CLUSTER SEEDS AND THE MAILER LEGACY

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THE MAILER "SEEDS" STIRRED, as the Twentieth Century dawned and American literature soared. The last century would climax in the late 1920s, and achieve its final "coming of age," now superior to its English and European counterparts, soon to be the new superpower's final word.

An early starting line indicator in the history of literary legacy—the birth of Ernest Hemingway in 1899. As an unknown expatriate in early 1920s Paris, America's future "Papa" was, probably, its first to orbit into international literary recognition and power. Meanwhile, on the home grounds, Walt Whitman, in 1892, died.

In his monumental *Leaves of Grass*, nine editions in total, Walt Whitman became the archetypal American Idealized Poet, the lover of the Universe, and the singular Bard of Selfhood, Freedom and Democracy, with a Vision of a Potential Utopian America. All his fresh idiomatic verse showered down in future generations of writers and shaped their artistic, cultural and political beliefs, mostly "Leftist," or "Liberal" or "Progressive" or any other relevant "ism."

Whitman died amid minimal "cult" media (no Mark Twain sensational funeral). Whitman's legacy was powerful and sometimes underground, but clearly many contemporary and later writers were inseminated with Whitman "seeds." And Norman Mailer was one of those who had more than his share. For the Mailer scholar, legacy quotient is based more on his authorial singularity and less on the common characteristics of his generation of contemporary writers. Whitman's death announced that the nineteenth-century American Realism of Howells and James had ended. In its wings

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was formed the new Literary Naturalism that might be called the "dynamic male quintet."

These five new literary figures—Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Jack London, Theodore Dreiser, and the lesser writer, Richard Harding Davis, a power-packed Quintet—personified the Mailer "seed womb" that gave rise to the man from Brooklyn and his subsequent place on the international literary scene.

The new literary generation, post-Civil War Realism, was Naturalism, a French import, and its chief spokesman was Emile Zola (1840–1902), author and activist, with a postmortem solution to the cultural ashes of the Darwinian era in which "revealed religion" had suffered a downward slide. In its place loomed Scientism and its cousin, Technology, which was clearly related to Industrialism. The spirit of objectivity was ushered in and the arts were forced to adapt to this new cultural reality. Thus, there could be no more significant aesthetic apartheid. Zola insisted on a remedial "cultural marriage." The new union was a merging of arts and sciences.

Zola published his 1800 manifesto, *The Experimental Novel*, in which he advocated that writers (and other artists) imitate the scientific method and, experimentally, return to nature, follow natural laws, and apply a somewhat strict theory and practice. Thus, a writer must observe and record and interpret less and be more objective—underplaying figurative and melodramatic prose. This perspective was primarily theoretical, but in practice resulted in hardcore realism that still included some romantic excess (exactly what Mailer subsequently achieved in his Naturalistic WWII novel, *The Naked and the Dead*).

British philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) transformed the more abstract biological Darwinism into a more practical cultural context, more ethical and sociological. Historians dubbed this "Social Darwinism." This movement ushered in a new empirical arena, characterized by such stark phrases as "struggle for existence" and "survival of the fittest," "Laissez Faire" and "Progress."

There were new literary directions in the air. The two new dominant thematic "isms" were Scientism and Humanism, often hybridized. Homo sapiens existed in a materialistic and deterministic universe, manipulated by outside forces. Behavior thus was subject to two prime conditioning factors. What Zola called "psycho-chemical laws" became translated as "heredity" (later as DNA). What Zola called the "milieu" became "environmental," and

its focus was the social sciences. Humans thus were biological pawns or social ciphers with limited free will. Thus evolved a literary sensibility that emphasized a character's external and not inner world.

Literary Naturalism offered new vistas, now Americanized, less dogmatic, and more pliable. There was a setting shift from the genteel upper and middle class to the "submerged tenth" or social bottom. The new prevailing mood was sordid, shocking, and depressing. There was new urban blight, factories and slums, along with their agrarian equivalent, the vanishing Jeffersonian farmer.

