

“I WAS A CREATURE OF ENVIRONMENT”:
JAMESIAN HABIT IN JACK LONDON’S *THE IRON HEEL*

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ABSTRACT

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William James describes in his *Principles of Psychology* the central role that habits and adaptation plays in the human experience. Habits affect an individual’s beliefs, actions, and emotions, and without habits an individual would not have any personality. In the nineteenth century, literary theorists such as Henry James describe the necessity for authors to create realistic characters and events. This thesis displays the intersection of these two intellectual movements in Jack London’s dystopian novel, *The Iron Heel*. I begin by examining the history of the theory of habits beginning with John Locke and ending with James’s own works on the subject. I then focus on literary theory and the ways it is conducive to the absorption of habit theory into the creation of realistic literary characters. I argue that novels that do this are “psychoepisodic,” or novels containing psychologically realistic characters that describes a piece of the psychological side of the human experience through various episodes. Finally, I use these theories to examine London’s *The Iron Heel* and the ways London uses habits in the development of the characters.

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To Scott W. Mason,
teacher, mentor, and friend

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

IH	<i>The Iron Heel</i>
LH	“The Laws of Habit”
P	<i>Pragmatism</i>
PP	<i>The Principles of Psychology</i>
TT	<i>Talks to Teachers on Psychology</i>
V	<i>The Varieties of Religious Experience</i>

Introduction

The entire timeline of psychological thought extends back at least to the ancient Greeks with the Platonic division of body and spirit. By the Roman era emotion and the passions had entered the discussion, especially as seen by political and moral rhetoric from men such as Cicero. Even so, there was a clear division between the mental intellect and the emotions, for nearly all classical scholars, although notably not the poets, declared that it is the duty of the mind to control the passions lest the passions control them. In his *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero says, “There remain two perturbations,—excessive joy and inordinate desire. If these do not affect the wise man, the wise man’s mind will always be tranquil” (201). Cicero thus explains that the wise man understands the emotions, but he also separates himself from their excess in order to maintain intellectual credibility. In the medieval period the question of psychology fell into the religious debate, and when it was again taken up by Renaissance scholars there was a significant effort to redefine classical thought in Christian terms. Although there was a renewed interest in the role of the passions, the biblical scholars and ministers quickly took up classical rhetoric regarding the control of these intense emotions due to a moral obligation to be more clear-headed and logical. Then, with René Descartes and his famous meditations, psychology becomes the focus of philosophical inquiry. His concept of innate ideas is quickly taken up by John Locke and others as they dissent from the Cartesian concept. It is at this point that empirical psychology becomes possible, leading to a more scientific field of study into the human mind.

My present project focuses on the latter section of this timeline as it prepares the way for William James and other nineteenth-century American psychologists. This time period is crucial to literary studies because it encapsulates early American thought, especially the New England variety. It is also the time immediately before psychoanalysis arrived in the United States,

beginning with Sigmund Freud's visit to Clark University in 1909. It is quite interesting that American psychology grew concurrently with various European varieties but also quite independently.¹ At the same time, however, psychological theorists in the United States directly drew from the thought of the (primarily Anglo) philosophers from centuries prior. In his *Talks to Teachers on Psychology*, James comments that, "there is no 'new psychology' worthy of the name. There is nothing but the old psychology which began in Locke's time, plus a little physiology of the brain and senses and theory of evolution, and a few refinements of introspective detail" (TT 7). The physiological focus appears in James's own work, especially as he emphasizes the importance of the physical characteristics of the brain and nervous system before moving to inner thoughts and feelings and their relationship to the whole of the human experience. The evolution to which he alludes is specifically Charles Darwin's, and James includes the evolutionary theories of adaptation in his own theories regarding habits and their formation. I argue that these habits are the central aspect of early American psychology because they bring the three factors (i.e. older philosophy, physiology, and evolution) together, and a vast majority of the theory from the later nineteenth century draws from the ideas formed in Jamesian habits.

Yet, the crux of my argument is not merely the centrality of habits in the psychological world around the turn of the century but rather that it affects the literature produced at the time. For the purposes of this thesis, I focus on Jack London's dystopian novel *The Iron Heel* in order to examine the ways in which the characters are built on psychological habit theories. Although there is evidence that London owned a copy of James's *Principles of Psychology*,² my intent is not to show the specific area of influence for this particular author. Rather, I argue that these theories

¹ cf. Eric Caplan, *Mind Games: American Culture and the Birth of Psychotherapy* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1998), 8-9.

² cf. Patrick Dooley, "Jack London's 'South of the Slot' and William James's 'The Divided Self and the Process of Its Unification,'" *Western American Literature* 41, no. 1 (2006).

appear in literary characters of the same time regardless of the author's literary background because there are numerous methods of infiltration. For example, even if London did not read the *Principles of Psychology* himself, he could have read a novel written by an author who did read James's text. Thus, I look at literature as following the trend of psychology at any given moment; with greater understanding of the ebb and flow of psychological theory, a critic can better judge the change in literary characters. Although this is merely a small selection of psychological inquiry throughout history, it will serve as a model for future examinations.

Although the nineteenth century boasts many exceptional American authors, I am using London because he is not only one of the most popular novelists of the late 1890s and early 1900s, but he also exemplifies the naturalist strain of realism that was central at the time. His focus on realism is essential, because even though *The Iron Heel* is a work of soft science fiction, meaning that it ponders a fictional future world without advanced technological development, his characters and events are largely realistic. Therefore, I argue that this novel is one of what I call "psychoepisodic" novels: novels containing psychologically realistic characters that describes a piece of the psychological side of the human experience through various episodes. A psychoepisodic novel may possess a protagonist who remains a child throughout the narrative, or one who is only seen as an adult.³ In addition, a psychoepisodic novel does not require a protagonist to achieve growth, for even a psychologically backslid or stagnant individual can say a great deal about the human experience. Ultimately, a novel is realistic psychologically if its characters display some coherence with the psychology of the day. Thus, in this thesis I argue that London's novel is psychoepisodic and relies on the psychology of the time, specifically regarding habits, in the personalities of the characters.

³ This is similar to the *Bildungsroman*, which focuses on the psychological and moral growth of a protagonist from childhood to adulthood, but psychoepisodic novels are more broad than that particular category.

The Growth of Empirical Psychology

William James's *Principles of Psychology* is a conglomeration of many psychological theories developed in the decades and centuries before him. Since James is the focal point of this enterprise, I focus on those who built the theories that he later appropriated in his own studies of the human mind. First, I examine John Locke and his rejection of René Descartes's concept of innate ideas; if humans are not born with pre-conceived ideas, then everything must be learned. Essentially, Locke created the rift through which psychology eventually could be born as an empirical study, so the history of this line of thinking is the history of psychology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Next, I examine David Hume because of his focus on association and habits themselves as the actual moderators of the mind. Then, I move to Charles S. Peirce, one of James's contemporaries, who created the foundation of pragmatism, which also exists as the foundation of both Peirce's and James's understanding of the mind and its habits. Finally, I move to James himself and his theories surrounding the laws of habits, including his pragmatism. It is important to note that this is not a critique or criticism of the theories regarding their accuracy in describing the human brain, but rather it is merely a history of the ideas that James later incorporates into his ideas of habit. As he himself says, "our fundamental ways of thinking about things are discoveries of exceedingly remote ancestors, which have been able to preserve themselves throughout the experience of all subsequent time" (P 170). In other words, as humans learn through experience, they develop intellectual habits that they then teach to their offspring. In much the same way, philosophers in this timeline either continue the habits from their predecessors or else strive to create a new path for theory to advance. Thus, each new psychological trend is simply a part of the dialogical history in which it finds itself. As such, it may be appropriate to consider this the macro timeline of Anglo-American psychology.

