labor in order to live. This process highlights the forces that limit the opportunities for small producers when wealth and power are held by a minority of the population.

London further develops the rise of the Iron Heel and the resulting consequences for the population through the labor castes that divide the workers from one another, enabling one group to attain prosperity while reducing others to poverty and desperation. After a general strike that paralyzes commerce throughout the country, the plutocracy subsidizes unions in the most vital industries to form an aristocracy of labor divorced from employees in other fields. This tactic has two primary advantages: by paying these individuals higher wages, granting them access to

superior schools, and building them nicer homes in better neighborhoods, the Oligarchy has created a privileged faction that would be unlikely to jeopardize the smooth operations of society since they now have a stake in its operations. Regarding the second benefit, Ernest notes that every “fit workman in the United States will be possessed by the ambition to become a member of the favored unions. . . . Thus will the strong men, who might else be revolutionists, be won away and their strength used to bolster the Oligarchy” (467-68). By providing advancement for some, who could serve to advance the cause of the revolutionaries, the Oligarchy can weaken challenges to their authority by not only co-opting potential leaders but also focusing hostility on the members of these trade associations, who “were branded as traitors, and in saloons and brothels, on the streets and at work, and, in fact, everywhere, they were deserted by the comrades they had so treacherously betrayed” (472). These perceptions and subsequent acts of retribution undermine the potential power of the common people since such undertakings divert attention from the men responsible for inequitable conditions, which diminishes the workers’ ability to challenge the existing set of social relations.

The representation of the favored unions have their origins in American labor history, which suggests that the circumstances in *The Iron Heel* are the logical extensions of practices common during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This connection is evident through a footnote that refers to Peter M. Arthur, the Grand Chief of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, who made separate terms with the railroads following the Great Upheaval of 1877, detaching one segment of the workforce from the vast majority (472). Further, Arthur engaged in strikebreaking during the Pullman Boycott and announced to his membership that “it is the duty of the engineers to run their engines. Any member refusing to do so lays himself liable to dismissal, and will not receive support from the union.”<sup>96</sup> These attempts to accommodate

capital by dividing the working class against have a precursor in the tactics of Samuel L. Gompers, who served as President of the American Federation of Labor (A. F. L.) from 1886 to 1894 and again from 1895 to 1924. This trade association only organized skilled craftsmen, ignoring the conditions facing the unskilled in exchange for recognition from industry. Gompers also collaborated with employers to form the National Civic Federation. This organization consisted primarily of representatives from notoriously anti-union firms, such as the presidents of the Federal Steel Company, McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, and Swift & Co., in addition to a number of conservative leaders, including Gompers and Arthur.<sup>97</sup> As Foner observes, the purpose of the National Civic Federation was to channel “the labor movement into conservative avenues and to rob it of any semblance of radicalism or militancy. The craft unions would win recognition from the leaders of the trustified industries for a small minority of the workers if they would ‘not make trouble’ for the corporations by organizing the mass of workers in their plants and factories.”<sup>98</sup> In essence, Gompers abandoned the majority of the workforce for the advancement of those who belonged to the A. F. L., placing the concerns of a select group over the needs of the population and creating a situation comparable to what London represents in the novel.

London also incorporates prominent episodes from American history in the oligarchs’ use of organized violence to eradicate labor militancy. This development manifests through the rise of the Black Hundreds, a paramilitary branch of the Iron Heel that takes its name from the forces loyal to the Tsar during the 1905 Russian Revolution. Meredith conveys the importance of this reference when he observes that the “name only, and not the idea, was imported from Russia. The Black Hundreds were a development out of the secret agents of the capitalists, and their use arose in the labor struggles of the nineteenth century” (434). This passage indicates the extent to

which the novel is informed by the major work stoppages prior to its composition, and London integrates these conflicts into the representation of the Iron Heel. Ernest's statement that instead "of habeas corpus you will get post mortems" echoes a declaration from Adjutant General Sherman Bell of the Colorado National Guard during the Colorado Labor Wars, which was characterized by violent behavior from vigilantes and federal troops (410).<sup>99</sup> Further, a footnote that describes the practice of confining protestors in bullpens alludes to the Coeur d'Alene Strike in 1892 when such practices were first employed (433). A second note discusses James Farley, "a notorious strikebreaker of the period," who organized bands of mercenaries to intervene in labor disputes, most notably on the side of the San Francisco United Railroad in 1903 and again in 1907 when his men opened fire on a crowd of 300, killing two and wounding twenty (467).<sup>100</sup> The suppression of the Peasant Revolt also operates in this context as London alludes to the Homestead Strike, the Pullman boycott, and the Colorado Labor Wars as state militias and private security companies employed excessively forceful means to quell each disturbance.<sup>101</sup> Through these incidents, London connects his dystopian future to tendencies rooted within his contemporary society, with the former as a frame for an examination of the latter through a narrative structure that allows for the critical contemplation of these issues.

The removal of the Socialists from Congress also illustrates the Oligarchy's use of violence to shape social conditions, and London again draws on contemporary events in portraying the forces aligned against labor. In developing this incident, Avis discusses a bombing that provides the justification for imprisoning Ernest and his associates, which Meredith explains in a lengthy footnote that refers to two episodes when such tactics offered a pretext for the suppression of dissidents: the Haymarket Massacre of 1886 and the Independence Train Depot Explosion in 1904 (492). In the former, after 180 policemen stormed a peaceful

demonstration and ordered the protestors to disperse, an explosive device detonated in their midst, killing seven officers; in response, the survivors fired into the crowd, murdering several people and wounding 200.<sup>102</sup> As a result of this occurrence, nine prominent radicals were charged with conspiracy to commit murder, tried, convicted, and sentenced to death without any evidence connecting them to this affair, which was later suspected to have been committed by Rudolph Schnaubelt, an alleged Anarchist who was actually an agent of the police.<sup>103</sup> Meredith further develops the context for the rulers' actions through mentioning an explosion at the Independence Depot during the Colorado Labor Wars that took the lives of thirteen non-union workers and injured sixteen others. This event supplied the rationale for launching a renewed offensive against the Western Federation of Miners (W. F. M.), whose leaders were indicted in a case that was later dismissed for lack of evidence.<sup>104</sup> Further, the Mine Owners' Association and the Victor Citizens' Alliance replaced elected officials with men who assumed that the strikers were guilty, and these groups organized mobs that opened fire on miners, destroyed the union hall, herded individuals affiliated with the W. F. M. into bullpens, and eventually deported them from the district.<sup>105</sup> However, testimony from A. C. Cole, the secretary of the Citizen's Alliance, and J. M. Huff, a member of the Victor Militia, indicated that the Mine Owners' Association was responsible for planting the bomb.<sup>106</sup> The references to these events suggest that the practices of the Oligarchy are the logical extension of tactics prevalent prior to the composition of the novel, which expresses the need to alter such conditions before they facilitate the forms that London presents in *The Iron Heel*.

Chapter 19 provides parallel illustrations of the consequences engendered by the Oligarchy, reintroducing the cast of characters from the first half of the narrative and tracing their destinies due to the operations of the Iron Heel. After his maiming at the Sierra Mills and

his inability to rectify his grievances through the legal system, Jackson, “embittered by his fate, brooding over his wrongs . . . became an anarchist—not a philosophical anarchist, but a mere animal, mad with hate and lust for revenge,” blowing up the palace of the primary stockholder in the firm (506). The reference to Jackson as a “mere animal” indicates that his deed stems from the forces arrayed against him, which have closed all other avenues of redress and have left bloodshed as his only possible means of retaliation. Avis reiterates this point through the transformation of Peter Donnelly from the superintendent who testified on behalf of the company at Jackson’s trial into a member of a fighting organization composed of “fanatics, madmen,” and he explains his current course by noting that “’tis revenge for my blasted manhood I’m after” as a result of death of his wife in addition to the defection of his youngest son into the mercenaries of the Iron Heel (506). Jackson’s and Donnelly’s experiences signify that the violence of the working class inevitably results from a social order that presents no other means of resolution and that these men merely replicate on a small scale the tactics that have been employed against them. London supplies contrasting examples through the trajectories of Dr. Hammerfield and Dr. Ballingford, the ministers who advanced views favorable to the powerful in Chapter 1 and “have been correspondingly rewarded with ecclesiastical palaces wherein they dwell at peace with the world” for adapting their metaphysics to the requirements of the Oligarchy (505). These positive outcomes reinforce the incentives for those aligned with the economic elite, offering a counterpoint to the earlier fates of Cunningham and Morehouse and heightening the representation of the Deterministic agents.

Further, the brutality of the Oligarchy parallels the development of revolutionary organizations, which accentuates the central theme that social change stems not from the workings of historical laws but from popular struggles to create a more equitable world.

Describing the formation of the Fighting Groups and the initial attempts to weed out *agents provocateurs*, Avis observes that it “was bitter, bloody work, but we were fighting for life and for the Revolution, and we had to fight the enemy with its own weapons. Yet we were fair. No agent of the Iron Heel was ever executed without a trial” (483). Avis reiterates that the radicals’ violent tactics are the logical response to a continued pattern of abuses and provide the only means to promote their objectives. However, the emphasis on fair trials for the agents of the Iron Heel contrasts with the summary killings committed on behalf of the ruling class, highlighting the values that have been superseded within a legal system of the elites. Meredith emphasizes the just nature of the insurgents’ proceedings through references to their “passionless and judicial procedure” with “a fair trial and opportunity for defence” for the accused (484). He extends these ideas when he states that members of the Fighting Groups “gave up their lives for humanity, no sacrifice was too great for them to accomplish, while inexorable necessity compelled them to bloody expression in the age of blood” (484-85). The connection between the oligarchs’ actions and the revolutionaries’ reactions supports the causative role of the former in dictating that undertakings of the latter and necessitating deeds that “violated their own natures” since they were “opposed to the taking of life” (483). While many of these individuals give their lives to engender an egalitarian society, London also traces their interpersonal contributions. This aspect manifests through Anna Royston, who adores children yet refuses to have any of her own as they would prevent her from being of service to the workers, and John Carlson, who, at great risk, maintains the refuge where the militants hide in order to evade execution. Reflecting on the perspectives underlying such practices, Avis notes that the Socialists “worshipped at the shrine of the Revolution, which was the shrine of liberty. It was the divine flashing through us. Men and women had devoted their lives to the Cause, and

newborn babes were sealed to it as of old they had been sealed to the service of God” (485). London’s use of religious imagery expresses the impulses that frame the sacrifices made by these men and women, whose exploits contribute to the eventual realization of the Brotherhood of Man.

The chapters devoted to the Chicago Commune and the First Revolt unify the central themes of *The Iron Heel* by reinforcing the consequences engendered by the Oligarchy. In her descriptions of the unskilled, Avis writes that they “lived like beasts in squalid labor-ghettoes, festering in misery and degradation. All their old liberties were gone. They were labor-slaves. Choice of work was denied them. Likewise was denied them the right to move from place to place, or the right to bear or possess arms. . . . They were machine-serfs and labor-serfs” (520). London underscores the impact of milieu through the reference to the workers as “beasts,” a development that stems from their confinement within urban slums and the denial of their basic rights. Avis intensifies this betrayal of principles fundamental to American life when she identifies these citizens as “labor-serfs,” and this reference to the state of peasants under feudalism denotes a regression to an earlier stage of development. This connotation further undermines an optimistic view of history inexorably leading toward a just society as institutions of economic power have the ability to thwart human progress as evident during the suppression of the First Revolt. Through their control over the press, the oligarchs print a series of reports that prematurely trigger the insurrection, which supplies the pretext for indiscriminate slaughter and guarantees the failure of its immediate objectives. Reflecting on the people who participate in the rebellion, Avis refers to men and women “with all the godlike blotted from their features and all the fiendlike stamped in, apes and tigers, anæmic consumptives and great hairy beasts of burden, wan faces from which vampire society had sucked the juice of life,” who signify “the



refuse and scum of life, a raging, screaming, screeching, demoniacal horde” (535). While this passage provides another illustration of the effect of environment on the individual, London accentuates the fates of those deemed inessential to the operation of the social order, who are consigned to a perpetual poverty that, like Johnny in “The Apostate,” strips them of their humanity, and this representation reiterates the necessity of change to prevent such outcomes.

London posits the need for a fundamental reorganization of society, yet he provides little information about the end of the Iron Heel or the particulars of the Brotherhood of Man. Rather than developing the events that facilitated a more just world, the *Everhard Manuscript* ends in the middle of a sentence as Avis discusses the magnitude of Ernest and the other leaders’ attempts to rebuild their organization after the First Revolt. London only offers generalized commentary on the process that culminated in the Socialist victory. Ernest observes that the Oligarchy and the labor castes, which by their nature would be separated from the rest of the working class, would gradually weaken without the influx of new blood from the proletariat, and “through it all the inevitable caste weakening will go on, so that in the end the common people will come into their own” (468). In response, Meredith again praises Ernest’s foresight and states that “he saw the defection of the favored unions, the rise and the slow decay of the labor castes, and the struggle between the decaying oligarchs and labor castes for control of the great governmental machine” (468). By omitting the concrete details of the successful revolution, London accentuates the importance of the immediate political problems represented throughout the narrative, and he draws attention to these ills in the context of a warning about the structures that could materialize if labor does nothing to ameliorate these conditions. Through this method, *The Iron Heel* suggests that the parameters of an egalitarian society and the process responsible for its emergence should not be the product of the individual. Instead, these decisions should emanate

from the collective in accordance with their interests, which London expresses through Meredith's endeavors to situate Ernest's actions in a broader historical context.

London illustrates this collective action in "The Dream of Debs," originally published in the *International Socialist Review* (January-February 1909) and included in *The Strength of the Strong* (1914), through a successful general strike that reveals the potential for financial gains when laborers operate in concert with one another.<sup>107</sup> Although Chapter 13 of *The Iron Heel* features a similar work stoppage that provides the impetus for more repressive measures from the Oligarchy, this occurrence does not undermine the potential power of the industrial action in the story since it involves more detailed planning and creates far greater consequences for capital, which contributes to the victory of labor. Through undercutting the owners' customary responses to such disputes and employing the same tactics used against them in these conflicts, the workers in "The Dream of Debs" are able to destabilize the hierarchies that shape American life. As such, this text represents an important development in Naturalism, indicating that while individuals are powerless to confront dominant institutions, the common people, when operating as a unit, have the power to fundamentally alter social conditions. London's narrative method and use of apocalyptic imagery further accentuate this theme through highlighting both the arbitrary economic arrangements that thwart progress and the necessity of a framework that is more receptive to human need.

London took detailed notes prior to composing "The Dream of Debs" that illuminate the central concerns of the story. He considered a number of potential titles, including "The Great Labor Day," "The Chaos of Order," and "The Dream of Labor," before settling on the final version, which connects the text to a particular notion of progress through the reference to the militant radical who formed the American Railway Union, co-founded the Industrial Workers of

the World (I. W. W.), and ran for President four times as the Socialist candidate.<sup>108</sup> Debs argued that

the labor movement means more, infinitely more, than a paltry increase in wages and the strike necessary to secure it; that while it engages to do all that possibly can be done to better the working conditions of its members, its higher objective is to overthrow the capitalist system of private ownership of the tools of labor, abolish wage-slavery and achieve the freedom of the whole working class.<sup>109</sup>

London advances a similar conception of the role of industrial disputes through a general strike that focuses on transforming economic relations by dismantling the hierarchies of his era. Clarifying the central themes of “The Dream of Debs,” London writes that the story will show the social order “like a man laying paralyzed – can’t move legs, arms, can’t speak, see, etc. but can only know that it is mighty uncomfortable” as a result of employees withholding the labor essential to the operations of the economy.<sup>110</sup> In his handling of this idea, London situates the narrative at an indeterminate time in the future, which allows him to convey the nature of his work stoppage in more universal terms as a logical outcome if the grievances of the masses are not addressed.

“The Dream of Debs” reinforces the critique of the bourgeoisie from *Martin Eden*, emphasizing the limited viewpoints that stem from this group’s financial advantages. London develops this theme through employing a first-person retrospective narration from the perspective of Mr. Cerf, who cannot interpret the significance of what is transpiring as a result of the intellectual restrictions of his economic position. He initially views the dispute in dispassionate terms, recalling an article that he had once “written on the subject for one of the magazines that I had entitled ‘The Dream of Debs.’ And I must confess that I treated the matter

very carefully and academically as a dream and nothing more.”<sup>111</sup> Cerf’s assertion reveals his failure to accurately apprehend the nature of the conflict, one that seems divorced from his lived experience as suggested by his reference to the general strike as a mere “dream.” While Cerf implies that such occurrences only exist in the realm of fantasy, the industrial action in the text presents Debs’s vision as the model that will enable the free development of labor, and the protagonist’s inability to even consider this possibility conveys the irony of using of the same title for both his article and the story. London reiterates the flaws in the narrator’s perceptions when he begins to witness the effects of the work stoppage. After leaving his home, Cerf states that it “would be interesting to be out in the streets of San Francisco . . . when the whole city was taking an enforced vacation” (241) and later finds that his “nerves were tinkling with an excitement” (242). This reaction anticipates the views of other members of his class as one acquaintance “was enjoying it hugely,” and Cerf remarks that “no one really apprehended anything serious” (243). For the affluent, this particular disturbance does not pose a threat to those in power; instead, it merely provides a source of entertainment, a respite from their daily routines, evident through the references to the strike as “interesting,” as a “vacation,” as nothing “serious.” These linguistic choices reflect the conceptions of one who is so closely aligned with the established order that he cannot perceive any possible challenges to its authority, which conditions his belief that this clash is merely a passing fancy that will be quickly overcome before life returns to normal.

London extends this critique of the bourgeoisie to encompass the structures of power that they represent since the affluent characters in “The Dream of Debs” profit from the inequitable conditions that engender the general strike. London clarifies this point through the description of Bertie Messener, whom the narrator states was “worth twenty millions, all of it in safe

investments, and he had never done a tap of productive work in his life—inherited it all from two uncles” (244). As this example attests, this particular group owes its position to the efforts of other people, a development that complicates the conventional structure of the national success story because some enjoy the benefits of fortunes accrued through no labor of their own. This representation stresses the corruption of the ideals central to American society, which allows for vast concentrations of wealth that have undesirable consequences for both owners and producers. Regarding the former, the narrator observes that Bertie “didn’t care about anything, had no ambitions, no passions, no desire to do the things he did so much better than other men” (245). This detachment from any meaningful engagement with life illustrates the consequences of the present economic order for the privileged, whose reliance on the accomplishments of previous generations facilitates a pervasive sense of ennui and causes their descendants to squander these advantages. The narrator, however, distinguishes between Bertie and the other members of his class as he has not orchestrated the conditions that allow for the stability of his assets, but he does benefit from the actions undertaken by his peers to safeguard their interests.

London develops these practices through incorporating important labor disputes into “The Dream of Debs,” and this connection to immediate economic reality sharpens the social criticism of the story. Discussing the causes of the general strike, Bertie mentions an earlier episode, observing that the “Employers’ Association precipitated that strike. . . . First you precipitated the strike, then you bought the Mayor and the chief of Police and broke the strike. A pretty spectacle, you philanthropists getting the teamsters down and then gouging them” (246). This passage refers to the 1901 waterfront strike that paralyzed commerce throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, in which the Employers’ Association played an important role. This organization was comprised of executives from prominent local businesses, such as Cahn &

Nickelburg, John Rapp & Son, Levi Strauss, and the Emporium, who contributed \$1,000 apiece, and often more, to impose open-shop policies that would diminish the power of unions.<sup>112</sup> The principal events of this conflict correspond to London's depiction in "The Dream of Debs" as the Employers' Association escalated unrest by locking out Teamsters in San Francisco and refused to negotiate with their representatives. These actions caused the City Front Federation, formed by the Teamsters, the Sailors' Union of the Pacific, and the Longshoreman's Union, to strike on July 30.<sup>113</sup> As in London's version, Mayor James D. Phelan had a significant part in this struggle, taking steps to help companies maintain operations: he enlisted police officers to protect replacement workers and deputized guards hired by the Employers' Association to patrol the waterfront, which caused violence to intensify for the remainder of the work stoppage.<sup>114</sup> The resolution of this industrial action differs from London's treatment in that it ended through the intervention of Governor Henry T. Gage, who threatened to declare martial law if the disturbance did not cease immediately, and owners reached a deal with the unions. While this development contributed to the demise of the Employers' Association, the position of organized labor was significantly weakened by the settlement since employees returned to their jobs at pre-strike wages, had to work alongside strikebreakers, and received no guarantees of a closed shop, the principal grievance of the City Front Federation and of the I. L. W. in "The Dream of Debs."

London further bases the causes underlying the general strike in labor history by referring to an attempt to destabilize the W. F. M, which underscores the operations of the Deterministic forces that shape the range of opportunities available to the working class. In developing the context for the dispute in the narrative, Bertie states that his associates "kept the president of the Southwestern Amalgamated Association of Miners in jail for three years on trumped up murder charges, and with him out of the way, you broke up the Association" (246). This passage

denotes the persecution of the W. F. M., which had waged bitter and violent industrial actions in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho in 1899 and in the Cripple Creek region of Colorado between 1903 and 1904. The union president, Charles Moyer, was arrested along with Big Bill Haywood and William Pettibone for the murder of Frank Steunenberg, the former governor of Idaho. London became involved in this cause, contributing money to a defense fund for these W. F. M. officials and writing "Something Rotten in Idaho," an article that appeared in the *Daily Socialist* on November 4, 1906. London observed that the desire to imprison these individuals resulted from the fact that they

stood in between the mine owner and a pot of money. These men are leaders of organized labor. They plan and direct the efforts of the workingmen to get better wages and shorter hours. The operation of their mines will be more expensive. The higher the running expenses, the smaller the profits. If the mine owners could disrupt the Western Federation of Miners, they would increase the hours of labor, lower wages, and thereby gain millions of dollars.<sup>115</sup>

In this view, the trial, which relied on coerced testimony and fraudulent evidence, represented the lengths to which the employers would go in order to protect their interests against the increasing militancy of their workers, and this interpretation gains credence from the estimated \$75,000 to \$100,000 raised by industrialists and the Colorado Mine Owners' Association in their endeavor to eradicate the W. F. M.<sup>116</sup> Discussing the broader implications of the accusations against Moyer, Haywood, and Pettibone, one newspaper editorialized that it "is not merely that Haywood and Moyer are on trial at Boise. A great labor organization is on trial. If Moyer and Haywood are found guilty . . . then organized labor will receive its bitterest blow."<sup>117</sup> While the case was not responsible for destruction of the W. F. M., and the men served one year of jail time

rather than three, the allusion to this litigation reinforces the power consolidated of those who preside over the economic system and expresses the rationale of the conflict represented in “The Dream of Debs.”

The incorporation of elements from the 1901 waterfront dispute and the persecution of the W. F. M. signifies that the industrial action in “The Dream of Debs” is the logical outcome of measures the affluent have taken to safeguard their resources, which necessitate a concerted response. Stephen Naft observed that the purpose of a general strike is “to completely interrupt production in the whole country, and stop communication and consumption for the ruling classes, and that for a time long enough to totally disorganize the capitalistic society; so that after the complete annihilation of the old system, the working people can take possession through its labor unions of all the means of production.”<sup>118</sup> This approach differed considerably from conventional work stoppages since these have often emphasized only the concerns of one group of employees and instead focused on altering the economic system itself. In “The Dream of Debs,” the I. L. W. accomplishes this objective by destabilizing the institutions that enable the capitalists to dictate the operations of the social order, which undermines the conventional patterns of managerial response to such clashes. The owners cannot starve their employees since they have stocked the supplies necessary to sustain them for several months, the bosses cannot secure injunctions to end the conflict because they cannot contact government officials due to the laborers cutting the telegraph wires, and the employers cannot utilize violence against the strikers as they have provided no pretext for the use of force. Through these methods, the workers have insulated themselves from the practices that had contributed to the defeats of the principal labor struggles of this era, most notably the Great Upheaval, the Homestead Strike, the Pullman Boycott, and the Colorado Labor Wars, among many others. As a result of the tactics of the I. L.



W., the wealthy are incapable of controlling the situation, and they are at the mercy of those they once dominated.

London dramatizes this theme through the destabilization of economic hierarchies, an alteration that initially manifests through the powerlessness of the rich to cope with the pressures brought about by the general strike. As a result of this dispute, the elite can no longer deal with practical concerns from securing the safety of loved ones to obtaining necessary provisions. London clarifies this point when Atkinson cannot locate his wife since the ferries have stopped running, and the striking longshoremen would not load his automobile on a private yacht (244). The cessation of all trade and industry as a result of the strike prevents the affluent from living in their accustomed manner, an outcome that stems from their inability to perform the work that has made their idleness possible. Cerf reinforces this idea when the cars of the bourgeoisie begin to break down, and he notes that the “repair shops and garages were closed, and whenever a machine broke down it went out of circulation. The clutch on mine broke and love nor money could not get it repaired. Like the rest, I was now walking” (249). The vehicles that once illustrated these individuals’ prosperity now express the broader consequences of their socioeconomic status, which has left them incapable of carrying out the efforts necessary to sustain their former mode of existence. Once their control has been stripped away, this lack of practical knowledge gives the common people authority over their former employers, who find that they must fend for themselves in an environment where their wealth has lost its value. These episodes further highlight the significant role of the working class in American life since they perform the tasks necessary for the operation of society, undertakings that generate profits for industry and facilitate economic growth, and the story suggests that these benefits might abruptly cease when employees recognize their power and withhold their labor.

London reiterates the inversion of social hierarchies through the inability of the bourgeoisie to secure the necessities of existence, and this development reduces them to the state of misery that they once forced on the masses. In the early stages of the narrative, Mr. Cerf comments on the absence of the cream for his coffee, the fancy rolls for his breakfast, and the olives for his martinis. However, as the story progresses, his focus changes from these luxuries to staple foodstuffs. Referring to his initial attempts to acquire provisions, Cerf observes that “I filled the car with sacks of flour, baking powder, tinned goods, and all the necessities of life suggested by Harmed” (243). The fact the butler recommends the purchase of these items is significant in that he has served as a buffer between the narrator and the outside world, tending to his physical requirements so that he was not bothered by such concerns. After the flight of his servants, Cerf must now take on these responsibilities, and his hardships are intensified by the careful planning of the I. L. W. as its members have hoarded enough supplies to last throughout the strike. This development causes the necessity of creating breadlines for the rich, which places them in the same position as the destitute and further erodes the foundation of their exalted status as they now exist alongside those who have been cast aside by industry after ceasing to generate sufficient profits. After the discontinuation of this distribution network, the wealthy are required to adopt alternate strategies that emerge in a primitive system of exchange. The narrator notes that residents of the working-class districts offer the owners meals in exchange for the silver that once signified their affluence and now accentuates the extent of their deprivation. London clarifies this destabilization of conventional relations when the narrator cites a proclamation from the I. L. W., which asserts that the dispute will cease “when our demands are satisfied, and our demands will be satisfied when we have starved our employers into submission, as we ourselves in the past have often been starved into submission” (253).

This connection between the current conflicts and past ones emphasizes the growing power of labor while also indicating that the elite, despite their sense of superiority over the common people, are subject to the same pressures that have often animated the actions of their subordinates.

London underscores this development through patterns of imagery that reflect the upper-class characters' devolution amid their struggles to obtain the necessities of existence and stress the altered circumstances that now govern their actions. London contextualizes this design when Garfield rails against the strikers, and the narrator describes "a very excited gentleman with rumpled, iron-gray hair, a flushed face, mouth sullen and vindictive, and eyes wildly gleaming" (245). This passage indicates the club patrons' predatory nature, evident through the "gleaming" eyes that connote a beast tracking its prey. London reinforces this conception through references to the affluent "squealing" about the practices of the I. L. W. (247) and going "on a hunt for more food" (248). These images intensify when meager rations of the rich have been exhausted, which causes them to undertake more drastic measures that manifest in their efforts to slaughter a cow. Cerf states, "I omit the details, for they are not nice—we were unaccustomed to such work, and we bungled it considerably" (250). Through their ignorance of the labor necessary to kill and to butcher the creature, Cerf and his companions are stripped of their former refinement and reduced to the level of animals as Brentwood approaches a calf "like a wolf or a tiger" (251). These actions become more pronounced when the men fight another group that attempts to commandeer the meat, and the narrator observes that the "scene that follows beggars description. We fought and squabbled over the division like savages. Brentwood, I remember, was a perfect brute, snarling and snapping and threatening that murder would be done if we did not get our proper share" (250). This regression from civilized beings to "snarling and snapping" brutes

expresses the reawakening of their primal instincts for survival and indicates that even the wealthy are not immune to the impact of environment.

London reinforces these themes during the flight of the bourgeoisie and underclass from San Francisco, which further traces the consequences that emerge as a result of economic deprivation. The narrator emphasizes this development through connecting the affluent with the destitute, noting that “all of the destruction and violence had been done by the slumdweller and the upper classes” (254) and that “millionaires and slumdweller had fought side by side for food, and then fought with one another after they got it” (255). This correlation between those who were once at the top of the social order and those at the bottom signifies the eradication of economic hierarchies since the actions of the former are indistinguishable from the deeds of the latter and are governed by the same motives. Surveying the damage caused by these groups, Cerf declares that “the country had been turned over to anarchy. Two hundred thousand people had fled south from San Francisco, and we had countless evidences that their flight had been like that of an army of locusts” (253). The reference to the “army of locusts” suggests Exodus when God warns Pharaoh that if he refuses to free the Israelites, then “I will bring locusts into your country tomorrow. They will cover the face of the ground so that it cannot be seen. They will devour what little you have left after the hail, including every tree that is growing in your fields.”<sup>119</sup> This description anticipates the carnage to follow in the narrative as Cerf finds that “all the vegetable patches had been rooted up by the famished hordes” (254), and he observes that the area is “a desolate wasted land” in which not “a living thing remained. The calves, the colts, and all the fancy poultry and thoroughbred stock, everything was gone” (255). Further, the apocalyptic resonance of Cerf’s statement offers a warning to those who preside over the economy, indicating that the events depicted in “The Dream of Debs” might transpire if the

powerful fail to address the grievances of labor. However, the story indicates that this cataclysm will stem not from Divine wrath but from the collective action of the working class, with the general strike as the principal means of rectifying these conditions and remaking society in a manner conducive to the interests of the general population.