Darwin is well known for his depictions of "atavism" or reversion to degradation or monstrosity, or earlier primal roots. In 1914, Edgar Rice Burroughs published, *Tarzan and the Apes.* Earlier, in 1897, Bram Stoker wrote *Dracula*, a series of written letters, published on the eve of the "movies," and the coming erosion of the nineteenth-century's power of the printed word. As for lycanthropy, Frank Norris (the American Naturalist writer, except for Dreiser, with the most Mailer "seeds") wrote *Vandover and the Brute*, a kind of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) novel. Instead of "monster," literary critics then preferred the phrase "brute," a creature of minimal intelligence, incompetent in the struggle for existence, and psychology and literature textbooks called such characters grotesques.

There was further new "ism" fallout, a host of new taboo-breakers—a Darwin-Spencer focus on basic human needs: sex, hunger, survival skills, which meant more stark violence, force against force—that is, animalistic human survival. The American language was not spared. Its brainchild was the modern documentary. This new prose was steeped in objectivity. Furthermore, as writing aped the sciences, it relied on basic research and copious details. Some candor and frankness was welcomed, but not the overtly rhetorical and figurative.

The once-puritanical American vernacular finally had loosened its tongue. Taboo cultural matters, such as physical bodily functions, especially sex, and its verbal offspring, profanity and depravity, were unleashed—at first slowly, but soon an avalanche of expletives poured out until the popular arts seemed awash with four-lettered realities. All of the above, collectively, was the cultural legacy of literary Naturalism. The first Naturalist novel, Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), modernized the literary scene. The twenty-two-year-old Crane and his shocking book ignited an overnight youth takeover of American letters and became the avant-

garde. At the forefront was the young male quintet, whose collective canons would transform earlier cherished literature, while they themselves were short-lived—quite literally premature deaths, except for Theodore Dreiser who survived just three years shy of *The Naked and the Dead*.

Mailer was born in 1923 when Naturalism was in its prime—illustrated by its 1925 masterpieces, *An American Tragedy* and *The Great Gatsby*. Of these powerful works, the pre-kindergarten Mailer would hardly be aware. But who knows? Maybe Mailer's literary DNA twitched and he could sense a change in times.

Stephen Crane (1871–1900) started out as a newspaperman writing the "Bowery Sketches," which resulted, at age twenty-one, in *Maggie*. Its focus was slums and prostitution. This first Naturalist work shocked the country. It appeared in yellow covers, a tiny printing (at Crane's own expense) with a self-protecting pseudonym, Johnston Smith (the two most frequently used names in the New York telephone book). Crane's second opus was *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), written from scratch with no actual war experience—and yet the first modern psychological treatment of war. This book remained his masterpiece and, like Mailer, Crane was a literary star in his mid-twenties. Thereafter, Crane fell in love with violence. He turned daredevil foreign war correspondent, in search of any available warfare moment, to foreshadow Hemingway and Mailer. Crane was America's first modern "Bad Boy Writer." Later critics dubbed him the "Poetic Naturalist." In raw content, his prose did have a veneer of tough fact. And he was a Zolaesque technician with a concern for form and economy. His diction remained compact, energetic, and provocative. Crane also wrote highly competent short fiction and stark verse. Crane's work evolved into literary impressionism, with an accent on tone and mood, rather than on theme, plot, and character. The result was prose that was no longer logical and orderly, a drift toward the non-rational, amoral, and pre-speech—all of these qualities a very early preview of today's postmodernism.

The Western canon posthumously embraced Crane's work, and he became a classic American. A veteran Mailer legacy quotient watcher might easily recast Crane's treatment into a transplanted 1960s Mailer scenario. Yet, obviously, Crane's most notable disciple was Hemingway, especially their similar lifestyles. But an obsessive Crane-Hemingway-Mailer's thread, probably diminished rather than enhanced Mailer legacy quotient. As for the

Crane-Mailer connection, its most positive legacy quotient factor was, despite writing in widely diverse times, each writer's singularity.