John Locke

The origin of Locke's ideas of the self is rooted in Cartesian theory. He describes the self as a "conscious thinking thing...which is sensible or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness or misery, and so is concerned for itself, as far as that consciousness extends" (458-9). Locke also believed in the existence of a soul, but he specifically argued against the doctrine of original sin. This dissent from the Augustinian view rises from his separation with Descartes in the realm of innate ideas, which is the most essential aspect of his thoughts for the purposes of Jamesian habits.

Through his dissent, Locke essentially brought psychological thought out of the realm of metaphysics and into a more experiential, and thus empirical, area of study. Locke's famous concept of the individual being born as "white paper" (121) questions the origin of ideas. His answer sounds identical to James's later responses, such as when Locke says:

Whence has it all the *materials* of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from experience. In that all our knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation employed either, about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understandings with all the *materials* of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring (122).

He goes on to define these two sources as "sensation" (123) and "reflection" (124), being the only methods for forming any new type of knowledge. In this way, Locke designates the two areas of psychological study: first, the physiological ways in which the brain relates to the various senses; second, the methods through which the mind considers itself and its memories. Yet, the

foundation of Locke's psychology is the former: to him sensation is the original method of gaining knowledge, and reflection only builds on that foundation.

The creation of ideas in the mind takes place gradually over a long period of time. Infants and young children spend most of their time simply looking around and taking in the various sensations that they do not yet have language to represent. It is only later that they can generate more complex ideas, for Locke says, "so growing up in a constant attention to outward sensations, seldom make any considerable reflection on what passes within them, till they come to be of riper years; and some scarce ever at all" (127). Locke creates a sophisticated hierarchy of sensations that must build on one another to rise to the next level. For instance, he separates primary and secondary qualities, whereas secondary qualities (e.g. color and sound) can only be identified through a combination of primary qualities (e.g. shape and size). Although later philosophers eliminate this division, preferring instead to simply designate between all physical sensation and all mental action, the concept of building experiences is essential to later psychology in this same line of thinking. As will be seen with James's pragmatism, all new ideas are really invasions into a simpler way of thinking that must be changed to accommodate the new idea.

David Hume

Hume follows much of Locke's theories concerning ideas and their origin, but he rejects Locke's reliance on reason as the primary moderator in the mind. However, he is very valuable in this timeline for his incorporation of the idea of habits, which he says is the general name for association itself. Hume states that, "all general ideas are nothing but particular ones, annexed to a certain term, which gives them a more extensive signification, and make them recal [sic] upon

occasion other individuals, which are similar to them” (17). In other words, abstract ideas are particular ideas used in a more general way, and this association gradually becomes solidified into a “custom” or “habit.” Thus, while habits later are typically seen as a physical operation, Hume uses it to describe the processes of the mind. One of his primary examples is that of cause and effect; this association becomes so strong that we habitually move from a cause to its effect, making it difficult to consider any other effect arising from the cause. In addition, this association is caused by experience and sensation, for without enough “instances” or with contradictory instances, a habit cannot form.

James frequently mentions Hume in his works, especially relating to these concepts of habit and constant change. In his *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume explains that people “are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement” (252). He goes on to describe the mind as a theater where the eyes are constantly moving and changing perception, therefore the mind itself is really only the continuous passage of perceptions. James describes this theory in his *Talks* when he says, “the ideas are themselves the actors, the stage, the theatre, the spectators, and the play. This is the so-called ‘associationist’ psychology, brought down to its radical expression” (TT 177-78). James clearly leaves Hume’s rejection of the soul, for even in James’s physiologically-focused *Principles of Psychology* there is the allowance of metaphysical intrusion. However, Hume’s contribution of association as the originator of habits and personality itself is a theme that James takes up to its extreme. One final contribution that requires mentioning is the publication of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (1859). This paved the way for the development of functional psychology, founded by James himself. Functional psychology focuses on the

individual's adaptation to his environment as the foundation for his mind and behavior.⁴ Through this approach, James continues Locke and Hume's reliance on the external environment as the basis for self, but only after Darwin's idea of natural selection could functional psychology itself arise.

James's concern with the total experience of the human being is particularly evident in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. This text received a great deal of criticism due to its unscientific nature; however, I argue that this text is indicative of his philosophy for psychology in general, especially in terms of the way that he simply refuses to divide the human into various categories. In a commentary on the text, Curtis W. Hart explains that, "James decries reductionism of any sort from all quarters including philosophy and science. As an empiricist, he respects both and yet at the same time notes their limitations in getting at the sort of experiential truth he seeks to describe" (522). For his study in the *Varieties*, James specifically seeks out subjective pieces of information in the journals and other writings of pious men. He selects for his study only candidates who burn with religious fervor, not those masses who are religious only as a cultural norm or societal habit; through his pragmatism, James judges the truth of the autobiographical claims based on the action such beliefs produce. In the first chapter of the text, James quotes Hippolyte Taine in his *Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise (History of English Literature)* who says, "Whether facts be moral or physical, it makes no matter. They always have their causes. There are causes for ambition, courage, veracity, just as there are for digestion, muscular movement, animal heat. Vice and virtue are products like vitriol and sugar" (V 9). In other words, the physical body creates the various passions and emotions; there are physiological causes, not

⁴ As this definition suggests, functional psychology was a precursor to behavioralism (cf. B. F. Skinner), although the behaviorists required a much more strict definition of empirical study and utilized the scientific method from the natural sciences.

merely mental ones. At the same time, James does not believe that one can understand the human mind strictly through the physical processes; instead, he states that the psychologist must study both the physical and mental-spiritual sides of the human experience. Therefore, James does certainly believe that the psychologist can search for those causes, but since they are not all physical, he does not use strictly empirical means to gain them.

Charles S. Peirce

Charles Sanders Peirce, a long-time friend of James, was the first to create the pragmatic philosophical system (he called it pragmatism) that James later adopted and expanded upon. However, Peirce was primarily a logician, and many of his writings focus on the logic of the mind. As a primary example, in “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities” (1868), Peirce explained that attention is essential in that it places emphasis on various elements of the mind. For example, events that have more attention placed on them at the time are more easily remembered later. Similarly, with more attention, an individual is more likely to be logical in his thought due to more emphasis on their accuracy. He then explains that, “Attention produces effects upon the nervous system. These effects are habits, or nervous associations” (152). In other words, an individual creates habits in his own mind when he places attention onto the action being completed; greater attention creates a more firmly ingrained habit. His use of the word “associations” also invokes Locke’s idea of all thought being a series of associations. Peirce goes on to state that, “Voluntary actions result from the sensations produced by habits, as instinctive actions result from our original nature” (152). In this passage, he first explains that all voluntary actions are ultimately grounded in habits, and those habits are formed by external sensations that, once repeated, compel the individual to act in a particular way. However, he also separates

habits from instinct, which James will do later, but he does so by placing instinct in the realm of “original nature.” In this way, Peirce seems to believe in an innate nature that causes these instincts to appear in certain individuals, but these innate ideas are not nearly as massive as those argued by Descartes.

In his essay “The Fixation of Belief” (1877), Peirce continues his logical inquiry into the human mind to describe the way that individuals formulate beliefs through habits. He explains simply, “That which determines us, from given premises, to draw one inference rather than another is some habit of mind, whether it be constitutional or acquired” (*Values* 96). In other words, two individuals with different habits of mind may conclude two very different truths from the exact same assumptions. Peirce again separates acquired habits from those of an innate characteristic, but his commentary on the habits themselves retain their value when reappropriated by James. Specifically, Peirce’s explanation of the truth value of an inference is the foundation of pragmatism (and pragmaticism). That is, “an inference is regarded as valid or not, without reference to the truth or falsity of its conclusion specially, but according as the habit which determines it is such as to produce true conclusions in general or not” (*Values* 96). His primary example is of a copper disk that ceases to rotate when placed between magnets; one might assume that the same would happen to any such disk and this becomes the guiding principle regarding copper. Therefore, if an inference appears that holds copper at its base, this individual will bring the mental habits associated with previous experience to any conclusions made, especially if physical experimentation is impossible. Regarding other types of belief, such as religious or political belief, similar experience in the form of mental habits will similarly affect an individual’s evaluation of an inference, which will then lead to different actions.

