The Iron Heel Study Guide

The Iron Heel by Jack London

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

Written in the early years of the twentieth century, The Iron Heel takes certain circumstances of the time, anchored in the tension between socialism and capitalism, and posits a two tiered future - a more immediate future of socialist revolution, and a centuries-distant, near-Utopian future in which that revolution has finally succeeded. In addition to exploring themes relating to the aforementioned tension, the book also explores the universality of human existence and one of that universality's manifestations - the belief in, and clinging to, self-righteousness as a form of self-preservation.

The novel begins with a forward from a twenty-seventh century academic named Anthony Meredith. He writes that the document about to be read (which he calls The Everhard Manuscript) is, while an accurate representation of the socio-political-economic situation of the time, something less than fully accurate when it comes to its portrayal of its central character, socialist revolutionary Ernest Everhard. Meredith suggests that the manuscript's author, Everhard's wife Avis, was influenced both by her personal adoration of her husband and her ideological adoration of/adherence to his beliefs - in other words, Meredith, writes, the document is as much a canonization as it is a report.

The document itself, written by Avis in first person narration and footnoted from a twenty-seventh century perspective (possibly by Meredith), begins in the aftermath of Everhard's recent death and the slightly less recent failure at the first attempted worker's revolution. Avis describes her first meetings with Everhard, during which she initially found his personal appearance and self-righteousness offensive. Later, she writes, after investigating one of the cases of capitalist indifference to the workers who sustain the system, she begins to see his point, finds him more attractive, and becomes more deeply involved with him both personally and ideologically. At the same time, Avis writes, both her father (scientist Dr. Cunningham) and a family friend (Bishop Morehouse) also begin to see the value of Everhard's arguments and begin to change their behavior.

As Avis, her father and Morehouse become more and more deeply involved in the socialist revolution, and as Avis becomes more emotionally involved with Everhard, the Oligarchy (the name given to the capitalistically self-interested coalition of bankers, industrialists and politicians) become more intensely involved in the process of keeping the Revolution at bay. For several chapters, the tension between the opposing forces builds, with both large and small scale effects on Avis, Everhard, and the others. Cunningham is forced out of his home and his university position, Morehouse is declared insane (but escapes from the asylum in which he is imprisoned), and Everhard, after being elected to Congress, is framed for a bombing attempt and sent to prison. Avis is also jailed, but is released after six months without ever being charged. She immediately goes into hiding and is joined some time later by the released Everhard. Together, and in association with other members of the revolution, they plot the next stage of their revolutionary activities.

Before the planned actions can take place, however, the Oligarchy, whose attitude of destruction towards the revolution is labeled by Everhard as the "Iron Heel", stages a preemptive strike in Chicago, triggering a riot that is forcibly and violently put down by mercenaries and other military forces employed and directed by the Oligarchy. Avis and Everhard are both present at the riot and are witness to the destruction of thousands of lives, including that of the now destitute Bishop Morehouse, at the hands of the Oligarchy. Dr. Cunningham has disappeared.

In the manuscript's final chapter, Avis writes of plans for rebuilding the revolution and trying again, but before those plans can be explained the manuscript abruptly ends. A footnote, written perhaps by Meredith, suggests that Avis, in the middle of writing, learned she was about to be arrested, hid the manuscript, and disappeared. The manuscript stayed hidden, the footnote continues, for several centuries and doesn't resolve the long unsolved question of how, exactly, Ernest Everhard died.

Introduction

Introduction Summary

Written in the early years of the twentieth century, The Iron Heel takes certain circumstances of the time, anchored in the tension between socialism and capitalism, and posits a two tiered future - a more immediate future of socialist revolution, and a centuries-distant, near-Utopian future in which that revolution has finally succeeded. In addition to exploring themes relating to the aforementioned tension, the book also explores the universality of human existence and one of that universality's manifestations - the belief in, and clinging to, self-righteousness as a form of self-preservation.

Introduction - The introduction is a real-world element of the book, a commentary by a contemporary authority (H. Bruce Franklin) on the origins and intentions of The Iron Heel and its author, socialist writer Jack London. He writes of what he portrays as the remarkable accuracy of London's futuristic vision and defines the forces, grounded in capitalism, against which London struggled as an individual and against which the revolutionaries struggle in his book. He catalogs both the causes and results of the workers' revolution in the book that have, since its publication in the early 1900s, come into actual being, and the personal and creative circumstances in London's life that gave rise to his creation of the book. Specifically, he describes the tension between London's socialist ideals and the capitalism-endowed circumstances of his life, such as the result of the profits of his more popular writings. The introduction concludes with references to the necessity for vigilance and struggle "to prevent the boast of the Iron Heel - to grind us down and walk upon our faces - from coming true".

Introduction Analysis

"Socialism" is the economic and philosophic theory that humanity should work together for the good of all humanity, and that every individual should share equally in both the responsibilities and the rewards. "Capitalism", on the other hand, is based on the economic and philosophic principle that financial profit and reward and accumulation are the rightful reward of those with the passion and the drive (and some would say, the greed) to pursue them. In other words, capitalists made their money off the workers who, in socialist theory and practice, were entitled to more than what they were given in wages. The tension between these two socio/economic/political positions is the basis of the book's thematic explorations and the driving force of its plot.