Another figure of singularity was Frank Norris (1870–1902). His literary DNA hinted as much, as did his Chicago affluent environment: his father, a successful jeweler; his mother, a teacher and actress; and their son, being taught the arts in Paris where he fell in love with medieval fantasy and chivalry. At age fifteen, Norris moved to San Francisco and entered the University of California, where he excelled in writing and football and fell under Zola's spell. Later, he fondly called himself, the "Boy Zola." When his parents divorced, he lost most of his inheritance (over a million dollars). But he persevered and, obeying Zola, he studied San Francisco's "social bottom," then went off to Harvard to study writing. He covered the Boer War as a newspaper man, then to Cuba and the Spanish-American War and, later, more domesticated, be became an editor-reader at Doubleday publishers, where he helped shepherd into print Theodore Dreiser's historic Naturalist novel, *Sister Carrie*. Norris's own canon, like Crane's, was brief, but intense. From the outset, Norris's literary trademark was sensationalism. Two subsequent novels, his second, *Moran of the Lady Letty*, and his fourth, *Blix,* were, at best, pulp melodramas. Norris struck gold in his controversial, *McTeague* (1899). Compared with Crane's slim yellow-wrapped *Maggie*, Norris's opus became America's first major thematic Naturalist novel. Its protagonist, McTeague, was the Darwinian Adam or the "brute within" but with a heart of gold. He was sluggish, unambitious, easily pacified, a massive slow-witted, blonde-mustached dentist with enormous hands who pulled out teeth with his bare hands, saddled with a mismatched grotesque wife, Trina Sieppe. She was afflicted, literally enslaved with both "avarice" and "sensuality." Such primal "greed," both racial and ethnic, was rooted in her Swiss peasant blood, which impelled her to take her money to bed where she, psychotically, "made love" with it. Her husband disapproved and the marriage turned violent.

The novel's supporting cast were the people of Polk Street, a slice of San Francisco's social bottom, rundown and stinky, full of racial-ethnic degenerates who grossly overate and exhibited other unseemly behavior. The novel's denouement occurred in Death Valley, where hero and villain perished with "thirsty" operatics. Such mega-sensationalism was a natural scenario for, some say, the greatest silent film, entitled *Greed*, directed by Erich

von Stroheim, who shot on location in Death Valley. The final director's cut was forty-two reels and was shown once in nine-and-a-half hours.

After *McTeague*, Norris embarked on his short final phase and his first enterprise was a trilogy, *The Epic of Wheat*, and its first novel was *The Octopus: A Story of California* (1901), which was panoramic serious fiction, and well written. Its mammoth theme was economic determinism, or man in the grip of uncontrollable forces. The two powers in conflict were the railroads, backed by urban bankers and industrialists, mostly state-wide and national, versus Californian wheat farmers, both rich and poor yet still powerful.

The octopus in the title figuratively refers to humankind's kinship with those entangling crushing primordial forces in Nature, opposed by human instinct. Yet this 1901 novel was well wrought. Critics and readers marveled at Norris's unlimited literary potential. The second novel, *The Pit* ("The Chicago Story"), was published posthumously in 1903 and it focused on the production of wheat. The scene shifted from the vast agrarian to the cramped urban scene and its "survival of the fittest." The title referred to Chicago's Board of Trade and the plot hinged on cutthroat attempts to corner the wheat market. Curtis Jadwin, an impassioned capitalist and a leading trade speculator, tests his Darwinian-Spencerian skills, both economically and romantically. Indeed, much of the novel is devoted to Jadwin's marital woes. The novel's ending threatens to be an absolute tragedy when the Wheat Market crashes, which breaks Jadwin's monopoly and erases his assets—all caused by natural forces (in this instance, unforeseen heavy wheat production in the far West). The third and final volume, *The Wolf*, dealt with the consumption of wheat in France, a novel which remained unfinished and unpublished.