The juxtaposition between the savagery of the affluent and the order produced by the strikers illustrates the workers' capacity to shape dominant society coupled with the bourgeoisie's resulting failure to function without the essential industry provided by their subordinates. While the wealthy try to secure provisions, the members of the I. L. W. are "out taking the air and observing the effects of the strike. It was all so unusual, and withal so peaceful" (242), and Cerf refers to "the crowded but orderly streets" (248). This sense of calm is what causes him to conclude that this dispute is not serious, yet he cannot perceive that the sources of this tranquility, which stem from the alteration of normal conditions and the power of the ordinary men and women when they begin to operate as a group. London continues to juxtapose the devolution of the bourgeoisie with the disciplined undertakings of organized labor: when Cerf and his companions attempt to butcher the calf and fight other men for the meat, an I. L. W. patrol restores order. Further, when Cerf and his cohorts flee the city in search of food, they observe that among the working class, "well-fed children were playing games, and stout housewives sat on the front steps gossiping" (253). Through the effective organization of the general strike, these individuals are able to attain drastic improvements over their usual conditions as evident through the well-fed children, as opposed to emaciated, sickly wretches like Johnny in "The Apostate," and the women engaged in small talk rather than silently tending machines in the factories. These elements highlight the ability of the common people to manage

their own affairs and their resulting ability to alter the constraints of the Deterministic world through acting in concert with their fellows.

The conclusion of “The Dream of Debs” reinforces these themes, suggesting both the workers’ ability to transform society and the owners’ resistance to such developments. After the Employers’ Association grants the I. L. W.’s demand for the closed shop, the narrator states,

that was the end of the general strike. I never want to see another one. It was worse than a war. A general strike is a cruel and immoral thing, and the brain of man should be capable of running industry in a more rational way. . . . It was part of the conditions of the I. L. W. that all of its members should be reinstated in their old positions. Brown never came back, but the rest of the servants are with me. I hadn’t the heart to discharge them—poor creatures, they were pretty hard pressed when they deserted with the food and silver. And now I can’t discharge them. They have all been unionized by the I. L. W. The tyranny of organized labor is getting beyond all human endurance. Something must be done. (257)

On one level, Cerf’s perspective has changed in that he acknowledges the source of his employees’ actions, evident through his awareness of the deprivation that caused them to abscond with his food and silver. However, the reference to “war” and his presentation of the industrial action as “a cruel and immoral thing” indicate Cerf’s position: the circumstances responsible for the general strike must be addressed in order to prevent a similar occurrence, which would result in additional hardship for the bourgeoisie and further cement the influence of labor. This reading gains further credence through the narrator’s objections to the gains produced by the conflict as he cannot dictate terms to his servants, who now have a say in the conditions of their employment due to the implementation of the union shop, a concession that

Cerf views as an illustration of “the tyranny of organized labor.” This phrase coupled with the threat in the final sentence reveals that the narrator has learned little from these events, and his desire to restore the previous balance of power demonstrates that his outlook continues to be governed by economic self-interest. This position contradicts an overly optimistic reading of “The Dream of Debs,” presenting this victory as one component in a much larger struggle, one that the powerful will not abandon until all of their resources have been exhausted.

Cerf’s perspective denotes that meaningful change will ultimately require the transformation of the existing socioeconomic order. London develops this idea at the end of “What Life Means to Me” when he asserts that

the imposing edifice of society above my head hold no delights for me. It is the foundation of the edifice that interests me. There I am content to labor, crowbar in hand, shoulder to shoulder with intellectuals, idealists, and class-conscious working men, getting a solid pry now and again and setting the whole edifice rocking. Some day, when we get a few more hands and crowbars to work, we’ll topple it over, along with its rotten life and unburied dead, its monstrous selfishness and sodden materialism.<sup>120</sup>

London’s emphasis on the foundation of society signifies the importance of those who perform the requisite labor to support those at the higher levels, while expressing the need to renovate the structure of American life so that all men and women can access the opportunities that have too often been the property of the elite. By dramatizing the consequences that stem from an exclusive focus on acquisition, London indicates the necessity of a social framework that takes into account the interests of the general population and that allows for the development of all individuals in accordance with their abilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Philip S. Foner, "Jack London: American Rebel," in *The Social Writings of Jack London*, ed. Philip S. Foner (Secaucus: Citadel Press, 1964), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Leonard Cassuto and Jeanne Campbell Reesman, "Introduction: Jack London, a Representative Man," in *Rereading Jack London*, ed. Leonard Cassuto and Jeanne Campbell Reesman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> For more discussion of London's life, see Charmian London, *The Book of Jack London*, 2 vols. (New York: Century, 1921); Irving Stone, *Sailor on Horseback: The Biography of Jack London* (1938; repr., Garden City: Doubleday, 1956); Joan London, *Jack London and His Times: An Unconventional Biography* (1938; repr., Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968); Andrew Sinclair, *Jack: The Biography of Jack London* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977); Alex Kershaw, *Jack London: A Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998); and James L. Haley, *Wolf: The Lives of Jack London* (New York: Basic Books, 2010). While these works have made important contributions to scholarship by examining elements that London often omitted from his public persona, they often obscure the complexity of his existence to fit a prescriptive thesis: Stone reduces London's inner life to an obsession with his illegitimate birth, Sinclair focuses on London's fixation on his health, and Haley seems preoccupied with London's sexual orientation, which he develops not through evidence but through conjecture.

<sup>4</sup> Jack London, *John Barleycorn* (1913; repr., New York: Modern Library, 2001), 114.

<sup>5</sup> London, *John Barleycorn*, 121.

<sup>6</sup> Haley, 60.

<sup>7</sup> Jack London, "How I Became a Socialist," *Comrade* 2 (March 1903), 122-23; repr. in *The Social Writings of Jack London*, 364.



<sup>8</sup> London, *John Barleycorn*, 124.

<sup>9</sup> Haley, 113.

<sup>10</sup> Jack London to George P. Brett, 25 March 1903, in *The Letters of Jack London*, ed. Earle Labor, Robert C. Leitz, III, and I. Milo Shepard (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 1: 358.

<sup>11</sup> Emanuel Haldeman-Julius, "The Pessimism of Jack London," *Western Comrade* (28 May 1913): 92.

<sup>12</sup> Jack London, "Revolution," *Contemporary Review* 93 (January 1908), 17-31; repr. in *The Social Writings of Jack London*, 499.

<sup>13</sup> Jack London, "The Class Struggle," *The Independent* 55 (5 November 1903), 2903-10; repr. in *The Social Writings of Jack London*, 448.

<sup>14</sup> Many works have called attention to the contradictory nature of London's Socialism, most notably Robert Barltrop, *Jack London: the Man, the Writer, the Rebel* (London: Pluto Press, 1976); Joan Hedrick, *Solitary Comrade: Jack London and his Work* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); and Carolyn Johnston, *Jack London—An American Radical?* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984). London accumulated material possessions as quickly as he could, lived on the sprawling acreage of his Beauty Ranch, complete with a valet and house servants; however, like many wealthy men, he did not view these developments as being inconsistent with his critique of capitalism, feeling that he had earned these luxuries through his own labor and not through the exploitation of others. For further discussion of London's Socialism, see Foner, "Jack London: American Rebel," 3-130; and Jonah Raskin, "Jack London: The Orphan at the Abyss," in *The Radical Jack London: Writings on War and Revolution*, ed. Jonah Raskin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 1-49.

<sup>15</sup> Jack London to the Members of Local Glen Ellen, Socialist Labor Party, 7 March 1916, *Letters*, 3: 1538.

<sup>16</sup> Charmian London, *The Book of Jack London*, 2: 49-50.

<sup>17</sup> James I. McClintock, *Jack London's Strong Truths* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1997), 129; and Jeanne Campbell Reesman, *Jack London: A Study of the Short Fiction* (New York: Twayne, 1999), 87. For further critical discussion of "The Apostate," see Steven T. Dhondt, "'There is a Good Time Coming': Jack London's Spirit of Proletarian Revolt," *Jack London Newsletter* 3, no. 1 (1970): 25-34; Leonard Cassuto, "Jack London's Class-Based Grotesque," in *Literature and the Grotesque*, ed. Michael J. Meyer (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), 113-28; Mark Simpson, "Travel's Discipline," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 26 (1996): 83-115; and Jeanne Campbell Reesman, "Frank Norris and Jack London," in *A Companion to the American Short Story*, ed. Alfred Bendixen and James Nagel (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 171-86. Dhondt views the story as an illustration of "the abominable conditions under which the working class lived in London's time" and examines his use of satire to illuminate the causes of injustice (25), and Cassuto argues that the protagonist is "a human whose grip on his humanity has been systematically loosened by the physical and mental effects of his unceasing toil" (118). While these readings effectively trace the political arguments that frame "The Apostate," Dhondt and Cassuto do not examine the text in relation to the American Dream, and they view the narrative as an indictment of child labor, overlooking the elements of the work that express a broader critique of an economic system that conditions such abuses.

<sup>18</sup> Haley, 235.

<sup>19</sup> Jack London to Mabel Applegarth, 30 November 1898, *Letters*, 1: 25.

<sup>20</sup> Stone, 22-30; Kershaw, 15-17; and Haley, 22-29.

<sup>21</sup> London, *John Barleycorn*, 39.

<sup>22</sup> London, *John Barleycorn*, 39.

<sup>23</sup> The close correspondences between the story and its journalistic influences would seem to buttress the allegations of plagiarism often leveled against London during his lifetime, including assertions that parts of *The Call of the Wild* came from Egerton Young's *My Dogs of the Northland* (1902), that *Before Adam* (1907) was indebted to Stanley Waterloo's *The Story of Ab* (1897), and that *The Iron Heel* owed a significant obligation to Ignatius Donnelly's *Caesar's Column* (1890). In response to a letter from S. S. McClure asking London to comment on an article in the *New York World* that traced similarities between "The Love of Life" (1906) and Augustus Bridle's "Lost in the Land of the Midnight Sun" (1902), London wrote that "I, in the course of making my living by turning journalism into literature, used material from various sources which had been collected and narrated by men who made their living by turning the facts of life into journalism" (*Letters*, 2: 570). London asserted that this practice was "recommended by all the instructors in the art of the short story" and one "generally employed by story-writers" who combed through press accounts to obtain the raw materials for their narratives (*Letters*, 2: 569). While these journalistic antecedents contribute the foundation for the text from specific episodes to general ideas, London does not merely reformulate the conclusions gleaned from the articles into narrative form. Instead, these works provide the foundation for an examination of the broader social forces that contribute to the plight of the poor, illuminating the causes and consequences of economic injustice. For further discussion of plagiarism charges against London, see Loren Glass, "Nobody's Renown: Plagiarism and Publicity in the Career of Jack London," *American Literature* 71 (1999): 529-49. Another interesting account is available in Franklin Walker, "Frank Norris and Jack London," *Mills College Magazine* (1966): 15-23.

Walker examines the resemblance of Norris's "The Passing of Cock-eye Blacklock" to London's "Moon-Face," which both appeared in July of 1902 and had their origins in a newspaper feature about a man who had been killed when his dog retrieved a stick of dynamite during a fishing trip.

<sup>24</sup> Jack London, "The Apostate," repr. in *The Social Writings of Jack London*, 232. All further quotations from this story will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of London in relation to Horatio Alger, see Sakae Fujiwara, "Jack London's Socialism: A Summary of Chapter One from *Jack London in Connection with the American Dream*," *Jack London Newsletter* 3, no. 3 (1970): 73-81.

<sup>26</sup> Horatio Alger, *Ragged Dick; or, Street Life in New York with the Boot Blacks* (Boston: Loring, 1867), 9.

<sup>27</sup> Owen R. Lovejoy, "The Modern Slaughter of the Innocents," *Men and Women* 3 (October 1905): 4; Jack London Subject File: Socialism, Jack London Collection, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, Box 555, JLE 1554.

<sup>28</sup> "Child Labor Legislation: Owen R. Lovejoy's Address to Factory Inspectors," in Jack London Subject File: Socialism, Jack London Collection, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, Box 555, JLE 1523,1.

<sup>29</sup> "To Protect Childhood," in Jack London Subject File: Socialism, Jack London Collection, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, Box 555, JLE 1529,1.

<sup>30</sup> "Child Labor Legislation," 1.

<sup>31</sup> Juliet Wilbor Tompkins, "Turning Children into Dollars," *Success Magazine* (January 1906), 15; Jack London Subject File: Socialism, Jack London Collection, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, Box 555, JLE 1579. London's marginalia and precise

references express the connections among these articles and the story, which he completed on March 29, 1906.

<sup>32</sup> Hedrick, 171; and Dhondt, 30.

<sup>33</sup> Tompkins, 17.

<sup>34</sup> Tompkins, 17.

<sup>35</sup> Cassuto, 120.

<sup>36</sup> Franklin Walker, "Jack London: *Martin Eden*," in *The American Novel from James Fennimore Cooper to William Faulkner*, ed. Wallace Stegner (New York: Basic Books, 1965), 133. For negative appraisals of the novel, see Charles Child Walcutt, *Jack London* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), 41-44; and John DeCaire, "The Boys Book of Despair," *Southwest Review* 88, no. 2-3 (2003): 277-90. For readings that examine the artistic and thematic complexities of the work, see Charles N. Watson, Jr., *The Novels of Jack London: A Reappraisal* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 123-64; and Earle Labor and Jeanne Campbell Reesman, *Jack London* (New York: Twayne, 1994), 77-82.

<sup>37</sup> For discussions of upward mobility in *Martin Eden*, see N. E. Dunn and Pamela Wilson, "The Significance of Upward Mobility in *Martin Eden*," *Jack London Newsletter* 5, no. 1 (1972): 1-8; Lewis, 189; Watson, 129-32; Renny Christopher, "Rags to Riches to Suicide: Unhappy Narratives of Upward Mobility: *Martin Eden*, *Bread Givers*, *Delia's Song*, and *Hunger of Memory*," *College Literature* 29, no. 4 (2002): 79-108; and Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., "Jack London's *Martin Eden*: The Multiple Dimensions of a Literary Masterpiece," in *Jack London: One Hundred Years a Writer*, ed. Sara S. Hodson and Jeanne Campbell Reesman (San Marino: Huntington Library, 2002), 81. While most of these articles address the national success story in the context of broader arguments, Renny provides an in-depth analysis of this concept, focusing

largely on the psychological dimensions of Martin's struggle for mobility and his growing estrangement from his working-class background. Dunn and Wilson also devote considerable attention to London's emphasis on advancement, viewing the narrative in the context of the author's own struggles to attain success as a novelist. For discussion of issues of economic class in the novel, see Richard Morgan, "Naturalism, Socialism, and Jack London's *Martin Eden*," *Jack London Newsletter* 10, no. 1 (1977): 13-22; Watson, 132-38; and Glass, 536-545. For discussions of race as a lens through which to view class distinctions in *Martin Eden*, see Yung Min Kim, "A 'Patriarchal Grass House' of His Own: Jack London's *Martin Eden* and the Imperial Frontier," *American Literary Realism* 34, no. 1 (2001): 1-17; and Jeanne Campbell Reesman, *Jack London's Racial Lives* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 207-236.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Watson, 124-25.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Watson, 125.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Watson, 126.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Watson, 126.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Watson, 126-27.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Watson, 126.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Watson, 125.

<sup>45</sup> London, "What Life Means to Me," *Cosmopolitan* 41 (March 1906): 526-30; repr. in *The Social Writings of Jack London*, 392.

<sup>46</sup> London, "What Life Means to Me," 397-98.

<sup>47</sup> London, "What Life Means to Me," 396.

<sup>48</sup> Jack London, "Martin Eden Notes," Jack London Collection, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, JL 968, envelope 1, 16.

<sup>49</sup> London, "Martin Eden Notes," 7: 47-51.

<sup>50</sup> London, "Martin Eden Notes," 7: 37.

<sup>51</sup> London, "Martin Eden Notes," 7: 5.

<sup>52</sup> Charmian London, *The Book of Jack London*, 2: 170; and Martin Johnson, *Through the South Seas with Jack London* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1913), 141-42. For a complete discussion of the genesis of the novel, see Charles N. Watson, Jr. "The Composition of *Martin Eden*," *American Literature* 53 (1981): 397-408.

<sup>53</sup> Watson, "The Composition of *Martin Eden*," 404.

<sup>54</sup> Watson, "The Composition of *Martin Eden*," 404-05; and Jack London to George P. Brett, 15 February 1908, *Letters*, 2: 734.

<sup>55</sup> Jack London to George P. Brett, 27 February 1908, *Letters*, 2: 738.

<sup>56</sup> London to Brett, *Letters*, 2: 738.

<sup>57</sup> Jack London, *Martin Eden* (1909; repr., New York: Penguin, 1984), 31. All further quotations from this edition will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>58</sup> For additional discussion regarding the significance of the painting, see Donald E. Pease, "Martin Eden and the Limits of the Aesthetic Experience," *Boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture* 25, no. 1 (1998): 158; and Thomas R. Tietze, "Teaching Aesthetics: Art and the Artist on Jack London's *Martin Eden*," *Eureka Studies in Teaching Short Fiction* 5, no. 1 (2004): 79.

<sup>59</sup> For further examination of London's allusions to Swinburne, see Roy L. Weitzel, "Toward a 'Bright White Light': London's Use of Swinburne in *Martin Eden*," *Jack London Newsletter* 7, no. 1 (1974): 1-8.

<sup>60</sup> For an analysis of sexual Determinism in the novel, see George M. Spangler, "Divided Self and World in *Martin Eden*," *Jack London Newsletter* 9, no. 3 (1976): 121-22.

<sup>61</sup> For contrasting viewpoints about the representation of Ruth, see Kim Moreland, "The Attack on the Nineteenth-Century Heroine Reconsidered: Women in Jack London's *Martin Eden*," *Markham Review* 13 (1983): 16-20; and Lisa Anderson, "Justice to Ruth Morse: The Devolution of a Character in *Martin Eden*," *The Call* 10, no. 1-2 (2008): 11-14.

<sup>62</sup> For discussions of Brissenden, see Sam S. Baskett, "*Martin Eden*: Jack London's Poem of the Mind," *Modern Fiction Studies* 22 (1976): 23-36; and Watson, *The Novels of Jack London*, 153-54.

<sup>63</sup> For criticisms of the ending, see Walker, 139-142; Sam S. Baskett, introduction to *Martin Eden*, by Jack London (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1956), xi-xii; and William Haney, "*Martin Eden*: The Failure of Individualism," *Jack London Newsletter* 12 (1979): 38-41. These readings overlook the patterns of imagery that anticipate Martin's suicide and how this act operates thematically in the novel. For defenses of the conclusion, see Starling Price, *Jack London's America*, Ph.D. dissertation (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1967), 406-21; Jonathan Spinner, "Jack London's *Martin Eden*: The Development of the Existential Hero," *Michigan Academician* 3 (1970): 43-48; Weitzel, 5-8; and Watson, *The Novels of Jack London*, 154-64.

<sup>64</sup> London to Fannie K. Hamilton, 6 December 1909, *Letters*, 2: 847. For analysis of London's reading of *Martin Eden*, see Walker, 136-37; Johnston, 89-92; Morgan, 19-20; and McElrath, 93-96. Morgan asserts that the "lack of a socialist 'model' casts further doubt on the existence, at least on an effective level, of an anti-individualist basis to the book" (19), and McElrath argues that "despite the lip service he gave to socialism after he completed *Martin*



*Eden*, he had strayed from the path of party-line virtue while writing it” (95). While the novel advances a critique of individualism, London does not present the Socialist characters in favorable terms, which undermines his view of *Martin Eden* as a testament to his ideology.

<sup>65</sup> Many commentators have viewed the work as a prophecy that anticipates the rise of fascism. For examples of such readings, see Anatole France, “Preface to *The Iron Heel*,” in *Critical Essays on Jack London*, ed. Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983), 35-37; and Leon Trotsky, *Trotsky On Literature and Art*, ed. Paul Siegel (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 223-24. France claimed that “Jack London had that particular genius which perceives what is hidden from the common herd and possessed a special knowledge enabling him to anticipate the future” (35), and Trotsky asserted that *The Iron Heel* is “precisely the picture of fascism, of its economy, of its governmental technique, its political psychology! The fact is incontestable: in 1907 Jack London already foresaw and described the fascist regime as the inevitable result of the defeat of the proletarian revolution” (223-24). London advanced a different view of the book, stating that “I didn’t write the thing as a prophecy at all. I really don’t think these things are going to happen in the United States. I believe the increasing socialist vote will prevent—hope for it, anyhow. But I will say that I sent out, in *The Iron Heel*, a warning of what I think might happen if they don’t look to their votes” (Quoted in Charmian London, *The Book of Jack London*, 2: 138-39). The novel, however, seems to discount the ability of the workers to transform society by electoral means due to the wealth and power of the capitalists, and London expressed this idea in his interview with Emmanuel Haldeman-Julius in 1913.

<sup>66</sup> Labor and Reesman, *Jack London*, 66, 104.

<sup>67</sup> Nathaniel Teich, "Marxist Dialectics in Content, Form, and Point of View: Structures in Jack London's *The Iron Heel*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 22 (1976): 85; and Paul Stein, "Jack London's *The Iron Heel*: Art as Manifesto," *Studies in American Fiction* 6 (1978): 78. While Teich bases his reading of *The Iron Heel* on London's approximation of Marxism rather than on a close reading of the novel itself, Stein advances a more nuanced analysis by examining the relationship between the structure of the narrative and its ideological content.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Watson, *The Novels of Jack London*, 99.

<sup>69</sup> *The Iron Heel* serves as a criticism of the utopian novels of the nineteenth century, most notably William Morris's *News From Nowhere* (1890), Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1893), and William Dean Howells's *A Traveler from Altruria* (1894), which represent a peaceful transfer of power from the capitalists to the workers that creates socialist societies. For further discussion of this point, see Gorman Beauchamp, "The Iron Heel and Looking Backward: Two Paths to Utopia," *American Literary Realism* 9 (1976): 307-14; Watson, 107-12; and Erica Briscoe, "The Iron Heel: How Not to Write a Popular Novel," *Jack London Journal* 5 (1998): 19-21.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Watson, *The Novels of Jack London*, 99.

<sup>71</sup> Jack London, "Explanation of the Great Socialist Vote of 1904," in *The Social Writings of Jack London*, 404.

<sup>72</sup> London, "Explanation," 404.

<sup>73</sup> London, "Explanation," 406.

<sup>74</sup> Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 90-98. For further discussion about Bloody Sunday, see Andrew M.

Verner, *The Crisis of Russian Autocracy: Nicholas II and the 1905 Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 141-83.

<sup>75</sup> Ascher, 92-94 and 162-65.

<sup>76</sup> Verner, 326-350.

<sup>77</sup> Haldeman-Julius, 92. For additional explanation of the impact of the 1905 Revolution on London, see Joan London, *Jack London and His Times*, 264-80.

<sup>78</sup> W. J. Ghent, *Our Benevolent Feudalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1902), 81-82. For London's discussion of this work, see "A Review," in *War of the Classes* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 195-214. London confined himself to presenting a broad overview of Ghent's argument in relation to John Graham Brooks's *The Social Unrest* (1903), examining the broader affinity of these works despite the fact that the writer of the former was a proponent of Socialism and the author of the latter was a defender of capitalism.

<sup>79</sup> These criticisms of Ghent also manifest in the novel. In discussing the rise of the Iron Heel, Ernest Everhard asserts that "Ghent has taught the Oligarchs how to do it" and states that "I'll wager they've made a textbook out of his 'Benevolent Feudalism'" (464). Anthony Meredith reinforces the prevalence of this position in a footnote, yet he also asserts that this belief is not accurate, observing that Ghent "is the most abused innocent man in all history" (464). These references highlight the discrepancy between the participants in the main narrative, who are too caught up in the struggles of their historical era to view them objectively, and Meredith, who can calmly and objectively weigh evidence from the vantage point of a future society.

<sup>80</sup> Jack London, "Notes for *The Iron Heel*," Jack London Collection, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, JL 833, envelope 1, 20-22.

<sup>81</sup> London, "Notes for *The Iron Heel*," 1: 30.

<sup>82</sup> London, "Notes for *The Iron Heel*," 3: 16.

<sup>83</sup> London, "Notes for *The Iron Heel*," 2: 1.

<sup>84</sup> Jack London to George P. Brett, 26 March 1906, *Letters*, 1: 558.

<sup>85</sup> Jack London to Cloudesley Johns, 12 September 1906, *Letters*, 1: 605.

<sup>86</sup> Jack London to Paul R. Reynolds, 18 September 1906, *Letters*, 2: 607.

<sup>87</sup> Jack London to George P. Brett, 28 September 1906, *Letters*, 1: 611; and Jack London to George P. Brett, 16 October 1906, *Letters*, 1: 619.

<sup>88</sup> Jack London to George P. Brett, 15 December 1906, *Letters*, 1: 649.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Joan London, *Jack London and His Times*, 310.

<sup>90</sup> Jack London, *The Iron Heel* (1908; repr., in *Jack London: Novels and Social Writings*, ed. Donald Pizer, New York: Library of America, 1982), 435. All further quotations from this edition will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>91</sup> For further discussions of narrative method in *The Iron Heel*, see Teich, 90-99; Dorothy H. Roberts, "The Iron Heel: Socialism, Struggle, and Structure," *Jack London Newsletter* 9, no. 3 (1976): 64-66; Stein, 79-85; D. D. Seed, "The Apocalyptic structure of Jack London's *The Iron Heel*," *Jack London Newsletter* 8, no. 1 (1980): 1-11; Alessandro Portelli, "Jack London's Missing Revolution: Notes on *The Iron Heel*," *Science-Fiction Studies* 9 (1982): 180-194; John Whalen-Bridge, "Dual Perspective in *The Iron Heel*," *Thalia: Studies in Literary Humor* 12 (1992): 67-76; and Briscoe, 20-26. Roberts asserts that the power of the novel resides "in the tension and interaction between a pessimistic action and an optimistic superstructure," which presents the distressing elements of the main narrative as necessary steps toward the evolutionary progress of Socialism, a future that is assured through the narrative frame (64).

Extending this argument, Stein contends that the effectiveness of the novel on an ideological level stems from “this double perspective of events[:] the immediate reaction of an individual caught up in the hurly-burly of contemporary conflict and the measured judgment of an observer enjoying the benefit of an historical overview” (79).

<sup>92</sup> London advances a similar strategy when Ernest explains the seemingly inevitable collapse of capitalism in relation to Marx’s theory of surplus value, the process of paying workers less in wages than the value created by their labor, which prevents them from consuming excess production. Ernest, in a speech that echoes London’s “The Question of the Maximum,” asserts that when “every country stands with an unconsumed and unsalable surplus on its hands, the capitalist system will break down under the terrific structure of profits that it itself has reared. . . . The United States, and the whole world for that matter, will enter upon a new and tremendous era” (420). The narrative, however, undercuts the inevitability of this development by illustrating the ability of the Iron Heel to adapt to changed circumstances through their efforts to dispose of this surplus, which manifests in the construction of their wonder cities and massive public works projects that forestall the revolution for three hundred years. While Ernest anticipates these events and Meredith again applauds the protagonist’s foresight, the actions of the oligarchs complicate conventional narratives of progress by accentuating the strategies employed by the wealthy to maintain their power, developments that necessitate militant rather than electoral action to facilitate social change.

<sup>93</sup> For further discussion of this episode, see Francis Shor, “Power, Gender, and Ideological Discourse in *The Iron Heel*,” in *Rereading Jack London*, ed. Leonard Cassuto and Jeanne Campbell Reesman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 80-82.

<sup>94</sup> Jocelyn Lewis, “Was it Worthwhile?” *Outlook* 18 (18 August 1906): 902-04. Watson also identifies *Our Benevolent Feudalism* as London’s source for the journalist who refuses to publish Avis’s article, noting several close correspondences with an anonymous reporter cited by Ghent (105-06).

<sup>95</sup> London first worked out these ideas in “Disappearing Class,” notes for a planned series of essays about the forces that would be responsible for the destruction of the middle class. London presented this group as being the most vulnerable since they depended on both workers and owners for survival, an outcome that seemed tenuous as capital aggregated into fewer hands and produced greater social strife. Placing this movement in a broader historical context, London observes that as “the worker passed from the comparative freedom of domestic production to the slavery of factory production, so the small capitalist to-day is passing from the comparative freedom of pre-trust competitive industry to slavery of post-trust industry (better) – incidentally point out, that there is a class struggle even within the capitalist class, between small and large capitalists” (JL 602, 3). For his primary illustration of this thesis, London invokes the conditions facing small farmers and producers, who find themselves squeezed out of production by the Beef Trust, a monopoly formation that controlled the price and distribution of livestock. London compares the earlier status of a cattleman, when he “was prosperous, was somebody, had something to say about the things that went to the making of his own welfare, was himself an economic force, empowered with initiative,” with his present state when he can either accept the offer of the Beef Trust or perish, a development that reduces him to the status of a slave in service to the established order (4).

<sup>96</sup> Quoted in Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 10 vols. (New York: International Publishers, 1947), 2: 264-65.

<sup>97</sup> Foner, *History*, 2: 385.

<sup>98</sup> Foner, *History*, 2: 386.

<sup>99</sup> In response to writs filed on behalf of imprisoned miners, Bell stated, “Habeas corpus be damned, we’ll give ‘em post mortems” (Quoted in Peter Carlson, *Roughneck: The Life and Times of Big Bill Haywood* [New York: Norton, 1983], 62).

<sup>100</sup> Robert Edward Lee Knight, *Industrial Relations in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1900-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 152, 187-88.

<sup>101</sup> For discussion of these labor disputes, see Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1997).

<sup>102</sup> Foner, *History*, 2: 110-11.

<sup>103</sup> Foner, *History*, 2: 110-11.

<sup>104</sup> Foner, *History*, 3: 398.

<sup>105</sup> George G. Suggs, *Colorado’s War on Militant Unionism: James H. Peabody and the Western Federation of Miners* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 110-12.

<sup>106</sup> Elizabeth Jameson, *All That Glitters: Class, Conflict, and Community in Cripple Creek* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 230-31.