Forward and Chapter 1

Forward and Chapter 1 Summary

In the Forward to the Everhard Manuscript, a twenty-seventh century academic, Anthony Meredith, introduces the manuscript by suggesting it cannot be taken entirely seriously since the heroic portrayal of its hero, Ernest Everhard, has been colored by the love and reverence of the manuscript's author, Everhard's wife Avis. Meredith suggests, however, that as a chronicle of the early stages of the worker's revolution, the manuscript does give a sense of the times in which it was written. He comments on the origins of the Oligarchy and of its nickname The Iron Heel, and the idealism that gave rise to both the socialist uprising and the creation of the Manuscript, idealism that he suggests was severely damaged following the failure of the Second Revolt. Finally, he writes that Avis created the manuscript after the First Revolt as a tribute to her "so recently dead husband" and the disappeared before the Second Revolt, having hidden the manuscript "in the heart of [an] ancient oak at Wake Robin Lodge", where it remained hidden for seven centuries.

Chapter one begins with Avis's poetically written contemplation on the state of her loneliness, two months after the death of her husband whom she calls "my eagle" in reference to his soaring intellect and soul, as well as to his leadership of the revolutionary socialist movement. Meanwhile, a footnote, written in Meredith's time perhaps by Meredith himself, reminds readers that Everhard was only one of several leaders of the movement around the world.

Avis then describes the occasion of their first meeting, a dinner party at the home of her father, who, a footnote describes, was a scientist responsible for some of the most society-defining discoveries of the era. Everhard, Avis writes, was out of place right from the beginning - badly dressed and physically powerful in a room full of over-dressed, overweight men whose power, they believed, was in their minds and silent in a room full of men of the intellectual class who, as she portrays them, loved to hear the sound of their own voices. She describes how, over the course of the dinner, Everhard remained silent, until the prodding of Dr. Cunningham, Avis's father, triggered him to speak. In words and phrasing that Avis describes in considerable detail and with considerable feeling, he attacks and demolishes both the arguments and pretensions of the intellectual "metaphysicians" in the room, essentially painting them as being entirely detached from the real world and having their heads in the clouds. He particularly challenges their belief that they speak for and aid the working class and, as Dr. Cunningham smiles his amusement, points out the flaws in both the philosophies and practices of metaphysics.

Forward and Chapter 1 Analysis

The most apparent noteworthy point about this introductory section of the novel is the establishment of its narrative context and central conceit - that the book is an actual historical document, evaluated and commented upon from the academic perspective of a near-Utopian, socialistically-oriented society. Worth particular note are the differences in style between the book's two narrative perspectives, the lush, near-romantic, near-melodrama of Avis's "present day" writing, contrasted with the coolly appalled, somewhat patronizing tone of the futuristic academic writing (both the introduction and the footnotes which, for the sake of argument, will be identified as Meredith's).

Meanwhile, other important components of the book's context and conceit include the reference to Everhard's death, the circumstances of which the book never reveals and which are, in fact, a significant mystery raised at the book's conclusion, and the clearly idealized portrait of Everhard and his ideals. This last is, as the futuristic introduction suggests, clearly driven and defined more by Avis's revolutionary agenda than by an agenda of presenting the facts. Then there is the equally clear portrayal of Avis as a product of the Oligarchy, a particularly significant point in that it marks the beginning of what she clearly intends the reader to see as a journey of transformation from pampered rich girl to defiant, moralistic activist. Note the reference to what she "intends", since there is the sense throughout the narrative that the author in fact intends something different - the suggestion that in spite of all her external transformations she remains, at her moral and emotional core, as judgmental and as self-righteous as the people she claims to condemn.

Finally, there is the sense that on some level, Meredith's commentary is intended to undermine, or at least leaven, the more idealistic qualities of Avis's story.

Chapters 2 and 3

Chapters 2 and 3 Summary

In chapter two, Avis describes her father's pleasure at the evening's events, explaining that since the death of his wife he had become a "dinner party" sociologist, inviting men of ideas and conviction to dinner and setting them arguing. Avis writes of beginning to read Everhard's books, one of which, a footnote suggests, was secretly published during "the three centuries of the Iron Heel", and describes her surprise at Everhard turning up for conversation with herself, her father and Bishop Morehouse, the one guest at the dinner party who wished to see more of him. Over the course of conversation, Everhard elaborates on his theories about the relationship between the working and capitalist classes, an elaboration based on the fundamental premise that all men are selfish. He goes on to suggest that the church is complicit and un-protesting in the capitalist system, challenging the increasingly uncomfortable Bishop to protest, at the risk of being discharged, the treatment of workers. Shortly afterward, the sight of an armless peddler, Jackson, leads Everhard to tell Avis and her father that they are responsible for his plight. The peddler, he says, worked in one of their factories, was injured on the job, was fired, and was denied compensation by the court deciding on his lawsuit. When Avis suggests that there might have been other reasons for the suit's dismissal, Everhard challenges her to investigate the case. Avis accepts, swallowing her resentment.