Finally, as a logician, Peirce carefully compares the law of mind, which he also calls the law of habit, to other physical laws. He explains in “The Architecture of Theories” (1891) that psychological notions are best understood in relation to the physiological apparatus that causes them. In this way he describes the importance of the first few chapters of James’s *Principles of Psychology*, which describe the various sense organs and their connection to the brain. Peirce then explains that physical laws are absolute in that the same thing will always occur under the same circumstances. Such conformity does not exist in mental laws, for “exact conformity would be in downright conflict with the law; since it would instantly crystallize thought and prevent all further formation of habit. The law of mind only makes a given feeling *more likely* to arise” (169-70). In this passage Peirce explains that habits are always malleable, and James himself later provides techniques to intentionally change habits in his essay “The Laws of Habits.” However, habits are more often changed by different experiences, and as an individual experiences more things, he builds, changes, and eliminates habits. As a result, an individual may be in the process of changing a habit, thus resulting in an action unlike the one expected by his former habits. Therefore, James offers a more strictly psychological approach to the study of habits in order to better understand when an unexpected feeling arises or when habits themselves change.

James and the Laws of Habits

As seen above, the questions surrounding the formation of ideas and knowledge quickly bring up the concept of habits; however, I argue that habits themselves are at the center of the spirit of psychology in nineteenth-century United States (and perhaps the United Kingdom). This is seen very clearly in James’s *Principles of Psychology* where he places a chapter entirely devoted to habit immediately after three chapters on the physiological structure of the brain. In

this way, James shows how habit is the basis for the connection between the physical world and the mind; habit is the introduction to the more overtly psychological theories. James explains:

For the entire nervous system is nothing but a system of paths between a sensory *terminus a quo* and a muscular, glandular, or other *terminus ad quem*. A path once traversed by a nerve-current might be expected to follow the law of most of the paths we know, and to be scooped out and made more permeable than before and this ought to be repeated with each new passage of the current (PP 1:108).

This description fits James's remark earlier in the chapter that habits primarily exists in the realm of physics, for it is comparable to the characteristics of other types of matter. In this way, James avoids the need to describe the tendency to acquire habits as an innate idea and rather to simply describe it as a law of nature itself. James, partially quoting Léon Dumont, compares psychological habits to the qualities of clothing fitting better as it ages and to the movement of water which gouges out a crevice for its continuous flow. Habits are also similar to physical injury, such as a broken arm, which is in danger of again being broken in the same place. Thus, these ideas are simply part of the physical universe, not merely a special agent in the mind. Overall, James's view on habits is summarized in an earlier essay: "any sequence of mental action which has been frequently repeated tends to perpetuate itself; so that we find ourselves automatically prompted to *think, feel, or do* what we have been before accustomed to think, feel, or do, under like circumstances, without any consciously formed *purpose*, or anticipation of results" (LH 439).

James notes that habits are very practical and necessary for the existence of human society and life itself. In one example, he describes how a piano student may begin learning by pressing each key by moving his entire arm, wrist, and hand. Later, with good habit being reinforced, the student will learn the minimum required actions to achieve the impression of the

desired keys. Therefore, his habits make his movements much simpler, more accurate, and easier (LH 439). James also explains that, “habit diminishes the conscious attention with which our actions are performed” (LH 441). His example for this result is that of a hunter who sees a target and has already aimed and shot seemingly unconsciously. Yet, this is not just a matter of convenient for the pianist and the hunter, but it is a matter of survival and mere existence. James quotes Henry Maudsley’s *Physiology of Mind* to explain this point: “If an act became no easier after being done several times, if the careful direction of consciousness were necessary to its accomplishment on each occasion, it is event that the whole activity of a lifetime might be confined to one or two deeds—that no progress could take place in development” (PP 1:113). The provided example is that a man may need all day to merely put on and remove his clothing. Without habits, therefore, a child would never learn to stand or walk. Without habits, education itself would be impossible, and human society would not only never advance, but it would never exist: even primitive action is habitual.

Now, to move into actual definitions of habits, it is first important to note that James does not view habits as unconscious actions, but rather as extremely fast conscious actions. Yet, by conscious he does not necessarily mean one must think about them, but that they can occur by more base relationships between sensations and muscular contractions. His diagram (figure 1) shows the growth of a habit. The capital letters are physical muscle movements, the lowercase

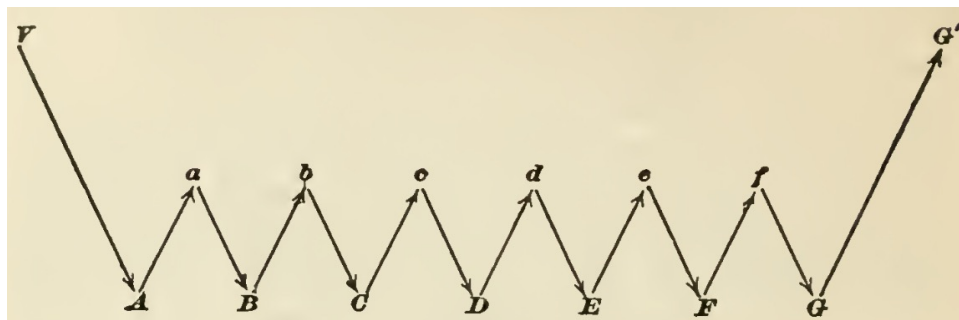


Figure 1: Diagram: This figure illustrates the chain of muscular contractions and respective sensations in habitual actions (from PP 1:116).

letters are sensations, which begin physically but then, through the nerves, become psychological sensations. In this diagram, V represents the initial voluntary action that starts the chain of habit, ending in G' , which is the perceived result. When cultivating a habit, the individual must physically and intellectually move through all of these individual steps, stopping whenever an incorrect movement takes place. To return to the example of the piano player, when learning a new song, he must move slowly through the various finger and hand movements required to match the notation on the page. However, after several repetitions, his hands begin to seemingly move on their own, but in reality his mind is simply processing the movements faster. In other words, the various actions do not become subconscious, they merely happen so quickly that it appears as though no conscious attention was drawn to it; James calls this “inattentive feeling” (LH 446). Yet, in the process of learning these new habits, attention is essential; the individual must make very particular choices that become habitual through repetition.

Once formed, these habits are not the same as instincts, for the latter is considered to be unconscious and in some cases evolutionary, whereas habit is a conscious, learned action or series of actions. Jean Suplizio, while critiquing the connection of James to contemporary evolutionary psychology, explains that, “For James the instincts are essentially impulses or physiological motor responses, not problem-solving devices. Once an instinctive reaction has served its original purpose of jump-starting the physical performance it is intended to achieve, the habits take over” (366). When compared to the diagram above (figure 1), this means that the instincts can be the initial volition to begin the habitual chain of events, but the chain itself cannot be an instinct. While evolutionary psychology posits that the human brain is full of instincts that evolve just as physical bodies, “for James, the bulk of the instincts amount to reflex movements, such as, sucking, biting, clapping, crying, standing, locomotion, and fear (e.g., of high places)” (368). As a

result, consciousness itself is more powerful than instincts after the initial reflex, and although reflexes may trigger habits, they are not themselves habitual. Consciousness is not led by the instincts, but rather has the power to choose between different courses of action. When repeated, these choices may become habitual, but they begin by conscious action, and even as a habit they remain in the realm of consciousness, not instinct.