<sup>107</sup> “The Dream of Debs” has received little critical attention. Labor and Reesman mention the story only in passing (66), Johnston limits her discussion to a brief summary of the work (131-32), and Foner merely posits that London’s handling of events reveals that he “had done considerable reading on the tactics of a general strike” (106). McClintock, who refers to the narrator as Corf rather than Cerf, examines the propagandistic nature of the text, asserting that as “interesting as the story is as a socialist argument, it is an artistic failure” yet basing his analysis on the intentions of the author and the responses of his readers (128). Hedrick also

focuses on problems that emerge through London's narrative method, claiming that "London's use of an upper-class narrator who is victimized by the strike denies the reader direct participation in the working-class victory, and his dead-pan narration kills much of the vitality of the story" (176). Reesman advances the most perceptive reading of "The Dream of Debs" as she interprets it in the context of London's major themes and observes that this tale represents one of the few examples of successful working-class revolt in his *oeuvre* (84-85).

<sup>108</sup> Jack London, "Notes for 'The Dream of Debs,'" Jack London Collection, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California JL 615, 1.

<sup>109</sup> Eugene Victor Debs, "Unionism and Socialism," in *Debs: His Life, Writings, and Speeches* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1908), 134. For discussion of Debs, see Ray Ginger, *Eugene V. Debs: A Biography* (New York: Collier Books, 1962). London further informed the social context of "The Dream of Debs" through his identification of the I. W. W. as the basis for his union in the narrative, writing that the "larger aggregations of capital that combined and defeated the big combinations of laborers – the I. W. W. had combined with the W. F. of M. and the A. F. of L." ("Notes," 5) In contrast to this trade association, the I. W. W. promoted unionism that spanned entire industries, organized both skilled and unskilled workers, and advocated the elimination of the present economic order. At the founding conference, Big Bill Haywood stated that the "aims and objects of this organization should be to put the working class in possession of the economic power, the means of life, in control of the machinery of production and distribution without regard to capitalist masters" (Quoted in Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* [New York: Harper, 1980], 330). To accomplish these objectives, the I. W. W. supported direct action in form of work stoppages, boycotts, and acts of



sabotage with the general strike as a principal means to establish the framework of a new society within the shell of the old.

<sup>110</sup> London, “Notes for ‘The Dream of Debs,’” 9.

<sup>111</sup> Jack London, “The Dream of Debs,” repr. in *The Social Writings of Jack London*, 241.

All further quotations from this story will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>112</sup> David F. Selvin, *Sky Full of Storm: A Brief History of California Labor* (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1975), 21. London was familiar with the 1901 waterfront strike as his folder for “Disappearing Class” includes articles about this conflict.

<sup>113</sup> Knight, 72-77.

<sup>114</sup> Knight, 85.

<sup>115</sup> Jack London, “Something Rotten in Idaho,” repr. in *The Social Writings of Jack London*, 409.

<sup>116</sup> J. Anthony Lukas, *Big Trouble: A Murder in a Small Western Town Sets off a Struggle for the Soul of America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 370-78. For further discussion of the case against Moyer, Haywood, and Pettibone, see Foner, *History*, 4: 40-59; and Carlson, 87-135.

<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 4: 55-56.

<sup>118</sup> Stephen Naft, *The Social General Strike*, trans. Arnold Roller (Chicago: Debating Club No. 1, 1905), 7.

<sup>119</sup> Exodus 10:3-5.

<sup>120</sup> London, “What Life Means to Me,” 399.

## CHAPTER 4

A REVOLUTION OF VALUES: ECONOMIC THEMES IN JOHN STEINBECK'S *IN  
DUBIOUS BATTLE AND THE GRAPES OF WRATH*

John Steinbeck was one of the last writers associated with American Naturalism and incorporated a greater range of complexity into a literary period often disparaged for the crudity of its prose and thought. As a result, many critics have questioned whether Steinbeck can accurately be interpreted within this movement, the precepts of which seem inconsistent with the author's treatment of experience. Discussing the manifestations of this form in Steinbeck's *oeuvre*, Michael J. Meyer maintains that the "label will remain a confusing one" and asserts that "critics need to broaden the analytical purview in order to create more inclusive descriptors that might help readers understand the how and why of a developing literary movement."<sup>1</sup> In a related vein, Donald Pizer notes that "I am uncertain that calling John Steinbeck a naturalist offers a useful insight into the distinctive nature of his work or of his literary imagination. The term is too encrusted with the clichés and polemics of past literary wars to serve as a guide."<sup>2</sup> Contrary to these claims, *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath* emphasize the controlling influence of environment, which situates these books within this trend in American literature. In representing the economic forces that impact the individual, Steinbeck, like his predecessors, draws on events from California history that illuminate the limitations on the central characters' abilities to shape their lives. These novels, however, further extend the parameters of Naturalist

fiction by emphasizing the principals' potential to address the conditions that create such drastic consequences when workers act as a unit rather than as individuals.

Steinbeck's body of work is rooted in science and the close observation of the natural world, which provide the impetus for the perspective underlying his art. His scientific outlook was indebted to Edward F. Ricketts, a marine biologist the author met in 1930 and whose philosophy was instrumental in forming Steinbeck's own.<sup>3</sup> Under Ricketts's guidance, Steinbeck shifted his attention to the experiences of common people, recognizing that their lives could supply the basis for literature. He first applied this lesson in *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932), a short story-cycle that introduced both a California setting and the Naturalistic method that would inform his greatest novels. This approach stems from the recognition that humans are the products of their environment and that their actions are governed by the same impulses as lower life forms. As Frederick Bracher notes, Steinbeck's writing reveals the belief that "man is formed of the same kinds of living cells, subject to the same primitive drives, and part of an ecological pattern as determinate [*sic*] as that of the tide pool, though infinitely more complicated."<sup>4</sup> This overview evokes the central tenets of Naturalist fiction, emphasizing the representation of individuals shaped by both their biology and milieu. This position is further influenced by Steinbeck and Ricketts's conception of non-teleological thought, which

derives through "is" thinking, associated with natural selection as Darwin seems to have understood it. They imply depth, fundamentalism, and clarity—seeing beyond traditional or personal projections. . . . Non-teleological thinking concerns itself primarily not with what should be, or could be, or might be, but rather with what actually "is"—attempting at most to answer sufficiently difficult questions *what* or *how*, instead of *why*.<sup>5</sup>

This theory relies on complete objectivity, with its attempts to understand the totality of an event without blame or judgment and without recourse to broader principles of causation. Further, Steinbeck's dispassionate investigation reflects the clinical detachment in Emile Zola's formulations of Naturalism. Although non-teleological thinking situates Steinbeck's point of view within the parameters of this movement, he deviates considerably from these precepts in his literary output, most notably in *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, which identify the dominant social institutions responsible for injustice and convey the need to address such outcomes.

These novels focus primarily on the interactions between individuals and their environment and the extent to which monetary pressures dictate the central characters' opportunities. This representation correlates directly to the national success story. Louis Owens observes that "Steinbeck's California fiction—all of his finest work—represents a lifelong attempt to open this 'new eye,' to awaken America to the failure at the heart of the American Dream and provide an alternative to that dream. . . . In nearly every story or novel he wrote, Steinbeck strove to hold the failed myth up to the light of everyday reality."<sup>6</sup> These concerns emerge through portrayals of the experiences facing the migratory workers who came West to improve their lives. These men and women, however, often encountered significant obstacles to the satisfaction of basic physical requirements, which undermined the conventional view of California as a land of prosperity. Steinbeck clarified this objection in "Starvation under the Orange Trees," first published in the *Monterey Trader*, observing that "the people who picked the cotton, and cut the peaches and apricots, who crawled all day in the rows of lettuce and beans, are hungry. The men who harvested the crops of California, the women and girls who stood all day and half the night in canneries, are starving," and Steinbeck claimed that such

problems would continue “until the rich produce of California can be grown and harvested on some other basis than that of stupidity and greed.”<sup>7</sup> The contrast between the abundance of the state and the poverty of the laborers highlights the structural inequality that pervaded the agricultural industry and the irrationality of an economic order that that could not assist those people most in need. Reflecting on the possible implications in “Dubious Battle in California,” Steinbeck asserted that it “is fervently hoped that the great group of migrant workers so necessary to the harvesting of California’s crops may be given the right to live decently, that they may not be so badgered, tormented, and hurt that in the end they become avengers of the hundreds of thousands who have been tortured and starved before them.”<sup>8</sup> Steinbeck presents the farmworkers’ plight within a broader pattern of exploitation that could engender an increasing number of disturbances, a similar approach to the one that he adopts in both *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Although these novels highlight the need for meaningful change to address injustice, Steinbeck did not profess radical beliefs; instead, he was a New Deal Democrat who objected to a consolidation of resources that jeopardized the most vulnerable members of society. Steinbeck had a life-long hostility toward Communism, which he referred to as the “pseudo right that calls itself left” and that was “about as revolutionary as the Daughters of the American Revolution.”<sup>9</sup> However, he maintained a deep concern about the average citizens’ struggles and protested against the power imbalance facing fieldworkers in California. Reflecting on the impulses underlying his fiction, Steinbeck asserted that

every effort I can bring to bear is and has been at the call of the common working people to the end that they may eat what they raise, wear what they weave, use what they produce and in every way and in completeness share in the works of

their hands and their heads. . . . I am actively opposed to any man or group who, through financial or political control of the means of production and distribution, is able to control and dominate the lives of workers.”<sup>10</sup>

This passage underscores Steinbeck’s compassion for the oppressed and his antipathy toward the individuals and institutions who constrain the development of the masses. His illustrations suggest that average men and women should have the ability to shape their labor and to manage their lives. Steinbeck presented this conflict as extension of the battle for security dating back to Western expansion and noted that since “the people will go on with their struggle, the writer still sets down that struggle and still sets down the opponents. The opponents or rather the obstacle to that desired end right now happens to be those individuals and groups of financiers who by the principle of ownership withhold security from the mass of the people.”<sup>11</sup> In portraying the tension between the requirements of the population and the avarice of those who possessed a disproportionate share of the wealth, Steinbeck illustrates the causative agents that manipulate production and distribution in California. The consequences for agricultural workers convey the necessity of an alternate economic structure that would enable the people to satisfy their physical requirements.

In this context, *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath* posit a framework to confront these Deterministic agents through concerted action, which introduces a broader range of agency and complexity into these novels. This potential for self-preservation and development has its earliest manifestation in Steinbeck’s phalanx theory, an idea that he initially discussed in a letter to Carlton A. Sheffield. Steinbeck wrote that the “fascinating thing to me is the way the group has a soul, a drive, an intent, an end, a method, a reaction, and a set of tropisms which in no way resemble the same things possessed by the men who make up the group. These groups have

always been considered as individuals multiplied. And they are not so. They are beings in themselves, entities.”<sup>12</sup> In this formulation, the dynamic of the unit establishes an identity that differs from those of the people who comprise the collective organism through tapping into its knowledge and strength. Steinbeck further explained this concept in “Argument of Phalanx,” observing that once a man becomes a part of such an entity,

his nature changes, his habits and desires. . . . Phalanx resistance to circumstance is far greater than individual man’s resistance. Once a man has become a unit in a phalanx in motion, he is capable of prodigies of endurance of thought or of emotion such as would be unthinkable were he acting as individual man. . . . All life forms from protozoa to antelopes and lions, from crabs to lemmings form and are part of phalanxes, but the phalanx of which the units are men, are more complex, more variable and powerful than any other.<sup>13</sup>

This description provides the basis for Steinbeck’s representation of characters who, although they are largely helpless by themselves, can challenge the dictates of the Deterministic world and improve conditions by acting in unison with one another. Through merging the individual with something larger than himself, the common people possess a range of defense that would not be possible for isolated men and women. The portrayal of the phalanx in Steinbeck’s major fiction, however, reinforces the power of milieu since it both necessitates the formation of the group as a means of protection and shapes the nature of the structure that emerges, which can have either positive or negative implications that are largely dependent on environmental pressures.

Steinbeck develops these themes in *In Dubious Battle*, which centers on the limitations that govern the American Dream due to concentrated land ownership, examining how unbridled capitalism can adversely impact all levels of society and create alternative models for action that

offer little hope of improved circumstances. The early reviews focused largely on Steinbeck's treatment of political issues, most notably his representation of the Communist strike leaders. Joseph Henry Jackson noted that conservative readers will view *In Dubious Battle* as "subversive, wicked, and revolutionary" and that many "extreme leftists are going to go into nice little rages at Mr. Steinbeck's failure to make his book a fine hot argument for their cause"; in a related vein, Wilbur Needham posited that neither "radicals nor reactionaries will like the book, for they will never be sure just where Steinbeck stands."<sup>14</sup> Contemporary critics have attempted more nuanced readings that move past questions of explicit advocacy to analyze broader issues. For instance, Warren French asserts that the "Steinbeck refused to become a blind partisan and rather showed how struggles between laborers and employers—however provoked and justified—can inevitably prove only destructive and demoralizing to both parties and to society as a whole," and Peter Lisca claims that novel illustrates that the "blatant injustice of the owners' ways of dealing with the strike is counterweighted by the strikers' own methods."<sup>15</sup> While *In Dubious Battle* does not necessarily portray the organizers in a favorable manner, the tactics of these individuals and the workers they represent are not equivalent to the measures undertaken by the large landowners. Through the inclusion of pivotal events from California labor history, the narrative indicates that the primary responsibility for suffering rests on those who control the economic framework of the Torgas Valley, one that limits prosperity for the general population to the extent that they have no means to protect their interests save through practices that threaten their objectives.<sup>16</sup>

*In Dubious Battle* has its origins in the labor struggles that swept through the Central Valley during the 1930s. Since the demise of the I. W. W. following the Palmer Raids of 1919, farmworkers were largely unrepresented until the Communist Party formed the Cannery and



Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (C. A. W. I. U).<sup>17</sup> This trade association played a prominent role in the two disputes that Steinbeck incorporated into *In Dubious Battle*: one at the Tagus Ranch in August of 1933 and another in the cotton industry throughout the San Joaquin Valley in October. In the former, 700 migrants at one of the largest and most industrialized agricultural operations in California walked off their jobs due to earnings that would barely offer a basic subsistence and demanded a raise, a forty-hour week, and union recognition.<sup>18</sup> When the ranch manager rejected overtures to negotiate with the C. A. W. I. U. and evicted employees from company-owned housing, organizer Pat Chambers threatened to call a general strike throughout the San Joaquin Valley. In response, 2,000 laborers went out at properties owned by the California Packing Corporation (Cal-Pak), which caused the firm to suspend both their picking and canning operations.<sup>19</sup> Recognizing the threat posed by this disturbance, Cal-Pak executives increased compensation to 25 cents an hour, and the encouragement of state mediators led to officials from the Tagus Ranch accepting this pay scale on August 18.<sup>20</sup> These victories provided the impetus for many work stoppages throughout the San Joaquin Valley. As a result of these conflicts, growers throughout the region also raised rates to 25 cents an hour, a figure that soon became the prevailing wage for fruit pickers.<sup>21</sup>

Labor strife intensified two months later when a cotton strike informed by similar economic tensions spread throughout the region yet featured a higher degree of violence perpetrated by the growers. This struggle originated from the fluctuating value of this commodity: while rates declined from 1929 to 1932 and compensation accordingly decreased by 75% over this period, prices for this article of trade increased by 150% in 1933.<sup>22</sup> On September 19, the Agricultural Labor Bureau of the San Joaquin Valley set wages at 60 cents per hundred pounds, a level of compensation that would barely meet the physical requirements of those who

harvested this crop.<sup>23</sup> When C. A. W. I. U. members voted to strike on October 4, hundreds of employees immediately walked off their jobs, and 12,000 were out in Tulare, Kings, and Kern counties by October 9.<sup>24</sup> Undeterred, armed landowners began patrolling the valley, attacking individuals who refused either to leave the area or to work under existing conditions, which culminated in vigilantes killing two people and wounding eight more after opening fire on a peaceful demonstration.<sup>25</sup> As a result of this event and the inability of local law enforcement to control the situation, George Creel, chair of the Regional Labor Board, appointed a fact-finding commission to determine a basis for settlement, and this panel ultimately decided that 75 cents per hundred would be a fair compromise.<sup>26</sup> Pickers initially held out for 80 cents and formal recognition of the C. A. W. I. U. by employers; however, the leaders of this trade association eventually persuaded membership to call off the dispute, recognizing that “the government will not recognize any union that has a militant policy of struggle in the interests of the working class” and that no additional benefit would come from prolonging the conflict.<sup>27</sup>

Steinbeck was familiar with these disputes and some of their organizers. Writing to Harry Thornton Moore about the historical sources for the book, Steinbeck claimed that

I usually avoided using actual places to avoid hurting feelings, for, although I rarely use a person or a story as it is—neighbors love only too well to attribute them to someone. . . . As for the Valley in *In Dubious Battle*—it is a composite valley as it is a composite strike. If it has the characteristics of Pajaro nevertheless there was no strike there. If it’s like the cotton strike, that wasn’t apples.<sup>28</sup>

As Jackson J. Benson and Anne Loftis have argued, Steinbeck combined the setting and underlying causes of the walkout at the Tagus Ranch with occurrences from the struggle in the

cotton industry, deviating from their particulars to present his work stoppage in more universal terms.<sup>29</sup> Discussing the basis for his representation of events, Steinbeck wrote his agents that “my information for this book came mostly from Irish and Italian communists whose training was in the field.”<sup>30</sup> Through Sis Reamer, the author became acquainted with Cicil McKiddy and Carl Williams when they were hiding in Monterey to evade arrest for their activities during the cotton strike.<sup>31</sup> Reamer introduced Steinbeck to the men at their boardinghouse, and the writer offered them a small sum of money for their stories, which he planned to use for a non-fiction account from the perspective of a Communist organizer. Jay Parini notes that Steinbeck contemplated this project “not because he himself was a communist but because he sympathized deeply with the plight of the workers and admired the idealism that lay, in theory, behind communism.”<sup>32</sup> Steinbeck, however, decided that a first-person narrative from a union leader’s point of view would not be the most effective use of this material, a decision that marked the start of the initial conception of *In Dubious Battle*.

Steinbeck began writing the manuscript in September of 1934 shortly after the completion of *Tortilla Flat*, which had not yet been accepted for publication. Describing his conception of *In Dubious Battle*, Steinbeck wrote that “I have used a small strike in an orchard valley as the symbol of man’s eternal, bitter warfare with himself” and elaborated that

I’m not interested in strike as a means of raising men’s wages, and I’m not interested in ranting about justice and oppression, mere outcroppings which indicate the condition. He has been able to defeat every natural obstacle, but himself he cannot win over unless he kills every individual. And this self-hate, which goes so closely in hand with self-love, is what I wrote about. The book is brutal.<sup>33</sup>

While the author prioritizes broader philosophical arguments over the economic goals of the strike, the use of a labor struggle as the foundation for Steinbeck's analysis highlights both the importance of such disputes and his method in the novel. Despite deemphasizing the concrete aims of such events, they do provide the context for the representation of issues fundamental to the human enterprise, an approach that expands the project from a muck-racking book to an exploration of the forces that animate behavior. Later in this letter, Steinbeck asserted that "I merely wanted to be a recording consciousness, judging nothing, simply putting down the thing."<sup>34</sup> This desire for impartiality manifests through the absence of an intrusive narrator who explains occurrences in terms of a Deterministic thesis; instead, Steinbeck develops his treatment of the work stoppage through the action of the narrative and the dialogue of the principal characters. This objectivity also emerges in Steinbeck's refusal to portray the conflict in broad strokes with predatory landowners ruthlessly oppressing the innocent, aggrieved proletariat. By contrast, Steinbeck presents both the laborers and the Communist organizers in unflattering terms: the former are ignorant creatures led to the slaughter by the latter, who seem to view people as abstractions in the service of revolutionary objectives.

After completing the manuscript of *In Dubious Battle*, Steinbeck sent it to his agent, Mavis McIntosh. He was uncertain about its merits, writing to her that "I hardly expect you to like the book. I don't like it. It is terrible. But I hope when you finish it, in the disorder you will feel a terrible kind of order."<sup>35</sup> McIntosh reassured Steinbeck that it was good and submitted it to Covici-Friede as planned. After two weeks, she received a letter from Harry Black, an editor at the firm, who declined the work due to qualms about its ideological stance. He asserted that the "book is totally inaccurate" and that it "is sure to offend people on the right as well as the left."<sup>36</sup> This appraisal was forwarded to Steinbeck, who confessed to be "deeply shocked by the

attitude of Covici. . . . Answering the complaint that the ideology is incorrect, this is the silliest of criticism. There are as many communist systems as there are communists.”<sup>37</sup> Steinbeck noted that it was useless to postulate an “ideal communist” since these individuals, like everyone else, were “subject to the weaknesses of humans and to the greatness of humans. . . . The blank wall of stupid refusal even to look at the thing without colored glasses of some kind gives me a feeling of overwhelming weariness and a desire to run away and let the stupid fools tear themselves to pieces.”<sup>38</sup> After this rejection, Elizabeth Otis took over as Steinbeck’s literary representative, and Bobbs-Merrill quickly accepted *In Dubious Battle*. When Pascal Covici returned to New York and learned what had happened, he immediately fired Black, mailed an apologetic note to Steinbeck, and asked to publish the book. After considering whether or not he should move on to Bobbs-Merrill, Steinbeck chose to remain with Covici-Friede, which brought out the novel on January 15, 1936 to largely favorable reviews. For instance, Fred T. Marsh called it “the best labor and strike novel to come out of our contemporary economic and social unrest,” while Harry Thornton Moore asserted that it “cannot be dismissed as a ‘propaganda’ novel—it is another version of the eternal fight against injustice.”<sup>39</sup> Despite Steinbeck’s deviations from conventional proletarian fiction, his strike is deeply rooted within the struggles of the 1930s, and the lasting power of the narrative emerges through its engagement with the economic forces responsible for injustice.

These themes are evident in Steinbeck’s choice of a title, one that reflects the strikers’ limited chance for success due to those who preside over the present order. *In Dubious Battle* comes from a line in *Paradise Lost* (1667) when Satan addresses his fallen followers, and this association has caused critics to view the narrative as an indictment of the labor dispute and the organizers’ motives with Allen Shepherd identifying Jim as Satan and Peter Lisca interpreting

Mac as a devil figure.<sup>40</sup> Louis Owens asserts that the extensive apple orchards throughout the valley provide another of Steinbeck's fallen Edens, which is reinforced through imagery of the fall of man.<sup>41</sup> However, this pattern alludes to the economic tensions in the region since the fruit symbolizes not temptation but indicates that the natural abundance of the fields can no longer nourish the population, an idea that Steinbeck extends through the burning of oranges in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Further, he employed a similar title, "Dubious Battle in California," for his article in *The Nation*. By using this phrase, Steinbeck does not express a broader critique of these workers and advances instead an indictment of the growers. The connection between this essay and the book further suggests that the conflict in the latter is not dubious in the sense that it is questionable or specious but that the employees are unlikely to prevail in this particular instance. While the outcome of the particular clash is an almost certain defeat, the battle is one that must be waged despite the vast obstacles against the victory of labor, one that seems possible only through merging the individual into the collective in line with Steinbeck's formulation of the phalanx.

In developing these themes, Steinbeck identifies the growers as the primary Deterministic agents since they dictate the conditions facing their employees, limit their possibilities for survival, and necessitate the strike. Describing those who wield power in the region, Mac states that they "got this valley organized. God, how they got it organized. It's not so hard to do when three men control everything, land, courts, banks. They can cut off loans, and they can railroad men to jail, and they can always bribe plenty."<sup>42</sup> The workers' plight stems from the practices of these individuals, who manipulate economic activity within the Torgas Valley and shape production in accordance with their interests. Since the pickers have few alternatives, they lack the means to alter the nature of their labor or to increase their compensation. These

consequences are exacerbated by the landowners' dominance over the fiscal structure of the area. The example of Mr. Anderson illustrates this point as he pays wages at the rates stipulated by the Growers' Association, owned by the Torgas Finance Company, which also holds his mortgage (81-82). When Mac proposes that Mr. Anderson allow the strikers to camp on his property, he responds, "I own this place. I got to get along with my neighbors. They'd raise hell with me if I did a thing like that" (81). Through this control over the financial system, the planters can subordinate small farmers by foreclosing on their land. Mr. Anderson, however, agrees to Mac's proposal because the promise of having his apples picked for free would enable him, theoretically, to pay off his debts and escape from the decrees of the Growers' Association.

In his depiction of these Deterministic agents, Steinbeck incorporated aspects of the labor disputes at the Tagus Ranch and in the cotton industry, which provide context for the circumstances that lead to the inevitable conflict throughout *In Dubious Battle*.<sup>43</sup> Mac explains his decision to travel to the Torgas Valley, stating that "the Growers' Association just announced a pay cut to the pickers. They'll be sore as hell. If we can get a good ruckus going down there, we might be able to spread it over to the cotton fields in Tandale" (20). This passage alludes to the immediate cause of the cotton strike: on September 19, growers and representatives of local finance companies, met to determine wages for the coming season and agreed on 60 cents per hundred pounds, well under the figure the pickers desired.<sup>44</sup> The incorporation of this reference heightens the realism of the narrative, reinforcing the landowners' ability to shape economic conditions, and this manifests further through the pay scale of fifteen cents, which parallels the compensation offered to the employees at the Tagus Ranch (36). The combination of these sources denotes the universal dimensions of the struggle since the disturbance in the book does not signal an isolated instance in the skirmish between labor and capital; instead, it reproduces

elements common to the intense clashes throughout California during this period. Further, Mac's statement about the spread of the strike accurately reflects the relationship between the two work stoppages that formed the basis for *In Dubious Battle* as the militancy on display at the Tagus Ranch inspired the pickers in the cotton fields to walk off their jobs.

Steinbeck incorporated other elements from these strikes into his conflict. Developing this point in a broader critique of the circumstances confronting the workers, an unnamed man states that the pickers have decided to walk off their jobs because "we're getting' screwed, that's why. The bunk houses is full of pants rabbits, and the company's store is taking a five per cent house-cut, and they drop the pay when we get here, that's why! And if we let 'em get by with it, we'll be worse in the cotton. We'll get screwed there, too, and you know it damn well" (64-65). The reference to the company store is significant in that it alludes to one of the principal grievances of the laborers at the Tagus Ranch, who were paid not in cash but in scrip at an establishment owned by the firm that charged 25 to 30% higher than those in the surrounding areas.<sup>45</sup> While this work stoppage does not provide a direct antecedent for the event that triggers the dispute, the antiquated ladder that breaks under Dan's weight and causes him to break his hip effectively dramatizes the substandard conditions that prevailed in California agriculture. Dan's injury, and the state of affairs that would permit a business to allow its employees to engage in dangerous occupations with unsafe equipment, indicates that the growers view their workforce as replaceable commodities without any broader value.

The portrayal of the causes underlying the strike highlights the inevitable nature of the conflict. Mac notes that the Communists did not engender the work stoppage; they merely responded to the forces created by the landowners. He states that they "cut the wages before we showed up, don't forget that. Hell, you'd think that we started this strike, and you know damn



well that we didn't. We're just helpin' it to grow straight instead of shootin' its wad" (109-10), and London observes that the walkout stems from a desire to protect their children from starvation by "usin' the only way a workin' stiff's got" (180). Mac and London view the dispute as the logical result of conditions set by the growers, as a necessary response to economic subordination. Mac's final sentence also indicates the role of the organizers, who are merely trying to give the industrial action some potential for success. Mac clarifies this point when he asserts that the owners "say we started this strike. Now get me straight. I would have started it if I could, but I didn't have to. It started itself" (188). The last sentence underscores the workers' lack of agency since they are merely responding to the material tensions that shape their labor.

*In Dubious Battle* features additional elements of the work stoppages at the Tagus Ranch and in the cotton fields, and these events further illustrate the landowners' power while also conveying the potential for progress through concerted action. Learning from the example of the former conflict, the growers commenced with a series of evictions; however, 2,500 people settled on a farm outside Corcoran, which offers a parallel to the encampment in Mr. Anderson's orchard in the narrative.<sup>46</sup> Benson and Loftis have noted that this property was donated by a sympathizer named Morgan, a small farmer who owned a tract of land of the outskirts of town, and his actions, like his counterpart in the book, caused him to live in fear of reprisals.<sup>47</sup> Further, the *Visalia Times-Delta* observed that 500 men remained after the disturbance to pick Morgan's "cotton free of charge since he furnished the land on which their camp is located," which approximates the men harvesting Anderson's apples in exchange for the right to settle on his holdings.<sup>48</sup> In addition, the local authorities' reactions were similar in both instances as press accounts presented Morgan's camp as a health threat. A correspondent for the *San Francisco Chronicle* asserted that the tent colony constituted a "menace to the health of the community

because of the lack of sanitation. With food and water running short and some growers urging that the strikers be ‘starved out,’ the situation is watched by local officials.”<sup>49</sup> Further developing these problems, another reporter declared that the “deplorable conditions among the more than 2000 striking cotton pickers . . . were emphasized here today with the death of a 3-months-old child from malnutrition . . . and a dozen more persons are known to be suffering similarly.”<sup>50</sup> Steinbeck stresses the hypocrisy of the affluent, who profess concern for the poor only when it serves the interests of the powerful. Mac comments that “they let us live like pigs in the jungle, but just the minute we start a strike, they get awful concerned about the public health” (89). Further, the attempts of the striking cotton pickers to prevent the closure of the settlement parallel their counterparts’ efforts in the novel. In both instances, a doctor named Burton set up sanitary facilities with running water, toilets, and a piping system that enabled the temporary lodgings to remain available throughout the labor disputes.<sup>51</sup>

The inclusion of pivotal events from the work stoppage at the Tagus Ranch further heightens the verisimilitude of the narrative, enhancing the representation of its causative agents. Mac observes that the owners have secured an injunction against picketing, a tactic that undermines the effectiveness of the walkout since the laborers have no access to property owned by the business and thereby cannot demonstrate against their employers (115). H. G. Merritt, Jr., the manager of the Tagus Ranch, employed comparable practices, obtaining a similar edict and ordering the eviction of anyone who refused to work from company-owned housing.<sup>52</sup> The Tulare County district attorney doubted the legality of this ruling, so authorities made no attempts to halt protests outside the gates. However, armed guards employed by the firm evicted several families on August 15, waving automatic rifles on loan from the Tulare police department and dumping the former inhabitants’ belongings along the highway north of the

county.<sup>53</sup> The fictionalization of this incident highlights the growers' control over the region, evident through the actions of local law enforcement to break the strike, whose tactics offer no peaceful alternatives and engender the violent conflict throughout *In Dubious Battle*. This outcome also stems from the actions of the vigilantes, and their display of force to frighten the protesters also has its origins in the Tagus Ranch dispute. A reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle* referred to high-powered weapons being used "in intimidating strikers" and further noted that a "machine gun had been purchased by the Tulare Chamber of Commerce and manned by Ray Edwards, a former Tulare police officer."<sup>54</sup> Steinbeck alludes to this incident through the vigilantes' use of artillery to threaten the strikers in Chapter 15, which provides another illustration of the landowners' power in the valley, developments that minimize the potential for a resolution of the dispute.