In chapter three, Avis's investigations of what happened to Jackson lead her first to Jackson himself and to his home in a rented, slum-lake area that disgusts and dismays her and which, a disbelieving footnote comments, was the usual sort of home for men of Jackson's working class. His story of what happened is similar to that recounted by Everhard. Next, Avis visits Jackson's lawyer and Jackon's superiors at the factory, all of whom tell her they believe Jackson was entitled to compensation, that the company's lawyer manipulated the trial so that it would be decided in favor of the company, and that they went along with the manipulation because they feared losing their means of supporting their families. Back at her home, Avis is surprised to encounter Everhard, who is there to return some borrowed books. She tells him what she discovered, and is not surprised to see that he isn't surprised. He explains that what she encountered - corruption and self-denial in the name of family security - goes on all the time, and comments that he has made a conscious decision not to have a family so his desire for revolution could not be derailed by appeals to his responsibilities as a provider. Avis writes that as he spoke, she began to feel something more than just interest in his ideas. As he leaves, he challenges her to look further into Jackson's story.

Chapters 2 and 3 Analysis

Important elements here include the beginning of Avis's self-defined journey of transformation from oligarch to revolutionary, the beginnings of her ideological, romantic

and sexual attraction to Everhard, and the deepening of Everhard's theories about the pervasively corrupt, or corruptively pervasive, ideals of capitalism. There are also several important instances of foreshadowing, specifically the reference to her father being a "dinner party sociologist", which foreshadows his later decision to continue his sociological "studies" after losing his wealth, and the appearance of Bishop Morehouse. This latter is particularly important in that Morehouse's journey from ignorant supporter of the Oligarchy to active revolutionary is, while tragic, exactly the sort of journey that Avis believes she is undertaking, but which the reader can tell is nowhere near as truly committed and as genuinely compassionate as that taken by the Bishop.

At this point, it's worth noting the interesting way history is utilized in The Iron Heel. Both Avis's narration and Meredith's commentary frequently incorporate references to actual, real-life persons and incidents. Former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt is a frequently referenced example of the former, while various elements of the real-life industrial revolution and its consequences are examples of the latter. The employment of history in the service of fiction is not a particularly new or innovative technique, but what it does in the context of this particular book, with its clear socialist perspective and agenda, is reinforce and perhaps even define the sense that London is actually writing about what he believes will happen in life, not just in fiction. In other words, he is using the past as support for his narrative and thematic contentions about what he believes can, and will, happen in both the immediate and long-distant future.

Chapters 4 and 5

Chapters 4 and 5 Summary

In chapter four, Avis writes of her preoccupied near-obsession with Jackson, his cause and his experience, and of how her deepening sense of discovery of the reality of his situation increases her awareness of just how complicit she and her class are in perpetuating that situation. She describes her interviews with the company lawyer that argued, and won, the case against giving Jackson compensation, who runs away from the conversation when confronted with uncomfortable truths, with the men who owned the company, who accept no responsibility, and with their "cultured" wives, who speak of the rightness of their position, both legal and financial. She also describes her interview with a journalist who wrote about the case and who speaks of how, if he or any journalist wrote of a truth that contradicted or challenged the principles of the paper's corporate owners, he would be fired. She also writes of speaking with Everhard, whom she says she has come to love, who tells her she is on the right track to discovering the truth about civilization. She describes encountering Bishop Morehouse who, she writes, wears a constant expression of horror - the result, she believes, of being shown the truth about the poor and working classes by Everhard. She sums up her discoveries by writing about how everyone she's interviewed about the Jackson case has been bound to the capitalist "machine".

In chapter five, Avis describes how Everhard with whom, she writes, she now has an understanding that they will be married, was invited to speak before the monthly gathering of the Philomaths, an elite group of millionaire capitalists, leaders in business, politics, and governance that regularly gathers to hear speakers of interest. Avis writes at some length of Everhard's speech to the gathering - his opening description of the circumstances of his life, his growing awareness/adoption of socialism as a personal philosophy, how the socialist movement has resulted in millions of workers worldwide being ready and willing to stage a revolution. Then, in what Avis portrays as a stinging attack, accuses the Philopmaths and the others of their class of mismanaging society. Avis writes of how speaker after speaker challenged Everhard, and how Everhard got the verbal best of every one of them, except for Mr. Wickson, who in no uncertain terms tells Everhard that whatever revolution begins will be completely crushed by violence. Everhard, Avis writes, quietly agreed, that the only way people like the Polymaths know how to respond when challenged is with violence. He goes on to say, however, that the revolutionists are prepared to respond to violence with violence, until they are ready to assume power themselves.

Chapters 4 and 5 Analysis

Here again, the bulk of the writing is taken up with idealization - specifically, Avis's idealization of Everhard and her ironic idealization of Jackson. Her perceptions of his maltreatment set him up, from her point of view, as an icon or archetype of how poor

workers are treated. The contrast between the two ideals is quite vivid - the articulate, powerful, passionate warrior Everhard, the inarticulate, weak, apathetic victim Jackson.

Against both these icons, Avis/the author paints a third side of the triangle of contrast in this section - the Philomaths, whose attitude is summed up in the character and actions and beliefs of Mr. Wickson who, throughout the narrative, returns as an icon of the Oligarchy, single-minded, controlling, cool-headed and certain. What all three sides of the triangle have in common is a driving, blinkered sense of self-righteousness - apparently, there are no shades of gray in this world. There certainly are none in the writing.