But literary quotient analysts pondered "Boy Zola's" marvelous literary excesses. His concept of Nature as Force and Energy, plus his "isms," plus ideological characters such as the Neitzchean Superman and even a Superwoman (see *Moran and the Lady Letty*), plus his anti-intellectual prose (and more elegant English), plus his atmospheric neo-primitivism and operatic techniques—all contributed to his status. Norris, indeed, was an outstanding stylist. His prose style was an odd hybrid, part documentary and part "purple prose." His tonal effects were multiplex—word packets of solemn messages in slapstick wrappings. But what most separated him from this first wave of American Naturalists was his becoming this movement's great-

est symbolist, akin to the twentieth-century-enshrined Melville. The Norris canon, posthumously, struck a strong prenatal Mailer connection with Norris's aesthetics in *The Responsibilities of a Novelist* (1903). There, Norris discussed three groups of novels: (a) of "plot" (of telling); (b) of "character" (of showing); and (c) (his preference), of "theme" (of proving)—the message novel. Norris also interpreted Naturalism as a new form of Romance and compared it as it differed from the earlier Realism of Howells and James. But what fascinated Mailer observers was Norris's theorizing about his and America's future. Thus, late in his life, Norris emerged as a "big thinker."

The once "Boy Zola" called for the American Novel, a "romance of force," and its template, man's "animal nature" transformed into a neo-epic, and its rhetoric would resemble a lifelike "symphony of energy," a vast "orchestration of force." Its narrative would focus on the human struggle for food, sex, shelter, and other earthly basic or more sublime abstractions such as power, wisdom, and justice.

What Norris was doing was making Naturalism and nationalism synonymous, and, in doing so, was previewing the literary gospel of America as the Twentieth Century's "global superpower." Norris, as seer, had prefigured the first Mailer seed storm. Mailer, either by reading or osmosis, would ingest the Norris message and he would make the most of the philosophic "Boy Zola." Yes, of these five literary revolutionaries—Crane, Norris, London, Davis, and Dreiser—Norris remained the best bet for becoming Mailer's earliest literary "blood brother."

At the opposite pole of minimalism, in 1900, Theodore Dreiser's Mailer influence was limited to his landmark Naturalist novel, *Sister Carrie*. Unlike the other four writers with their strikingly early deaths, Dreiser survived until 1945, on the eve of Mailer's first draft of *The Naked and the Dead*. Consequently, the more salient Dreiser-Mailer connection occurred after Dreiser's two female-centered novels, *Sister Carrie* (1900) and *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911). Dreiser's first novel was an instant failure, with few sales and the barest recognition. For a decade, a stricken Dreiser did not publish. In 1900, in the midst of a literary arch-masculine "ism," Dreiser introduced Naturalism's first three-dimensional female protagonist in a highly readable novel. Concurrent heroines, such as Crane's slum-girl, *Maggie*, and Norris's Viking Superwoman, *Moran*, were either lab "case studies" or wild male fantasies. But Caroline Meeber (sister Carrie) came off the page as a real new

woman in a new real environment. A potential twentieth-century bestseller, instead, got snuffed out and Dreiser, readerless, had vanished.

Consequently, when Crane and Norris died, their muscle-bound canons boomed on, until Dreiser's new female reality, after a decade hiatus, resurfaced about 1925, American literature's banner year. Earlier, after *Jennie Gerhardt* (a sentimental *Carrie*), Dreiser shifted into more familiar Zola-Norris territory with his "Trilogy of Desire," capped by his masterpiece, *An American Tragedy*, published in 1925, as was another iconic novel, *The Great Gatsby*. Those avid female readers of the Jazz Age Flappers also quickly assimilated *Sister Carrie* and were fascinated by how its heroine ended. Carrie, now a generic "sister," had rebelled and survived, socially unpunished, emotionally unscathed, except for seemingly natural bemusement. Dreiser's underlined theme was that females' recourse to instinct or intuition immunized them from emotional tragedy. The 1920s vamps, of course, read Carrie's "victory" as a call for the "new women" to go into a cultural free fall.

The fourth member of the "modern" literary Quintet was Richard Harding Davis (1864–1916), an odd fit with his literary peers, a media darling of his times, and thus an essential link from Twain and London to later media masters, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Mailer. Davis was a leading journalist, a globetrotting, derring-do reporter of wars, such as the Greek-Turkish War, the Spanish-American War, the Boer War, and World War I. Yet he was prolific, his prose was pedestrian, and he "could spin a yarn." His short stories, eleven volumes, numbering over eighty stories, were factually crafted, vivid, and exciting, with flashes of local color. His fiction had global settings, was highly theatrical with sensational plots, fast-paced with typed characters, and not exactly "serious" fiction. He wrote twenty-five plays. His novels were outlandishly romantic and superficial. His most representative novel was the author's self-image, *A Soldier of Fortune* (1897). Davis was known as the Beau Brummel, or dandy-dressed, of the American press. Then, he was the ideal male—tall, handsome, tough but debonair, at ease at showy wars, in proper salons, and risqué beds—and he was blessed with a manly code of good manners (faint echoes of the later Hemingway hero).