Finally, James's ideas concerning habits are not complete without a comment on pragmatism, the philosophical idea of practical meaning regarding truth. This philosophy affects habits because it describes the ways in which experiences affect the mind and its habits. As explained above, James's habits are not only physical but also mental. It is through habit that a child learns that the tall brown object with many smaller green objects on it is called a "tree." It is also through habit that the child learns that biting is not appropriate behavior, or that stealing is morally wrong. Therefore, when James describes the way in which an individual accepts a given belief as "true," he is also describing the method that habits, particularly physical ones, are formed and changed. James explains the way that this philosophical system applies to the physical life on a man: "If there be any life that it is really better we should lead, and if there be any idea which, if believed in, would help us to lead that life, then it would be really *better for us* to believe in that idea, *unless, indeed, belief in it incidentally clashed with other greater vital benefits*" (P 76). In other words, when faced with numerous different experiences, the pragmatic individual makes truth determinations based on the most (perceived) beneficial belief. This individual may then change his habits so that his life aligns with the new belief. In the same way, a less-reflective individual may very easily possess certain beliefs that contradict his habits, but they remain unchanged due to the power of the habits themselves. Therefore, the change in belief does not necessarily enforce the change in habit; an inner contradiction is not only possible, but it is likely.

Literary Theory around the Turn of the Century

As explained in the introduction, this enterprise has as its premise that the same sorts of things being discussed in psychology also appear in literature. This is not only because of the similarity of the questions each discipline asks about human nature but also because of literature's principle of imitation, which was common especially around the turn of the century. Of course, not all literature attempted to imitate life, and even of those that do, not every work is meaningful in the psychological realm. Thus, I limit myself here to an examination of literary theory with regards to psychoepisodic literature, specifically novels. The general trend was that the novel ought to be *mimetic*, realistic to life. Many prominent authors of the era achieved this by first living in the experience about which they later wrote. Such examples include Henry David Thoreau spending two years on Walden Pond before publishing *Walden*, Herman Melville working on whaling vessels before *Moby Dick*, Nathaniel Hawthorne working at the Boston Custom House before writing *The Scarlet Letter* (especially the introduction), and Jack London working in Alaska as well as on vessels in the Pacific Ocean before such texts as *The Call of the Wild*, *White Fang*, and *The Sea Wolf*. Yet, personal experience is not necessary so long as the creation itself *appears* realistic to life, even if only formed from imagination or from the stories of other authors. At the same time, authors could be realistic in some characteristics of a story while being wildly fantastic in others. For example, Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw" considers the place of ghosts in an English estate; however, James is realistic in his creation of psychological characters, even if the supernatural makes an appearance. Therefore, when studying psychoepisodic literature, the most essential piece of the text is a psychologically realistic character who moves throughout the various episodes in a realistic manner, even if the episodes themselves are fantastic.

Jack London & Herbert Spencer: Consider the Reader

In 1917, London wrote an article describing his own career as a writer entitled “Eight Great Factors of Literary Success.” The short piece is exemplar of London’s witty short stories, such as in his explanation that his success is in large part due to being born in America with ancestors who were among the first to settle the New World. He explains that his heritage and his good fortune are to thank for his brain, lest he “might have been born twins, or an imbecile” (164). He also explains that his poverty made him “hustle,” but that only his good luck can account for his not being dead, diseased, or imprisoned from his poverty. All of these things surely being true, for a dead writer is never prolific, his most intriguing factor for literary success is his reading of Herbert Spencer’s “The Philosophy of Style” (1852), of which he said:

It taught me the subtle and manifold operations necessary to transmute thought, beauty, sensation and emotion into black symbols on white paper; which symbols, through the reader’s eye, were taken into his brain, and corresponded with mine. Among other things, this taught me to know the brain of my reader, in order to select the symbols that would compel his brain to realize my thought, or vision, or emotion. Also, I learned that the right symbols were the ones that would require the expenditure of the minimum of my reader’s brain energy, leaving the maximum of his brain energy to realize and enjoy the content of my mind, as conveyed to his mind (164).

This commentary shows London’s manifest interest in not only language and the way it transmits meaning to the reader, but also his knowledge of psychology through his discussion of the brain. Spencer was also an early psychological thinker, although he considered psychology to be more of an aspect of sociology than its own discipline. London’s interest in psychology continued

throughout his literary career, for he also owned a copy of William James's *Psychology: Briefer Course* and also read Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, but not until very late in his life (Dooley 61). In his commentary on Spencer's text, London describes his desire that readers see *his* particular vision; he is very interested in choosing the *right* words to communicate the message that he has chosen.⁵ These *right* words are, as he says, the ones that are most natural to the reader's mind, that is, the words that are closest to the words that the reader himself would have used, thus making the act of reading easier and more enjoyable. Yet, this is only one facet of Spencer's text, for he also considered the author's psychology, not merely that of the reader.

In the middle to late nineteenth century, Herbert Spencer was powerfully influential among the English intelligentsia, and he was among James's influences as well as London's. Spencer considered a number of philosophical perspectives, such as the prominence of evolution in nearly every aspect of life, which is an idea later subsumed into James's psychology. However, in his *Philosophy of Style*, Spencer examined a number of formal elements to literary style, which he considered merely an offshoot of sociology. Fred N. Scott explains in his introduction to the text that, "in it literature is dealt with as one of the fine arts, being considered a psychological phenomenon determined by social conditions" (xvi). In this way, when considering literature, Spencer explains that one must examine the social elements surrounding the text as well as the psychological condition of the author. In his section on Homer and Milton, whom he considers ideal authors in the literary canon, Spencer states:

It is by virtue of a thousand minute traits of character, the gradual deposit of life's experiences, that any one speaks, writes, even walks and moves, as we see him

⁵ cf. Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin, 1991): "Every literary work of any power—whether or not its author composed it with his audience in mind—is in fact an elaborate system of controls over the reader's involvement and detachment along *various* lines of interest. The author is limited only by the range of human interests" (123).

do. For there must be some reason why, if two men set about describing a scene, or giving even a plain, unvarnished account of some event, the mode of their narration differs, differs, too, in such a way that each can be ascribed to its author, as we say, by internal evidence, that is, by its style. While, then, no better explanation appears, that theory of style may perhaps be provisionally accepted which identifies it with character—with unconscious revelations of the hidden self (56).

In this passage, Spencer states that an author's character is formed through the numerous experiences gained throughout life, and these experiences cause different authors to write different types of stories. In addition, he brings the unconscious mind into the realm of literature, for an author may write certain stories in certain ways without realizing that he is doing so. In other words, as Spencer states later, the physical artifact of the text is a direct imprint of the author's mind and inner life.⁶ Therefore, in Spencer's view, while London explained his search for the exact words to impress his story upon the reader, he is also stating the importance of knowing one's inner life while writing. Similarly, considering Spencer's importance as an earlier psychological text in the nineteenth century, London's privileging of it shows his interest in including psychological thought in his novels.

As a final comment on London's theoretical background as an author, it is important to note that he included the hard sciences as well as the social sciences in his thought. While he explains the importance of choosing the correct words from a sociological and psychological perspective, he also presents the ideology in terms of scientific materialism, which he frequently promoted. For example, Barbara Lindquist shows how a number of authors of the period used

⁶ Certainly, there are a number of issue with this ideology when compared to Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" (1967), which came over a century after the first edition of Spencer's essay.

the laws of thermodynamics in the texts they produced, such as Bellamy critiquing competition as a waste of energy. Regarding London she says, “The writer’s body, or more specifically for London the writer’s ‘brain,’ becomes the site of energy conversion through which ‘beauty’ and ‘sensations and feelings’ are transformed and reappear in the reader or listener. The conversion takes place through the medium of language” (101). In this way, London continued to believe that aspects such as “beauty” and “feelings” could be objectively transformed, using the correct language, and passed along to the reader, where they would then reverse the process and experience the feelings as if they had originally felt them himself. Although such a conversion is possible for physics, such as the conversion of matter to energy, light to heat, etc., London’s comparison to human understanding displays the joining of natural science terminology with that of the human sciences. Therefore, while London continually states his materialist tendencies, he really promotes a traditional romantic literary hermeneutic in scientific terminology, that is, he searched for the correct words to impart the correct vision of his literature when creating characters and events.