Meanwhile, there are several incidents of foreshadowing in this section. Many of the individuals Avis encounters on her search for the truth about Jackson are encountered again later, while Bishop Morehouse's eventual descent into poverty-stricken revolutionism is again foreshadowed here. Finally, there are the references to violence by both Wickson and Everhard, which foreshadows the explosion of violence late in the novel.

Chapters 6 through 9

Chapters 6 through 9 Summary

In chapter six, Avis describes the sense (adumbration) of impending conflict that began to seep into her life and those around her. She writes of becoming aware that she is being avoided by her friends because of her association with Everhard, and of being told by her father that he has been instructed to rethink his association with Everhard. She also writes of being told by Everhard that Bishop Morehouse is being driven into a kind of martyrdom by his empathetic discoveries of and commentaries on how the poor are treated by the capitalist machine. Finally, she writes of Everhard's revelation that he has been offered by, he says, Wickson and men like him an important job in government and labor relations. The job, he says, is a bribe to try to get him to stop being a revolutionary.

In chapter seven, Everhard warns Avis that when Bishop Morehouse makes his make a presentation to a group of philanthropists, he is likely to make some very unpopular statements and to be treated badly. Avis attends the presentation and transcribes the Bishop's speech, in which he refers to how society, government, and the church have all drifted from Christ's original teachings of compassion, and how he has begun trying to live in a more Christ-like way. Becoming more insistent, he urges the other attendees to do the same, but is eventually led away from the podium. As they leave the presentation, Everhard tells Avis what he believes will happen: the journalists at the presentation will say only that the Bishop became unwell, and that later word will be spread that he has gone away on an extended vacation. Avis writes that this is exactly what happened, adding that "little did [she] dream [of] the terrible road the Bishop was destined to travel..."

In chapter eight, Avis writes that "just before Ernest ran for Congress, on the Socialist ticket", her father invited him to what he called his "Profit and Loss" dinner. The other guests was a group of "small capitalists", businessmen who ran small business empires of their own but who, Avis comments, were to a man angry that the larger corporations and trusts were taking all their profits. In his debates with the other guests, Ernest makes them see that in principle (i.e., the desire for profit), the small businessmen were no different from the corporations they resent. He calls their desire to destroy those corporations as foolish, likening them to "the machine-breakers" of the early industrial age who, as an act of revolution against their capitalist bosses, attempted to destroy the machines that, while working and creating product much more efficiently, put people out of jobs and livelihoods. He advises them that they should instead rise up to take control of the machines themselves, adding that when they rise up, they will not only be countered by the force of the American Militia, but they will be drafted into the militia, as indicated by a recently passed, little known law. This means, he adds, that they will eventually be forced to fight themselves. The businessmen protest that such an act of drafting is illegal and unconstitutional, but Everhard shows them a pamphlet describing the law and how, when, and why it was passed.

In chapter nine, a continuation of chapter eight, Avis narrates Everhard's mathematically and economically precise explanations of how and why the middle class, composed of mid-level capitalists (i.e., the dinner guests and others like them), is inevitably going to be destroyed by the larger capitalists and eventually absorbed into the proletariat. It is in this section that Everhard, according to a footnote, coins the phrase "The Iron Heel" to sum up both the actions and attitudes of the Oligarchy, or the capitalist powers-that-be. Another footnote, meanwhile, indicates that Everhard's argument is essentially that of socialist philosopher Karl Marx, while a third footnote contains a detailed description of how a particular oligarch, John D. Rockefeller, gathered his fortune and uses it to accumulate both more money and more political influence.

Chapters 6 through 9 Analysis

There are several important elements in this section. First, there is the incorporation of several historical elements/incidents into the narrative. These include the interestingly juxtaposed references to socialist philosopher Karl Marx and capitalist icon John D. Rockefeller. Other examples of incorporating history include the references to the industrial age "machine breakers" and to the formation and purposes of the American Militia. Finally, the reference to Christ and his teachings in chapter six can be seen as falling into this category, but is noteworthy for other reasons as well.

This section is one of very few places in the narrative where religion, in both its intent and its manifestations, is discussed directly, and with any significant depth. Interestingly, such discussions come into play in relationship to the Bishop who, it seems, comes to a truer experience/understanding of, and insight into, what Christ's teachings really mean and how they should be acted upon. Later in the narrative, by contrast, the Catholic Church is described on a couple of occasions, as being allied both philosophically and politically with the Oligarchy. Meanwhile, in chapter fifteen, Christian believers in the Book of Revelation are portrayed as believing they are living in the foretold "last days", and prepare for salvation, less an act of genuine faith than an expression of desperation for some kind of meaning in an otherwise hopeless existence. Overall, there is the sense that for Avis and the other revolutionists, religion is another manifestation of the Iron Heel, a spiritually and morally corrupt extension of the power and goals of the Oligarchy.