The conduct of these Deterministic agents has its precursor in the tactics employed by the owners during the cotton strike, who sought to reassert their control of the economic activity in the region through the suppression of labor. Early in this conflict, the ranchers determined to employ whatever level of force was necessary, forming protective associations and attempting to drive the so-called radicals out of the San Joaquin Valley.<sup>55</sup> During a mass meeting on October 9, L. D. Ellett, chairman of the Kings County Growers' Committee, stated that the "time has come when we have to take the law into our own hands. We will have to use force to get rid of these workers and get new ones."<sup>56</sup> Toward these ends, the men who owned large farms took up arms to patrol the district and to confront those individuals who refused to return to their jobs under existing conditions or to leave the area, tactics that caused a reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle* to observe that the San Joaquin Valley had become "a veritable powder magazine likely to explode at any instant."<sup>57</sup> This eruption of violence occurred in Pixley on October 10

when forty armed growers arrived at the C. A. W. I. U. hall where workers had congregated to protest the arrests of several pickets from a nearby ranch. As Chambers called the meeting to an end, one landowner fired into the crowd, and when a striker, Dolores Hernandez, attempted to take this man's gun, he was clubbed to the ground and riddled with bullets.<sup>58</sup> The rest of the farmers immediately discharged their weapons at the fleeing men, women, and children, continuing to shoot into the building until their ammunition ran out, killing an additional laborer, Delfino D'Avila, and wounding 7 more.<sup>59</sup> These homicides engendered significant popular support for those on strike and condemnation of the planters with an editorial in the *San Francisco News* asserting that the "men guilty of this massacre are not honest California farmers. They are criminals who deserve the severest punishment provided by the law for wanton homicide."<sup>60</sup> Following the murders of D'Avila and Hernandez, 1,500 people gathered in Tulare for the funeral services at St. Aloysius Catholic Church, and this number increased to 5,000 as they marched to the cemetery for the burial. A correspondent for the *San Francisco Chronicle* noted that the protesters maintained a "military marching order" with "armed police in close attendance," which offers an approximate parallel to the public funeral and demonstration for Joy.<sup>61</sup> Despite the upsurge of anger against the growers, C. A. W. I. U. leaders largely prevented reprisals in order to capitalize on the sympathy engendered by the shootings. This development, in addition to further acts of aggression from vigilante groups, provided the pretext for the government mediation that ultimately ended the dispute.

Steinbeck does not include the particulars of this shooting; however, the immediate social context of this event reflects the climate of hostility produced by the people who control the Torgas Valley. Doc Burton tells Jim that "the end is never very different in its nature from the means. . . . You can only build a violent thing with violence" (184). While Doc focuses his

attention on the workers' methods, his analysis seems to more accurately suggest the landowners' tactics. Mac clarifies this point when he warns a representative of the planters that "if any of your boys touch that property or hurt Anderson, if you hurt one single fruit tree, a thousand guys'll start out an' every one of 'em'll have a box of matches. *Get it, Mister?* Take it as a threat if you want to: you touch Anderson's ranch and by Christ we'll burn every fucking house and barn on every ranch in the Valley" (94). Mac traces a strictly causal relationship between the practices of the growers and those of the pickers with violence as the logical result of the measures undertaken by the affluent. Mac highlights the character of these procedures when he notes that the vigilantes "like to hurt people, and they always give it a nice name, patriotism or protecting the constitution. But they're just the old nigger torturers working. The owners use 'em, tell 'em we have to protect the people against reds. Y'see that lets 'em burn houses and torture and beat people with no danger" (120). The conventional platitudes associated with these individuals provide the rhetorical justification to employ brutal means in order to quell any popular disturbances under the guise of promoting freedom, liberty, and other cherished American values. However, the allusion to these men as plantation overseers expresses the nature of their activities, equating the working class with slaves and underscoring the imbalance of power between the parties involved in the strike.

*In Dubious Battle* continues to illustrate this causal relationship between the aggression of capital and that of labor, which reinforces the consequences fostered by the Deterministic agents. Expanding on this idea, Mac observes that the strikers have

no money and no weapons, so we've got to use our heads, London. See that? It's like a man with a club fighting a squad with machine guns. The only way he can do it is to sneak up and smack the gunners from behind. Maybe that isn't fair, but

hell, London, this isn't any athletic contest. There aren't any rules a hungry man has to follow. (206-07)

This disparity, evident through the juxtaposition between a club and machine guns, necessitates methods that deviate from ideal conduct, and the final sentence further connects the actions of the pickers to the practices of their employers. This pattern manifests throughout *In Dubious Battle*: Sam burns down a grower's house after vigilantes destroy Anderson's barn, the frenzied demonstrations of the men occur after Joy's death, the pickers attack the strikebreakers since their presence threatens the success of the labor dispute. Even the most disturbing episode of brutality, Mac's thrashing of a high-school student, originates within the climate set by the individuals who control the Torgas Valley. Jim states that the boy, a sniper with a deadly weapon, "wasn't a scared kid, it was a danger to the cause. It had to be done, and you did it right. No hate, no feeling, just a job" (199). The conditions in the Torgas Valley create a climate in which violence offers the only means to protect the laborers' interests, and the casualties produced by the working class characters pale in consideration to those of the owners and allies, who kill Jim and Joy, severely beat Al and burn down his restaurant, and abduct Doc, in addition to injuring, threatening, and harassing countless people.

The portrayal of violence parallels the formation of a collective consciousness that offers labor a means to combat the landowners, yet the phalanx reflects pressures rooted within the immediate environment of its members. Throughout *In Dubious Battle*, the emergence of this unit conveys both a positive development, in that the combined strength of the strikers enables them to challenge the growers, and a negative one as the conduct of the assemblage can have an ultimately damaging effect.<sup>62</sup> The first tendency manifests in Chapter 9 when the murder of Joy provides the impetus for the group's unification. The narrator states that the "guards were

frightened: riots they could stop, fighting they could stop; but this slow, silent movement of men with the wide eyes of sleep-walkers terrified them. They held to their places, but the sheriff started his car” (118). The fact that this silent procession of men prevents the guards from their usual violent tactics demonstrates the power of the workers, averting the outcomes usually associated with disobeying the imperatives of capital. While concerted action allows the laborers to defy the privileged, Steinbeck illustrates its harmful implications when the workers attack the strikebreakers in Chapter 10, and the narrator states that

Jim looked without emotion at the ten moaning men on the ground, their faces kicked shapeless. Here a lip was torn away, exposing bloody teeth and gums; one man cried like a child because his arm was bent sharply backward, broken at the elbow. Now that the fury was past, the strikers were sick, poisoned by the flow from their own anger glands. (131)

This graphic description of the aftermath of the fight highlights the destructive capability of the masses and enhances the objectivity of Steinbeck’s handling of his material through his refusal to portray the proletarians as innocent victims. However, the broader representation of this scene emphasizes the operation of the causative agents since the practices of the working class are necessitated by conditions in the valley: if the replacement workers harvest the apples, then the pickers lose their only potential advantage against the owners, who will assuredly emerge victorious. Further, the combatants’ remorse suggests that their actions have been determined by insuperable forces rather than individual will, which is heightened by the reference to basic biological processes. These elements undermine the agency of the men, yet the potential for such drastic human consequences indicates the need to direct the collective toward constructive ends.

The exchange among the organizers and Bolter reinforces the need for such actions and draws on the landowners' methods during the cotton strike. After the laborers reject an offer for a pay increase, Bolter declares that he and the other growers "have a right to protect our property, and we'll do it. . . . From now on the roads are closed. An ordinance will go through tonight forbidding any parading on the country roads, or any gathering. The sheriff will deputize a thousand men, if he needs them" (182). His threats correlate to events in October of 1933 as a reporter for the *Visalia Times-Delta* observed that pickers, "hitherto allowed to hold meetings on public roads in front of ranches where picking is in progress, are now being denied that privilege. They are allowed to parade through the cotton districts in automobile caravans, but are not allowed to stop and hold meetings."<sup>63</sup> While the book deviates from the actual events since the strikers were able to parade on local roads, *In Dubious Battle* accurately reflects the limited nature of these demonstrations. Sheriff Robert Hill of Visalia passed an ordinance stipulating that workers "will not be able to stop on roads, they will not be allowed to double back on roads," and "none of the strikers will be able to get out of their automobiles."<sup>64</sup> These measures effectively prevented men and women from protesting against their former employers or destabilizing the importation of strikebreakers. Steinbeck's incorporation of this information highlights the operations of a legal structure that offers few options for redress and necessitates the use of forceful tactics, which the narrator underscores through the reference to the sheriff deputizing a thousand men. This figure represents an exaggeration in that the *Visalia Times-Delta* reported that Hill could appoint approximately 250 people, yet this number was augmented by private citizens who were granted permission to carry concealed weapons in the strike districts, including 600 individuals in nearby Kern County.<sup>65</sup> These references express the local



authorities' role in perpetuating the inequitable conditions and contextualize the practices of labor.

Steinbeck's animal imagery also illustrates the causative function of the landowners, signifying not that the laborers are lesser life forms unworthy of the decency accorded to humans but that they have been reduced to this state by the practices of the powerful. Many instances, such as the reference to Al as a "ruminating cow" (32) or the statement that London has the eyes of a gorilla (38), emphasize the insignificance of man and the peripheral roles of these people to the strike, which denotes the limited potential of individual action. The further instances of such images display the consequences engendered by the growers, most notably when Dan observes that the "stiffs don't know what's happenin', but when the big guy gets mad, they'll all be there. They'll be bitin' our throats with their teeth, and clawin' off lips. . . . That big guy'll run like a mad dog, and bite everything that moves. He's been hungry too long, and he's hurt too much" (48). The reference to the men as mad dogs evokes the responsibility of the wealthy for these traits since they have created the circumstances that have brought these elements to the forefront. Dan, however, recognizes the problematic nature of this development: the working class, when united as one through their anger toward their bosses, might turn on themselves and employ violence indiscriminately, a representation that reinforces Mac's assertions about the need to direct labor for the walkout to have any chance of success. The Deterministic nature of the references to the characters as animals manifests in Dakin's breakdown. After the vigilantes destroy his truck, he "crawls for 'em, slaverin' around the mouth like a mad dog—just nuts, he just went *nuts*! I guess he loved that truck better'n anything in the world. The guy that came back said it was just awful, the way he crawled for 'em. Tried to bite 'em. He was snarling—like a mad dog" (134). The use of Dakin is important in that he had a calm demeanor that

distinguished him from the other strikers, and his descent provides a clearer illustration of the problems that could occur as a result of the tensions in the valley. Further, Dakin is separated from his fellows because he has a stake in society due to his ownership of a new truck and well-appointed tent. These possessions indicate that he has more to lose during the struggle, while his fate reveals that even those who profit from an inequitable economic system will suffer its consequences. Mac clarifies this point when reflecting on the potential ramifications of the labor dispute by noting that the workers “are straight now. They know how much capital thinks of ‘em and how quick capital would poison ‘em like a bunch of ants” (234). The reference to the poor as unimportant creatures that must be exterminated signals the owners’ view of the pickers, one that shapes the treatment that they must endure and ultimately seek to eradicate in order to survive.

The continuing portrayal of violence contextualizes the perspective and corresponding tactics embraced by Mac, who emphasizes the consequences of the existing economic framework and the need for an alternate social structure to ameliorate these circumstances. Although critics have often condemned Mac for viewing the workers as mere abstractions in his pursuit of broader revolutionary ends, the representation of this character focuses on his basic humanity amidst what seem to be examples of his calculating nature.<sup>66</sup> After the destruction of Al’s diner, the labor organizer asks, “how does it feel to be a Party man now, Jim? . . . . That poor guy . . . I feel responsible for that” (124). While Al declares allegiance to the Party, Mac’s response demonstrates his sensitivity and an awareness of his role in this outcome. As a result of Al’s fate, Mac states that it is “awful hard to keep your eyes on the big issue,” which reveals an individual who is deeply concerned with the ramifications of his undertakings (124). *In Dubious Battle* features a parallel illustration of this conception through Mac’s interactions with Mr.

Anderson. After the vigilantes burn down the farmer's barn Mac looks "weak and sad," tries to console Anderson, and tells London, "I wish it hadn't happened. Poor old man, it's all his crop" (190). This response is inconsistent with an interpretation of Mac as one who views people as mere pawns in the Revolution; instead, he exhibits compassion for a man who has lost everything during the work stoppage and shows remorse for bringing about this occurrence. Mac's use of Joy's murder to inflame the strikers further dramatizes this idea. Far from exploiting the death of his friend, Mac's approach is consistent with his colleague's desire to help the cause and thereby serves as a tribute to Joy, and the organizer's utilization of the corpse to illustrate the practices of the growers also provides a means to honor his friend and to further serve the struggle to which both had devoted their lives.

This devotion, however, does not supersede the immediate aims of the work stoppage as these are inextricably linked with Mac's grander aspirations, which further show his compassion for the laborers. The precise illustrations of Mac's apparent tendency to prioritize Party objectives over the strikers' needs give credence to this point. Before traveling to the Torgas Valley, he informs Jim that a "strike that's settled too quickly won't teach the men how to organize, how to work together. A tough strike is good. We want the men to find out how strong they are when they work together" (22). While the first sentence expresses a limited concern with the outcome of the walkout, Mac's formulation links the fate of the individual to that of the group coupled with the realization that collective endeavors offer the men a means of confronting a more powerful force. Connecting these larger ambitions to the existing conflict, Mac observes that "we made the men work for themselves, in their own defense, as a group. That's what we're out here for anyway, to teach them to fight in a bunch. Raising wages isn't all we're after" (42). The final statement illustrates that Mac does not lose sight of the particular

target of the strike, and his desire to facilitate radical change does not preclude improving compensation. The current struggle is intimately related to the future vision as the former would increase wages for the apple pickers and prevent a cut in the cotton fields while also teaching them how to organize themselves. This development can supply a framework for broader action within the pursuit of more concrete goals since these are not divorced from the ends embraced by the Party. Mac clarifies this point when he tells Doc that there is “an end to be gained; it’s a real end, hasn’t got anything to do with people losing respect. It’s people getting bread into their guts. It’s *real*, not any of your high-falutin ideas” (146). This focus on basic requirements conveys the nature of Mac’s interest in the labor dispute and the perspective that governs his undertakings, which center on providing an organizational structure that will enable the working class to prosper.

Due to this outlook, Mac contrasts with Doc Burton, who views the workers in terms of abstract categories that ignore their struggle and does not challenge the imperatives of the landowners. While many critics interpret Doc as a preferential alternative to the organizer, and Steinbeck does associate some of his ideas with the former, he is not the writer’s spokesman and instead illustrates the problematic nature of imposing theoretical formulas on existence.<sup>67</sup> Doc exhibits a concern for individual suffering, apparent through his efforts to aid the strikers despite not believing in their cause, yet his interest in the collective does not correlate to the concrete objectives of the pickers. Doc asserts that “I want to *see*, Mac. I want to watch these group-men for they seem to me to be a new individual, not at all like single men. A man in a group isn’t himself at all, he’s a cell in an organism that isn’t like him any more than the cells in your body are like you. I want to watch the group, and see what it’s like” (104). This passage reflects Steinbeck’s theory of the phalanx; however, Doc’s perspective differs considerably from that of

Steinbeck, whose Depression-era fiction presents the power of concerted effort to protect labor. Doc, by contrast, advances this proposal as a mere scientific postulate, one detached from the practical world and one that perceives the exploitation of men in a manner similar to the operations of bacteria under a microscope. This viewpoint gives him a position divorced from the conflict as evident through his emphasis on ocular tropes. Doc's desire to watch and to investigate an event from all possible angles, which evokes non-teleological thinking, creates a paralyzing sense of objectivity that prevents him from operating with any broader purpose.<sup>68</sup> This reduction of human life to intangible formulations obscures an understanding of economic forces and foregrounds his ultimate disillusionment. In his last conversation with Jim, Doc states that everything "seems meaningless to me, brutal and meaningless" (183) and later admits to Mac, "I'm lonely, I guess. I'm awfully lonely. I'm working all alone, towards nothing" (186). Doc's assertions and his subsequent disappearance highlight the limitations of his position, conveying that intellectual neutrality only leads to isolation and prevents meaningful action.

Steinbeck reinforces this theme through the negative example of Jim Nolan, who continues to be preoccupied by individualistic concerns despite his apparent absorption in the pickers' cause. The narrator clarifies this point when he states that

Jim stepped to the washstand in the corner and washed his hands and combed water through his hair with his fingers. Looking into the mirror fastened across the corner of the room above the washstand, he peered into his own small grey eyes for a moment. . . . He glanced about the room and then twisted the mouth of the bag closed. For a moment he looked casually into the mirror, then turned off the light and went through the door. (1)

The narrator's emphasis on Jim's eyes and the act of looking into the mirror provides the first manifestation of the perspective that will characterize his actions throughout *In Dubious Battle* as he cannot transcend the confines of the self. While Lisca, Levant, and Rose view Jim as an illustration of the loss of individuality that emanates from the phalanx, he fixates on himself, beginning with his decision to join the Party, which stems less from an impulse to help the poor than from his personal aspirations.<sup>69</sup> After initially asserting that he wishes to become an organizer because his "whole family has been ruined by this system" (4), he finally admits that "I want to work toward something. I feel dead. I thought I might get alive again" (6). Instead of addressing the systemic forces that condition the laborers' plight, Jim views the class struggle in terms of his fulfillment, which manifests further when he gains a measure of power over others and says, "I'm happy. . . . And happy for the first time" (145). Jim again focuses on his impressions and needs after a group of workers have been brutally beaten; unlike Mac, he does not identify with the men or regard them with compassion, instead prioritizing what such occurrences mean in relation to him. After Mac thrashes the would-be sniper, Jim states "I'm stronger than you, Mac. I'm stronger than anything in the world, because I'm going in a straight line. You and the rest have to think of women and tobacco and liquor and keeping warm and fed" (199). This stress on separating himself from Mac and the other strikers expresses that he still acts within the confines of his ego rather than through a communal entity. This reading gains additional credence because he is not motivated by the drives that animate everyone else. His limited interest in human companionship or basic requirements highlights his fundamental alienation from the aims of the labor dispute, which serves as a vehicle for his self-discovery rather than a means to improve the conditions facing the working class.

The conclusion reinforces these themes by deviating from the factual antecedents for the novel and underscoring the requirements of the group. Both of these disputes resulted in victories for the C. A. W. I. U. and an immediate improvement in compensation for the affected laborers, yet *In Dubious Battle* ends with Jim's murder and the almost certain defeat of the work stoppage. Describing Mac's efforts to prevent this outcome, the narrator states that the veteran organizer's

hands gripped the rail. His eyes were wide and white. In front he could see the massed men, eyes shining in the lamplight. Behind the front row, the men were lumped and dark. Mac shivered. He moved his jaws to speak, and seemed to break the frozen jaws loose. His voice was high and monotonous. "This guy didn't want nothing for himself—" he began. His knuckles were white, where he grasped the rail. "Comrades! He didn't want nothing for himself—." (250)

The repetition of Jim's supposedly selfless motives presents an ironic commentary on his egotistical impulses, and the double negative, with the implication that he did want something for himself, stresses the selfish ends that he had hoped to realize through the struggle. The narrator provides a counterpoint to Jim through the portrayal of the strikers as indistinguishable from one another, and the reference to their "eyes shining in the lamplight" suggests that the identification of their common fate coupled with undertakings based on this realization offer the potential for a future victory that will alter the conditions that have determined their fate. The narrator highlights this point through Mac, who is able to reconcile his interest in the individual with his obligation to the collective. The former manifests through his grief, apparent through the emphasis on his eyes, the movement of his "frozen jaws," and his efforts to steady himself on the rail. On the other hand, his recognition of the need to use Jim's corpse in an attempt to prolong

the strike indicates a willingness to subordinate his personal impulses to the requirements of the conflict, which illustrates the nature of the perspective necessary to transform society.

While this ending deviates from the particulars of the labor disputes that served as the historical foundation for the novel, the conclusion reflects the social context of the following period, which was characterized by the concerted efforts of capital to undermine the progress that emerged from these victories. The success of the cotton strike provided the impetus for the destruction of the C. A. W. I. U. as its continued emphasis on addressing agricultural conditions aroused the wrath of the newly-formed Associated Farmers, and this group began a program of violence and intimidation against workers. These tendencies manifested during a lettuce strike in the Imperial Valley in January of 1934, when landowners intensified their vigilante tactics from 1933 to end the walkout, and again during another clash in Brentwood during the spring of 1934.<sup>70</sup> Following the San Francisco General Strike, when a clash between longshoremen and local police caused a work stoppage that paralyzed shipping on the West Coast, the Associated Farmers embarked on a renewed crusade to weaken labor.<sup>71</sup> The organization was able to effectively eradicate the C. A. W. I. U. through the convictions of its leaders, including Chambers, under the California Criminal Syndicalism Act, which offered a pretext for imprisoning radicals.<sup>72</sup> After the demise of the C. A. W. I. U., the Associated Farmers continued to wage bitter and violent campaigns against unions, most notably in Sonoma County during June of 1935, Los Angeles in April and May of 1936, Orange County during June and July of 1936, Salinas in September of 1936, and Stockton in April of 1937.<sup>73</sup> These conflicts all ended in defeat for the strikers, erasing the gains from the struggles that formed the basis for *In Dubious Battle*, and the tactics adopted by the Associated Farmers illustrated the growers'



control over the machinery of the state, actions that highlighted the need for a collective response to combat such forces.

*The Grapes of Wrath* advances a similar view of people victimized by a restrictive social structure and reflects the underside of the California dream. Despite the seemingly exhaustive scholarly discussions of this book, few recent critics have devoted serious attention to these issues in Steinbeck's masterpiece or its placement within the trajectory of American Naturalism.<sup>74</sup> Even those who have contemplated the work in this context have provided interpretations that have further confused the relationship between the text and this literary movement. For instance, Charles L. Etheridge, Sr. asserts that "Steinbeck's narrative technique grows directly out of his Naturalism when the term is understood as a biological term rather than a literary one."<sup>75</sup> Alan Gibbs posits that Steinbeck incorporates the diverse strands of Transcendentalism and Marxism that are responsible for "affecting or diluting his Naturalistic tendencies," elements that Gibbs again defines in a chiefly biological sense.<sup>76</sup> While *The Grapes of Wrath* contains a range of discursive patterns and forms, they are all closely related to the socioeconomic themes of the text, which traces the causative agents that drive the Joads from their ancestral home and engender their migration to California. This emphasis on identifying the Deterministic forces that limit the range of action available to the migrants situates *The Grapes of Wrath* within the Naturalist tradition, highlighting the need to alter the institutional framework that has contributed to the plight of the poor in order to broaden the scope of human progress. In this context, the narrative attributes considerable agency to working-class characters, who have the ability to improve their living conditions by acting in unison with one another, which demonstrates the capacity for common people to create structures to defend their interests.

*The Grapes of Wrath* has its origins in the conditions facing Dust Bowl migrants, whom Steinbeck discussed in a number of non-fiction works, beginning with “Dubious Battle in California” in September 1936. The conditions facing these individuals originated from the destructive farming practices employed in the Great Plains. When the Sooners settled this area in the 1880s, they extended production to unsustainable levels through mechanized plowing, a procedure that was responsible for eliminating the grasses that kept the topsoil in place; in addition, homesteaders also left their fields bare during the winter with little protection from the elements.<sup>77</sup> These techniques were intensified as a result of rising wheat prices during World War I, which caused growers to expand their undertakings by putting more ground under cultivation, and owners took out mortgages on their property to purchase new machinery in order to maximize profits.<sup>78</sup> During the recession after the war, ranchers increased the scope of their operations and further eroded the soil by placing five million additional acres in the Southern Plains under development between 1925 and 1930.<sup>79</sup> Due to the abundance of produce glutting the market by the end of the decade, net agricultural income plummeted between 1929 and 1932 with the value of cotton falling by more than two thirds and wheat declining by 50%.<sup>80</sup> As a result, many individuals could not meet their payments and lost their holdings, either remaining behind as tenants, who operated 61.2% of the small farms in Oklahoma by 1935, or going elsewhere as 28% of the rural population worked different land each year.<sup>81</sup> These problems were exacerbated by a prolonged drought throughout the 1930s, which engendered severe dust storms that could last from an hour to several days with clouds of dirt as high as eight thousand feet often accompanied by thunder, lightning, and powerful winds. One particular episode in March 1935 carried off twice as much earth as had been dug up during the construction of the Panama Canal. Such occurrences destroyed half of the wheat harvest in Kansas and the entire

grain crop in Nebraska.<sup>82</sup> Since the inhabitants could no longer survive in this region due to poverty, foreclosures, and the lack of rain, between 315,000 and 400,000 people moved to California during the 1930s and sought employment in its agricultural industry.<sup>83</sup>

Steinbeck became acquainted with the struggles of these migrants, all of whom were viewed as Okies regardless of their actual state of origin, through a series that he wrote for the *San Francisco News*, which ran from October 5-12, 1936 and was later collected as *The Harvest Gypsies*. After the publication of *In Dubious Battle*, Steinbeck met the editor of the paper, George West, who asked the author to investigate the conditions facing this group and to examine the progress of the camps that the Resettlement Administration (R. A.), the forerunner to the Farm Security Administration (F. S. A.), had established to aid these individuals.<sup>84</sup> Explaining the purpose of these articles, Steinbeck observed that “we shall try to see how [the migrants] live and what kind of people they are, what their living standard is, what is done for them, and what their problems and needs are,” and he asserted that “while California has been successful in its use of migrant labor, it is gradually building a human structure which will certainly change the state, and may, if handled with the inhumanity and stupidity that have characterized the past, destroy the present system of agriculture in the state.”<sup>85</sup> To conduct the research for this assignment, Steinbeck began touring the Central Valley, interviewing men and women from the Dust Bowl region, and coming into contact with their widespread poverty and desperation, which formed the foundation for *The Harvest Gypsies* and later manifested in *The Grapes of Wrath*. In his travels, Steinbeck visited the Arvin Sanitary Camp, established by the R. A. to offer a model that landowners could emulate, and continued to explore the area with manager Tom Collins, who would serve as the basis for Jim Rawley. The author continued to glean information from his encounters with migratory workers, augmenting these observations

with material from the reports that Collins sent to the F. S. A., and Steinbeck used these resources to further understand the lives and experiences of these people amid their battle to survive in California.<sup>86</sup>

*The Harvest Gypsies* reflects the main themes of *The Grapes of Wrath* and anticipates its pivotal episodes. In his articles, Steinbeck attributes the plight of the itinerant laborforce to the operations of the large landowners, whose ventures “are organized as closely and are as centrally directed in their labor policy as are the industries and shipping, the banking and public utilities,” and the Associated Farmers, which drew its membership from “officials of banks, publishers of newspapers and politicians; and through close association with the State Chamber of Commerce they have interlocking associations with shipowners’ associations, public utilities corporations and transportation companies.”<sup>87</sup> Through this method of organization, coupled with the infiltration of state and local agencies, the growers could shape the nature of agricultural production and dictate the circumstances facing migratory workers. This power was compounded through the ownership of mortgages on small farms, whose inhabitants had no alternative than to adopt policies favorable to large financial institutions, and the organization’s control over local law enforcement.<sup>88</sup> This authority provided the Associated Farmers with the means to suppress labor unrest and closely correlates to the causative agents in *The Grapes of Wrath*. In outlining the consequences of these practices, Steinbeck incorporates some events that later manifest in the book. For instance, the description of the squatters’ encampment parallels that where the Joads stay in Chapter 20, and the discussion of the Arvin Sanitary Camp as an alternative to this squalid atmosphere suggests the presentation of Weedpatch in Chapters 22 and 24. Further, Steinbeck adopts a narrative strategy in the fifth installment that is similar to the one he would ultimately employ in *The Grapes of Wrath*, describing the predicament of one family

and observing that “case histories like it can be found in their thousands,” which evokes the function of the Joads as a representative example of the group.<sup>89</sup> Steinbeck’s summation expresses a central thematic concern in its emphasis that attempts to compel these people “into a peonage of starvation and intimidated despair will be unsuccessful. They can be citizens of the highest type, or they can be an army driven by suffering and hatred to take what they need. On their future treatment will depend which course they will be forced to take.”<sup>90</sup> By tracing how the actions of individuals stem from prevailing economic conditions and the opportunities they afford for development, Steinbeck deemphasizes the agency of the migrants and places the onus on those who preside over the social system to ameliorate the forces they have set in motion.

After the publication of his articles in the *San Francisco News*, Steinbeck embarked on another research trip with Collins in October and November of 1937 to plan a novel about the migrants. They started from Gridley, where Collins was managing another F. S. A camp, and traveled from Stockton to Brawley, stopping wherever these individuals might gather.<sup>91</sup> By the end of the year, Steinbeck had begun to compose a narrative that he titled *The Oklahomans*, although he noted that it was “still a long way from finished.”<sup>92</sup> In an interview with Louis Walther, Steinbeck stated that this new book would focus on the positive character of the men and women who came from the Dust Bowl region, whom Steinbeck thought would have a dramatic impact on California, asserting that their “coming here now is going to change things almost as much as did the coming of the first American settlers” and that the “Californian doesn’t know what he does want. The Oklahoman knows exactly what he wants. He wants a piece of land. And he goes after it and gets it.”<sup>93</sup> However, Steinbeck stopped working on this project during January of 1938, and Robert DeMott doubts that the author made much progress on the manuscript, which has never been discovered.<sup>94</sup> His decision to abandon *The Oklahomans*

coincided with the worsening of conditions among the migratory laborers as a result of significant flooding in Visalia and Nipomo during the winter of 1938. Writing to Elizabeth Otis in February, Steinbeck stated that “I must go over into the interior valleys. There are about five thousand families starving to death over there, not just hungry but actually starving. The government is trying to feed them and get medical attention to them with the fascist group of utilities and banks and huge growers sabotaging the thing all along the line.”<sup>95</sup> This widespread suffering, intensified by the powerful blocking the shipments of food and medicine necessary to sustain the starving workers, highlighted the consequences of consolidating too much power among a narrow segment of the population and demonstrated how economic self-interest could intensify the detrimental effects of natural disasters.