Davis, instead, became a media-created American male hero, to be emulated and revered.

But the "other" Davis, the literary careerist, was radically different, more like the high-risk lifestyles of Crane and London. On news assignments, Davis actually tempted death. The press loved his go-for-broke front line

antics. He called the Spanish-American War "splendid fun" and took part in the Battle of San Juan Hill, and made Teddy Roosevelt and his Rough Riders famous. Davis became the newspapers' darling. He had continuous access to elite personages from presidents to kings and queens, even the underworld.

All this fame peaked at about age twenty-six and turned into high financial rewards as Davis began to reshape both American history and journalistic fiction. Upon the heels of the 1890 U.S. Census announcing the Closing of the Frontier, Crane toured the West, and rechristened the Wild West, the "Mild West" (see "The Blue Hotel"). Davis went out West, pressed the flesh with sportive cowboys, Texas Rangers, and even Mexican murderers. He temporarily revived the myth of the Wild West, a preview of the coming power of celebrity journalists and other media hounds to temporarily remake history.

Davis also had "splendid fun" with the literary urban crime genre. In his story collection, *Van Bibber and Others* (1892), he introduced his new upperclass hero, Courtland Van Bibber, of rich Dutch ancestry, the moneyed young clubman and eternal playboy, the public consummate law-abider who, by night (like today's comic books' caped crime-stoppers), descended to the underworld, disguised, to save maidens and right wrongs. Such was the clever packaging of Robin Hood, the Scarlet Pimpernel, and Andrew Carnegie, who gave away $350 million dollars and called it, "The Gospel of Wealth." "Van Bibber's" ultimate tone was not seriousness, but amusement. Davis's fiction with media accompaniment had turned American literature into banal comic grand opera.

If Mailer, during the decades of building his canon, ever pondered such quaint cultural and literary goings-on, he probably both winced and smiled at seeing a virtual repeat of those big-media shows, obvious only during Paine's two brief stints, and the more prolonged follow-ups by Emerson and Twain. Mailer also probably noted (with Hemingway's melodramatic demise on his mind) that Davis died naturally in 1916, the same year as Jack London's more mysterious death, and how Jack (call me "Wolf"), in a much shorter lifespan, and whose one-decade career, attracted intense glaring media legacy quotient that threatened to eclipse Mark Twain.

The fifth and final Naturalist was Jack London (1876–1916). His early demise was foreshadowed by a storybook life, which read like a boyish yet mannish fantasy. He was born in the slums of San Francisco—illegitimate.

London's early life—waterfront Oakland poverty and an eighth-grade education—was spent reading Kipling, Marx, Spenser, and Nietzsche. (Later, at age twenty-one, on his 1897 Yukon arctic-trek, he brought *The Origin of Species*, *Paradise Lost*, and read and reread *Moby-Dick*.)

London, at age thirteen, became an oyster pirate, purchasing a sloop in San Francisco Bay. At age fifteen he drank heavily and had a mistress. At age seventeen he sailed for seven months in the Pacific. Still seventeen, London won a newspaper prize for an account of a typhoon off Japan. He then returned to Oakland for one more high school year and, in 1896, at age twenty, he spent one semester in college, where he joined a radical wing of the Socialist Party as an activist speaker. He was occasionally jailed.

In 1898, after time in the Klondike, he returned to Oakland to begin serious writing. What followed was a short but brutal ordeal (he called himself a "work beast"). There were a sea of rejections, dramatized in his later autobiographical novel, *Martin Eden,* and, in 1900, his breakthrough happened—nine collected stories, *The Son of the Wolf*, and sudden national fame. Like Mailer, London achieved substantial notoriety in his mid-twenties. Yet the London corpus of work, incredibly large for its sixteen-year span, was a mix of throwaway pulp, but also some excellent writing, and thus a mixed career.