Ultimately, this entire section can fall under the category defined by the title of chapter six, "Adumbrations", a term which essentially translates into "foreshadowing". In other words, everything Avis writes about and/or describes in these four chapters lays the groundwork for the confrontations and struggles that follow. These include the references to the Bishop's future, the repeated comments on violence, and Everhard's suggestion about the eventual absorption into the proletariat of the middle class merchants, all of which are narrated by Avis later in the manuscript.

Chapters 10, 11 and 12

Chapters 10, 11 and 12 Summary

Chapter ten begins with Avis's comment that shortly after the dinner party, her life, along with those of Everhard, her father, and the American revolutionaries, soon got sucked into a "vortex" of violent, anti-revolutionary activity. She writes of how her father's book "Economics and Education" was suppressed shortly after it was published, an action undertaken, according to Everhard, by the Oligarchy, that quickly led to the suppression of all socialist publications. As she records Everhard's comment that "the Iron Heel is getting bold", Avis writes of how large strikes across the country were "broken" (i.e., halted) by those responding to and wielding the power of the Oligarchy, leaving the revolution essentially "crushed". Everhard sees the situation as an omen of the inevitability of the revolution becoming violent, adding that his partners in revolution still hope for a "peaceful" resolution of the conflict in the forthcoming Congressional elections.

Chapter eleven describes how, as the result of Avis's marriage to Everhard, she became his partner in life and work, and how he was sustained through poverty and his own work by her attention and support. This chapter also describes how Avis's father lost his wealth, his home, and his influence after refusing to take the bribe of power and influence from Mr. Wickson, a series of circumstances that Avis's father looked upon as an "adventure". He maintained this perspective, Avis writes, even when the three of them, Everhard, Avis, and Avis's father, are forced to move into a small, four room apartment.

In chapter twelve, Avis writes of what happened to Bishop Morehouse who, after returning from his enforced vacation, immediately preached the same sort of sermon that got him removed from his position in the first place and was put into an asylum for the insane. Avis writes that it was impossible to see him or even communicate with him, but did eventually learn several months later that he was released. She goes to visit him, comments on how shaken he seemed to her, and then writes that he mysteriously disappeared only to be found later, by chance, by Avis, on the street on his way to deliver some potatoes to an elderly, crippled seamstress. Avis insists that he accompany her back to the apartment she shares with her father and Everhard, where the Bishop reveals that has sold all his possessions and taken up what he calls "Christ's work" - genuinely and humbly ministering to the poor, adding that it was conversation with Earnest that led him to do so. He speaks of his terror at being found by the Oligarchy and sent back to the asylum, making the end of the chapter, when Avis reveals that that is exactly what happened to him, even more poignant.

Chapters 10, 11 and 12 Analysis

What's particularly noteworthy about this section is the way the narrative parallels the societal and personal vortexes at work in the lives of the characters. To look at it another way, there is the sense here that each of the characters is experiencing a vortex within a vortex, how the personal life is spinning in a new direction within the context of the life of society. This is true of all the characters, major (Everhard, Avis), secondary (Dr. Cunningham, the Bishop), and minor (the Seamstress), and may be a manifestation of a subsidiary thematic point - that acts of social revolution affect both society at large and the individuals who struggle to survive within the context of that society.

It's interesting to note, meanwhile, the contrasts between the various responses to being :"vortexed". On the one hand, the book portrays several circumstances in which individual and societal vortexes, in spite of their essential discomfort, as ultimately being sources of joy. It almost goes without saying that this is the case for Avis and Everhard, but it is somewhat surprising to see that joy, that sense of rightness and of purpose, in both Dr. Cunningham and the Bishop, who find themselves in circumstances of significant suffering. On the other hand, there is the clear portrayal of misery and struggle that can also exist within the vortexes, specifically in the character of the Seamstress. Further - her appearance here, and Avis's essentially distasteful reaction to her - foreshadow both later appearances of workers in similarly drudging circumstances and Avis's consistent, albeit unconsciously expressed, distaste for both the workers and their situation. In other words, in the appearance of the Seamstress there is a reiteration of the deeply felt, and apparently unsuspected, presence of lingering Oligarchic prejudice.

Chapters 13, 14 and 15

Chapters 13, 14 and 15 Summary

Chapter thirteen begins with Avis's description of how Everhard won election to Congress, and of how political machinations by the Oligarchy resulted in the Socialists failing to win their expected majority. The situation, she writes, led to the beginnings of war between the Oligarchy and its economic rival in Germany, a war headed off by the actions of the Socialists in both countries who worked together to stage a simultaneous week long general strike, in which all the workers stopped doing their jobs, in both countries. Once the strike was over, the war was called off and an alliance was established between Germany and the United States, an alliance that was broken when "the German socialists rose" and drove the warlord governor from power.

Chapter fourteen begins with commentary on how other countries in the world where the Revolution had been successful were waiting for the United States to catch up and on how the Oligarchy kept getting in the way - specifically, by gaining control over several of the larger unions. Avis describes how a conversation with the leader of one of those unions leads Everhard into contemplation and explanation of how the Oligarchy will continue to assert its control of the country, and of how the financial surplus it accumulates will be spent on the creation of art, including "wonder cities". He says that nevertheless, there will continue to be an "abyss, wherein will fester and starve and rot, and ever renew itself, the common people" who will, he contents, eventually rise and cause the Oligarchy to crumble away. He also comments that he knows he will never see it, and seeks comfort in Avis's arms.