This event led Steinbeck to a new conception of his book about the Dust Bowl refugees, one that also has its origins in the Salinas Lettuce Strike in September of 1936. Writing to George Albee about this event, Steinbeck noted that there “are riots in Salinas and killings in the streets of that dear little town where I was born.”<sup>96</sup> This work stoppage provided another illustration of the Associated Farmers’ strength when the organization assembled local law enforcement and vigilantes drawn from the common people in the community to end the dispute.<sup>97</sup> By the time the pickers were locked out of their sheds and strikebreakers were brought in, the entire city had come under the control of Henry Sanborn, a colonel of infantry in the Army Reserve, who coordinated the growers’ resistance, and the conflict ended on November third with the complete victory of the owners and shippers.<sup>98</sup> In February of 1938, Steinbeck began drafting *L’Affaire Lettuceberg*, a satire aimed at the affluent citizens of Salinas who had taken a leading role in the strike. However, he had abandoned the project by May, informing his

agent and editor, who had already announced the publication of the novel, that he would not be delivering the manuscript. Explaining his rationale, Steinbeck notified Otis that

this book is a bad book and I must get rid of it. It can't be printed. It is bad because it isn't honest. Oh! these incidents all happened but—I'm not telling as much of the truth about them as I know. In satire you have to restrict the picture and I just can't do satire. . . . My whole work drive has been aimed at making people understand each other and then I deliberately write this book the aim of which is to cause hatred through partial understanding.<sup>99</sup>

Steinbeck's decision to destroy the draft is significant in that it communicates the vision animating his fiction, one preoccupied with telling the truth about issues of human importance to an audience that can act to change conditions, which can only be accomplished through an honest approach to the material rather than simply condemning those viewed as the oppressors. This stage marked the development of an alternate conception for the project, one that moved past merely attacking those responsible for injustice to representing the struggles of the migrants and their underlying dignity against overwhelming obstacles.

After burning *L'Affaire Lettuceberg*, Steinbeck started work on *The Grapes of Wrath*, drawing on his previous materials about the migrants' struggles. Steinbeck began the manuscript of May 31, 1938 and wrote approximately six pages a day on oversize ledger paper that held nearly 1,200 words. While drafting, Steinbeck kept a journal that has since been published as *Working Days*, and the entries that comprise this volume suggest that he conceived the structure of the novel early in the composition process. Steinbeck already knew that he would alternate between exposition, which he called "general" chapters, and the main narrative, which he termed "particular" ones, following the journey of one family from Oklahoma to California.<sup>100</sup>

Steinbeck wrote that the former, “although they are highly charged—are nevertheless the repository of all the external information and material.”<sup>101</sup> The diaries also reveal that he envisioned the final tableau of Rose of Sharon nursing the starving man early in the course of drafting as Steinbeck noted that “I went over the whole of the book in my head—fixed on the last scene, huge and symbolic, toward which the whole story moves. And that was a good thing, for it was a reunderstanding of the dignity of the effort and the mightyness [*sic*] of the theme.”<sup>102</sup> Steinbeck reinforced this view of final image as the culminating moment toward which the entire narrative organically flowed when he began Chapter 30 as he refers to the “starving man and the last scene that has been ready so long.”<sup>103</sup> Steinbeck completed his manuscript of 200,000 words by October 26 and revised until mid-December, yet he made very few substantive alterations.<sup>104</sup> Viking published *The Grapes of Wrath* in April 1939, selling 83,000 copies by the middle of May and shipping 430,000 by the end of the year; since then, the work has never been out of print or had an annual sale of less than 50,000.<sup>105</sup>

In its representation of the migrants, *The Grapes of Wrath* advances a view of individuals as victims of seemingly insuperable forces, presenting characters at the mercy of both the natural world and economic pressures.<sup>106</sup> Steinbeck introduces the former through the impressionistic opening paragraphs, which trace the ruination of the soil due to overproduction and drought. The narrator states that to

the red country and part of the gray country of Oklahoma, the last rains came gently, and they did not cut the scarred earth. The plows crossed and recrossed the rivulet marks. The last rains had lifted the corn quickly and scattered weed colonies and grass along the sides of the roads so that the gray country and the dark red country began to disappear under a green cover. . . . The sun flared down



on the growing corn day after day until a line of brown spread along the edge of each green bayonet. The clouds appeared, and went away, and in a while they did not try any more. . . . The surface of the earth crusted, a thin hard crust, and as the sky became pale, so the earth became pale, pink in the red country and white in the gray country.<sup>107</sup>

As Owens observes, this movement from the panoramic first line to a specific focus on the landscape and back reflects the structural principle of the novel as it alternates between a generalized treatment of the conditions facing the migrants and the plight of the Joads, a representative family whose experiences mirror those of the group.<sup>108</sup> Further, this passage illustrates the hostility of nature, which no longer promotes human welfare due to changing weather patterns that diminish the fertility of the earth. Steinbeck develops this point through the imagery he weaves through the chapter, most notably through the “bayonets of the corn” and the sun that is “red as ripe new blood” (3). The corn, which once supplied the farmers with the means to sustain their physical existence by giving them both nourishment and money through sales, now emerges as something antagonistic and foreign, with the “bayonets” implying that the crops now serve a destructive function, a point that the narrator buttresses through the reference to the bloody sun that now brings death rather than life. This state of affairs reinforces the Deterministic quality of the initial section by illustrating the elements that necessitate that movement of families like the Joads, who cannot alter their fates and have no options other than to leave their homes.

The operations of nature are augmented by the representatives of capital, who perceive the earth in terms of the wealth that can be extracted from it, and the structure created by dominant financial institutions comprises the primary Deterministic agent in *The Grapes of*

*Wrath*. Steinbeck develops this point in Chapter 5 through the use of indirect discourse, supplying a commentary on the new landowners' justifications for their practices through a broader disavowal of responsibility. The representative of the banks asserts that they "breathe profits; they eat the interest on money. If they don't get it, they die the way you die without air, without side-meat. It's a sad thing, but it is so" (32). The personification of these entities intimates that they possess an organic existence, yet the underlying logic indicates that these firms sustain themselves by exploiting the efforts of others and consuming the resources of the region. Through the substitution of air and meat for profits and interest, the banker expresses the relationship between the farmers and the current owners of the land with the practices of the latter undermining the ability of the workers to survive. The people will die without access to nourishment; however, the consumption favored by fiduciary establishments prioritizes acquisition rather than the satisfaction of basic needs. Steinbeck echoes Shelgrim's arguments in *The Octopus* when the anonymous speaker asserts that the "bank is something else than men. It happens that every man in a bank hates what the bank does, and yet the bank does it. The bank is something more than men, I tell you. It's the monster. Men made it but they can't control it" (33). While this person claims that these destructive actions result from abstract laws of exchange without any individual agency, he veils the fact that the conditions governing such practices originate from the actions of men as one tenant observes that there must be "some way to stop this. It's not like lightning or earthquakes. We've got a bad thing made by men, and by God that's something we can change" (38). The references to natural disasters highlight that people motivated by economic self-interest are responsible for injustice, which enables the population to challenge the fiscal concerns that often govern the human enterprise, an idea that the narrator reinforces through making this the final line of dialogue in the chapter.

The narrative further highlights the negative effects facilitated by the Deterministic agents' myopic view of the natural world, which reduces it to a mere commodity in the interest of capital accumulation. In developing this idea, the narrator reflects the positions of the owners by noting that they have "got to take cotton quick before the land dies. Then we'll sell the land. Lots of families in the East would like to own a piece of land" (33). This perfunctory presentation of the destruction of the earth suggests that it is a disposable resource to be exploited in order to maximize earnings, and such an assessment does not encourage the use of practices that would enable the survival of the countryside for future generations. The narrator provides another illustration of this point in Chapter 11 when he refers to a man hired to work on acreage now owned by the bank and states that so

easy that the wonder goes out of the work, so efficient that the wonder goes out of the land and the working of it, and with the wonder the deep understanding and the relation. . . . For nitrates are not the land, nor phosphorus and the length of fiber in the cotton is not the land. Carbon is not a man, nor salt nor water nor calcium. He is all these, but he is much more, much more; and the land is so much more than its analysis. (115)

The reduction of the fields to a source of wealth undermines an understanding of their significance, an outlook that negates the history and complexity of the soil in favor of a limited focus on the chemical composition conducive to productivity. The narrator intensifies this perspective by noting that "the machine man, driving a dead tractor on land he does not know and love, understands only chemistry; and he is contemptuous of the land and of himself. When the corrugated iron doors are shut, he goes home, and his home is not the land" (116). The emphasis on the tractor operator's dehumanization reveals the consequences for those aligned

with dominant financial institutions, which results in alienation from others and the natural world itself, a theme that the narrator strengthens through the final clause.

Steinbeck, however, heightens the moral complexity of the novel by locating the deeds of these characters within a broader pattern that reflects the corporate outlook on the soil. In expressing the nature of this relationship, the narrator states that the current inhabitants' fathers "had to kill the Indians and drive them away" (33) and that "Grampa killed Indians, Pa killed snakes for the land" (34). These references indicate that the conditions facing families like the Joads are deeply rooted within the national archetype through the removal of the indigenous population and the seizure of their resources, which makes the migratory workers complicit in the process of expropriation that characterized the founding of the nation.<sup>109</sup> Through such undertakings, these individuals practice on a small scale what the banks and large growers employ on a much grander one. Further, this view of the natural world as a commodity animates the sharecroppers' engagement with their property as economic motives shape their agricultural techniques and create the circumstances that the narrator presents in the first chapter. Steinbeck clarifies this point when the tenants plead for a chance to remain on their land by exclaiming that maybe "the next year will be a good year. God knows how much cotton next year. And with all the wars—God knows what price cotton will bring. . . . Get enough wars and cotton'll hit the ceiling" (32). This emphasis on financial gain, especially profits attendant on widespread destruction and despair, highlights the extent to which capital has formed the perspectives of the small farmers, although they, unlike their affluent counterparts, have no means of bringing about this desired end. This context further situates the impetus for westward migration within a larger system of exploitation, and the integration of the Dust Bowl refugees into this design further

underscores the representation of the Deterministic forces since these people have no alternate course of action.

While these agents shape the perspectives of the migrants, they have a view of the natural world that demonstrates a deeper engagement with the earth as opposed to the purely monetary significance imposed by capital. Muley Graves develops this point through his refusal to leave his family's land after the bank has foreclosed. Reflecting on such practices, he states that

What'd they get so their "margin a profit" was safe? They got Pa dyin' on the ground, an' Joe yelling his first breath, an' me jerkin' like a billy goat under a bush in the night. What'd they get? God knows the land ain't no good. Nobody been able to make a crop for years. But them sons-a-bitches at their desks they jus' chopped folks in two for their margin of profit. They just cut 'em in two.

Place where folks live is them folks. (52)

Despite the fiduciary impetus of their production, the small farmers in Oklahoma perceive their former holdings as records of their pasts and relatives that confer a more natural basis for ownership than the titles at financial institutions since these documents that only have an arbitrary relation to the soil. Muley's precise examples express that this property is inextricably linked to lives of its inhabitants, which he underscores through the final line. The narrator reinforces this idea in Chapter 9 when a group of people attempt to sell their belongings and one man asserts that

you're not buying only junk, you're buying junked lives. And more—you'll see—you're buying bitterness. Buying a plow to plow your own children under, buying the arms and spirits that might have saved you. . . . You're buying a little

girl plaiting the forelocks, taking off her hair ribbon to make bows, standing back,  
head cocked, rubbing the soft noses with her cheek. (86-87)

The residents' actions have endowed the earth with a value that cannot be measured in money since their lives and memories are so closely associated with their possessions, and the resulting failure of these individuals that strips them of their farms and histories colors the disposal of their household items. The anonymous man observes that the "anger of the moment, the thousand pictures, that's us. This land, this red land, is us; the flood years and the dust years and the drought years are us" (87). This further correlation between the conception of the self and the land dramatizes the profound sense of loss tied to the sale of their former homes, which estranges them from the experiences of generations who have worked these same fields amid similar catastrophes. These elements indicate the fundamental conflict with the forces of the Deterministic world as the broader spiritual connection to the environment has been severed by an individualistic and predatory social order.

The narrative further develops the relationship between these small farmers and their land by locating the experiences of these individuals within the cycle of nature. This point emerges through the turtle in Chapter 3, whose attempts to cross the highway are not thwarted by either environmental forces as symbolized through the red ant or mechanical ones as manifest through the truck that tries to force the reptile off the road when he transports the wild oat across the thoroughfare. This episode serves an important structural function by establishing a parallel to the Joads, whose actions are also determined by both natural and unnatural predators. The narrator also develops a series of connections between this creature and the characters introduced over the next few chapters: it has been traveling southwest, which anticipates the Joads' journey to California; Tom picks it up as a present to the family; and it continues in the same direction

when released, a progression that indicates the instinct for survival and steadfast determination behind the migrants' undertakings.<sup>110</sup> These correspondences and the representation of the tortoise's act of transporting the seed suggest that the Joads also serve an important function in the natural world and that they are inextricably bound up within its patterns. Steinbeck returns to this idea in Chapter 11 when the narrator reflects on the abandoned dwellings and states that the "weeds sprang up in front of the doorstep, where they had not been allowed, and grass grew up through the porch boards. The houses were vacant, and a vacant house falls quickly apart. Splits started up the sheathing from the rusted nails. A dust settled on the floors, and only mouse and weasel and cat tracks disturbed it" (116). This description alludes to the sale of the tenants' possessions in Chapter 9 as the articles that once filled the structures, and the memories associated with them, have been removed, leaving the buildings to fall into disrepair and the property to return to its organic state. The reference to the animals, however, hints at the possibility of regeneration by expressing the return of life to the deserted houses. This creation of a nascent community in the structure, although men are no longer present, anticipates the efforts of the central characters in their movement from individual isolation to the unity of the collective.

These elements emerge through the formation of a consciousness that connects the individual to the collective and offers the potential to overcome entrenched power. Jim Casy articulates this theme when he asserts that maybe "all men got one big soul ever'body's a part of" (24).<sup>111</sup> As Frederic I. Carpenter has noted, this opinion situates Casy's outlook within the context of American Transcendentalism and Ralph Waldo Emerson's conception of the Over-Soul, the belief that all humans are joined in one indivisible soul.<sup>112</sup> The former preacher,

however, shifts this formulation from the metaphysical realm to the material one, linking the eradication of the unity of life to economic self-interest and observing that

I got thinkin' how we was holy when we was one thing, an' mankin' was holy when it was one thing. An' it on'y got unholy when one mis'able little fella got the bit in his teeth an' run off his own way, kickin' an' draggin' an' fightin'. Fella like that bust the holiness. But when they're all working together, not one fella for one fella, but one fella kind of harnessed to the whole shebang—that's right, that's holy. (81)

The narrative illustrates this process of removal from the group through the poverty and the lust for possessions that shape the lives of the working class, yet the emphasis on cooperative endeavor advances a strategy for addressing these grievances. The tractor driver in Chapter 5 presents a counterpoint to this idea by stating that he cannot contemplate the consequences of his undertakings because he has “to think of my own kids. Three dollars a day, and it comes every day. . . . You got no call to worry about any other kids than your own. . . . Big shots won't give you three dollars a day if you worry about anything but your three dollars a day” (37). The need for basic survival causes people to place their interests above those of the unit and act in accordance with policies that are ultimately destructive since the man's efforts to support his family prevent others from doing the same by forcing them from the land that once provided their means of subsistence. The narrator further highlights this point when the progeny of the dispossessed eat fried dough and watch the tractor operator consume a Spam sandwich and a “piece of pie branded like an engine part” (36). The contrast between the meals of the children and that of the worker emphasizes his separation from the group as his actions have supplied a



higher standard of living, evident through his store-bought food, yet these references reinforce the artifice of the man's perspective through his association with machine-made products.

While the novel indicates that the unity of life has been fractured by undertakings based on self-interest, concerted action offers the potential to recover this harmony through fostering a shared sense of purpose. Steinbeck develops this movement through Ma Joad, who advances an outlook that encompasses the requirements of the broader human community.<sup>113</sup> This idea manifests when she offers to feed Tom and Casy, whom Pa tells her are strangers in need of a meal, and Steinbeck extends this theme when the matriarch argues in favor of the preacher accompanying them to California by asserting that "I never heerd tell of no Joads or no Hazletts, neither, ever refusin' food an' shelter or a lift on the road to anybody that asked. They's been mean Joads, but never that mean" (102). Ma's willingness to assist others contrasts with the endeavors of the used-car salesmen who fleece the migrants in Chapter 7 in addition to the men who purchase the tenants' belongings for less than their real value in Chapter 9. Her kindness attains a deeper significance given the poverty of the Joads, who barely have the means to sustain themselves on the journey to the West. Ma's compassion situates the fate of each person within that of the collective, which has the potential to enable the survival of the group and restore unity. Chapter 12 conveys another illustration of this premise through the juxtaposition of an individual consciousness with sympathy, which offers an alternative model of development. Steinbeck presents the former through the mechanic who states, "I ain't in business for my health. I'm here a-sellin' tires. I ain't givin' 'em away. I can't help what happens to you. I got to think what happens to me" (120). This selfish position reinforces the perspective responsible for exacerbating the plight of the poor, and this construct is not limited to the financial institutions in Oklahoma but instead stems from the economic impulses that govern

the social order. The narrator, however, provides a counterpoint through the man who picks up a family on the side of the road, towing them to California and feeding them throughout their travels. These deeds parallel Ma's insistence on taking Casy to the West Coast and sharing their resources with him.

The journey to California reinforces the development of this collective consciousness and the benefits of solidarity. The progression manifests through the Joads' interactions with the Wilsons, who offer their mattress to the dying grandfather. Reflecting on the importance of this occurrence, Sarah Wilson states that "We're proud to help. I ain't felt so—safe in a long time. People needs—to help" (141). This response expresses a sense of compassion that the Joads have not received from others prior to this point in the narrative, and the connection between security and assisting others highlights the value of the perspective that emerges when the Wilsons accompany the Joads to the West Coast, sharing resources and enabling the voyage to proceed. The narrator clarifies the significance of this progression in Chapter 14 when he offers a broader commentary on the threat that the union of families like the Joads and Wilsons pose to the economic elite. He notes that in the connection between individuals,

"I lost my land" is changed; a cell is split and from its splitting grows the thing you hate—"We lost *our* land." The danger is here, for two men are not as lonely and perplexed as one. And from this first "we" there grows a still more dangerous thing: "I have a little food" plus "I have none." If from this problem the sum is "We have a little food," the thing is on its way, the movement has direction. . . .

This is the thing to bomb. This is the beginning—from "I" to "we." (151-52)

The reference to the splitting of cells indicates that the shift from "I" to "we" is the organic result of present conditions and that this movement is necessary for survival due to the power that

comes from acting on the basis of their common fate. Steinbeck reinforces this theme when Ma observes that “all we got is the family unbroken. Like a bunch of cows, when the lobos are ranging, stick all together. I ain’t scared while we’re all here, all that’s alive, but I ain’t gonna see us bust up” (169-70). The use of animal imagery highlights the strength that occurs through the operations of the group rather than as isolated men and women, who would become prey for forces that the collective could withstand. The incorporation of the Wilsons into the traveling party, much like the earlier addition of Casy, denotes the expansion of the family to a unit that incorporates the interests of a larger community based on the recognition that the fate of one is inextricably linked to the circumstances facing others.

The Joads’ arrival in the Central Valley places the narrative within the parameters of the American Dream as the natural abundance of this locale evokes the potential for fiscal progress. The owners tell the tenants in Oklahoma, “why don’t you go on west to California? There’s work there and it never gets cold. Why, you can reach out and pick an orange” (34). The emphasis on the plentiful crops contrasts with conditions in the Dust Bowl region and presents California as a land of rebirth as its fertile soil appears to provide the means for financial security or even prosperity. As Owens observes, Steinbeck develops the portrayal of the West through a prominent Eden motif, which, contrary to the religious readings of *The Grapes of Wrath*, situates the family’s movement within a clearly-demarcated economic context, and their desire for renewal focuses less on spiritual aims than broader monetary concerns.<sup>114</sup> Ma reinforces this perspective, exclaiming that “I like to think how nice it’s gonna be, maybe, in California. Never cold. An’ fruit ever’place, an’ people just bein’ in the nicest places, little white houses in among the orange trees” (91). This idyllic vision correlates to conventional ideas of the West as a place

of promise and plenty that affords opportunities to all comers, a point that the narrator reinforces when the Joads enter the Central Valley:

They drove through Tehachapi in the morning glow, and the sun came up behind them, and then—suddenly they saw the great valley below them. . . . The vineyards, the orchards, the great flat valley, green and beautiful, the trees set into rows, and the farm houses. . . . The grain fields golden in the morning, and the willow lines, the eucalyptus trees in rows. . . . The peach trees and walnut groves, and the dark green patches of oranges. And red roofs among the trees, and barns—rich barns. (227)

The narrator's emphasis on such vast resources and produce reflects the material possibilities of the region, which should offer better prospects to the migrant family than the barren ground of their former environment. This passage, however, reveals the illusions that govern the Joads' perceptions of their new home and suggests that their new surroundings will offer a limited chance for mobility since these characters do not possess the ability to share in the wealth of this area.

The reality underlying this idyllic portrayal of California manifests through the handbills that the growers distribute to attract a large supply of laborers in order to decrease wages, which destabilizes the migrants' potential for financial security and creates conditions that pit individuals against one another for limited resources. Regarding the rationale underlying these documents, the ragged man claims that an employment contractor "wants eight hundred men. So he prints up five thousand of them things an' maybe twenty thousan' people sees them. An' maybe two-three thousan' folks gets movin' account a this here han'bill" and that as a result, the "more fellas he can get, an' the hungrier, less he's gonna pay" (189-90). These advertisements

provide a means to exert downward pressure on compensation by inflating the workforce, and the promise of employment was even more likely to engender migration given the extreme poverty facing those in the Dust Bowl region. While Kevin Starr has challenged the accuracy of this representation since no such documents have been found, the empirical foundation for these references seems to have their basis in the reports that Collins assembled for the F. S. A.<sup>115</sup> He referred to the attempts of the management at DiGiorgio Farms to quell a strike by telling employees “that an advertising campaign in the Oklahoma and Arkansas press would bring out, on short notice, hundreds, and probably thousands of wor[k]ers from those states and that those workers would be quite happy to work for the 25¢ per hour scale,” and Collins later asserted that the “threat of Di Georgio [*sic*] to bring to California, drought stricken farmers and sharecroppers from Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas can be taken quite seriously.”<sup>116</sup> Further, the use of circulars to draw transient workers to various parts of the state during harvest season was common practice in the agricultural industry at the time. For instance, the owners of the Durst Ranch advertised jobs throughout California and Nevada, luring 2,700 hundred people to the fields in Wheatland when only about 1,500 positions were available, a course of action that approximates the logic of the handouts in *The Grapes of Wrath*.<sup>117</sup> As such, the leaflets reinforce the operations of the Deterministic agents in the narrative, and these references serve a structural function through introducing the idea that life in California does not accurately reflect the myths ascribed to this locale.

This tension between the potential for prosperity and the harsh reality of the state continues for the remainder of *The Grapes of Wrath*. When the male Joads bathe in the Colorado River, they encounter a boy returning to Oklahoma with his father, who exclaims that California is “a nice country. But she was stole a long time ago. . . . An’ you’ll pass lan’ flat a’ fine with

water thirty feet down, and that lan's laying fallow. But you can't have none of that lan'" (205). The failed promise of the region stems from a concentration of land ownership that limits the ability of the earth to sustain the population, and this point manifests through the reference to the fertile ground left fallow, which anticipates the destruction of oranges to increase prices. The man further asserts that the countryside is "nice to look at, but you can't have none of it. They's a grove of oranges—an' a guy with a gun that got the right to kill you if you touch one. They's a fella, newspaper fella near the coast, got a million acres" (206). This inequity, predicated on the possession of more than one needs while others lack basic necessities, has its foundation in the history of California. Regarding the Americans who settled this area, the narrator states that "such was their hunger for land that they took the land—stole Sutter's land, Guerrero's land, took the grants and broke them up and growled and quarreled over them" (231). The reference to the cancellation of the Mexican-era grants evokes the period immediately following the Gold Rush, which Steinbeck conveys through the reference to Sutter, who owned the property where Marshall first found this precious metal in 1848. The narrator also presents the alternate conception of the environment that emerged during this period, noting that those who commandeered resources lost their appreciation for the natural world: "Crops were reckoned in dollars, and land was valued by principal plus interest, and crops were bought and sold before they were planted" (231). This description reflects the changing formulation of the American Dream after the discovery of gold with the focus on amassing fortunes through chance rather than effort and initiative. Further, the narrator observes that as the farms became bigger, "the owners no longer worked on their farms. They farmed on paper; and they forgot the land, the smell, the feel of it, and remembered only that they owned it, remembered only what they gained and lost by it" (232). This passage establishes the growers in California as the counterparts to

the banks in Oklahoma since both view the earth through the calculus of the marketplace, negating any connection between the soil and the lives of its residents.

This concentration of resources facilitates the exploitation of the migrants and provides them with few opportunities for development, which expresses the need to alter the social order that has generated such consequences. The narrator observes that the Dust Bowl refugees “streamed over the mountains, hungry and restless—restless as ants, scurrying to find work to do—to lift, to push, to pull, to pick, to cut—anything, any burden to bear, for food. The kids are hungry. We got no place to live. Like ants scurrying for work, for food, and most of all, for land” (233). The references to these individuals as ants evokes their dehumanization since they are now governed by their animal instincts for survival, and the narrator situates this process within a socioeconomic arrangement that ties the wealth of the growers to the poverty of the workers. The narrator states that

the great owners, who must lose their land in an upheaval, the great owners with access to history, with eyes to read to read history and to know this great fact: when property accumulates in too few hands it is taken away. And that companion fact: when a majority of the people are hungry and cold they will take by force what they need. And the little screaming fact that sounds all through history: repression works only to strengthen and knit the repressed. (238)

While this passage serves as a warning to the large landowners responsible for the plight of the poor, the narrator’s clinical, dispassionate tone diagnoses the causes of injustice with an eye toward ameliorating this situation and reflects the reformist strain of Naturalist fiction. Rather than cautioning against such change, the narrator establishes this development as the logical

outgrowth of poverty and desperation. While the powerful immediately benefit from such practices, the narrator indicates that

the companies, the banks worked at their own doom and they did not know it. The fields were fruitful, and the starving men moved on the roads. The granaries were full and the children of the poor grew up rachitic, and the pustules of pellagra swelled on their sides. The great companies did not know that the line between hunger and anger is a thin line. And money that might have gone to wages went for gas, for guns, for agents and spies, for blacklists, for drilling. (284)

By hoarding the abundant crops of California and by channeling funds that could alleviate preventable suffering into weaponry to further repress labor, the owners facilitate conditions that destabilize the economic system. This context signifies that this emphasis on profit will ultimately engender widespread animosity which will produce the circumstances necessary for the transformation of society.

The narrator highlights this need for social change when the Joads arrive at the squatters' camp in Chapter 20, which reinforces the growers' control over the economic activity in the region. The landowners have the ability to pit laborers against one another by engendering a surplus of pickers who compete for the few available positions and depress wages for all. The young man tells Tom that the ranchers "get them men for what they wanta pay. If ya don' wanta take what they pay, goddamn it, they's a thousand men waitin' for your job. So ya pick, an' ya pick and then she's done" (246). Due to the influx of the people, individuals must fight amongst themselves for limited resources, and the self-interest of the owners conflicts with the workers' ability to subsist. Tom asserts that "this ain't no lan' of milk and honey like the preachers say. They's a mean thing here. The folks here is scared of us people comin' west; an so' they got the



cops out tryin' to scare us back" (251). The fear exhibited by both the migrants and the Californians conveys the fundamental commonality of their experiences since they are informed by the same financial pressures that prevent both the poor and middle class from improving their circumstances, conditions that allow for widespread poverty in a land of plenty. However, Ma's interactions with the children at the end of the chapter and her ultimate decision to provide them with some of the family's meager food are a counterpoint to the forces of the Deterministic world through the further expansion of a communal perspective.

Steinbeck offers a further representation of this point through the undertakings of Floyd, who models the activism that Tom will eventually adopt at the conclusion of *The Grapes of Wrath*. When Floyd challenges the labor contractor to stipulate in writing the compensation for prospective employees, the deputies allied with the wealthy try to detain this worker, which leads to a woman being badly injured while Tom and Casy attempt to help Floyd evade almost certain arrest.<sup>118</sup> This episode reinforces the landowners' use of violence to punish disobedience but also the need for people to work together in order to address the social conditions that contribute to such outcomes. Casy develops this contention when he takes the blame for Tom attacking the police officer and observes that "I got no kids. They'll jus' put me in jail, an' I ain't doing nothin' but set around. . . . If you mess in this your whole fambly, all your folks, gonna get in trouble" (265-66). Through this self-sacrifice, Casy places the concerns of others over his own, echoing the movement toward a collective consciousness. The narrator extends this theme through a reference to Weedpatch, which connects the growth of the individual to that of group in pursuit of common aspirations. Discussing the locale where the Joads will get a brief reprieve from their suffering, Floyd states that the administrators treat "ya like a man 'stead of a dog" (271). Tom heightens the contrast between the camp and the world outside when he notes that

the deputies are “workin’ away at our spirits. They’re a-tryin’ to make us cringe an’ crawl like a whipped bitch. They tryin’ to break us” (278). By operating outside the parameters of the growers, the collective structure of self-governance at Weedpatch presents the people with the means to impact the decisions that affect their lives and restore their dignity.