Henry James: Represent Life

Such ideas of the philosophy of literature is very common among nineteenth-century authors and literary critics, especially within the United States. Henry James, the brother of William James, is greatly supportive of a single authoritative writing methodology, which he grounds in mimetic writing. In his essay, “The Art of Fiction,” James describes quite simply that, “The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life” (378). Representation of life is not mere presentation, as the historian aspires to; the novelist must seek to be true to life, but not necessarily true to the historical reality of the premises of the novel

(379). The author requires freedom to experiment and produce characters, events, and narratives that exist outside of the timeline but are also intimately related to the realities of life itself. James says that the novel “lives upon exercise, and the very meaning of exercise is freedom,” so that, “the only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel, without incurring the accusation of being arbitrary, is that it be interesting” (384). Taken together, James states that the ideal novel is realistic, free to exercise different possibilities, and interesting; in other words, the novelist is free to create an imaginative and interesting piece, but it ought to be realistic.

A couple decades later, Kenneth Burke describes a similar requirement in his essay “Literature as Equipment for Living” in which he describes the novel as a place where an author may create a world as an exercise in building a strategy. First, Burke agrees with James in that novelists must be realistic: “One must *size things up* properly. One cannot accurately know how things *will* be, what is promising and what is menacing, unless he accurately knows how things *are*” (298). Regarding the novel itself, John McGowan describes Burke’s essay in similar terms as James: “Literature dramatizes possibility...the existence of options and the capacity, but not the necessity, to exercise some but not all of those options,” so that, “literature allows us to play out the options, to set them in contrast to each other, and to project their development” (133-34). Burke would not say that all literature is this way, nor would he say that all literature must be read in this way, otherwise he would have titled his essay, “Literature *Is* Equipment for Living”. However, it seems as though James sees the best novels as equipment for living, especially in terms of the minimal requirements, such as regarding his view of literary characters.

From here, James critiques *Don Quixote* due to the author’s tainted vision of reality that appears in the characters themselves, and he then describes the qualifications of a good author. James states the criteria of an author who may create good literary characters: “It goes without

saying that you will not write a good novel unless you possess the sense of reality; but it will be difficult to give you a recipe for calling that sense into being. Humanity is immense, and reality has a myriad forms” (387-88). He continues to state that the only absolute regarding humanity in novels is that some have it and others do not, but he does not provide a rubric for discovery of those novels on the positive end. Instead, he critiques experience saying that it is constantly growing and evolving, so that a critic cannot state absolutely what kind of experience is worth writing into fiction. Similarly, he states that imagination has a large role to play in fiction writing, but that these are “miracles” and cannot be put down in any concrete format as a guide to aspiring authors. His example is of an English novelist who created a novel about French Protestant youth; when asked, the author admitted that the entire experience came from a trip to Paris where she saw a mere glimpse of young Protestants eating a meal. This mere snapshot of an event, when mixed with her personal experience and knowledge of France and Protestantism, created a concrete vision and reality for her novel. Using this example, James provides a tentative definition of experience:

The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life in general so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it—this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience, and they occur in country and in town, and in the most different stages of education. If experience consists of impressions, it may be said that impressions *are* experience, just as they are the very air we breathe (389).

Although James does not write in the psychological terms of either his brother or London, he essentially says the same thing: impressions on the mind are experience whether sensually

experienced or transmitted in another way. Reading a book about climbing a mountain, therefore, could provide the experience for an author to create another book about that same mountain, having never physically been there himself. The author, according to James, must mimic reality with a novel, but it only needs to *seem* real, for the reality on which it may be based has been in the mind of the author, and therefore subject to the effects of the brain.

In this way, James removes literary criticism from the realm of morality, discussions of truth, or other similar debates. He says that the author, given the freedom necessary to create an interesting novel, must be granted whatever subject he chooses. The critic, therefore, can only question what the novelist does with that subject, that is, “questions of art are questions (in the widest sense) of execution” (405). In terms of London’s literary success, James would agree that aspects such as word choice, sentence structure, and other methods for clearly transmitting a message from the author to the reader makes a novel good or bad. Yet, throughout all of these technical aspects of the novel, James continues to return to the refrain that a good novel imitates life: “Do not think too much about optimism and pessimism; try and catch the colour of life itself” (408). This includes events and settings, but it is especially applicable concerning fictional characters.

As a final note, the English novelist E. M. Forster, being contemporary to London, provides a succinct vision of literary characters and their relationship to reality. In *Aspects of the Novel*, published after two decades as a novelist, Forster describes the division between flat and round characters. First, he says that, “Flat characters were called ‘humorous’ in the seventeenth century, and are sometimes called types, and sometimes caricatures. In their purest form, they are constructed round a single idea or quality” (224-5). In his examples, Forster describes flat characters in a single sentence which fits throughout the course of the novel; a flat character does

not change. On the other hand, a round character “is capable of surprising in a convincing way” (231). Although this is a very subjective definition, it essentially states that a round character is more realistic, especially regarding human psychology. Although in life one may anticipate the actions of another, a human can always do something unexpected and seemingly outside of their personality, such as in the case of a religious or ideological conversion. Therefore, while most novels rely on flat characters, such as advancing the plot for the protagonists, existing as auxiliary characters, or even just existing because the novelist does not spend the time to develop the character fully into a round one, the round characters are those that resemble life.⁷ Thus, Forster exists in the same mimetic line of thinking, for these characters are the most valuable and the most necessary to a good novel, just as James states the necessity of characters realistic to life.

This overview of late nineteenth-century literary theory is essential to the project of examining the psychoepisodic nature of any novel, such as *The Iron Heel*. In the following discussion of London’s novel, it is noteworthy that there is arguably only one round character: Avis Everhard, the fictional author of the narrative itself. Since the novel is supposedly the annotation of Avis’s own perspective throughout the shift in American politics, it makes sense that many characters will appear flat being filtered through Avis’s experience. However, the primary emphasis of this endeavor is to examine the ways London’s text display habit through the characters, the events, and the actual narrative structure of the novel. Knowing that London actively created novels that sought the “right words” and that the emphasis of the novel was regarding realism in the realm of character development, I can examine *The Iron Heel* for its usage of nineteenth-century psychology, even unintentionally, through characters. In other words, I am using the literary theory of the era as a vehicle to combine psychology with character

⁷ cf. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 187. He describes characters with increasing complexity regarding virtues and vices, thus making them round characters.

development in London's particular novel. Through this, I display that London's text displays characters intimately connected to psychological habit, especially inasmuch as their survival is based on the ability to change their habits and adapt to their environment.

Habits in Jack London's *The Iron Heel*

Jack London wrote *The Iron Heel* in 1908 as the primary expression of his socialist views and their application to the United States. Formally, the novel is multi-layered, for it is primarily the autobiographical narrative of Avis Everhard, the husband of the socialist idealist and working class representative Ernest Everhard. The narrative begins with Avis's initial meeting of Ernest and continues throughout the early socialist uprisings and their subsequent destruction at the hands of the newly-empowered government known as the Oligarchy. However, the text begins with a forward from Anthony Meredith, a scholar from the year 419 B.O.M. (Brotherhood of Man), which is approximately seven hundred years after the Everhard narrative.⁸ With this additional layer, the dystopian text of Avis's narrative is ever surrounded by the utopian era to follow the eventual destruction of the Oligarchy. As a result, London provides numerous layers of the psychology of his time, matching the levels of the novel itself. First, there is the conversion of Avis to the socialist idealism of Ernest. According to William James's psychological theories, conversion is essentially the profound changing of habits, both mentally and physically, leading to a vastly different set of beliefs. Although he typically focuses on religious conversion, the same ideas relate to ideological conversion, such as in this text. Second, there is the failure of the social uprising and the subsequent fall of the working class to more atavistic animal-like tendencies. Third, but occurring simultaneously, is the rise of the Oligarchy, which is largely the habitual responses of the wealthier classes and those they choose to support financially. Yet, through these three different scenarios, habits, either their rigidity or their changing, appear at the center of the development of the various characters.