In chapter fifteen, Avis summarizes the world-wide process of social breakdown as the Oligarchy gained power, specifically its support of so-called "favored unions", unions who came to a money-sharing arrangement that enabled them to receive financial and/or material compensation for supporting the Oligarchy. She describes social revolutions around the world that resulted in Japan becoming an oligarchy of its own, the United States leading a western oligarchy that consumed Canada and all of South America, and Europe forming an economic/political coalition of its own simply to survive. She writes of how members of the "favored unions" and their families eventually became separated, along with their higher style of living, from the rest of society, thus creating a caste system and triggering constant violence and unrest. She also describes how, in a desperate effort to find faith and meaning in their situation, many of the abandoned proletariat turned to Biblical faith and prophecy, with the result that thousands came to believe they were living in the so-called "end times" and perished from starvation as they waited, high on mountain-top refuges, for the Second Coming. Finally, she describes how the association of farmers and merchants known as the Grangers , who existed between the favored unions and the abandoned proletariat, foresaw their own inevitable rise to power as the capitalist oligarchy eventually falls apart. Everhard, however, warns them that that goal can and will be achieved only through violence.

Chapters 13, 14 and 15 Analysis

There is an interesting undertone about this section, in that the author brings back his secondary thematic contention that America is, at least for the purposes of his novel, the worldwide center of oligarchic/capitalist power and control. There is the sense here that, for the author, whatever other countries and regions may or may not define themselves socially, politically, or economically, their actions and philosophies evolve in relation to actions and philosophies taken in the United States. And if the reader remembers that the book was written in the very early years of the twentieth century, before the full rise of the so-called "American Empire", there is the very clear sense here, as suggested in the real world prologue, that the novel is as prophetic as the Introduction suggests.

Meanwhile, in terms of the story being developed in the book, the narrative in this section feels more than ever like a historical document, a straightforward narration of events and sequences rather than any kind of exploration of character and or story. While for the most part this sensibility pervades most of the book, in this particular section it is at its most intense, the most essentially academic. In other words, there is little or no sense of empathy with the people caught up in these events and situations, a situation that, with few exceptions, also pervades the book. Avis, it seems, is more interested in documenting the conflict between ideologies rather than exploring, in any depth, how people, on all layers of society, lived, felt, and functioned within that conflict. In that context, the reader would be quite justified in wondering whether this is the perspective of the author as well as that of his central character.

Chapters 16 and 17

Chapters 16 and 17 Summary

In chapter sixteen, Avis describes how, when it came time for Ernest to take his seat in Congress in Washington, Dr. Cunningham stayed behind in San Francisco to continue his sociological experiments and studies, and there had a surprising encounter with the still successful, and still judgmental, Mr. Wickson. Avis also describes how she and Ernest arrived in Washington prepared to continue the political work of the revolution in alliance with the Grangers, but soon discovered that the Oligarchy was both willing and able to destroy the Grangers' influence through political and violent confrontation. She also describes the establishment of The Fighting Groups, which a footnote describes in detail as the violent, secret side of the Revolution - seeking out revenge on those who betrayed them, stealthily attacking the lives and well being of members of the Iron Heel. Finally, Avis describes the circumstances of complete, corrosive, spying mistrust within which both the directors of the Revolution, including Everhard, and of the Oligarchy operated. In spite of those circumstances, she writes, and for those committed to the Revolution, faith in its ideals and purposes remained strong.

In chapter seventeen, Avis describes how the end of this first act of revolution came about - how, as Everhard made a speech in defense of a bill, introduced by the socialists, to defend and support the unemployed, she could tell something was about to happen by the presence of soldiers, wearing scarlet livery. She describes how Everhard, goaded by the confrontational responses of the other representatives, began speaking derisively of the Oligarchic members of congress, of how a sudden explosion interrupted his speech, and how he and dozens of other socialist congressmen were arrested, tried, and convicted of attempting to bomb Congress. Avis, from her position close to the inner circle of the Revolution's planners, states unequivocally that the Revolutionists had nothing to do with the bomb and that she has faith that the truth of what happened will one day come out, adding her suspicions and offering evidence that the Iron Heel (the Oligarchy) was behind it. A lengthy footnote details that truth - that the Oligarchy enlisted the assistance of a condemned criminal Pervaise who, in exchange for freedom and financial compensation, threw the bomb onto the floor of Congress. The footnote also describes how, on his deathbed, Pervaise confessed to a Catholic priest, how the confession was long suppressed by the Vatican, and how it was accidentally unearthed by a scholar doing other research. Finally, the footnote describes how Everhard was sent to Alcatraz Prison, while other socialists, who were tried and convicted on trumped up charges of conspiracy in planning and executing the bombing, were scattered among prisons around the country.