America's natural topographical frontier was rapidly fading after the U.S. Census declared the frontier officially closed. President Teddy Roosevelt embodied the "strenuous life" and London was its chief literary embodiment. The boy "oyster pirate" turned into a frontier strong man, a primitive adventurer who sniffed out new raw settings. There was the Klondike near-Arctic wilderness, then the bottomless South Seas, and onto the "submerged tenth" of London slums and the San Francisco waterfront. Interestingly, by Mailer's time, the pristine frontier was truly closed shut.

London's lifestyle also turned him into a literary pioneer. Destined to become a serious writer, he nonetheless gave birth to enhanced he-man *Argosy* stories and other pulp magazines, and he also toughened up the sudsy Horatio Alger (how-to-succeed) Dime Novels, with a new dose of rugged individualism. Unlike his compatriot Quintet, his canon had heavy pulp content but it was muscular and moving, peopled at times with (successful) abysmal brutes. London's tone, however, was excessively melodramatic, sentimental, and outlandish at times.

London's Naturalism, at its most exotic, took place in the Klondike-Arc-

tic—"Seward's Folly," or Russia's "white elephant gift"—that later turned into an icy golden U.S. forty-ninth state. This mammoth chunk of the near-Arctic was then mostly uncharted literary territory when London arrived with his gold pan, ink pen, and well-thumbed *Moby-Dick*. He wrote about the awesome setting, people, and animals, especially the primal dog family. *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and its reverse-sequel *White Fang* (1906), two novels with dogs as makeshift protagonists, made London the first such American writer whose canon featured serious fiction that deeply probed canine consciousness. And these probings were not only high quality experiments. They are also high canon content. London's two canine heroes—Buck and White Fang—could be likened to Kurtz and Marlowe in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, with canines substituting for humans in white Arctic America. Such dog destiny also played well in the Darwinian-Spenserian context—that is, atavism or species reversion, with Buck from domestic farm dog to wolf, and, White Fang, the opposite, from wolf to subjugated dog. After studying these two canine creations, London critics either approved or snidely remarked that London could fictionalize dogs better than people.

The Mailer canon, despite its chic "now" surface, also co-existed as a primordial descent, an American version of Jung's racial memory, as if America had its own mythic dream life, the American as civilized animal at zero-primitive—as if Mailer were retelling London's atavistic tale of Buck and White Fang, now transformed into the "now" human condition, with infused American superpower angst. And so the Mailer canon, periodically, would lurch into Jungian night-mythos, such as America's primordial racism in the celebrated essay, "The White Negro,"—or (with a global canon in the Mailer mind), why not switch from the customary Greek-Roman American roots and lurch back to *Ancient Evenings* in Egypt, more at home with magic rather than logic? And the Mailer canon was laced with primitive ornaments, such as Mailer's—and his American Dream murderer, Rojack's—lust for smell, Homo sapiens' most primitive sense. Long live Buck and White Fang, and note how the positive legacy quotient light turns a dark green.

London's addiction to socialism was Americanized, less revolutionary, and more akin to the Progressive Movement. But his core beliefs, nonetheless, were fervent. At age eighteen, to protest the 1893 "Panic's" unemployment, London joined Kell's "March on Washington" (early intimations of Mailer's "March on the Pentagon"). At age twenty, London formally joined the Socialist Party. Immediately, his canon turned socio-political didactic.

He wrote two Socialist treatises, *War of the Classes* and *The Human Drift.* Zola's "social bottom" now obsessed him. With his recently acquired fame, he traveled to England and did a "live" documentary treatment of London slum life, a shocker about sweat dens and garbage eating in *The People of the Abyss* (1903). This volume was the first of later social exposés, including *John Barleycorn* (1913), an autobiographical memoir, a polemic in support of the Prohibitionist Movement, his prose still highly readable and self-revealing. Soon, his hard drinking would cause serious health problems.

London's cultural and political radicalism shaped his fiction. In his 1913 novel, *The Valley of the Moon*, the hero and family, victimized by urban plutocrats, escape to idyllic Agrarianism. The title refers to a California utopian community, a haven from dreaded Capitalism. There the hero and wife return to the "land" and await their son's birth, a cultural and literary scenario recognized as neo-primitivism.

