On Jack London’s Individualism

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Abstract. *Martin Eden* was Jack London’s patently autobiographic novel. In his novel, Jack London wanted to show his individualism, but readers at his period didn’t understand his real intention. This paper discusses Jack London’s contradictory beliefs and shows that he is both a socialist and an individualist. Through these discusses this paper wants to show Jack London’s failed individualism and his contradictory mind.

Introduction

In Jack London’s patently autobiographical novel *Martin Eden*, the poor protagonist Martin Eden was full of vigor and strength. He struggled for love and better life in spite of all kinds of difficulties, while he committed suicide in the end although he had won great wealth and fame as a successful writer. Jack London arranged such a tragic ending for Martin Eden intended to show his denial for Martin's individualism but his denial was weaker than description of Martin’s individualism. This just reflected the author's contradiction and limitation in thought.

Chapter one Martin’s Individualism

In this book, the protagonist, Martin Eden, is a young, ordinary sailor who is upright and honest, poor but tough, and he loves life. He met the banker’s daughter Ruth on a casual occasion. He admired the purity and elegance of Ruth, and Ruth was attracted by his uncouth. Inspired by love, Martin studied hard and wrote hard. But their feelings encountered opposition from Moss couple and Ruth also shape Martin according to "established value standard" like her class and family, and later abandoned him after failing. After the breakup with Ruth, Martin succeeded by great perseverance and became a famous writer. Some people who had previously been dismissive of him treated him differently. Ruth wanted to make up with Martin, but Martin angrily refused. But when Martin was in the upper class, he saw through the selfishness and hypocrisy of the bourgeois, he committed suicide in the agony of disillusionment.

Jack London has arranged such a tragic ending for Martin, representing a doubt and denial of individualism in fact. But because of his descriptions of Martin's individualism, the ending of his novel did not make the readers understand his true intentions, which reflects the contradiction and limitation of the author’s thoughts.

Although Martin claims to be an individualist, most readers, including socialists, have slandered and vilified his work. They believe that Jack London has glorified individualism in his novel, which proves that he no longer believes in socialism. In the novel, one of the important intentions of Jack London is to attack Nietzsche's "superman philosophy" and to expose his individualism. Why didn't the reader get the real intention of Jack London? Obviously, the reason is the contradiction and limitation of his own thoughts. He is both a socialist and an individualist. Jack London has showed deep sympathy for Martin, the protagonist, the socialists failed to realize his real purpose. and Martin is the epitome of individualism, so the readers are deeply misunderstood. Jack London was troubled by this failure for the rest of his life.

Martin once declared himself to be an "individualist" and had a discussion with the banker, Mr. Morse, at his house. Martin told Mr. Morse that he was an individualist, and had expressed the view that "the first thing in the race is to win the battle." Martin has made no secret of his individualism,
and believes that individualism and socialism are incompatible. Martin has repeatedly emphasized that he was an individualist and has criticized capitalism and socialism, expressing his hatred for both. Martin argued that there was only a third way to save the society, and that the road was "individualism".

Martin preached a third way, but he never put it into practice. He believed in "the law of the strong" and pinned his hopes on "the strong", but at the same time, he showed sympathy for the weak and didn’t want to defeat the weak. It is not hard to find this from the novel. Martin was very warm-hearted and compassionate. After he became famous, he still kept in touch with his former friends. He bought a well-equipped small laundry for his friend Joe with his royalty, and helped his sister Gertrude, and his landlady Maria selflessly.

In this article, Martin revealed his faith in Nietzsche's "superman philosophy", but when Martin saw his sister crying in the street, his faith in Nietzsche's superman philosophy almost wavered. When he was described by the tabloid press as a fierce revolutionary, Ruth distanced herself from him because he had made some of the low-level people and some socialists. At this point, his sister Gertrude advised him to get a job anywhere else, but he refused. When Martin saw his sister trudging, with heavy and staggering pace, crying quietly away, he felt a desolate poignant, and his "building of Nietzsche’s style" seemed to collapse.