Chapters 16 and 17 Analysis

At this point, it may be worth considering the titles of the various chapters, particularly those of the last six or so. They have, in some ways, been repetitive, indicating over and

over that an end of some kind is coming, although it's never made clear exactly what. This becomes, after a while, something of an anti-climax. When an ending is predicted over and over again but never seems to actually be happening, when something finally does come to a conclusion there may very well be a sense of dissatisfaction, or at least of letdown, in the reader. However, when one realizes, in this context, what exactly "the end" being referred to actually is, that sense of anti-climax eases somewhat. In this case, "the end" is the end of the preliminary stages of the revolution. The movement of Everhard and the other comrades into the political arena of Congress on one level takes the revolution out of the realm of planning and into action. On another level, that action also comes to an end in the chapter titled "The End", with the revolution's apparent loss of support from the Grangers. The question, of course, is why this particular chapter is titled "The End" when in fact the revolution, or at least its overt, public manifestations, comes to an end in "The Scarlet Livery", when the political advance of the revolution is sabotaged and, therefore, the social advance does as well.

Meanwhile, other important elements to note include the interesting, ironic parallels between the experiences of Dr. Cunningham and Mr. Wickson, who are both moving into fuller experiences and/or manifestations of their true inner selves, and the story of Pervaise, which, as described in the footnote, once again portrays the Catholic church as being in league with the Oligarchy. The most interesting element of this section, however, is Avis's reference to how mistrust and fear pervaded the ranks of both the Revolutionists and the Oligarchy. This is a reiteration of the narrative's perhaps subconscious suggestion that in spite of holding so strongly to such opposing views and perspectives, the two sides of the Socialism/Capitalism conflict, both in the book and in history, ultimately aren't all that different.

Chapters 18 through 21

Chapters 18 through 21 Summary

In chapter eighteen, Avis writes of her six-month imprisonment without charge, and of the clandestine plans made by the imprisoned Socialists through their network of cause-sympathetic prison guards and officials for a unison escape from their imprisonment. She describes her disappearance after being released, disguised as the wealthy daughter of a member of the Oligarchy, and her finding refuge in a childhood hiding place in the backwoods of Sonoma - a natural cave deep in the overgrown, neglected reaches of a deer park and preserve owned, ironically enough, by Wickson. She describes how a home was set up for her in the cave, how she was helped by a revolutionary named John Carlson who worked for Wickson, and how, "with one exception", it has never been discovered by an outsider. A footnote describes how the cave was buried in an earthquake a few hundred years after it was first occupied, how it was later excavated, and how several artifacts of Avis and Everhard's time there were found.

In chapter nineteen, Avis describes the process by which she submerged her own identity into an alternate persona, a disguise that went beyond "appliances" (i.e., wigs, makeup, etc) and into entirely different ways of being, talking and behaving. After describing how a brush with discovery by an Iron Heel spy was averted by the loyal John Carlson, who "fixed him", Avis muses on how strange it seems, to her, to have lived two such completely different lives - as a socialite and a socialist. This leads her to remembrances of both allies and enemies - of her father, who disappeared, of the Bishop, who was believed dead but whom Avis glimpsed during the riots of the Chicago Commune, of Jackson, who became an anarchist and "vaporized" a prison, and of Jackson's lawyer. He, she writes, pleaded with her for help after being condemned to death by the Oligarchy after being discovered as a socialist spy. She also describes how those opposed to Jackson's seeking compensation (the lawyers and company owners) rose to positions of influence in the Oligarchy.

In chapter twenty, Avis briefly describes the mass escape of the jailed socialists, after which she was happily reunited with Everhard. She describes how, the morning after their reunion, she assumed her alternative persona (Mary), and how Everhard was completely fooled by her, later joking that he was married to two women. Avis then writes of how, in their subsequent eighteen months together, they were happy, busy, and joined by several members of the revolution, and how one interloper, the son of Mr. Wickson, stumbled upon their hiding place by accident. Avis describes how he was captured and how, after a period of education and study, he became a loyal member of the revolution.

In chapter twenty-one, Avis devotes much of this chapter to commentary on the state of the outside world during the time of her refuge with Everhard in the backwoods of Sonoma. She describes how the oligarchs developed a system of government that

worked effectively and inevitably to its advantage, how the caste of Favored Unions continued to benefit from its alliance with the Oligarchy, and how the caste of Mercenaries developed. This, she writes, was the section of society devoted to enforcing the way of things, as defined by the Oligarchy, commenting that both the Mercenaries and the Oligarchy were convinced of the inevitable rightness of their position. She also writes that the vast numbers of workers outside of both the Favored Unions and the higher ranks of the Revolutionists were a "roaring abysmal beast" that had to be kept under control. Finally, she writes of how, after Everhard's body and face were transformed by surgery, and as the process of planning the First Revolt was nearing completion, she and her husband went out into the world as secret agents of the Oligarchy.

Chapters 18 through 21 Analysis

There is a sense of regrouping about the narrative in this section, that the central characters and their cause are gathering energy and resources for a major, and in their minds definitive, assault on the forces that both challenge and suppress them. There is also, however, a sense of the incredible, of the unlikely, about several of the situations described. First is the location of the hiding place. Is it credible that such frequent comings and goings, not to mention such a well-furnished hiding place, can go unnoticed for such a long time? Second is the inability of Everhard to penetrate Avis's "disguise". Is it credible that a man can believe his wife is a different person when there has been no physical and/or surgical transformation?