⁸ cf. Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*; this novel is also a description of a dystopian world being read in the context of many years later when a better society has arisen.

The Conversion of Avis and Ernest Everhard

Avis describes her first experience meeting Ernest, who was an invited guest to her father's dinner in Berkeley, California. With their first handshake, Avis immediately judges him based on class terms: "You see, I was a creature of environment, and at that time had strong class instincts. Such boldness on the part of a man of my own class would have been almost unforgivable" (IH 5). Up until her meeting of Ernest, Avis had no need to question her habits or to go outside of the world in which she has grown. Her environment was her father's home, and her father was in the higher classes of society being not only a member of Berkeley's intelligentsia, but also a world-renowned physicist and professor at the University of California. As a result, all of Avis's habits (she calls them instincts) are those of the upper class, and her reaction to Ernest's boldness is indicative of her own moral and ethical beliefs that had been formed at least in part from her class habits. Thus, her habits are not simply related to the proper dress or the correct dinner procedure, but it actually affects her personality, her beliefs, and by extension, her actions.

Avis's conversion takes place through her investigation of a factory worker named Jackson and his missing arm. Jackson, after working longer hours than normal, slipped on a machine and lost his arm. However, Jackson received no support from the company for the loss of his arm in their institution. Before her investigation, Avis believes that the legal system, despite minor flaws, was largely good and just, even for the working class: "The case would not have been decided against him had there been no more to the affair than you [Ernest] have mentioned" (IH 41). Due to her education and experiences, Avis insists that Jackson must have done something wrong while operating the machine, but she quickly learns that his only flaw was being in the working class. She first goes to his lawyer, and she makes manifest her class prejudice again when she says that he "whines" during their interview rather than recognizing a man who simply realizes his

worth in the social system. The lawyer explains how all of the testimonies given before the court, such as by Jackson's supervisor and coworkers, were all in support of the company, for they knew that their well-being came from the company. The lawyer then explains, "All my reading and studying of [law books] has taught me that law is one thing and right is another thing. Ask any lawyer. You go to Sunday-school to learn what is right. But you go to those books to learn... law" (IH 47). Until her beliefs were questioned, Avis associated what is morally right with what is legally right, but that ideology is the creation of bourgeois rhetoric. Through new experiences and by the acquisitions of new knowledge, especially alongside discussions with Ernest surrounding the plight of the working class and the oppression of labor by capital, eventually change Avis's class habits.

After her investigation, Avis describes her slow conversion in terms of forced reconsideration of her intellectual habits. She explains that through these new experiences, "I was confronted by the concrete. For the first time I was seeing life. My university life, and study and culture, had not been real. I had learned nothing but theories of life and society that looked all very well on the printed page, but now I had seen life itself" (IH 59). Much like a child entering adulthood, Avis must confront facts that no longer fit into her idea of life; somehow her idea must change. The change is gradual, and Avis frequently experiences new things that force her to shift her thinking even more. James explains this shifting in *Pragmatism* where he says, "Our minds thus grow in spots...but we let them spread as little as possible: we keep unaltered as much of our old knowledge, as many of our old prejudices and beliefs, as we can" (P 168-69). James says that at any moment, the mind possesses a series of beliefs about the truth of the world; when the individual experiences something new, the mind must take that pragmatic truth into account, which may mean the complete shift of beliefs. He continues: "New truths thus are resultants of

new experiences and of old truths combined and mutually modifying one another” (P 169), and that is precisely what is happening to Avis in this conversion experience. Additionally, James’s language is that of habits, for it is through experience that the old truths were formed and it is now through new experience that new truths will displace them. Therefore, the experience of discovering the flaws of the judicial system forces Avis to consider that her beliefs may be mistaken in other areas. Through this crevice, Ernest pushes through to continue to shift her ideas and eventually complete her conversion to socialism.

Ernest completes Avis’s conversion by promoting his new socialist worldview so that it can take the place of her older class ideology. This method is very similar to James’s comments on the ideal candidate for conversion: “first, the present incompleteness or wrongness, the ‘sin’ which he is eager to escape from; and, second, the positive ideal which he longs to compass” (V 209). Avis clearly has become aware of her habitual class “sin” through Jackson’s story, and Ernest embodies the positive ideal by becoming her religious hero: “Ernest rose before me transfigured, the apostle of truth, with shining brows and the fearlessness of one of God’s own angels, battling for the truth and the right, and battling for the succor of the poor and lonely and oppressed” (IH 61). The obvious allusion to Jesus is particularly ironic considering Avis’s previous description of Ernest as, “a superman, a blond beast such as Nietzsche has described” (IH 6); Nietzsche’s Zarathustra only becomes a superhuman through the realization that God is dead. Despite the contradiction of allusions, religious language proliferates throughout the text from a variety of characters, including Ernest himself.⁹

⁹ cf. Sam S. Baskett, “A Source of *The Iron Heel*,” *American Literature* 27, no. 2 (1955). He states that this religious language originates from the periodical *The Socialist Voice*, published in Oakland, California, and its features regarding the church in socialism.

Aaron Shaheen explains the combination of contradictory ideas as complex humanism, which imagines the journey to modernity as a dialectical exchange between reason and irrationality, between secularism and religion. In this way, Ernest speaks to the Philomaths, Berkeley's intelligentsia, as if his own conversion to socialism, much like Avis's, is a religious experience. Shaheen notes, "Given Ernest's near-one dimensionality, his occasional reference to the Bible in Avis' company provides a sharp counterpoint to his scientific idealism; as a result, this tension creates the 'impurities' that in turn give Ernest some glimmer of interiority" (48). In other words, Ernest is a flat character because he can be described in a single sentence: he is the spokesman for London's own brand of socialism. Being that London frequently confirmed his atheism and materialism, Ernest's comments do not fit this single sentence, but these moments are too rare to make Ernest anything other than flat. Therefore, since he is not the type of character examinable in psychoepisodic novels, this complex humanism rather confirms the complicated state of habits. The changing of intellectual habits through conversion is a mystery, one for which even James had no empirical answer, and even the superhuman socialist reverts to religious commentary.

Thus, I argue that London's use of the conversion rhetoric with Ernest and Avis is more than just convenient or conventional language to describe a change in a person, but rather that it is specifically regarding the psychological concepts connected to habit change and, by extension, personality change. For example, when James discusses the connection between religion and neurology in his *Varieties*, he describes religious emotions and thoughts as the same as non-religious emotions and thoughts, but exploded (V 24). In his chapter on "Saintliness," James describes the inner conditions of a saint: "where the character, as something distinguished from the intellect, is concerned, the causes of human diversity lie chiefly in our *differing susceptibilities of*

emotional excitement, and in the *different impulses and inhibitions* which these bring in their train” (V 261). Regarding the philosophical literary heroes, such as Zarathustra and Ernest, the otherwise rational intellectual only achieves heroic status through intense personal devotion to the theory; thus they are saints or apostles to rationalism and socialism, respectively. Ernest’s “faith” in socialism is grounded in his personal experience, his conversion, and now his personal mission to spread the “good word” of Marx. In the same way, James comments that, “the original factor in fixing the figure of the gods must always have been psychological. The deity to whom the prophets, seers, and devotees who founded the particular cult bore witness was worth something to them personally” (V 329). Therefore, as the flat character and mouthpiece of socialism, Ernest displays his personal devotion to the theories of socialism. It is only through the spreading of such a devotion, Ernest explains, that American society can change its capitalistic habits in order to create the national intentional community with the “cult of socialism” at the center.

