

## The Sea Wolf: A Naturalist Novel?

### Presenter

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### Mentor

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### Session

- [Session 2M: Philosophy, Ethics and Literature](#)
- 288 MGH
- 3:30 PM to 5:00 PM

Jack London's American Naturalist novel is one of the greatest works the author had written, and along with "The Call of the Wild," appeared on newly formed American Bestseller lists for American novels after its publication in the early 1900's. While a popular novel, the Sea-Wolf is also a major literary achievement. As one of Jack London's early pieces, The Sea-Wolf exhibits London's efforts at responding to major philosophical and political ideas of the era's international climate: London explores in his novel, ideas of Social Darwinism, alongside the need of altruism in an age of the consolidation of the Capitalist system and its economic policies. These two ideas owe the attention given to them to the genre of Naturalism and Realism, whose division is controversially blurred, which was a literary movement occurring at the time of the novel's writing. These two ideas are accompanied by the Naturalist's focus on the individual in the city, and is foregrounded by an antecedent Romantic literary tradition, which put concerns of the individual in front of societal ones. In the Naturalist tradition, the opposite occurs, and the individual must survive in the face of an antagonistic and often mechanistic environment. My research will entail close-reading passages of the Sea-Wolf to show that it cannot be strictly one genre, and that its hybrid form is in fact an emergent one in which new methods are found to say new things. I will be using as my theoretical framework, and supplementary texts, Donald Pizer's definition of Naturalism and also Donna M. Campbell's examination of Naturalism under the lens of gender in her "Resisting Regionalism". My aim in this presentation is to show The Sea-Wolf trafficks in Naturalist themes, such as the inability to escape the forces of environment, and the transformative, and even the degenerative effect it can have on the human encased within it. I want to show London's novel deals with the grittier aspects of life, as many Naturalist novels do, but it also utilizes the strategies of a more feminine literary tradition in the creation of the displaced domestic space existing between the novel's Humphrey Van Weyden and Maud Brewster. I want to show that by the end, Maud's last line as she spots a search boat, "Rescue us from ourselves," has implications equivalently significant both for a Naturalist reading and a Local Color one.