The following interchapter underscores the need for such structures by illustrating the repressive forces arrayed against the poor, and the practices of those who oppose the migrants despite their common interests present the negative implications of the phalanx. The narrator observes that “the hostility changed them, welded them, united them—hostility that made the little towns group and arm as though to repel an invader, squads with pick handles, clerks and storekeepers with shotguns, guarding the world against their own people” (282). While the deprivation and exploitation of the Dust Bowl refugees provide the means for the recognition of their shared predicament, the narrator indicates that this movement is not graven in stone since the imperatives of capital pervade all levels of the social order. Within this context, many Californians, who are only slightly removed from the fate of the impoverished, operate in accordance with the landowners. This tendency, which allows the current inhabitants to view the recent arrivals as creatures who do not merit the treatment accorded to human beings, emerges through the demonization of the migratory workers.<sup>119</sup> The narrator conveys this point when he adopts the perspectives of those aligned with the growers: “Okies are dirty and ignorant. They’re degenerate, sexual maniacs. These goddamned Okies are thieves. They’ll steal anything. They’ve got no sense of property rights” (283). These arbitrary differences allow the owners to divide potential allies by causing one group to perceive the others as invaders coming to jeopardize what the former have attained or hope to achieve, which enables their mutual adversary to plunder with impunity. The narrator reinforces this idea when he asserts that the

vigilantes think they “own the country. We can’t let these Okies get out of hand. And the men who were armed did not own the land, but they thought they did. And the clerks who drilled at night owned nothing, and the little storekeepers possessed only a drawerful of debts” (283). The contrast between the exalted estimation of their positions and the reality of their situations illustrates that the inequitable division of resources adversely affects those who believe that they benefit from the present system. Since they seem to gain from the smooth operation of society, they are less likely to unite against those who condition the plight of both these small tradesmen and the migrants.

The chapters set in Weedpatch convey an alternative to this scenario and also offer a clear expression of what people can accomplish together. Steinbeck discussed the inspiration for this locale, the Arvin Sanitary Camp, in his fourth article for the *San Francisco News*, asserting that “the intent of management has been to restore the dignity and decency that had been kicked out of the migrants by their intolerable mode of life,” a pattern of existence that “does reduce his responsibility and does make him a sullen outcast who will strike at our Government in any way that occurs to him.”<sup>120</sup> This description posits a model of organization that challenges the broader inequities that have shaped the migrants’ predicament. This explanation reflects the structural function of Weedpatch in *The Grapes of Wrath* as a further movement away from the individual consciousness of the landowners. Weedpatch also offers basic services to the downtrodden, giving them access to sanitary facilities, childcare, and health care, while also engendering a sense of solidarity. This development occurs through the communal use of resources when the family in the tent next to the Joads splits their meager breakfast with Tom, a parallel to Ma sharing food with the children at the Hooverville. The family also helps Tom find a job, yet this episode highlights the distinction between Weedpatch and dominant society

through the material tensions that govern the men's employer. He explains a pay cut by stating that "do you know who runs the Farmers' Association? I'll tell you. The Bank of the West. That bank owns most of this valley, and it's got paper on everything it don't own. So last night the member from the bank told me, 'You're paying thirty cents an hour. You'd better cut it down to twenty-five. . . . You going to need the usual amount for a crop loan next year?'" (294-95). The bank pressure on small farmers to depress wages reinforces the constraints of the Deterministic world by supplying a further illustration of the economic control over the region.

Despite this shortcoming, Weedpatch offers a framework for the rediscovery of the migrants' common humanity and a means for self-preservation. The democratic structure of this setting and management's emphasis on providing basic services transform its inhabitants. One tenant asserts that the "folks in the camp are getting used to being treated like humans. When they go back to the squatters' camps they'll be hard to handle" (296). While the government camp cannot address the inequality that conditions the plight of the poor, this location does establish a model for organization and cooperation that could potentially lead to meaningful social change if these practices were enacted on a broader scale. Developing the importance of Weedpatch, Ma states that the growers and their functionaries

done somepin to us. Ever' time they come seemed like they was a-whippin' me—all of us. An' in Needles, that police. He done somepin to me, made me feel mean. Made me feel ashamed. An' now I ain't ashamed. These folks is our folks—is our folks. An' that manager, he come an' set an' drank coffee, an' he says, "Mrs. Joad" this, an' "Mrs. Joad" that—an' "How you getting' on, Mrs. Joad?" . . . Why, I feel like people again. (307)

Ma's statements illustrate the role of this locale in the restoration of her own value and dignity, which poses a threat to the owners: the return of these characteristics and the belief that the workers should be regarded as men and women rather than beasts make them less likely to tolerate their subordination. The narrator develops this idea when the police attempt to provoke a riot during the dance, yet the residents prevent this outcome through a unified response that maintains order. By forming committees to intercept the interlopers and refraining from the acts of violence that would enable law enforcement to enter Weedpatch, the migrants demonstrate their capacity to manage their own affairs. One man underscores this point when he tells a gatecrasher, "don't knife your own folks. We're tryin' to get along, havin' fun an' keepin' order. Don't tear all that down. Jes' think about it. You're jes' harmin' yourself" (344). This focus on the concerns of the individual separate from those of the group reinforces the ability of capital to pit natural allies against one another, which undermines the possibility for an alteration of the social order.

Chapter 25 reiterates the need for such development through illustrating the consequences wrought by the central Deterministic agents and juxtaposing their practices against the material possibilities of California. The repeated references to spring throughout this interchapter signify the potential for rebirth, a progression tied to the cycle of the natural world with grapes "swelling from the old gnarled vines" and produce so heavy that "the limbs bend gradually under the fruit" (346). These crops promise the ability to sustain the residents, and the reference to the hills as "round and soft as breasts" evokes the benevolent role of the countryside in nursing the migrants back to health, thereby anticipating Rose of Sharon's actions at the end of the novel (346). This abundance is further intensified by scientific and technological advances that make it possible for people to transform "the world with their knowledge," causing

“short, lean wheat” to become “big and productive” and making “little sour apples . . . large and sweet” (347). However, men also undermine the capacity of the earth to support the population by allowing these commodities to decay in order to keep prices high. The narrator states that those “who can graft the trees and make the seed fertile and big can find no way to let the hungry people eat their produce. Men who have created new fruits in the world cannot create a system whereby their fruits may be eaten. And the failure hangs over the state like a great sorrow” (348). The inability to direct these innovations to satisfying hunger limits the agency of the impoverished and denotes that their plight stems from institutional forces which constrain the range of opportunities. The narrator reinforces this theme through the burning of oranges, asserting that there

is a crime here that goes beyond denunciation. There is a sorrow here the weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that topples all our success. The fertile earth, the straight tree rows, the sturdy trunks, and the ripe fruit. And children dying of pellagra must die because a profit cannot be taken from an orange. And coroners must fill in the certificates—died of malnutrition—because the food must rot, must be forced to rot. (349)

This indictment of the misuse of resources highlights the inadequacy of a system that privileges capital accumulation over basic human requirements and indicates the necessity of an alternate economic model that would prevent such predictable and unnecessary tragedies.

The Joads’ departure from Weedpatch further situates the narrative within the contours of the national success story. When Ma observes the fertile landscape on the way to the Hooper Ranch, she states that “I ain’t really felt so good for a long time. . . . ‘F we pick plenty peaches, we might get a house, pay rent even, for a couple months. We got to have a house” (366). This

perspective reflects a return to her past illusions by alluding to the rationale underlying the journey to California. The narrator reiterates the forces that will prevent the Joads' progress when they become strikebreakers, aligning themselves with capital in the interest of basic survival. The narrator buttresses this point through the reintroduction of Casy, whose new vocation as a labor leader contrasts with undertakings of the Joads, who have deviated from a collective consciousness due to economic necessity. Explaining why they are willing to cross a picket line, Tom notes that that "tonight we had meat. Not much, but we had it. Think Pa's gonna give up his meat on account a other fellas? An' Rosasharn oughta get milk. Think Ma gonna wanta starve that baby jus' 'cause a bunch of fellas is yellin' outside a gate" (384). Tom's focus on the Joads' requirements illustrates the deprivation that perpetuates inequality, reinforces arbitrary distinctions among individuals, and minimizes the likelihood that they will operate in concert with their fellows.

This tension between the individual and the group frames the murder of Casy and Tom's resultant killing of the deputy, events that further develop the consequences of the present course of policy and highlight the need for change. Explaining the rationale of the strike, Casy states that the fruit pickers walked off their jobs after management cut compensation in half. The decision to offer the replacement workers a higher wage that will decrease to pre-strike levels after the company wins the dispute reinforces how the working class is divided by capital to perpetuate their control. Casy suggests this function by telling the officers, "you don' know what you're doin.' You're helpin' to starve kids" (386). His demise provides another instance of the repression against the migrants and reiterates the consequences of challenging structures of power, yet the final sentence articulates the necessity of such undertakings even when they come at such a tremendous cost. Further, the emphasis on the limited responsibility of all

involved, which stems from their positions in the socioeconomic hierarchy, parallels Tom's slaying of the deputy. Describing the crime, the narrator states that Tom "wrenched the club free. The first time he knew that he had missed and struck a shoulder, but the second time his crushing blow found the head, and as the heavy man sunk down, three more blows found his head" (386). This focus on the mechanical nature of the homicide, one that stresses Tom's physical actions rather than the cognitive processes that gave rise to them, amplifies his lack of agency. He reinforces this point when he tells Ma, "I didn' know what I was a-doin', no more'n when you take a breath" (392). The implication of this scene is that the nature of an economic arrangement that privileges the prerogatives of the affluent will engender widespread dissatisfaction that could culminate in violence when people have no other means to protect their interests.

The concluding sequence of *The Grapes of Wrath* reinforces the central themes of the narrative through Tom's burgeoning political awareness, which posits the promise for renewal through challenging the Deterministic world. His separation from his family, intensified by his refusal to take Ma's money, shows that he has learned the lessons from Casy's teachings, shifting from immediate concerns of the individual to the interests of the people as a whole. Tom asserts that "I been thinkin' a hell of a lot, thinkin' about our people livin' like pigs, an' the good rich lan' layin' fallow, or maybe one fella with a million acres, while a hunderd thousan' good farmers is starvin'. An' I been wonderin' if all our folks got together an' yelled, like them fellas yelled, only a few of 'em at the Hooper ranch—" (419). Tom connects his impulses to the structure of a society that undermines the basic humanity of the poor. Describing his conception of such undertakings, Tom states that wherever "they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever there's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I'll be in the



way guys yell when they're mad an' I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an' they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build—why, I'll be there" (419). Tom's pronouncements, through their catalogue of specific acts of injustice, reiterate the necessity of creating a social order conducive to the migrants' interests, and these assertions reflect a change in consciousness predicated on recognizing the essential unity undermined by exploitative practices.

Steinbeck juxtaposes Tom's transformation with the further deterioration of the family's circumstances as a result of the floods that undermine the Joads' fleeting moment of financial security. The narrator contextualizes this development in Chapter 27, which foreshadows the impermanence of the Joads' apparent gains. An anonymous speaker states, "try for God's sake ta save a little money! Winter's comin' fast. They ain't no work at all in California in the winter" (408). The cyclical character of labor compounds the dilemma of the agricultural workers, whose wages do not allow them to save money for the months when their services are not needed. These hardships are compounded by the hostility of the natural world, a representation that Steinbeck based on widespread flooding in Visalia and Nipomo during February of 1938. Describing conditions in the area, Steinbeck wrote that "four thousand families, drowned out of their tents are really starving to death. . . . The locals are fighting the government bringing in food and medicine. I'm going to try to break the story hard enough so that food and drugs can get moving. Shame and a hatred of publicity will do the job to the miserable local bankers."<sup>121</sup> This event exacerbated the plight of the migrants, and the inclusion of this incident in *The Grapes of Wrath* expresses a return to the enmity of nature that frames the initial chapters, with the additional critique that the owners refuse to take the action necessary to assist the victims. The narrator notes that "the comfortable people in tight houses felt pity at

first, and then distaste, and finally hatred for migrant people” (434). This perspective provides a parallel illustration of the individualistic consciousness that impedes progress, further dramatizing the consequences of this outlook.

The final chapter underscores the benefits of cooperation as a means of combating the restrictions of the Deterministic world. When the men attempt to build a dam to prevent the flood waters from entering the box car while Rose of Sharon is in labor, the narrator states that they

heaped the mud up in a long embankment, and those who had no shovels cut live willow whips and wove them into a mat and kicked them into the bank. Over the men came a fury of work, a fury of battle. When one man dropped the shovel, another took it up. . . . They were tired now, and the shovels moved more slowly. And the stream rose slowly. It edged above the place where the first dirt had been thrown” (441).

These efforts to keep the deluge at bay suggest the need for individuals to operate as a unit to forestall hostile forces, even in the face of a certain defeat. These efforts are significant in that the men are not building the levee for themselves; instead, they are working past the point of exhaustion for Rose of Sharon, who is no condition to protect herself. Ma clarifies the value underlying such developments when she observes that once “the fambly was fust. It ain’t so now. It’s anybody. Worse off we get, the more we got to do” (445). The closing tableau of Rose of Sharon nursing the starving man provides a concrete illustration of this theme and indicates that the poor have an obligation to their class since no one else will offer assistance.<sup>122</sup> The failure of society to tend to the interests of those who cannot defend themselves manifests through Rose of Sharon’s stillborn child, who exemplifies the consequences engendered by

greed. Her actions at the end of the novel, however, evoke the potential for renewal in the aftermath of the devastation through adaptations to environment in the context of the collective organism. This development reflects the alteration of the family dynamic to incorporate the requirements of the human community, which is reinforced by the fact that Rose or Sharon feeds a stranger.

The growth of Tom and Rose or Sharon reflects the attributes necessary to address the consequences engendered by economic self-interest, and the actions of these characters mirror the dominant impulses underlying Steinbeck's broader project as a novelist. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, he asserted that the

writer is delegated to declare and to celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit—for gallantry in defeat, for courage, compassion, and love. In the endless war against weakness and despair, these are the bright rally flags of hope and of emulation. I hold that a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectibility of man has no dedication nor any membership in literature.<sup>123</sup>

The principals in *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath* operate in this context as they demonstrate tremendous courage in their struggles against seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Steinbeck, however, indicates that these forces ultimately can be defeated through a return to the values that exemplify man's "greatness of heart and spirit," ideals that provide a more equitable basis for existence than the financial concerns that too often govern individual behavior. These representations, like that of Annixter in *The Octopus*, signify that a meaningful social transformation begins with a change in consciousness and that the application of these insights to lived experience portends a greater range of development for the working class.

## Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Michael J. Meyer, "Misnomers and Misunderstandings: Tenets of Naturalism in the Work of John Steinbeck," in *John Steinbeck: A Centennial Tribute*, ed. Mashkoo Ali Syed (Jaipur: Surabhi Publications, 2004), 167

<sup>2</sup> Donald Pizer, "John Steinbeck and American Naturalism," *Steinbeck Quarterly* 9 (1976): 12. For further discussions of Steinbeck in the context of American Naturalism, see Woodburn O. Ross, "John Steinbeck: Naturalism's Priest," *College English* 10, no. 8 (1949): 432-38; Frederick Bracher, "John Steinbeck and the Biological View of Man," in *Steinbeck and his Critics: A Record of Twenty-Five Years*, ed. E. W. Tedlock and C. V. Wicker (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1957), 183-96; Peter Copek, "Steinbeck's Naturalism?" *Steinbeck Quarterly* 9 (1976): 9-12; and Richard E. Hart, "Steinbeck on Man and Nature: A Philosophical Reflection," in *Steinbeck and the Environment: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Susan F. Beegel, Susan Shillinglaw, and Wesley N. Tiffney, Jr. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 43-54.

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion of the relationship between Steinbeck and Ricketts, see Richard Astro, *John Steinbeck and Edward F. Ricketts: The Shaping of a Novelist* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1973).

<sup>4</sup> Bracher, 663.

<sup>5</sup> John Steinbeck and Edward F. Ricketts, *Sea of Cortez: A Leisurely Journal of Travel and Research* (1941; repr., Mount Vernon: Paul P. Appel, 1989), 135. While this formulation has been commonly associated with Steinbeck, non-teleological thinking is actually the philosophy of his collaborator. As Richard Astro observes, the Easter Sermon in *The Sea of Cortez* comes almost verbatim from Ricketts's unpublished writings (14). As such, these ideas are not

necessarily indicative of Steinbeck's position toward his material as he devoted considerable attention to basic principles of causation and attributed blame for social injustice, positions that do not suggest objective detachment.

<sup>6</sup> Louis Owens, *John Steinbeck's Re-Vision of America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> John Steinbeck, "Starvation under the Orange Trees," *Monterey Trader* (15 April 1938): 1, 4; repr. in John Steinbeck, *America and Americans and Selected Nonfiction*, ed. Susan Shillinglaw and Jackson J. Benson (New York: Penguin, 2002), 83.

<sup>8</sup> John Steinbeck, "Dubious Battle in California," *The Nation* (12 September 1936): 304.

<sup>9</sup> John Steinbeck, "I Am a Revolutionary," in *America and Americans*, 89.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in *Working Days: The Journals of "The Grapes of Wrath," 1938-1941*, ed. Robert DeMott (New York: Penguin, 1933), 152.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Jackson J. Benson, *The True Adventures of John Steinbeck, Writer* (New York: Penguin, 1984), 386.

<sup>12</sup> John Steinbeck to Carlton A. Sheffield, 21 June 1933, in *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*, ed. Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten (New York: Penguin, 1989), 74.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Astro, 65.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Henry Jackson, "Tortilla Flat Author Produces Proletarian Novel of Sound Worth," *San Francisco Chronicle* (1 January 1936): 4; repr. in *John Steinbeck: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., Jesse S. Crisler, and Susan Shillinglaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 52; and Wilbur Needham, "California's Radicals," *Los Angeles Times* (2 February 1936): 4; repr. in *John Steinbeck: The Contemporary Reviews*, 59.

<sup>15</sup> Warren French, *John Steinbeck* (Boston: Twayne, 1975), 76; and Peter Lisca, *The Wide World of John Steinbeck* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1958), 66.

<sup>16</sup> For further discussion of historical sources of *In Dubious Battle*, see Jackson J. Benson and Anne Loftis, "John Steinbeck and Farm Labor Unionization: The Background of *In Dubious Battle*," *American Literature* 52 (1980): 194-223. Benson and Loftis identify the labor struggles that Steinbeck used as the basis for his novel, yet they do not present this information in the context of an interpretation of the novel. For readings of *In Dubious Battle* that examine its economic themes, see Jerry W. Wilson, "*In Dubious Battle*: Engagement in Collectivity," *Steinbeck Quarterly* 13 (1980): 31-42; Owens, 89-100; John H. Timmerman, *John Steinbeck's Fiction: The Aesthetics of the Road Taken* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 75-94; and Richard S. Pressman, "Individualists or Collectivists?: Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle* and Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not*," *Steinbeck Quarterly* 25 (1992): 119-33. Timmerman revisits the ground covered by Benson and Loftis, discussing the strike as the foundation for a broader exploration of the tension between individual freedom and responsibility to the collective. By contrast, Pressman and Wilson question Steinbeck's seemingly objective treatment of his work stoppage in the book, analyzing the favorable representation of the organizers and workers in the context of Steinbeck's sympathy for the plight of agricultural labor.

<sup>17</sup> For discussions of the C. A. W. I. U., see Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field* (1935; repr., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 214-29; and Cletus E. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers, 1870-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 128-65.

<sup>18</sup> “Tagus Strike Not Expected to be Serious,” *Visalia Times-Delta* (12 August 1933): 1; and Daniel, 157.

<sup>19</sup> “Statewide Walkout in Orchards Threatened by Strikers Unless Growers Meet Wage Demands,” *Visalia Times-Delta* (18 August 1933): 1; and “NRA to Aid Rolph Settle Strike,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (17 August 1933): 1.

<sup>20</sup> “NRA to Aid Rolph Settle Farm Strike,” 1; and “Walkout Averted As New Price Set for Field Labor,” *Visalia Times-Delta* (19 August 1933): 1.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel, 159.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel, 179.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel, 180.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel, 184, 194.

<sup>25</sup> “4 Slain in State Strike,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (11 October 1933): 1, 9.

<sup>26</sup> “75 Cent Rate Fixed by Commission,” *Visalia Times-Delta* (23 October 1933): 1.

<sup>27</sup> “Cotton Strikers Defy U. S.!” *San Francisco Chronicle* (26 October 1933): 1; and “Cotton Strikers Capitulate Row,” *Visalia Times-Delta* (27 October 1933): 4.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Harry Thornton Moore, *The Novels of John Steinbeck: A First Critical Study* (Chicago: Normandie House, 1939), 102.

<sup>29</sup> Benson and Loftis, 202.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Lisca, 113.

<sup>31</sup> Benson and Loftis, 200.

<sup>32</sup> Jay Parini, *John Steinbeck: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), 151.

<sup>33</sup> John Steinbeck to George Albee, 15 January 1935, *A Life in Letters*, 98.

<sup>34</sup> Steinbeck to Albee, *A Life in Letters*, 98.

<sup>35</sup> John Steinbeck to Mavis McIntosh, 4 February 1935, *A Life in Letters*, 105.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Parini, 154.

<sup>37</sup> John Steinbeck to Mavis McIntosh, April 1935, *A Life in Letters*, 107.

<sup>38</sup> Steinbeck to McIntosh, *A Life in Letters*, 108.

<sup>39</sup> Fred T. Marsh, “*In Dubious Battle* and Other Recent Works of Fiction,” *New York Times Book Review* 85 (2 February 1936), 7; repr. in *John Steinbeck: The Contemporary Reviews*, 60; and Harry Thornton Moore, “Though the Field Be Lost,” *New Republic* 86 (19 February 1936), 54; repr. in *John Steinbeck: The Contemporary Reviews*, 63-64.

<sup>40</sup> Allen Shepherd, “On the Dubiousness of Steinbeck’s *In Dubious Battle*,” *NMAL* 2, no. 2 (1978): item 19; and Abby H. P. Werlock, “Looking at Lisa: The Function of the Feminine in Steinbeck’s *In Dubious Battle*,” in *John Steinbeck: The Years of Greatness, 1936-1939*, ed. Tetsumaro Hiyashi (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993): 53. For a discussion of the connections between *Paradise Lost* and *In Dubious Battle*, see Joseph Fontenrose, *John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963), 42-53.

<sup>41</sup> Owens, 93.

<sup>42</sup> John Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle* (1936; repr., New York: Bantam, 1972), 121. All further quotations from this edition will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>43</sup> As many critics have noted, Steinbeck deviated considerably from his source material in his representation of the strikers. While the majority of the workers in the disputes both at the Tagus Ranch and in the cotton fields were Mexican, all of Steinbeck’s characters are white. Benson and Loftis speculate that Steinbeck changed the ethnic composition of the labor force because racial “differences, even the presence of more than one ethnic group, would complicate the picture and detract from his themes” (210). Owens agrees with this assessment, contending



that the introduction of the role of played by minorities and women “would have complicated the simple picture of group-man he wished to show, and to have introduced the complexities of race and gender would have blurred the single focus he sought” (“Writing in Costume: The Missing Voices of *In Dubious Battle*,” in *John Steinbeck: The Years of Greatness*, 86).

<sup>44</sup> Daniel, 180.

<sup>45</sup> Daniel, 157.

<sup>46</sup> “State Labor War Spreading; Strike Affects 20,000,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (10 October 1933): 1.

<sup>47</sup> Benson and Loftis, 211.

<sup>48</sup> “Cotton Strikers Capitulate Row,” 6.

<sup>49</sup> “State Labor War Spreading,” 13.

<sup>50</sup> “Infant Starves in Strike Camp,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (11 October 1933): 9.

<sup>51</sup> Ella Winter, *And Not to Yield: An Autobiography* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1963), 196-97.

<sup>52</sup> “NRA to Aid Rolph Settle Farm Strike,” 6.

<sup>53</sup> “Police Dump Household Goods of Strikers,” *Visalia Times-Delta* (15 August 1933): 1.

<sup>54</sup> “NRA to AID Rolph Settle Farm Strike,” 6.

<sup>55</sup> “Wave of Unrest among Workers Halts Agriculture,” *Visalia Times-Delta* (10 October 1933): 6.

<sup>56</sup> “Martial Law Call Hinted in Cotton Strike,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (21 October 1933): 11.

<sup>57</sup> “State Labor War Spreading,” 1. For further discussion of the practices embraced by the vigilantes and growers, see “Vigilantes Rout Strikers in Fight; Cotton Area Arms,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (9 October 1933): 1. The correspondent reported a clash between workers and vigilantes, and he also described one attempt to force strikers out of the area: “shooing strikers before them like so many sheep, the farmers, dominating the situation because of their bristling guns, ran their virtual prisoners down the highway for a distance of some fifteen miles. Many of the strikers were afoot and were kept on the run” (11).

<sup>58</sup> “Strikers Demand Murder Charge,” *Visalia Times-Delta* (11 October 1933): 1; “Grand Jury to Consider Pixley Cotton Rioting,” *Visalia Times-Delta* (11 October 1933): 6; and “4 Slain in State Strike Riots,” 1.

<sup>59</sup> “Strikers Demand Murder Charge,” 1; and “4 Slain in State Strike Riots,” 1.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in “As California Editors View Cotton Strike Situation,” *Visalia Times-Delta* (12 October 1933): 2.

<sup>61</sup> “Martial Law Faces Cotton Strike Area,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (15 October 1933): 3; and “Strikers Refuse to Return to Work,” *Visalia Times-Delta* (16 October 1933): 6.

<sup>62</sup> For discussions of the role of the Phalanx in the novel, see Lisca, 118-21; Fontenrose, 45-46; Astro, 124-25; and Howard Levant, *The Novels of John Steinbeck* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974), 79-82.

<sup>63</sup> “Creel May Take Personal Charge in Cotton Strike,” *Visalia Times-Delta* (17 October 1933): 6.

<sup>64</sup> “Maintain Order in the Strike Area,” *Visalia Times-Delta* (24 October 1933): 6.

<sup>65</sup> “Maintain Order in the Strike Area,” 6; and “Starving Strikers to be Fed,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (13 October 1933): 10.

<sup>66</sup> For criticisms of Mac, see Anthony F. R. Palmieri, “*In Dubious Battle: A Portrait in Pessimism*,” *RE: Artes Liberales* 3, no. 1 (1976): 61-71; Lisca, 124-25; Timmerman, 85-94; and Werlock, 53-54. Lisca asserts that “Mac’s actions make it increasingly evident that he is exploiting the workers for party agitation rather than helping them” (125), and Palmieri refers to this character as “a cold-blooded opportunist who cares nothing for his fellow men as individual human beings” (65). Timmerman extends these arguments by stating that “one wonders what difference there is between Mac and the growers themselves. Both have their own, separate ends, but the means hardly differ at all” (87), whereas Werlock examines the organizer in relation to Lisa, who “becomes the first of many individuals Mac views as useful objects; as such she illuminates Mac’s inhumanity” (54). For a contrasting argument, see Linda Ray Pratt, “In Defense of Mac’s Dubious Battle,” *Steinbeck Quarterly* 10 (1977): 36-44; and Wilson, 38-42.

<sup>67</sup> Fontenrose asserts that Doc Burton is Steinbeck’s “non-teleological spokesman” (53), Lisca argues that this character provides “an objective chorus” and possesses an outlook that “is very close to Steinbeck’s (126-27), Shepherd contends that Burton speaks with “authorial power” (19), and Owens opines that “Doc is the spokesman for Steinbeck’s point of view in this novel; his detached, intellectual position of noncommitment mirrors the novelist’s relationship to his materials” (96). Such interpretations do not take into account how Steinbeck undermines Doc’s perspective and illustrates that his emphasis on objectivity prevents any meaningful engagement with the cause of labor, which produces a profound sense of alienation. For readings that examine the problematic representation of Doc, see Levant, 83-87; Pratt, 42-44; Wilson, 35-38; and Barry Sarchett, “*In Dubious Battle: A Revaluation*,” *Steinbeck Quarterly* 13 (1980): 91-95.

<sup>68</sup> For further discussion of this point, see Owens, 97-99.

<sup>69</sup> Lisca, 122; Howard Levant, "The Unity of *In Dubious Battle*: Violence and Dehumanization," *Modern Fiction Studies* 11 (1965): 25; and Alan Henry Rose, "Steinbeck and the Complexity of the Self in *In Dubious Battle*," *Steinbeck Quarterly* 9 (1976):17-18. For a contrasting view, see Sarchett, 89-90.

<sup>70</sup> McWilliams, 224-26.

<sup>71</sup> For discussions of the San Francisco General Strike of 1934, see Mike Quin, *The Big Strike* (New York: International Publishers, 1979); David F. Selvin, *A Terrible Anger: The 1934 Waterfront and General Strikes in Francisco* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996); and Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1997), 170-75.

<sup>72</sup> Daniel, 249-57; McWilliams, 226-28.

<sup>73</sup> McWilliams, 240-60.

<sup>74</sup> For discussions of *The Grapes of Wrath* in relation to the American Dream, see Owens, 129-39; Warren French, "John Steinbeck and American Literature," *San Jose Studies* 13 (1987): 35-48; and Eugene R. August, "Our Stories/ Our Selves: The American Dream Remembered in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*," *University of Dayton Review* 23 (1996): 5-17. Owens offers a perceptive reading of *The Grapes of Wrath* focuses largely on its representation of the Eden myth. For discussions of the economic themes of *The Grapes of Wrath*, see Sol Zollman, "John Steinbeck's Political Outlook in *The Grapes of Wrath*," *Literature and Ideology* 13 (1972): 9-20; Richard S. Pressman, "'Them's Horses—We're Men': Social Tendency and Counter-Tendency in *The Grapes of Wrath*," *Steinbeck Quarterly* 19 (1986): 71-79; William J. Beck and Edward Erickson, "The Emergence of Class Consciousness in *Germinal* and *The Grapes of Wrath*," *The Comparatist* 12 (1988): 44-57; Michael G. Barry, "Degrees of Mediation and their Political Value in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*," in *The Steinbeck Question: New*

*Essays in Criticism*, ed. Donald R. Noble (Troy: Whitston Publishing, 1993): 108-24; Nicholas Visser, "Audience and Closure in *The Grapes of Wrath*," *Studies in American Fiction* 22 (1994): 19-36; and Keith Windschuttle, "Steinbeck's Myth of the Okies," *New Criterion* 20 (2002): 24-32. These articles largely overlook the relationship between the American Dream and *The Grapes of Wrath* or the association between the novel and Naturalist fiction, which frames Steinbeck's handling of the economic forces that undermine individual progress in this book.