The Failure of the Socialist Uprising

One of London’s primary contributions to the idea of the socialist revolution is the confrontation that would have to take place before any sort of utopia could arise. Gorman Beauchamp comments on how *The Iron Heel* differs from many other socialist utopian texts of the era that displayed a revolution based on intellectual persuasion and voluntary social change. He states that London specifically worked “to destroy the myth of the obliging oligarch,” and show how, “not moral suasion nor lessons in economics, but superior force would alone suffice to overthrow the capitalist system and institute the era of socialist brotherhood” (311). The entire first half of the novel focuses on the effect of persuasion: the lectures do help convert Avis to the socialist cause, but they do nothing to those in power who could initiate the social change.

Through these discussions, especially to the Philomaths, Ernest displays the limits of logical persuasion by revealing the brutish nature below.¹⁰ Before his presentation to the Philomaths, for example, he says, “When their morality is questioned, they grow only the more complacent and superior. But I shall menace their money-bags. That will shake them to the roots of their primitive natures,” and further that Avis, “will see the cave-man, in even dress, snarling and snapping over a bone...an illuminating insight into the nature of the beast” (IH 74). When compared to Avis’s response to a new piece of knowledge threatening the old beliefs, the Philomaths completely reject the socialist message. James theorizes similar types of rejection when he explains, “what is better for us to believe is true *unless the belief incidentally clashes with some other vital benefit*” (P 77). These members of the higher classes depend on capitalism for their very livelihood, and socialism threatens that. As a result, the belief in the positive aspects of socialism certainly clashes with the benefits they reap from capitalism, so they dismiss it as untrue.

In this scene London actively combines James’s theory of habits with his pragmatism; if an individual does not believe something to be true on pragmatic grounds, then his habits will not change. In this way, worldview and beliefs are not merely intellectual persuasions, but rather the cultivation of a series of ideas and beliefs that work for that individual in that particular environment. Thus when Ernest pushes for a response: “Give me an intellectual answer to my intellectual charge that the capitalist class has mismanaged society” (IH 94), the only response acceptable is: “We are in power. Nobody will deny it. By virtue of that power we shall remain in power” (IH 96). Although Ernest pushes his socialist message in terms of truth, the only accurate

¹⁰ See Jack London, *Before Adam* (New York: Macmillan, 1907) for a more complete vision of the slippage between civilized man and savage beast. In the novel a modern boy, somehow being able to tap into his “evolutionary memories,” dreams the memories of his ancestor “Big-Tooth.” Throughout the text, he displays the fluid movement between man and animal, such as his noting how anger can make one of the evolving “Folk” into a pure beast: “There was nothing human left in him. He was the beast incarnate, roaring and raging and being destroyed” (169), or that “I am unable to tell what age I am living in...I, the modern, am incontestably a man; yet I, Big-Tooth, the primitive, am not a man” (227).

truth in the novel, especially at this moment, is that the world is the way that it is, and it works. Only with a violent uprising, only with some fissure in the workings of the society will force the change, both socially and personally. This view of socialism accurately fits James's image of society at the same period of time:

Habit is thus the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative agent. It alone is what keeps us all within the bounds of ordinance, and *saves the children of fortune from the envious uprisings of the poor*. It alone prevents the hardest and most repulsive walks of life from being deserted by those brought up to tread therein. It keeps the fisherman and the deck-hand at sea through the winter; it holds the miner in his darkness, and nails the countryman to his log-cabin and his lonely farm through all the months of snow; it protects us from invasion by the natives of the desert and the frozen zone. It dooms us all to fight out the battle of life upon the lines of our nurture or our early choice, and to make the best of a pursuit that disagrees, because there is no other for which we are fitted, and it is too late to begin again (LH 447, emphasis added).

In this passage, James essentially says that capitalism and its allowance of oppression exists due to the reality of psychological habits. Ernest displays this very psychological problem for the question of socialism in the United States; socialist leaders do not need intellectual reasonings, persuasive arguments, or academic clubs to support their political bent. Rather, they must confront physical and intellectual habit, for as the conservative agent, habit is the very enemy of socialism while in a capitalist world. It is noteworthy that James's examples are all related to the means of production, such as the fisherman, deck-hand, and miner being forced into their place.

Ernest does admit one change taking place naturally in society at this time: the complete invasion of industry. His commentary on the shift matches London's own literary theory, as well as that of romantic hermeneutics, for Ernest says, "I wish I could convey to you the conception that is dimly forming in my own mind" (IH 104). Through his personal experience, he holds particular beliefs and thoughts about the way that the world is, but he also recognizes his limited ability to put those experiences into language such that Avis will feel those things as if they were her own. More interesting, though, is the way that he shows how the industrial system is "causing equally swift changes in our religious, political, and social structures. An unseen and fearful revolution is taking place in the fibre and structure of society" (IH 104). Essentially, the rise of technology and industry in the United States is, according to Ernest, doing the very thing that his socialist message cannot do: change society's habits. Industry has this power because it has a physical effect on the environment, whereas socialism's only power is intellectually in the mind of those who convert to its belief system. In an article discussing the psychological status of James's pragmatism, Michael S. Lawlor explains that, "Environments, like individuals, vary as to the degree to which they will tolerate just any comfortable belief...certain personalities may be more attracted to this environment, and it may foster certain habits of thought" (329). As the environment in the United States becomes more industrial, it forces its inhabitants to establish new habits conducive to such a way of life. Therefore, Ernest's comment reveals the changing personality of the various social structures in society so that they can become more fitting in the capitalist world.¹¹

¹¹ cf. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (New York: Penguin, 2002). Weber points out that many of the beliefs from the Reformation aligned with the later rise of modern capitalism. Therefore, later iterations of Protestant religious institutions, as well as associated social structures, all grow and evolve under the auspices of capitalism, being the overarching environment affecting the "organisms" of these institutions.

Ernest's commentary all surrounds the fact that the university threatened Avis's father for his personal beliefs since he is now thoroughly converted to the socialist ideology. Although the university is much larger than a single individual, it does act as a being with a single personality in this example. The university gains a great deal of money through private donations from capitalists, and those capitalists detest the socialist ideology that threatens to undermine their fortunes. As a result, the university changes its personality to better fit with the capitalist environment that supports it. However, Avis's father refused to shift with it, believing that his personal stores could save him: "I am independent. I have not been a professor for the sake of my salary. I can get along very comfortably on my own income, and the salary is all they can take away from me" (IH 106). Through this obstinate reaction, Avis's father has failed to develop habits acceptable for his environment, and thus the environment will reject him. Later in the novel, he loses his job, his claim to industrial dividends, and even his house. Clearly, although he believes that his socialist ideas are true, they do not work in the pragmatic sense because his new habits could not act appropriately for his environment. These effects show the power of the capitalist environment in habitual terms, as Lawlor explains, "For James a true belief is one which allows its holder to act successfully to attain ends which are the practical consequences of those beliefs, while simultaneously causing as little adjustment to the rest of one's beliefs as possible" (327). Most of the society in *The Iron Heel* holds beliefs that support the capitalist worldview simply so that they avoid the same fall as Avis's father. Additionally, these types of beliefs cause little adjustment to the individual's existing set of beliefs because the latter were formed in the capitalist environment already. Therefore, from the capitalist habits developed in childhood from capitalist-thinking parents, only the capitalist beliefs fit with minimal adjustment, whereas socialist ideas would force a reintegration of an entire lifetime's worth of beliefs.