The more apocalyptic aspects of the classic Marxist class struggle are the centerpieces of London's *The Iron Heel.* It was truly omniscient, structured as a fragmentary historic document, told through a diary (1912–32) of several decades of Capitalist persecution. Titanic class warfare was being waged between Plutocrats and the Masses, the latter's only hope of a Socialist Utopia. Such was not to be, at least in 1932, when the diary stopped. But readers were informed that after three hundred years of a dystopian nightmare, only then could blessed collectivism be restored and advanced into Utopian Socialism. Such was the tonal dichotomy of a famous writer who introduced to Literary Naturalism very readable and, yet, high quality Marxist ABCs. This radical political fallout prefigured what the 1930s called "proletarian literature" and, later, would foreshadow Mailer's political odyssey from an early flirtation with Henry Wallace's tepid US communism and his gradual shift into a somewhat ambiguous, self-proclaimed "left conservative."

With his breakthrough *Son of the Wolf*, London was hailed as the "American Kipling," a counterpart to England's incredibly popular manly author, well known for his plain style. This development resulted in highly profitable, reader-friendly prose. It sported clear images—that is, a skilled blend of concrete sense details plus a smoothing flowing story or plot and catchy, moderate tonal passion and sincerity. Such was the formulaic prose that brought Kipling both fame and wealth.

In both the London and Mailer canons, there is a medley of thematic, tonal, and mood crossover effects. For example, London's 1905 novel, *The*

Game, featured a prizefighter—a Mailer fixation. And there was a plentitude of Maileresque thematic clouds, filled with metaphysical power preoccupations, hovering above one of London's best novels, *The Sea Wolf* (1906), famed for its Nietzschean captain of the "Ghost," a sealing schooner. Within Wolf Larson, London had transplanted the atavistic dog formula, the "Buck-half," on to a human seafaring environment, with its demonic antagonist. London said that his anti-hero symbolized an "attack on the superman philosophy." As for this novel's legacy, scholars have called Wolf Larson the "Zolaesque Captain Ahab of literary Naturalism."

London emulated Crane, Norris, and Davis, and turned into a gutsy, flashy war correspondent, covering the Russo-Japanese War and other headline chaos. He copied Twain, and embarked on a lecture tour, both street-side among the proletariat and among eggheads at Yale and Harvard. The Klondike man, as ever, was a work beast, and now, also a spend beast. He reconditioned a great house called "Beauty Ranch"—1,500 acres, 100 employees, and at $3,000 per month a luxury mecca for worldwide guests, high and low. While this opulence was at a proliferated cost, still there was financial success. For example, the serialization of *The Sea Wolf* earned $4,100, and made the novel a best-seller. During this period, London earned about $75,000 a year, but was always about $200,000 in debt, yet he still wrote about 1,000 words per day. And his fluid, inner circle friends, employees, and strangers, milked and robbed him blind, not unlike the fate of some of today's celebrities.

In 1911 there was a new wave of fame and success, and in 1913, London unveiled "Wolf House," a magnificent dream castle built in one year, of solid stone, and a cost of about $100,000. Soon after construction it was destroyed by fire, probably arson. London's luck had turned. The work beast wrote about ten hours per day to keep financially afloat. His body gave way. Those prolonged global cruises had brought him multiple tropical physical ailments and his overall health collapsed.

London became a breathing medical alert, a sick man beset with headaches, rheumatism, dysentery, painful kidney or renal nephritis, and excess weight from overeating and heavy drinking. And there were mental maladies. He mourned the loss of an infant child. He also suffered from spousal problems—a passive and jealous wife, which only intensified London's melancholic yearnings for the glorious past. He was despondent over what he saw as declining sales and fame. Now, toward the end, he became disillusioned with Socialism, and dropped pacifism and turned hawkish, a

supporter of World War I against Germany. He died in 1916, apparently from uremia or a stroke or heart failure or (some whispered) suicide, but his strong legacy lived on.