<sup>75</sup> Charles L. Etheridge, Jr. "The *Grapes of Wrath* and Literary Naturalism," in *The "Grapes of Wrath": A Re-Consideration*, vol. 2, ed. Michael J. Meyer (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 653.

<sup>76</sup> Alan Gibb, "Naturalism and Steinbeck's 'Curious Compromise' in *The Grapes of Wrath*," in *The Grapes of Wrath: A Re-Consideration*, 689.

<sup>77</sup> Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 83-90; and Timothy Egan, *The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2006), 59-60

<sup>78</sup> Worster, 89-94.

<sup>79</sup> Worster, 94.

<sup>80</sup> Nelson Lichtenstein, Susan Strasser, and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *Who Built America? Working People and the Nation's Economy, Politics, Culture and Society* (New York: Worth, 2000), 376.

<sup>81</sup> Worster, 59-60.

<sup>82</sup> Lichtenstein, Strasser, and Rosenzweig, 377-78.

<sup>83</sup> James M. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 10. Gregory asserts that the vast majority

of the men and women coming to California from the Great Plains were not from the Dust Bowl region, which only accounted for 16,000 migrants to the state or 6 percent of the total moving to the area (11). Gregory observes that people left their land and came to California as a result of the droughts throughout the southwest that had rendered the land unable to sustain crops in addition to an increase in foreclosures and the decrease in the prices for crops (11-13). The emphasis on the economic basis for migration coheres with Carey McWilliams's argument that the distress of the rural population "is the end product of a process of social disintegration set in motion as early as 1900. Their problem is a distinctly man-made problem. Their tragedy is part of a greater tragedy,— the wasteful and senseless exploitation of a rich domain,— the insane scrambling of conflicting group interests that frustrated the promise of the frontier and (within a decade) converted a pioneer territory into a sink of poverty" (quoted in Worster, 59). These broader causes are also important in that they contextualize the plight of the Joads, whom Steinbeck locates in Sallisaw, a town on the Arkansas border that thereby was not affected by dust storms. The family, however, is victimized by drought as indicated in the first chapter, and the seizure of their home by the bank, which places them within the general framework that conditioned the exodus to California. For further discussion of the setting for the Oklahoma chapters of *The Grapes of Wrath*, see Arthur Krim, "Right Near Sallisaw," *The Steinbeck Newsletter* 12 (1999): 1-4.

<sup>84</sup> Parini, 174.

<sup>85</sup> John Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies: On the Road to "The Grapes of Wrath,"* ed. Charles Wollenberg (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 1988), 25.

<sup>86</sup> Steinbeck was so impressed with Collins's reports that he pledged to edit them for publication into a full-length book, and Steinbeck introduced Collins to one of his agents, Annie

Laurie Williams, in late 1936. However, the more preoccupied that Steinbeck became with his own project, the less attention he devoted to Collins's, preferring instead to incorporate this material into his own writing. For further discussion of Collins and his role in the development of *The Grapes of Wrath*, see Jackson J. Benson, "'To Tom, Who Lived It': John Steinbeck and the Man from Weedpatch," *Journal of Modern Literature* 5, no. 2 (1976): 151-93; and Jackson J. Benson, "An Afterward and an Introduction," *Journal of Modern Literature* 5, no. 2 (1976): 194-210.

<sup>87</sup> Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies*, 33.

<sup>88</sup> Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies*, 34-35.

<sup>89</sup> Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies*, 48.

<sup>90</sup> Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies*, 62.

<sup>91</sup> Benson, 361-63.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Louis Walther, "Oklahomans Steinbeck's Theme," *San Jose Mercury Herald* (8 January 1938): 12.

<sup>93</sup> Walther, 12.

<sup>94</sup> Robert DeMott, Introduction to *Working Days: The Journals of "The Grapes of Wrath," 1938-1941* (New York: Penguin, 1933), xxxvi.

<sup>95</sup> John Steinbeck to Elizabeth Otis, February 1938, *A Life in Letters*, 158.

<sup>96</sup> Steinbeck, *A Life in Letters*, 132.

<sup>97</sup> T. H. Watkins, *The Hungry Years: A Narrative History of the Great Depression in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999), 440-41.

<sup>98</sup> Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2007), 213.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in DeMott, xl.

<sup>100</sup> Steinbeck, *Working Days*, 23, 57.

<sup>101</sup> Steinbeck, *Working Days*, 57. Steinbeck first refers to the interchapters in an entry from June 8, noting that “I find I am not satisfied with the numbering of these chapters. It may be that they will simply be numbered with large numerals for the general and small for the particular” (23).

<sup>102</sup> Steinbeck, *Working Days*, 36.

<sup>103</sup> Steinbeck, *Working Days*, 90.

<sup>104</sup> Steinbeck made relatively few revisions between the holograph manuscript and the published novel. To avoid potential libel charges, Steinbeck removed Joan Crawford’s name from the discussion of the syphilitic actress in Chapter 15 and omitted William Randolph Hearst’s name from Casy’s comments about the large landowner who was dead inside in Chapter 19. Steinbeck also added three paragraphs on a separate sheet following page 87 to explain the disappearance of Noah Joad in Chapter 18, and he deleted a lengthy passage in Chapter 21 that compared the arrival of the migrants in California with the invasion of Rome by German hordes. For further discussion of these changes and other minor alterations, see Roy S. Simmonds, “The Original Manuscript,” *San Jose Studies* 16, no. 1 (1990): 117-32.

<sup>105</sup> Parini, 226. For discussions of the reception of *The Grapes of Wrath*, see Frank J. Taylor, “California’s *Grapes of Wrath*,” *Forum* 102 (1939): 232-38; Carey McWilliams, “California Pastoral,” *Antioch Review* 2 (1942): 103-21; Martin Shockley, “The Reception of *The Grapes of Wrath* in Oklahoma,” *American Literature* 15, no. 4 (1944): 351-61; W. Richard Fossey, “The End of the Western Dream: *The Grapes of Wrath* and Oklahoma,” *Cimarron Review* 22 (1973): 25-34; Susan Shillinglaw, “California Answers *The Grapes of Wrath*,” in *John Steinbeck: The Years of Greatness*, 145-64; Marci Lingo, “Forbidden Fruit: The Banning of



*The Grapes of Wrath* in the Kern County Library,” *Libraries and Culture: A Journal of Library History* 38, no. 4 (2003): 351-77; and Rick Wartzman, *Obscene in the Extreme: The Burning and Banning of “The Grapes of Wrath”* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008). As Shockley notes, the majority of the early appraisals of the novel focused on the accuracy of its representation of conditions facing the population affected by the Dust Bowl (352). The reaction was especially vehement in Oklahoma, where reviewers objected to the portrayal of their state and its inhabitants. One of Steinbeck’s most vocal critics was U. S. Representative Lyle Boren, who condemned the writer on the floor of the House, claiming that “the painting Steinbeck made in this book is a lie, a damnable lie, a black, infernal creation of a twisted, distorted mind” (Quoted in Fossey, 27). In California, critics responded to *The Grapes of Wrath* with works that presented the region in a more positive light, most notably Taylor’s non-fiction account, Marshall V. Hartranft’s *Grapes of Gladness: California’s Refreshing and Inspiring Answer to John Steinbeck’s “The Grapes of Wrath”* (1939), and Ruth Comfort Mitchell’s *Of Human Kindness* (1940). However, the findings of the La Follette Civil Rights Committee investigation into migrant labor largely confirmed Steinbeck’s portrayal of the plight of these individuals as did McWilliams’s “California Pastoral.”

<sup>106</sup> Carol Steinbeck thought of the title for the novel, which comes from the second line of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” Regarding the significance of this reference, Steinbeck wrote Elizabeth Otis that “I think it is Carol’s best title so far. I like it because it is a march and this book is a kind of a march—because it is in our own revolutionary tradition and because in reference to this book it has a large meaning. And I like it because people know the Battle Hymn who don’t know the Star Spangled Banner” (*A Life in Letters*, 171). This title provided a means of situating the narrative within the broader currents of U. S. history, linking the migrants’ plight

to other struggles for justice and equality throughout the country's past and suggesting that *The Grapes of Wrath* involved a conflict central to the American experience, one that pit the powerful against the powerless in order to determine whether or not the ideals of the nation would truly apply to all. The use of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" had a further advantage as Steinbeck observed in a letter to Covici that the "fascist crowd will try to sabotage this book because it is revolutionary. They try to give it the communist angle. However, the Battle Hymn is American and intensely so. Further, every American child learns it and then forgets the words" (*A Life in Letters*, 174). By invoking a song so commonly associated with patriotic sentiment, Steinbeck could preempt claims that *The Grapes of Wrath* was Communist propaganda and instead present the work as one that dealt with uniquely American characters, conditions, and experiences, and Steinbeck further expressed the significance of the title by insisting that Covici print the lyrics and music to Howe's song in the endpapers of the book.

<sup>107</sup> John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939; repr., New York: Penguin, 2006), 3. All further quotations from this edition will be cited parenthetically in the text

<sup>108</sup> Owens, 131. For further discussion of the intercalary chapters, see Lisca, 156-68; Mary Ellen Caldwell, "A New Consideration of the Intercalary Chapters of *The Grapes of Wrath*," *Markham Review* 3 (1973): 115-19; Timmerman, 106-10; Barbara Anne Heavilin, "Hospitality, the Joads, and the Stranger Motif: Structural Symmetry in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*," *South Dakota Review* 29, no. 2 (1991): 142-52; and Phyllis T. Dircks, "Steinbeck's Statement on the Inner Chapters of *The Grapes of Wrath*," *Steinbeck Quarterly* 24 (1991): 86-94; and John J. Han, "A Defense of Steinbeck's Intercalary Chapters in *The Grapes of Wrath*," in "*The Grapes of Wrath*": *A Re-Consideration*, 603-18. Steinbeck explained the purpose of these chapters in a letter to a student at Columbia University, writing that "you say

the inner chapters were counterpoint and so they were—that they were pace changers and they were that too but their basic purpose was to hit the reader below the belt. With the rhythms and symbols of poetry one can get into a reader—and open him up and while he is open—introduce things on a [*sic*] intellectual level which he would not or could not receive unless he were opened up” (Quoted in Dircks, 87). Steinbeck’s discussion of the narrative method he employed in *The Forgotten Village* is also germane to *The Grapes of Wrath* as he noted that “many documentary films have used the generalized method, that is, the showing of a condition or an event as it affects a group of people. . . . In *The Forgotten Village* we reversed the usual process. Our story centered on one family in one small village. We wished our audience to know that family very well, and incidentally to like it, as we did. Then, from association with this little personalized group, the larger conclusion concerning the racial group could be drawn with something like participation” (*The Forgotten Village* [New York: Viking, 1941], 5). This description, with its emphasis on a representative family to reflect the experiences of a significant segment of people, mirrors the relationship between the interchapters and the Joad narrative with the former as a means of universalizing the experiences of these characters within a broader historical and economic context.

<sup>109</sup> For further discussion, see Louis Owens, “*The Grapes of Wrath*”: *Trouble in the Promised Land* (Boston: Twayne, 1989), 58-64.

<sup>110</sup> For further discussion of the turtle, see Lisca, 158-59 and Levant, 102-03.

<sup>111</sup> For discussions of Casy, see Martin Shockley, “Christian Symbolism in *The Grapes of Wrath*,” *College English* 18, no. 2 (1956): 87-90; Lisca, 169-72; Kelly Crockett, “The Bible and *The Grapes of Wrath*,” *College English* 24, no. 3 (1962): 193-99; Charles T. Dougherty, “The Christ-Figure in *The Grapes of Wrath*,” *College English* 24, no. 3 (1962): 224-26; Helen Lojek,

“Jim Casy: Politico of the New Jerusalem,” *Steinbeck Quarterly* 15 (1982): 30-37; Stephen Bullivant, “‘That’s Him. That Shiny Bastard’: Jim Casy and Christology,” *Steinbeck Studies* 16 (2005): 14-31; Kelly MacPhail, “‘He’s—a kind of man’: Jim Casy’s Spiritual Journey in *The Grapes of Wrath*,” in “*The Grapes of Wrath*”: A Re-Consideration, vol. 1, 99-128.

<sup>112</sup> Frederic I. Carpenter, “The Philosophical Joads,” *College English* 2, no. 4 (1941): 316-18.

<sup>113</sup> For discussions about Ma Joad, see Mimi R. Gladstein, “Ma Joad and Pilar: Significantly Similar,” *Steinbeck Quarterly* 14 (1981): 93-104; Warren Motley, “From Patriarchy to Matriarchy: Ma Joad’s Role in *The Grapes of Wrath*,” *American Literature* 54, no. 3 (1982): 397-412; Nellie McKay, “Happy [?]-Wife-and-Motherdom: The Portrayal of Ma Joad in John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*,” in *New Essays on John Steinbeck’s “The Grapes of Wrath,”* ed. David Wyatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 47-70; Lorelei Cederstrom, “The ‘Great Mother’ in *The Grapes of Wrath*,” in *Steinbeck and the Environment*, 76-91; and John H. Timmerman, “Ma Joad as Thematic Center,” in *Readings on “The Grapes of Wrath,”* ed. Gary Wiener (San Diego: Greenhaven, 1999), 76-80.

<sup>114</sup> Owens, *John Steinbeck’s Re-Vision of America*, 133-36. Critics have often interpreted the Joads’ travels to California in the context of both the Book of Exodus and broader patterns of religious imagery in the novel. For further discussion, see Lisca, 169-72; Enna Klammer, “*The Grapes of Wrath*: A Modern Exodus Account,” *Cresset* 25 (1962): 8-11; Fontenrose, 67-83; John H. Timmerman, “John Steinbeck’s Use of the Bible: A Descriptive Bibliography of the Critical Tradition,” *Steinbeck Quarterly* 21 (1988): 24-39; and John Clark Pratt, “Religion in *The Grapes of Wrath*: A Reader’s Guide,” in “*The Grapes of Wrath*”: A Re-Consideration, 149-59. For contrasting arguments, see Tamara Rombold, “Biblical inversion in ‘The Grapes of Wrath,’”

*College Literature* 14, no. 2 (1987): 146-66; and Ken Eckert, "Exodus Inverted: A New Look at *The Grapes of Wrath*," *Religion and the Arts* 13 (2009): 340-57. Eckert argues that the journey suggests an inversion of Exodus with California as Egypt rather than Canaan, which coheres with the representation of this state and highlights the problems with readings that rely too heavily on Biblical parallels (341). Eckert, however, presents Oklahoma as the Promised Land, an interpretation that does not have adequate grounding in the novel, and the religious readings of *The Grapes of Wrath* largely elide the economic arguments at the center of the narrative.

<sup>115</sup> Kevin Starr notes that many landowners in California did not embrace such practices; in fact, the Associated Farmers even placed ads in newspapers in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska warning migrants to stay away (*Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996], 259). Further, when cotton growers in Arizona distributed leaflets encouraging migration, the California Chamber of Commerce protested under the assumption that these workers would continue West after the picking season ended (259).

<sup>116</sup> Thomas Collins, "Report for Week Ending July 11, 1936," Weekly Narrative Reports 1935-1936, Arvin File Code 918-01, Box 23, National Archives and Records Administration – Pacific Region, San Bruno, California, 4-5.

<sup>117</sup> McWilliams, *Factories in the Field*, 158.

<sup>118</sup> The use of labor contractors was a common practice in the agricultural industry of California. In her notes on conditions at migrant camps for the F. S. A., Sanora Babb explained the actions of those employed by large landowners to recruit workers: "he drives along the camps, talks to the 'Okies' and tells them all to go to a certain farm where several hundred men are needed, at good wages (perhaps at 80 cents), etc. Then he drives to another camp, repeats the

offer, and more men go to these farms. Finally where 300 men are actually needed 1,000 to 2,500 men will appear. The offered price at once comes down, and most of them leave without work. They have arrived with their last bit of gas and no food at ‘home’ so that they are forced to take anything” (*On the Dirty Plate Trail: Remembering the Dust Bowl Refugee Camps*, ed. Douglas Wixson [Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007], 64). This explanation offers an approximate parallel to Floyd’s account in *The Grapes of Wrath*, which also suggests the logic underlying the handbills that attract the migrants to California, and these elements express the serious obstacles to the Joads’ attainment of material progress in their new environment.

<sup>119</sup> For further discussion of this point, see Gregory, 79-112.

<sup>120</sup> Steinbeck, *The Harvest Gypsies*, 39.

<sup>121</sup> John Steinbeck to Elizabeth Otis, 14 February 1938, *A Life in Letters*, 159.

<sup>122</sup> The conclusion has been the source of controversy since Steinbeck first submitted the typescript of *The Grapes of Wrath* to Pascal Covici, who encouraged Steinbeck to change the ending or to incorporate the stranger into the novel prior to the final scene. Steinbeck refused to do so, writing his editor that the final tableau “is casual—there is no fruity climax, it is not more important than any other part of the book—if there is a symbol, it is a survival symbol not a love symbol, it must be an accident, it must be a stranger, and it must be quick. To build this stranger into the structure of the book would be to warp the whole meaning of this book. The fact that the Joads don’t know him, don’t care about him, have no ties to him—that is the emphasis” (*Life in Letters*, 178). This emphasis on the final scene as a symbol of survival suggests that the fate of the migrants rests on transcending perspectives based on narrow self-interest and acting based on the needs of others, an idea reinforced by the fact that the man is a stranger. For further discussions of the ending, see Jules Chametzky, “The Ambivalent Endings of *The Grapes of*

*Wrath*,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 11, no. 1 (1965): 34-44; John Ditsky, “The Ending of *The Grapes of Wrath*: A Further Commentary,” *Agora* 2 (1973): 41-50; and Martha Heasley Cox, “The Conclusion of *The Grapes of Wrath*: Steinbeck’s Conception and Execution,” *San Jose Studies* 1 (1975): 73-81.

<sup>123</sup> John Steinbeck, “Acceptance,” *Nobel Lectures: Literature, 1901-1967*, ed. Horst Frenz (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1969), 575-76.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The major studies of Naturalism, from Donald Pizer to Walter Benn Michaels, have deemphasized economic Determinism within this tradition, focusing instead on scientific theories that have been largely discredited and philosophical constructs that have lost their currency.<sup>1</sup> Such readings obscure the ideological impulses underlying the movement. Louis J. Budd observes that the “naturalists were the first cohort to consider without surprise the processes that the Civil War had made dominant. They recognized that industrialism and urbanism, now clearly irreversible, were accelerating; iron mills had expanded into steel mills run by corporations scheming toward monopoly” and “the conflict between capital and labor was getting bloodier at the seams of a hardened class structure.”<sup>2</sup> The focus on such circumstances would seem to diminish the apparent pertinence of Naturalist fiction since legislation has remedied many of the specific grievances addressed by Frank Norris, Jack London, and John Steinbeck. For instance, the Sherman Anti-Trust Act broke up corporate monopolies, the Wagner Act provided workers with the right to collective bargaining, and the Fair Labor Standards Act restricted child employment. While social conditions have changed considerably in the decades following the publication of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the emphasis on restrictive environments that shape the actions of individuals remains highly relevant, exerting a significant influence on American literature and cinema throughout the twentieth century.



Norris, London, and Steinbeck attribute the plight of their protagonists to the economic pressures that determine both their actions and eventual outcomes. Norris connects the fates of Trina and McTeague to the rampant materialism of Polk Street, a setting that provides a microcosm for the material impulses within American life, and the writer augments his handling of this theme through recurrent gold imagery that reflects the avarice of the principals. *The Octopus*, *In Dubious Battle*, and *The Grapes of Wrath* trace the tragedies produced by a concentration of resources, which allows for monopoly control over the essential commodities that the principals depend on to survive. The representatives of the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad and the large landowners heighten these consequences through their dominion over the political, fiscal, and legal structures of California, which causes these agencies to serve the interests of the powerful rather than those of the public. In *The Iron Heel*, London presents the operations of similar agents, portraying a capitalist oligarchy that maintains its authority through the formation of a paramilitary organization to subordinate labor. In “The Dream of Debs,” London emphasizes the practices of employers who profit from an inequitable socioeconomic order and create the basic conditions that give rise to the general strike. This attention to financial causation even manifests within the references to biological tendencies. For instance, Norris situates the sexual Determinism that frames the coupling of McTeague and Trina within the motifs of consumption associated with Polk Street, and the dentist’s violence toward his wife emerges in response to his monetary deprivation. Further, while Norris stresses the role of genetic inheritance in Trina’s hoarding, elements within her surroundings trigger this impulse for accumulation, a reading that gains further credence through the intensification of her avarice in relation to the couple’s deterioration. Through this focus on the role of environment, these writers amplify the social criticism of these narratives, presenting the fiduciary causes of

injustice and linking the predicaments of individuals to forces that can be changed through human endeavors.

In his treatment of these themes, Norris emphasizes the plight of characters who are unable to maintain their social standing due to pressures within their immediate environments. *McTeague* and *The Octopus* center on figures who have temporarily attained mobility, evident through the dentist's ascent from the mines, the extensive holdings of Magnus Derrick and his associates, and the harvest that promises even greater monetary returns. In the former novel, the deterioration of the protagonist commences when he is prohibited from seeing patients since he does not have a license to practice dentistry. The narrator develops the McTeagues' poverty through their residence in a series of increasingly dilapidated dwellings and their inability to meet physical requirements, a process that is intensified by Trina's refusal to spend her savings. The protagonist's return to Placer County provides a further illustration of the constraints that have molded him, and McTeague's impending demise indicates his ultimate helplessness against the confines of the Deterministic world. The growers in *The Octopus* also occupy a tenuous position within the economic order due to the dominance of the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad, evident through its power to determine both land prices and freight rates, which undermines the gains made by the ranchers and engenders their demise. Norris, however, connects the actions of his farmers to those of company executives as the former practice on a small scale what the latter employ on a much grander one, with the significant difference that the tactics of the League create far less severe consequences than those of the railroad. The fiduciary self-interest of these competing factions provokes the inevitable tragedy of the text, a portrayal that suggests the need to balance capital accumulation within humane considerations. Further, the plight of the principals in both *McTeague* and *The Octopus* signifies not the failings

of individuals but the extent to which the conduct of men and women is shaped by environmental forces that complicate the characters' ability to sustain their prosperity.

While London presents the experiences of individuals who lose their positions in the social hierarchy, he primarily focuses on impoverished characters' efforts to transcend their humble origins. In *The Iron Heel*, the power of the Oligarchy emerges through the destruction of the middle class and the agrarian population. The plight of the first group transpires through the manipulation of the institutions supposedly responsible for broader opportunities for the poor, and the economic elite engineer a financial collapse to destabilize the sector often associated with these gains. Further, the ruination of the farmers underscores the consequences for small producers when wealth and power are held by a minority. In portraying members of the working class, London highlights their attempts to advance through the diligent industry that once yielded prosperity; however, these actions no longer result in such progress. "The Apostate" emphasizes the ceaseless toil of Johnny, whose exertions do not enable him to move past his starting point for long. Instead, his employment sets in motion the elements that engender his decline and turn him into another component in the process of production. *Martin Eden* differs from the other texts by centering on a figure who becomes affluent through the conventional methods of prudence, industry, and thrift, which London develops through the chapters devoted to Martin's incessant labor to become a writer. His individualistic aims allow for acquisition but do not lead to realizing the romantic and intellectual aspirations that he defines as the measures of success, and the narrator connects the young man's failure to achieve his objectives to his alienation from his fellow workers. In his desire for advancement, Martin has exchanged his earlier environment and associates who appreciate him as a person for those who only value his money and fame, a

representation that calls into question the worth of mobility predicated chiefly on fiduciary grounds.

Instead of emphasizing dramatic fluctuations through protagonists who experience downward mobility or attain advancement in a manner that evokes a broader failure, Steinbeck presents laborers whose roles in the social hierarchy are largely static. The pickers from *In Dubious Battle* initially work for low wages amid poor conditions, and the book ends with the probable defeat of the strike that might have ameliorated these problems, which highlights the inability of these characters to shape their fates. Despite the absence of any improvement, Steinbeck posits the potential for eventual progress through collective action, a development that provides common people with the strength to address the power imbalance in the Torgas Valley. This force alludes to the possibility for future gains when the organization of labor is channeled into productive ends that would prevent the outbreaks of violence that manifest in the narrative and increase the likelihood of the workers' victory. *The Grapes of Wrath* offers a similar presentation of principals who lack the means to change their lives. While the Joads have fallen from an independent existence as landowners to the status of tenant farmers, this transformation occurs outside the realm of the text, and the family, despite the journey across the country, is fixed in its economic position. Even their brief moments of apparent security quickly evaporate and return the family to destitution through the necessity of their flight from the Hooper Ranch and the floods in Chapter 30. This focus on a group of people whose prospects do not really change expresses a heightened realism in *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle*. This sense is enhanced through Steinbeck's use of subjects familiar to his audience because labor struggles were prevalent throughout the 1930s and migrants were visible throughout California, suffering under circumstances that closely reflect those in the novel.

Norris, London, and Steinbeck attribute the fates of their protagonists to monetary pressures, yet these figures are not necessarily innocent victims ruthlessly exploited by villainous corporations. McTeague and Tom Joad commit murder; the proletarians in “The Apostate,” *Martin Eden*, and *In Dubious Battle* are petty and ignorant creatures; the ranchers in *The Octopus*, like the emissaries of the railroad and the tenant farmers in *The Grapes of Wrath*, prioritize their financial objectives and readily part with their scruples to pursue their interests; and the workers in *The Iron Heel* and *In Dubious Battle* perpetrate acts of violence that call into question the nature of their aspirations. Such depictions heighten the moral complexity of these narratives, yet these portrayals enhance the writers’ social criticism through demonstrating the consequences produced by causative forces. For instance, Norris frames McTeague’s slaying of Trina through reiterating the economic motifs associated with their relationship, which establishes his actions as logical responses to his wife’s greed and the circumstances that have shaped it. The representation of the other working-class characters stresses the controlling role of their immediate environment and those who dictate its operations in turning men and women into animals and machines. Norris, London, and Steinbeck further contextualize the laborers’ avarice and cruelty as the inevitable results of an institutional structure that does not allow any means of redressing their grievances, and these authors link these negative outcomes to the practices of the powerful. These connections place the responsibility for such incidents on the socioeconomic system that has produced them and indicates the need to address these causes in order to prevent similar occurrences.

These arguments are reinforced by the representation of the affluent, who are not immune to the consequences produced by dominant society and suffer from the restrictions of their privileged positions. This idea appears in *Martin Eden* through Ruth Morse, whose perceptions

originate within the limitations of her milieu. These constructs become evident through her endeavors to shape the protagonist in accordance with bourgeois values irrespective of his interests, efforts that prefigure the demise of their relationship and undermine her potential happiness. These elements provide a sympathetic account of a figure who is also adversely affected by social hierarchies, and this concern broadens the scope of American Naturalism by highlighting how environment impacts all individuals regardless of their economic status. This theme also manifests in “The Dream of Debs,” which indicates that the owners’ reliance on the efforts of others prevents the former from adapting to changing circumstances. When their wealth has lost its value and their control has faded away, these men are reduced to a savage state that renders them indistinct from the destitute. The depiction of the general strike presents a warning to the privileged about what might transpire if they do not address the grievances of the downtrodden. Steinbeck employs this approach in *The Grapes of Wrath* through the emphasis on the probable results of the owners hoarding the resources of California and repressing labor, practices that could facilitate widespread animosity when people have no other means to protect their interests. These portrayals reflect the fact that these literary texts were not necessarily directed at the workers, who were already familiar with the injustices presented in these volumes and experienced them on a regular basis. Instead, these narratives had their primary readership among the middle class, and presentations of how such circumstances could impact their own security would appeal to this audience to take the action necessary to ameliorate these conditions before their interests were threatened.<sup>3</sup>

The affluent characters, however, possess considerable agency based on the possibilities generated by their wealth and their control over essential commodities, which makes them accountable for their actions. This theme emerges in *The Iron Heel* and “The Dreams of Debs”

through the role of the privileged in determining the opportunities available to the workers. London's dystopian novel stresses the connection between the undertakings of the oligarchs and the reactions of the revolutionaries, whose tactics are shaped by those of the Iron Heel despite the Socialists' aversion to the methods they must implement. In "The Dream of Debs," the unionists' measures to commandeer the food supply and to foster widespread distress among the bourgeoisie reflect the same strategies they used against their employees in countless strikes. In these disputes, the owners were not compelled by poverty and desperation but rather by a desire to subordinate labor through the imposition of the open shop. Although Shelgrim in *The Octopus* and the bankers in *The Grapes of Wrath* deny their culpability for suffering, which they attribute to abstract laws of the marketplace, these men orchestrate the practices that create such drastic consequences. The ranchers' dilemma comes from the railroad officials' manipulation of supply and demand by fixing the price of land and arbitrarily setting freight rates to maximize profits. Similarly, the Joads' predicament results from the operations of the banks that force the migrants off their property and the large growers in California, whose policies allow starvation in a region of abundance. Through this influence over basic conditions and their desire for financial gain in excess of any rational need, these individuals and institutions bear ultimate responsibility for the plight of the poor, a depiction that heightens the social criticism of these works by reinforcing that these forms of injustice originate from the deeds of men and thereby can be altered by human action.

While the individuals in these texts are largely powerless against these forces, these characters possess the means to challenge the constraints of the deterministic world when they operate in concert with their fellows. This idea gains its clearest expression through "The Dream of Debs" as the I. L. W. provides the workers with the means to destabilize the hierarchies that

have governed American life. Through the general strike, the union members attain drastic improvements and dictate the terms of their employment. The organization stops short of the revolution that London advocated in his lectures, yet “The Dream of Debs” denotes the capability of the common people to manage their affairs based on the productive positions they occupy within dominant society. *The Iron Heel* advances a different dynamic, highlighting the insufficiency of individual initiative through the defeat of the Second Revolt, Ernest’s greatest contribution to the movement. However, the tension between the failure of his immediate objectives and the eventual success of his vision for humanity suggests that the efforts of one person, in conjunction with those of others animated by the same ideals, can contribute to positive change. Further, the ability of labor to defy the imperatives of capital also manifests through the juxtaposition between the brutality of the Oligarchy and the development of revolutionary organizations. This concurrence accentuates London’s central theme that a social transformation will result from not a peaceful transfer of authority but the actions of committed, organized men and women willing to confront institutions of economic power despite immense sacrifice.