Ultimately, the class conflict in the novel takes place in terms of habits, both changing and stagnant. The very few upper class conversions are only an exception to the rule, for men like Ernest, as heroic figures, force them to intentionally experience events or achieve realizations that no longer allow their previous worldview to continue unaltered. Most of the working class members' beliefs and actions are rooted in survival, and survival itself is dictated by the rule of habit. They act and believe in the way to which they are accustomed, for that is the only truth that they know being that it had worked in the past. They seek to avoid the fate that comes to Bishop Morehouse: "If he persisted in the truth as he saw it, he was doomed to an insane ward... his views were perilous to society, and society could not conceive that such perilous views could be the product of the sane mind" (IH 189). Most people, wanting to exist in society, cannot hold those same beliefs because they would not work; that is, the individuals who hold those beliefs would not be able to stay out of an asylum. At the same time, Morehouse also fits into James's notion of superior minds who are more independent from the movements of societal habits. While the average person may largely concern themselves with the cohesion of current beliefs with the present, James says, "Religious melancholy is not disposed of by a simple flourish of the word insanity. The absolute things, the last things, the overlapping things, are the truly philosophical concerns; all superior minds feel seriously about them, and the mind with the shortest views is simply the mind of the more shallow man" (P 108). In this way, Morehouse believes the socialism to which Ernest introduced him because his mind is concerned with larger issues than the vast majority of society. Yet, the socialist revolution requires the participation of the entire working class, so until they can be convinced to change their capitalist habits and believe that socialism is true, they will continue in the habitual path in which they are accustomed

Near the end of the novel the revolutionaries lose any political power that they gained through democratic means. Due to the danger that now exists through the hegemony of the Oligarchy, Ernest forces Avis to assume a new identity. He tells her, “You must make yourself over again... You must cease to be. You must become another woman—and not merely in the clothes you wear, but inside your skin under the clothes. You must make yourself over again so that even I would not know you—your voice, your gestures, your mannerisms, your carriage, your walk, everything” (IH 274). Ernest makes it clear in this passage that the transformation cannot merely be external, but it must be a complete change of personality. Since personality is the result of the collection of habits and beliefs throughout life, Avis proceeds to change those most intimate things about herself. She began by envisioning a new woman to take her place; she calls this her “other self” (IH 274). Avis describes her change as a long process, like learning a new language, that she achieves only through hours of effort. Since her change in identity is essentially a massive habitual change, James’s rules for effectively bringing about new habits are extremely applicable.¹² These rules include making a conscious effort to change, which Avis clearly does here, and not allowing “an exception to occur till the new habit is securely rooted in your life” (LH 448). Avis most certainly does this, too, because she explains that it would take great effort to return to her old self having working so intently at becoming a new woman. She says, “It was necessary for us to practise [sic] until our assumed rôles became real” (IH 275), and even Meredith in his footnote explains that disguises at the time were “fundamental, intrinsic, part and parcel of one’s being, second nature” (IH 275, note 1). These disguises, therefore, are not simply physical changes in appearance, nor are they conversions in the sense of Avis’s transformation

¹² cf. Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will* (London: Parker, 1859). His chapter “The Moral Habits” serves as the source for these maxims as summarized in James’s text.

into a socialist. Instead, Avis and her group of rebels are consciously altering their habits in order to affect their personalities. In pragmatic terms, their survival depends on their ability to hide their true form, so they must achieve a belief system that allows new identities to become real.

During the same time in the novel, socialist rebels seized many of the cities in the United States in order to create intentional communities outside of the influence of the Oligarchy. As a result, the upper classes simply left downtown areas and moved to the suburbs in order to avoid the revolution and also to preserve what remains of civilization.¹³ Through this move, the upper classes display themselves as creatures of habit working in their own self-interest for survival. The ideology behind socialism, although appealing for the lower classes, threatens the livelihood of the upper classes. As such, the upper classes create their own rhetoric that supports their worldview. Carl Abbott, writing about this move to the suburbs in *The Iron Heel*, explains the phenomenon of the dual city by saying, “suburban Americans have internalized the premises that success justifies privilege and that suburban comfort is a natural manifestation of civilized order” (373). The members of the upper classes possess their own set of beliefs that include their place as the keepers of civilization. At the same time, the socialist ideology sees the suburbs as a physical representation of the separation between classes, and thus in a socialist utopia they cannot exist. However, the final vision of the novel has very little room for any utopian vision, especially in Chicago, as the Oligarchy crushes the first rebellion by focusing on the Chicago Commune.

In the final episode of the novel, Avis describes the Chicago Commune, being the first iteration of an idealized socialist world, as a pit of corruption and animalistic people called the people of the abyss. As the Mercenaries, the armies hired by the Oligarchy, began to destroy the

¹³ See Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* (Boston: Ticknor, 1888) for a utopian vision that is the exact opposite: a world where everyone lives in cities that then become technological metropolises.

Chicago Commune, these people of the abyss came out of hiding to find some revenge against the upper classes. As Avis moves throughout the commune, her guide explains that the people of the abyss are not their socialist comrades, but rather they are the victims of both the socialist and capitalist ideologies battling one another. Avis describes her first impressions: “It was not a column, but a mob, an awful river that filled the street, the people of the abyss, mad with drink and wrong, up at last and roaring for the blood of their masters” (IH 326). Through her use of Roman terms for the military and the general population, Avis summons images of the violent classical communities that enjoyed gladiatorial shows and invented crucifixion. Similarly, she describes them as slaves looking for revenge from those masters who held them in forced labor bondage for so long, if not by chains, then by debt and other capitalist burdens. According to Avis these people no longer looked human, but rather they were “apes and tigers, anæmic consumptives and great hairy beasts of burden...faces of fiends, crooked, twisted, misshapen monsters blasted with the ravages of disease and all the horrors of chronic innutrition—the refuse and the scum of life, a raging, screaming, screeching, demoniacal horde” (IH 326-27).¹⁴ Avis uses these images of atavistic beasts and barbarians not in fear, nor in disgust, but rather in pure shock; she continues to describe how the mob overtook her and nearly pushed her into the Mercenaries’ machine guns. In this way, London describes habits as having the power to convert people into more advanced forms but the power to degenerate humans into animals and civilized citizens into criminals.

¹⁴ cf. London, *Before Adam*. In this novel, London describes the most barbaric beast as being closer to humanity: “Red-Eye, in spite of his tremendous atavistic tendencies, foreshadowed the coming of man, for it is the males of the human species only that murder their mates” (167).

Conclusion

London displays the use of habits and personality in his characters of *The Iron Heel* especially because it is a dystopian text. The novel describes the violent beginnings to a futuristic socialist society, and these changes force characters to consider their beliefs and habits in order to survive in the new world. Beauchamp explains London's unique perspective, saying, "London reverses the usual balance found in the utopian novels of the time, in which the new social order is lengthily detailed, while its birth pangs (if any) are but briefly related. But this reversal of emphasis—from contemplation to action—has its own ideological as well as psychological significance" (308). In other words, while other authors and philosophers imagined a world where the upper classes would peacefully and voluntarily give their power over to the proletariat, London describes the bloodshed that such a transformation would require.¹⁵ More importantly, London examines the different methods that one might use to motivate another to alter his thinking. In the first half of the novel, he displays the inability for mere philosophical inquiry to affect the habits and beliefs of most people. In the second half, he shows the resulting violence and its ability to change habits, although not necessarily for the better. Therefore, London does focus on the socialist revolution and its political stakes, but he also describes the psychological effects on the characters through these various episodes.

Ultimately, the nineteenth and very early twentieth centuries flourish with psychoepisodic novels, especially considering the realistic focus of literary criticism and the rise of American psychology as a specific area of research and inquiry. While the utopian and dystopian novels are particularly fruitful for their psychological value, many other novels include some view into the human psyche. In particular, James's psychology illustrates the importance of pragmatic belief

¹⁵ See Ignatius Donnelly, *Caesar's Column* (Chicago: Schulte, 1890) for another example of the violent worker's revolution and its effect on socialist leadership.

and habitual action, and this can appear in a novel's characters. Through such an interpretation, one can see the ways a character determines the truth value of a particular belief and the ways in which the character handles shifts in the environment. In dystopian novels, one can see the destabilization of society and the subsequent effects on the characters of that world. Some characters rise to the occasion, whereas others fall into corruption and atavism; however, every response is connected to the character's psychological processes. Additionally, since London so adamantly grasps the necessity of right words and realistic characters, his attention to the habits and various conversions of Avis and the others display the importance of such psychological traits in such novels. Therefore, in *The Iron Heel* the environments change, and the characters' habits adapt with them, but the text shows that habits always exist, for in them lies personality.

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