The postmortem legendary London impact was impressive. In less than two decades, the work beast's canon could boast about more than two hundred short stories, twenty novels, three plays, and over four hundred nonfiction pieces and some sizeable pulp junk. London admitted that he was "more business man" than writer. His mammoth Darwinian-Spenserian struggle to achieve success was powerfully rendered in his "personal" novel, *Martin Eden.*

London's powerful legacy factor was also enhanced and sustained by American literature's breakthrough into a global presence. In 1991, the International Copyright Law was initiated. No more foreign "pirated" editions. Instead, both international and American literary and artistic works could be copyrighted, and from there into a wide-open global market. This copyright bonanza, coupled with America's Twain-fed fascination with plain prose, instantly made London America's most translated writer. Indeed, his work was translated into more than eighty languages. In a more radical political context, London's fame subsided in his home country, but elsewhere it soared, especially in the young Communist Russia, and resulted in four "complete editions," in the old USSR. London was enshrined as America's foremost International Author.

In London's day, when the media was still somewhat primitive, he had become a complex celebrity. On one level, he was the new flashy literary globalist. On a personal level, he concocted an idiosyncratic multiple myth of himself, as if he were living simultaneous lives—the radical politico, the mythic Naturalist, the risky adventurer, the conspicuous consumer. And all of his front page literary agency was nurtured, clearly, by authorial megalomania. London loved being called "Wolf." Thusly, he signed his letters and book inscriptions, and his bookplate featured an engraved picture of a wolf's head. So in this earlier America with its quaint media, a virtual one-man show was about to exit.

On the brink of the Twentieth Century, with its media ready to go heads-on with electronics, American literature had a threesome, a trio of virtual one-man celebrity shows (Twain, London, and Davis) but only Twain would prevail with the highest legacy quotient standard. All of this notoriety was because of one book, *Huckleberry Finn*, then as now, America's most singu-

lar, quintessential book. With this media-enshrined novel, Twain had touched his (and his country's) mother tongue's central nerve. Now it was exit time for London, Davis, and all earlier American writers. At the Nineteenth Century's closing, if there were to be only one man and one book standing, it would be Twain and *Huck*.

Those who question Mailer's legacy quotient might ponder this question: Will Mailer and his literary contemporaries survive such stringent legacy quotient guidelines, previews of future "cuts." Davis is an automatic no-show, too minor and ephemeral. Crane seems pinpointed with Hemingway and, thus, a Mailer dead-end. And Dreiser, who would live on into Mailer's own time, must be considered as a potential Mailer legacy/literary "Godfather."

The Norris-Mailer connection, indeed, was vital, and mostly from Norris's twin literary trademarks—bigness and sensationalism, especially in his more abstract prophetic stance (not found in the London canon) in his "Responsibilities of the Novelist," the lead essay in a posthumous (1903) collection. There, Norris pontificated, on a cosmic-global level, on the upward march of American literature, symbolizing the fulfillment of Western civilization's destiny. All of this would seem to be strong academic "meat" for a heavy thinker like Mailer. In a "nuts and bolts" more practical America, the London canon remained the best media package and best rejoinder to the legacy of Mark Twain. Yes, the London career and canon were robust with survival knowledge about the nature of authorial megalomania and media response. It all came down to control. And who had it, the writer or the media?

Let us consider the life and works of Jack London and their connection to Mailer. During the heady days of literary Naturalism and its Quintet, London was the one writer who came the closest to controlling the media of his time. London was his own star performer and he played quite well for two short decades joining those few select icons (Twain, Hemingway, Fitzgerald) who are still universally recognized and respected. "Wolf" London survives today in the U.S. and overseas. His legacy quotient is well earned.

A century or more in the future, will Norman Mailer be among such august literary artists? Already there are some early positive signs for the future, those budding literary quotient seeds. For example, in their shared trait of literary megalomania, Mailer's mode, unlike London's, was expressed only secondarily through his character, personality, and career—but primarily through his protean canon. Big-theme writers tend to impress "Ivory Tower"

canon academicians. As for being the combative media writer, Mailer, both in the ring and on the page, was a singular battler with the media, and a controller and survivor. These qualities will play an important role in determining the Mailer legacy.