He didn’t care about abstract slave class, but showed sympathy for his sister. If any slave were to be bullied by the strong, it was his sister Gertrude. Faced with this contradiction, his heart is clearly sour and helpless. As a disciple of Nietzsche, his rational thought was shaken by his mood because of the slave morality. In fact, his compassion for his sister was the compassion for the weak, and that was the morality of slavery.

Because Martin's description of Jack London was not clear, the reader didn't understand the real intention of Jack London clearly.

**The Contrast Between Individualists and Socialists**

In order to win Ruth's love, Martin left his class and his friends, but only to find that it was a dream. So he committed suicide because of regret, desolation, emptiness and loneliness. Jack London thinks Martin is an individualist and he is a socialist, and that is why he continues to live and Martin kills himself. Jack London thought Martin's death is enough to reveal his individualism, in fact, this tragic ending can only revealed that he saw through capitalism selfishness and greediness, showing contempt for the values of upper class which he once admired. And there was another factor for Martin's disillusion, which was his friend Brissenden's suicide, all these factors eventually deprived him of his passion for life, filled with disillusionment, and finally committed suicide. But Jack London did not give sufficient evidence that Martin was an individualist, and there was no evidence showing that Martin's suicide was a result of individualism.

Jack London portrays Martin as a positive and optimistic hero. Poor as he is, he is diligent, intelligent and energetic. The author wants to succeed in shaping him as an individualist who needs to get into trouble for his socialism, and a lot of plots are needed right now. In contrast to Martin, Jack London described the socialist Brissenden as a mysterious man. He was a very weak man, and a degenerate who indulge in drinking and entertaining. The life style is pungent and acerbic, cynical, although dying, he showed love and enthusiasm for life, had a strong eagerness for life. He was a man without a past, and his future was a grave, and all his interest was the bitter fervor of life. Brissenden was a close friend of Martin, a slacker romantic. He and Martin share similarities and differences in their views. Brissenden also expressed contempt for the civilian population, he advocated socialism only because of his hatred for capitalist. He believed that the capitalist society was rotten, and sooner or later the socialist society would replace it, which was inevitable. But he also hoped that the capitalist system could be replaced by any other kind of social system. He did not realize that only socialism could save society. As a socialist, Brissenden did not criticize Martin's individualism, so he was not really a socialist, but a degenerate.

In an Oakland socialist rally, Martin followed his friend Brissenden's suggestion, and also spoke in the rally. Confidently and passionately, he attacked the slaves and their strategy, morality, frankly
indicated they were slaves. He cites Spencer and Malthus to explain the laws of biological development. Martin's speech caused a stir, and most of them struck back with passion, without suggesting a new rule of biology, which revealed that he had used the old rules from a new angle. They used some ideas that Martin had never heard before, which inspired and shocked Martin greatly. But their counterattack was so pale that it was clear that Martin had the edge. In the whole novel, Martin also occupied a favorable position.

Jack London aimed to expose Martin's individualism, but he used his autobiography as the basis for his plot. It was not difficult to find out from the article that Jack London appreciated Martin, just as he appreciated himself, so that the reader had a deep affection for Martin. Both the author and the reader were deeply sympathetic to Martin from the beginning of the novel and these were the reasons why the character of Martin could win the success.

At the same time, the display of Martin's individualism fully revealed the state of the society at that time, which eventually led Martin to committing suicide.

It was worth mentioning that the author points out another road for Martin, which was the socialist road. Martin's close friends Brissenden had told him that socialism would be his future hope, he hoped Martin would become a socialist before he left, then Martin could strive for this goal for the rest of his life, therefore, his life would be valuable and meaningful. It would also be a way to save him from despair. Unfortunately Martin did not seriously consider Brissenden's suggestion. Why didn't Martin receive Brissenden's advice? Because he was a disciple of Nietzsche, he was an individualist. Jack London believed that Martin was an individualist, he was a socialist, and that was why Martin committed suicide himself and he was alive.