Norris and Steinbeck advance comparable representations of the necessity for cooperative action, accentuating the importance of an alteration in values as the precondition for social change. In *The Octopus*, this development is discernible through Annixter, who shifts from an exclusive focus on his personal requirements and begins to prioritize the desires of others. His perspective gradually grows from the inclusion of Hilma Tree to Dyke’s mother and daughter with the implication that this progression would have continued if not for his death. Though this transformation comes too late to prevent the tragic outbreak of violence, the aftermath of the gunfight suggests that the enlargement of this view to the remaining characters could have



averted such an outcome as the combatants now perceive everyone in terms of their common humanity rather than their roles in the conflict. Further, Annixter's viewpoint mirrors that of Jim Casy with their stress on balancing the interests of the group with those of the individual, who must realize his place within the human family and act accordingly. This outlook emerges through his decision to take the blame for attacking a police officer since Tom's arrest would have a detrimental effect on the Joads, and Casy's emphasis on placing others' needs above his own manifests when he reemerges as a labor leader in Chapter 26. These tendencies contrast the selfish concerns of dominant society and advance a strategy for addressing these concerns through the formulation of a collective consciousness. Tom's movement toward activism reflects these insights and expresses a recognition of the essential unity that has been undermined by economic exploitation. Rose of Sharon provides a parallel illustration of this point through her conduct at the end of the novel, evoking the potential for renewal through an adaptation of the familial unit to incorporate more people. In this context, the fact that she feeds a stranger is important because the absence of any tie to the man signifies the compassion necessary to alleviate suffering, values that could offer an alternate basis for existence.

The social criticism of these texts also emerges through their portrayals of nature, which center on how people undermine its capacity to sustain the population, a representation that conveys an alternative to the hostility of the earth common in Naturalist fiction. Contrary to London's narratives of adventure, "The Apostate" presents the countryside as a means for development outside the confines of the factory. Johnny's shift to the outdoors supplies the framework for him to contemplate the constraints that have governed his existence and expresses the reawakening of the individuality displaced by industrial processes. In *The Octopus*, Norris depicts the land through gestational imagery that highlights its role in shaping conditions to

support life through the abundant wheat harvest. The majority of the novel, conversely, illustrates that the ranchers' and railroad executives' fiscal concerns interfere with the ability of the fields to perform this function. The tension between the practices of men and the potential of the soil suggests that the latter cannot be realized in a meaningful sense without alterations of the former, a position that Steinbeck develops in *The Grapes of Wrath*. The narrator's emphasis on the plentiful crops of California reflects the material possibilities of the region as it appears to provide better prospects for financial security than Oklahoma. However, the concentration of resources facilitates the exploitation of the migrants and offers them few opportunities for prosperity. By showing how humans interfere with nature based on self-interest, these writers further solidify their treatment of the Deterministic agents in their works and posit the need to alter the economic system.

The narrative method in these works highlights their dominant themes, reinforcing the immediate causes of injustice yet also creating greater aesthetic and philosophical complexity. *McTeague* and *The Octopus* involve omniscient narrators who possess a frame of reference unknown to the principals, yet Norris frequently utilizes indirect discourse, which allows him to trace the psychological dimensions of the characters' struggles. The shift to McTeague's perspective, especially during his courtship of Trina, signifies his internalization of the material constructs of his world, while the movement to Presley's viewpoint provides a critical framework for examining positions that trivialize suffering. This technique reinforces the operations of a Deterministic power through illustrations of how it pervades the cognitive realm of the individual and molds his perceptions. Steinbeck also employs an all-knowing speaker in *The Grapes of Wrath* that adopts an objective point of view in the representation of the Joads yet features a more didactic tone in the interchapters when explicating the forces that have shaped

the plight of this family. These sections also establish connections among significant episodes in the narrative, reflecting on previous events or anticipating future ones within an examination of the causative agents that dictate the lives of the working class. For instance, Chapter 15 alludes to Chapter 2, which centers on Tom's interactions with the truck driver and their need for human contact, in addition to Chapters 7 and 13, with the car salesman and gas station attendant as representatives of those who prey on the downtrodden. Further, the narrator juxtaposes these actions against the compassion of the cook and waitress, who sell the migrants food at a reduced price. These actions anticipate Ma sharing her meager rations with the hungry children and the shopkeeper at the Hooper Ranch taking money out of his pocket so that the matriarch could obtain more meat. This intercalary chapter signals the function of the others as they reveal the correspondences among events through both an examination of the structures that determine the Joads' circumstances and the expression of a parallel movement toward the collective consciousness that could transcend these constraints.

London and Steinbeck display considerable variety in their narrative method as they deviate from the omniscient voices prevalent in Naturalism. London employs third-person limited perspectives associated with his protagonists in "The Apostate" and *Martin Eden*, the testimony of Mr. Cerf in "The Dream of Debs," and the accounts of both Avis Everhard and Anthony Meredith in *The Iron Heel*. The speaker in "The Apostate" effectively dramatizes the adverse effects of the boy's toil, demonstrating the forces that constrain his development and highlighting the fleeting nature of his moment of self-awareness. In *Martin Eden*, this approach conveys the young writer's desire to enter the bourgeois world and charts the spiritual malaise that stems from the attainment of his goals. The frame in *The Iron Heel* reinforces London's complex representation of economic Determinism: the Everhard manuscript presents the

consequences provoked by the seemingly invincible Oligarchy, yet Meredith's foreword and footnotes situate these occurrences within the broader scope of history that culminates in the victory of labor. Mr. Cerf heightens the social themes of "The Dream of Debs" through illustrating the intellectual restrictions of the bourgeoisie that prevent them from adapting to the circumstances created by the strike. *In Dubious Battle* marks a significant departure from the other works as it lacks an intrusive narrator who explains occurrences in terms of a Deterministic thesis; instead, Steinbeck develops his portrayal of a strike through dialogue and the action of the narrative. While this novel avoids the didactic tendencies often associated with Naturalist fiction, the events of the book exemplify the basic principles of causation, which enables Steinbeck to present the dispute without the need for any explicit condemnation of the growers since such arguments are implicit in the material.

The handling of these Deterministic forces necessitated appropriate aesthetic devices to underscore the themes of these works. In *McTeague*, Norris undergirds his representation of avarice through widespread patterns drawn from motifs of gold and consumption that are unified through the dentist's gilded molar, an object that connects his occupation to the greed theme. Steinbeck utilizes symbols associated with the causative agents, evident through the tractors in *The Grapes of Wrath* that exemplify the emerging industrial order responsible for displacing the poor, and the immediate practices of the powerful, manifest through the destruction of oranges to increase prices. *The Octopus* provides a similar depiction of mechanization through the railroad that thwarts the ranchers' ambitions, which Norris reinforces through the description of the Pacific & Southwestern map that highlights the parasitic function of the company. London largely avoids the symbolism of Norris and Steinbeck, instead utilizing descriptions that express the constraints responsible for shaping his protagonists, such as the nautical references that frame

the introduction of Martin Eden and the machines that efface Johnny's intellectual capabilities in "The Apostate." The main ideas of these works are often buttressed through pervasive animal imagery that conveys the principals' struggle for survival. Through such constructs, Norris emphasizes McTeague's reversion due to economic pressures and indicates the ranchers' limited agency in *The Octopus*. London's use of such patterns in *The Iron Heel* reveals the predatory inclinations of the ruling class and their devolution in "The Dream of Debs," whereas the animal images reflect the loss of Johnny's humanity in "The Apostate." Steinbeck employs similar structures extensively in *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle*, which signifies not that the laborers are lesser life forms but that they have been reduced to this state by the privileged. These elements also have positive implications as they connect the characters to the natural world and establish the dominant instincts that allow for the continuity of the species. Through such devices, these writers bolster their portrayals of the consequences that result from an inequitable economic system, underscoring the need to address these sources of injustice in order to prevent such outcomes.

Naturalism has a continued relevance as its major themes comprise a persistent strain in American literature, influencing the works of many important writers who adapted the central preoccupations of this movement to reflect the conditions and tensions of their eras. Pizer asserts that even though

realism, as defined and practiced by Howells, has been confined in modern American fiction to a relatively minor role, naturalism, in its various interests and strategies, has continued to flourish. . . . Indeed, one of the striking characteristics of this movement has been its adaptability to fresh currents of idea and expression in each generation while maintaining a core of naturalistic preoccupations.<sup>4</sup>

This malleability manifests in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* (1920), which advances a view of individuals as the victims of impersonal forces beyond immediate control, and the narrator juxtaposes these elements against Newland Archer's desire for an autonomous existence.<sup>5</sup> The established customs of the New York aristocracy govern the protagonist's experiences, dictating his actions and animating his wish to transcend the limitations of his environment through his relationship with Ellen Olenska. Newland initially perceives his obligation to his class as a mere deference to surface forms that allows him to maintain his independence, yet his marriage to May Welland, who is a product of their shared social climate, represents his broader adherence to the constraints of the community. Even the central character's divergence from these conventions express how firmly he is entrenched within his milieu, evident through his replication of patriarchal constructs since he perceives Ellen simply as a symbol of his inner life and thereby negates her complexity. The portrayal of the causative agents in *The Age of Innocence*, however, deviates from Naturalist principles. While the old families of New York society seem to signify an immutable structure that exercises inflexible authority over the individual, Wharton presents this group on the verge of obsolescence, indicated by the initial discussion of the new opera house to serve the *nouveau riche* and through the repeated references to anthropology, which suggest the irrevocable decline of the elite. Further, the catalogue of historical changes following May's pregnancy denotes the gradual breakdown of the categories that once controlled Newland's world, a development that renders aristocratic codes and taboos as devoid of purpose as the relics in the Metropolitan Museum.

The conventions of Naturalism also anticipate the thematic preoccupations of Modernism, with its emphasis on restrictive surroundings and the resulting waste of human potential. This influence was most prominent on F. Scott Fitzgerald, who was greatly indebted

to Norris and Theodore Dreiser in *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), which focuses on the deterioration of Anthony and Gloria Patch due to environmental pressures.<sup>6</sup> The novel highlights the enervating nature of wealth since the central character has ordered his life around the anticipation of an inheritance. This pursuit has prevented him from generating any inner reservoir of strength or finding a vocation that would have provided a broader sense of meaning. Fitzgerald also illustrates this theme through Gloria, whose overreliance on her beauty has thwarted the development of any higher attributes as a result of conventional expectations for women. Anthony's affluence and Gloria's good looks enable them to maintain a self-indulgent existence as they squander their advantages through dissipation, a narrative arc that contains a number of important parallels to Norris's *Vandover and the Brute* (1914). Like Fitzgerald's hero, Vandover is motivated chiefly by the pursuit of sensuous pleasure, which results in his disinheritance; wastes his aptitudes through idle amusements; and lacks any structure or purpose to sustain his existence. Further, Anthony and Vandover engage in affairs with lower-class women, both men signal their self-destruction through futile attempts to borrow money from former friends, and the ending of each book highlights the protagonist's deterioration by presenting him through the perspective of a disinterested observer.<sup>7</sup> While Fitzgerald does not have Anthony succumb to lycanthropy or dramatize nineteenth-century theories of atavism, the correspondences between *Vandover and the Brute* and *The Beautiful and Damned* express the enduring appeal of Deterministic ideas to reflect the constraints that shape the human enterprise.

Fitzgerald extends these Naturalistic themes in *The Great Gatsby* (1925), which traces the consequences engendered by a restrictive socioeconomic order. Clare Eby observes that Fitzgerald's masterpiece contains many correspondences with *McTeague* through devoting considerable attention to fraudulent products, focusing on protagonists whose identities are based

on false grounds, and including pivotal acts of violence against women.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, both works involve individuals who attempt to improve their class positions and exist within a stratum of society where they are out of place. Norris conveys this point through a juxtaposition between McTeague's strength and the restrictions of the Polk Street milieu, whereas Fitzgerald establishes similar ideas through the elaborate formality of Jay Gatsby's speech and his contrast with Tom Buchanan. *McTeague* and *The Great Gatsby* also express the discrepancy between the central characters' progress and conventional formulations of the American Dream. The representation of Trina's thrift operates in this context as her refusal to spend her savings does not evoke Puritan virtue. Further, her incipient avarice signifies the destructive nature of acquisition when divorced from ethical considerations, an idea that also emerges through the criminal enterprises responsible for Gatsby's ascension. His advancement indicates a more complicated portrayal of the national success story because Daisy is the primary object he seeks to acquire, with wealth as the means for realizing this ambition. However, his romantic aspirations cannot transcend the immediate economic reality of modern life as he can never truly enter the realm of the Buchanans despite his riches.<sup>9</sup> Further, the valley of ashes in Chapter 2, which denotes the waste of the nation's material resources to sustain the social order, has its precursor in the Big Dipper Mine as Norris's descriptions stress the destruction of the natural world in order to extract the very objects that have conditioned the demise of the principals. The interrelation between *McTeague* and *The Great Gatsby* complicates a conventional view of Modernism as a rejection of the premises of Naturalism and instead suggests that the literary period between the wars involved the application of the thematic content of latter to a broader range of formal and aesthetic concerns. While Fitzgerald's novel features principals capable of



moral choice, the depiction of figures whose desires are thwarted by the circumstances of their lives highlights the continuing importance of Naturalist fiction.

Thomas Wolfe also invokes Naturalist themes in *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929), juxtaposing the aspirations of Eugene Gant against the dictates of a society that provides no outlet for these impulses and prevents him from altering the basic conditions of his existence.<sup>10</sup> Wolfe introduces these ideas in the opening paragraphs, which employ conventional motifs of Determinism to trace the past occurrences responsible for the range of experiences open to the individual in the present. These elements appear through the representation of W. O. Gant, whose actions are conditioned by his father's genetic template, and Eliza Pentland, who reflects the pervasive materialism of the community and whose desire to accumulate property over all other concerns creates the central conflict of the novel. Wolfe highlights the influence of these hereditary and environmental forces on Eugene as he is shaped by his mother's acquisitive impulses and the social order that has conditioned them. The hero is not resigned to this fate and seeks another structure of meaning that emerges through his attempts to excavate an inner life of the mind, one that enables him to develop attributes that have no place within his mother's boardinghouse. Wolfe extends these ideas through the protagonist's entrance into the Altamont Fitting School, a setting that offers a temporary release from the drudgery of his usual surroundings, and the maternal instincts of Margaret Leonard contrast with the absence of these qualities in Eliza. Wolfe further expands Eugene's desire to rise above his stifling milieu through the references to pre-existence. These motifs are triggered by the actuality of the causative agents operating upon the central character and reflect the sensations denied to him in reality. Wolfe highlights this tension at the conclusion of *Look Homeward, Angel*, which seems to express Eugene's ability to transcend the constraints of the Deterministic world when he

leaves Altamont to attend Harvard; however, his flight is financed by Eliza, by the avarice that has marred his days and limited his development. As such, he will still exist within, and be dependent on, the same economic framework that he abhors, an ending that calls into question the nature of his apparent progress.

The central ideas of Naturalist fiction also appear in William Faulkner's *The Hamlet* (1940) as the portrayal of the Snopeses emphasizes the financial forces that shape the characters' conduct.<sup>11</sup> The opening paragraphs situate the narrative within the systemic changes following the Civil War coupled with the rise of a socioeconomic order, typified by Will Varner, that reduces all aspects of life to commodities and intensifies the exploitation of the population. Flem Snopes recognizes the abusive nature of this arrangement, aligning himself with the prevailing order through a position at Varner's store and utilizing the same business practices by which he accrued his income. In the context of these monetary arrangements, Flem is firmly entrenched within the commercial fabric of Frenchman's Bend, and he serves as the logical extension of an economic system that prioritizes acquisition. Faulkner reinforces this point through the horse auction and the sale of the Frenchman's plantation after Flem has planted coins in the ground. While these episodes illustrate his predatory techniques, such actions are connected to established customs in the area: the former occurred on a regular basis and the efficacy of the latter resulted from the local legend of buried treasure at the property due to Varner's long-time ownership before giving it to Flem as a wedding present. Each instance also reflects the avarice that pervades the community as the effectiveness of his methods relies on the acquisitiveness of his victims, who desire capital accumulation to the extent that they will jeopardize the fruits of years of dedicated labor and risk their ruin to gain wealth. Rather than serving as an indictment

of the practices of individual agents, *The Hamlet* advances a more trenchant critique of the framework that has created these outcomes in line with the precepts of American Naturalism.

The major themes of this movement also manifest in works commonly associated with Post-Modernism, most notably Joan Didion's *Play It As It Lays* (1970), which presents a similar tension between the desires of the individual and an environment that precludes their realization.<sup>12</sup> This conflict emerges through the alienation of Maria Wyeth, an actress who gives an account of her life while recovering from a nervous breakdown. Even though her privileged position as the narrator of her own story expresses a range of self-awareness often absent from Naturalist fiction, she does not control her destiny and has no means to develop a fulfilling existence. Her two films indicate the constraints governing her experiences through the undertakings of her husband and director, Carter Lang. When watching these movies, Maria cannot ascertain a connection between her actual self and the characters she plays on the screen since their images have been manipulated by Carter to promote his professional ambitions, and she serves solely an aesthetic object. This power over her celluloid representation denotes his authority over the real Maria in a relationship that no longer provides any larger sense of meaning. Even their divorce furthers her subjugation: Carter dictates the terms of ex-wife's visits with their daughter Kate, and he blackmails Maria into terminating another pregnancy by threatening to further restrict access to their child. This episode signifies the heroine's lack of agency as Carter compels her behavior regardless of her conscious wishes and demonstrates that she does not have a say in the decisions that affect her. This event also highlights Maria's flawed perceptions because she believes that the abortion will enable her to attain autonomy, yet the procedure further diminishes her control and leaves her deeply traumatized. To escape from these emotions, she drives compulsively on the freeways throughout Southern California. This

course of action reveals her absence of direction and her limited opportunities as the conventional associations of the road with betterment and self-determination do not apply to the heroine, whose pursuits only deepen her disconnection from the world around her. This sense is heightened when she returns to the desolation of Silver Wells, a portrayal that even the promise of nature offers no hope for Maria.

The dominant ideas of Naturalism are apparent in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985) as this work presents characters who are also shaped by the assumptions and constraints of their environment. This theme emerges through DeLillo's representation of men and women embedded within a social order in which commodities and technology determine every aspect of their lives.<sup>13</sup> From the opening section of *White Noise*, individuals are inextricably linked with their belongings from those that define the college students in addition to the gadgets at the Gladney home, and Jack perceives the world through the white noise from radio ads, jingles, and various slogans that have become the substance of existence. The inability of these consumer goods and technological advances to allay the principals' apprehensions heightens their sense of anxiety, a development that is intensified through "The Airborne Toxic Event." The poisonous cloud is a by-product of commercial society since the gas is caused by the manufacture of insecticide, which highlights the potentially destructive nature of the material objects that constitute modernity, and the family's failed attempt to escape in their car signifies the inability of these goods to make life more secure. The representation of this point strengthens the Naturalistic tendencies of *White Noise* as Babette and Jack's fear of death governs their perspectives and actions. To cope with her terror, she becomes a test subject for Dylar, a pharmaceutical designed to eliminate these worries, agreeing to sleep with the scientist in charge to obtain the drug. Jack increases his devotion to his academic discipline of Hitler studies, even

trying to learn German despite his aversion to the language, and tries to kill the man with whom Babette had an affair. While these deeds do not reach the extremes of those undertaken in *McTeague* or *The Iron Heel*, Jack and Babette lack the ability to determine their destinies, evident through the absence of any resolution or closure to the narrative.

The influence of Naturalism also appears through Film Noir as this genre provides a further distillation of the central premise of the literary movement. Steven M. Saunders asserts that the protagonists in these movies are “trapped in circumstances that they did not wholly create and from which they cannot break free.”<sup>14</sup> Christopher Orr posits that both the detectives and the criminals, “regardless of how they see themselves, are nevertheless victims of forces beyond their control.”<sup>15</sup> These tendencies emerge in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), often acknowledged to be the first noir, and *Double Indemnity* (1944), which established the thematic and aesthetic conventions of this phase in American cinema. These films involve characters who are shaped by their environments, emphasizing avarice and lust as the primary causes of destructive behavior. *The Maltese Falcon* indicates that an emphasis on acquisition undermines all interpersonal relationships, most notably between Wilmer and Gutman, who privileges the bird above a man he considers a son, and between Sam Spade and Brigid O’Shaughnessy, who views Spade as a means to obtain the statue.<sup>16</sup> Further, her deceit suggests the manipulation of conventional values, a point that also frames Spade’s behavior as he plays one person against the others in order to promote his interests. However, the detective can assemble seemingly incongruous clues into a coherent picture of events, and he possesses the agency necessary to adhere to an ethical code that materializes through his decision to hand Brigid over to the police, attributes that express a range of possibility absent from Naturalist fiction. *Double Indemnity* also traces the detrimental nature of greed and the power of deception to undermine human

interactions, representing individuals who are powerless to avert their imminent destruction. Walter Neff is motivated chiefly by his desire for Phyllis Dietrichson, which portends an alternative to the monotony of his position as an insurance salesman, while she relies on her sexual charms to manipulate him into killing her husband in order to profit from his life-insurance policy, events that condition the couple's inevitable demise. Neff's voiceover narration intensifies the Deterministic basis of the picture, demonstrating an awareness of the forces that will engender his ruin, which he presents in terms of mechanistic forces and the operations of Fate. The expression of these themes in Film Noir highlights the adaptability of Naturalist fiction and its continued importance through its connection to an influential cinematic period.

The novels of Frank Norris, Jack London, and John Steinbeck are still relevant due to their use of dominant themes that have persisted throughout twentieth-century fiction and cinema, adapted to reflect conditions in these periods and a broader range of aesthetic complexity. These works have a lasting appeal because they involve a concept central to the American experience, the belief that individuals can shape their material circumstances, and illustrate an apparent discrepancy between this ideal and its application to life in the United States. Despite the fact that these authors drew on specific events and located their writings in precise temporal settings, their fiction portrays struggles for justice that cannot be confined to a particular moment in time since people continue to fight similar battles. The continuity of these thematic concerns establishes Naturalism as a significant presence in American letters, one that provides an alternative to conventional narratives of progress, and the writers associated with this movement deserve greater critical scrutiny in order to further ascertain their artistic and philosophical influence on modern literature.

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<sup>1</sup> For Pizer's arguments against reading Naturalism in terms of Determinism, see *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), 11-33. See also Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 1-29.

<sup>2</sup> Louis J. Budd, "The American Background," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism*, ed. Donald Pizer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 42.

<sup>3</sup> For discussion of this point, see June Howard, *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 147-65; and Jude Davies, "Naturalism and Class," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Literary Naturalism*, ed. Keith Newlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 307-21.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Pizer, "Introduction: The Problem of Definition," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism*, ed. Donald Pizer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 13. For further discussion of the influence of Naturalism on contemporary fiction, see Richard Lehan, *Realism and Naturalism: The Novel in an Age of Transition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 206-34.

<sup>5</sup> For discussion of *The Age of Innocence* in relation to American Naturalism, see Larry Rubin, "Aspects of Naturalism in Four Novels by Edith Wharton," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 2, no. 4 (1957): 182-92; James A. Robinson, "Psychological Determinism in *The Age of Innocence*," *The Markham Review* 5 (1976): 1-5; Cynthia Griffin Wolff, "*The Age of Innocence*: Wharton's 'Portrait of a Gentleman,'" *The Southern Review* 12, no. 3 (1976): 640-58; and

Donald Pizer, "American Naturalism in Its Perfected State: *The Age of Innocence* and *An American Tragedy*," in *Edith Wharton: New Critical Essays*, ed. Alfred Bendixen and Annette Zilversmit (New York: Garland, 1992), 127-42.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 148. In a letter to his editor, Maxwell Perkins, shortly before the publication of *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald wrote, "I've fallen lately under the influence of an author who's quite changed my point of view. He's a chestnut to you, no doubt, but I've just discovered him—Frank Norris. I think *McTeague* and *Vandover* are both excellent. . . . There are things in *Paradise* that might have been written by Norris—those drunken scenes, for instance—in fact, all the realism. I wish I'd stuck to it throughout" (*The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, ed. Andrew Turnbull [New York: Bantam, 1971], 146). Fitzgerald makes a similar point in a message to James Branch Cabell after completing *The Beautiful and Damned*, noting that "I have just finished an extraordinary novel called *The Beautiful Lady Without [sic] Mercy* which shows touches of your influence, much of Mencken, and not a little of Frank Norris" (*Letters*, 470). For discussion of the relationship between *Vandover and the Brute* and *The Beautiful and Damned*, see Henry Dan Piper, "Frank Norris and F. Scott Fitzgerald," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (1956): 393-400; Richard Astro, "*Vandover and the Brute* and *The Beautiful and Damned*: A Search for Thematic and Stylistic Reinterpretations," *Modern Fiction Studies* 14 (1968): 397-413; and Michael Nowlin, "Naturalism and High Modernism," in *F. Scott Fitzgerald in Context*, ed. Bryant Magnum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 179-90.

<sup>7</sup> For further discussion of the intersections between these works, see Astro, 399-411.



<sup>8</sup> Clare Eby, "Of Gold Molars and Golden Girls: Fitzgerald's Reading of Norris," *American Literary Realism* 35, no. 2 (2003): 130-58. Fitzgerald expressed an interest in *McTeague* throughout his career. He presented a copy to his Zelda Sayre prior to their marriage, yet she was not impressed: "All authors that want to make things true to life make them *smell bad* – like *McTeague*'s room – and that's my most sensitive sense. I do hope you'll never be a realist – one of those kind that thinks being ugly is being forceful (Quoted in Nowlin, 181). The month before his death, Fitzgerald wrote Edmund Wilson accusing Steinbeck of plagiarizing *McTeague* in *Of Mice and Men* through Lennie's constant requests for George to describe the small farm of their dreams, which reflects Zerkow's frequent demands that Maria repeat the story of the golden dinner service. For further discussion of this connection, see Richard Allen Davison, "Of Mice and Men and *McTeague*: Steinbeck, Fitzgerald, and Norris," *Studies in American Fiction* 17 (1989): 219-26.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of economic themes in *The Great Gatsby*, see Brian Way, "Fitzgerald and the Art of Social Fiction: *The Great Gatsby*," in *American Fiction: New Readings*, ed. Richard Gray (Totowa: Barnes & Noble, 1983), 150-64; Ross Posnock, "'A New World, Material without Being Real': Fitzgerald's Critique of Capitalism in *The Great Gatsby*," in *Critical Essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby"*, ed. Scott Donaldson (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1984), 201-13; and Veronica Makowsky, "'Among the Ash-Heaps and Millionaires': Teaching *The Great Gatsby* through the Lens of Class," in *Approaches to Teaching Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby"*, ed. Jackson R. Bryer and Nancy P. VanArsdale (New York: Modern Language Association, 2009), 75-83.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of Determinism in *Look Homeward, Angel*, see Richard S. Kennedy, *The Window of Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 126-27; and

John Hagan, "Structure, Theme, and Metaphor in Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*," *American Literature* 53, no. 2 (1981): 266-85. For a discussion of economic themes in the novel, see Richard Reed, "Real Estate in *Look Homeward, Angel*," *Southern Literary Journal* 19 (1986): 46-55.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the economic themes in *The Hamlet*, see Joseph Gold, "The Normality of Snopesism: Universal Themes in Faulkner's *The Hamlet*," in *William Faulkner, Critical Collection*, ed. Leland H. Cox. (Detroit: Gale, 1982), 301-12; Mauri Skinfill, "Reconstructing Class in Faulkner's Late Novels: *The Hamlet* and the Discovery of Capital," *Studies in American Fiction* 24 (1996): 151-69; and Matthew Lessig, "Class, Characters, and 'Croppers: Faulkner's Snopeses and the Plight of the Sharecropper," *Arizona Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (1999): 79-113.

<sup>12</sup> For further discussion of *Play It As It Lays*, see Cynthia Griffin Wolff, "*Play It As It Lays*: Joan Didion and the New American Heroine," in *Joan Didion: Essays and Conversations*, ed. Ellen G. Friedman (Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 1984), 124-37; and Ulrike E. Koestler, "Joan Didion's *Play It As It Lays*: Female or Feminist Perspective?" in *Flip Sides: New Critical Essays in American Literature*, ed. Klaus H. Schmidt (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1995), 103-21.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of *White Noise* in relation to American Naturalism, see Donald Pizer, "'Is American Naturalism Dead? Raymond Carver, Paul Auster, and Don DeLillo,'" *American Literary Naturalism* (Bethesda: Academia Press, 2002), 35-40. For a broader discussion of DeLillo and Naturalism, see Paul Civello, *American Literary Naturalism and Its Twentieth-Century Transformations: Frank Norris, Ernest Hemingway, Don DeLillo* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 112-61.

<sup>14</sup> Steven M. Saunders, "Film Noir and the Meaning of Life," in *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, ed. Mark T. Conrad (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2006), 93.

<sup>15</sup> Christian Orr, "Cain, Naturalism, and Noir," *Film Criticism* 25, no. 1 (2000): 49. For further discussion, see Jeff Jaeckle, "American Literary Naturalism and Film Noir," in *The Oxford Handbook of American Literary Naturalism*, 483-97.

<sup>16</sup> Jaeckle notes an interesting connection between *McTeague* and *The Maltese Falcon* through a number of similarities between Zerkow and Kasper Gutman, observing that both characters are defined by their avarice as they search for illusive gold objects, whose origins they take great pleasure in hearing and reciting (487). While there is no evidence that Dashiell Hammett read *McTeague*, these correspondences, among the others mentioned by Jaeckle, suggest a familiarity with Norris's novel. Further, Kevin Starr observes that Hammett and Norris played comparable roles in creating the fictional landscape of San Francisco: "If Frank Norris invented the San Francisco of the 1890s as literary mise-en-scène, Dashiell Hammett performed the same service for the 1920s and 1930s, establishing a mood, an iconography, a social complexity, solidly based in place, that would flourish in fiction and film for the rest of the century and remain a fixed element of the San Francisco identity" (*Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, 1950-1963* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 289).

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