**Jack London's Contradictory Beliefs**

Jack London's life experience had a great influence on his beliefs. He had a very unhappy childhood and lived a poor life. Many years of wandering life did not deprive Jack London of his confidence in life. He was in passionate pursuit of knowledge, and he was unwilling to abandon himself. Even in the quagmire of drifting, books became his companions. He has read Marx's writings, the works of Hegel, Spencer, Darwin and Nietzsche. Jack London's ideas are mixed. Jack London's important intention was to attack Nietzsche's philosophy of the superman. In fact, Jack London's real purpose was to expose Martin Eden's individualism. But because of his deep sympathy with Martin, even the socialists had not grasped his real meaning.

Martin claimed himself as an individualist, and individualist against and again, he criticized both capitalism and socialism and showed his hatred for both of them. Martin thought only the third road can save this society. According to Martin's point of view, the third road was defined as individualism. Jack London has molded Martin into a superman, and the most basic reason is the complexity and ambivalence of his worldview.

Jack London believed in Marxism, accepted some socialist ideas and Darwin's theory of evolution. Nietzsche's "superhuman philosophy" also had a great impact on Jack London's thought. Jack London, who was so deeply impressed by Nietzsche's thought that he believed in the superhuman theory of the jungle. These incompatible ideas and doctrines are intertwined, creating a sharp contradiction in Jack London's faith.

Jack London believed in Nietzsche's philosophy of superman, believing that life was not equal and there was really exist people who were inborn stronger than the average man in the world, superman is better than ordinary people, they were supermen and they were inborn ruling class, and ordinary people were slaves. Jack London appreciated himself and thought he could overcome any difficulties. He despised the weak socialist government and opposed Labor. As a socialist, he did not seem bothered by that. He believed in socialism, and at the same time, he also believed in Nietzsche's "superman philosophy", which was actually incompatible. Jack. London was the contradictory community of individualism and socialism. Because the poverty of his family, Jack. London had a vagrant experience that caused him to advocate such values as "individualism", 186
"wealth is the first priority", which made him stray away from his own pursuit of the cause of socialism, to pursue the bourgeois way of life. But jack London, born in the working class, was once a member of the poor. He had been helped by the poor in the vagabond, and he had deep feelings for the poor. So the poor people who have been exploited by the bourgeoisie are filled with sympathy and hatred for the bourgeoisie. The complex emotions led him to criticize the bourgeoisie in his work, while he envied the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois lifestyle.

It is not difficult to understand why Jack London showed his deep sympathy for Martin Eden while trying to expose Martin's individualism, because he is both an individualist and a socialist. This view is easily found in his novels. As Martin is described by the tabloid as socialist, his girlfriend Ruth break up with him, then he met her sister in the street Gertrude, his sister persuaded him to go find a job somewhere, but he refused, he did not give any explanation. How could he explain that? For he was shocked by the gap between himself and his class, he could not cross the gap to explain his position and point of view - Nietzsche's superman views and socialist viewpoint, it was hard for him to explain this kind of complex and contradictory views. Now it is easy to understand why London showed his so deep sympathy with Martin though he intended to expose Martin’s individualism, just because he was both a socialist and an individualist. His wife once commented on him: he was an individualist at first, and then he became a socialist after he became famous.

**Conclusion**

Jack London intended to expose Martin Eden’s individualism in this novel, he didn’t get the expected effect. Readers and critics at that time failed to find his objection to individualism. On the contradictory, they thought he had beautified individualism and rejected socialism.

From all the above facts, we can find that Jack London’s beliefs were complicated and contradictory. He believed in socialism, and accepted the point of view of Nietzsche at the same time. He was both a socialist and individualist. That was the reason why Jack London showed deep sympathy with Martin.

**References**