Third, there is the transformation of Wickson's son into an agent of the revolution, which, by the way, can be seen as an echo, and perhaps an intended reinforcement, of Avis's own transformation, not only from Avis into "Mary" but from socialite into socialist. While this is somewhat more credible, something similar happened in the 1970s to heiress Patricia Hearst who, after being kidnapped by a revolutionary group, joined forces with them, ultimately all three of these situations can be seen more as manifestations of Avis's agenda. In other words, there is the clear sense that her intention to create a pro-socialist, pro-revolutionary document, and her desire to present both the movement and its practitioners in an idealized way, have tainted the objectivity of her reporting, a circumstance that arises throughout the book. This occurs again quite significantly in chapter twenty-one, specifically in Avis's reference to "the roaring abysmal beast". In its implied distaste for the people it describes, the phrase can be seen as a manifestation of attitudes held over from Avis's socialite past. This idea is reinforced by the narrative perspective and phrasing in the following chapters, which contain descriptions of the uprisings of the "people of the abyss" couched in similar phrasings and, it seems, manifesting similar attitudes.

Chapters 22 through 25

Chapters 22 through 25 Summary

In the first part of chapter twenty-two, Avis details the plans for the First Revolt, which was to begin with a simultaneous, country-wide strike against the pillars of the Oligarchy's social and political structure. She writes of there being thousands of loyal revolutionists within the ranks of the Mercenaries and the Favored Unions, as well as within the secret service of the Oligarchy itself, that were prepared to participate in the rebellion at whatever cost. She adds, however, that the Oligarchy somehow got word of the impending revolt and planned to stage a preventive strike in Chicago. She describes her desperate efforts to get word to the comrades in Chicago, her concerns for Everhard, and her overnight journey into the strangely quiet heart of the city. There, she writes, she heard explosions in the communities of Mercenaries and Favored Unions, encountered police, whom she bypasses by providing Oligarchic passwords, and witnesses a bomb being thrown into a police convoy. As she and a fellow agent move further into the heart of the city, they become aware of pillars of smoke towering "more ominously in the heavens".

In chapter twenty-three, Avis describes how suddenly "the people of the abyss" - the working/poor classes not affiliated with the Favored Unions - surged out of their ghettos and rampaged through the city, coming into direct, violent, fatal conflict with the Mercenaries. At the same time, she writes, revolutionists were staging some of their planned attacks, taking out some of the fortresses of the Mercenaries and destroying the ghettos. The enclaves of the Oligarchs, she writes, remained untouched. Meanwhile, she adds, her perspective on her situation, even while running through murderous mobs, taking refuge under piles of dead bodies, and coming near to death herself, became removed, distant and objective.

In chapter twenty-four, Avis recounts the fragments of nightmarish memories she retains of her night in Chicago, including being taken by a soldier, believing her passwords of the Oligarchy, to a hospital. There, she writes, she found Everhard who, using his own passwords, got them a car and started the journey out of the city. While en route, Avis adds, she and Everhard passed the body of Bishop Morehouse, and as they were leaving the city, hordes of "abyss-people" were being led in to help in the reconstruction. Those who lived in Chicago, Everhard comments, were all destroyed.

In chapter twenty-five, Avis writes of the origins of terrorist groups, surviving members of both the revolutionists and the people of the abyss who took violent, vindictive revenge on the Oligarchy and the Mercenaries. "Through it all," she writes, "moved the Iron Heel, impassive and deliberate", also taking its revenge, but on the revolutionists. As she writes that Everhard and the rest of the revolutionist leadership were still planning the next uprising (the Second Revolt), the manuscript comes to an abrupt, mid-sentence end. A footnote suggests that this ending is the result of Avis being told of an impending mercenary raid, and suggests that if she had completed her narrative, she might have

cleared up "the mystery that has shrouded for seven centuries the execution of Ernest Everhard".

Chapters 22 through 25 Analysis

On a technical/narrative level, the novel reaches its climax in this section, with the perhaps inevitable confrontation between the revolutionists and the oligarchy which results in the equally inevitable crushing of the former by the latter. An interesting point here, though, is how Avis clearly intends the reader of the manuscript which, it must be remembered, is slightly different from the novel, to believe that everything she has described so far is, essentially, the prologue for the ultimate, successful act of revolution ahead. In other words, even in describing the misery of the Chicago Massacre, she is fulfilling her agenda - promoting the ideals of the revolution, and specifically of her husband.

On another level, however, those ideals and that agenda are significantly undermined by the sense that throughout this final section of the book, and perhaps throughout its second half, the moral line between the Oligarchs and the Revolutionists becomes blurred. Both sides of the conflict are in this section portrayed as having significant, almost heartless, disregard for the value of human life. This, combined with references in other chapters to righteousness and to singleness of purpose, among other things, on both sides, not to mention the sense that Avis seems to describe the people of the abyss in much the same terms as the Oligarchs would, could very well raise suspicions in the reader's mind. It seems that in spite of differences in ideology that one hesitates to call superficial, at the core of their deepest humanity the broad strokes goals of each movement, the individual goals of each movement's members, and ultimately their fundamental natures are more alike than either would care to admit.

Finally, there is the final fate of Bishop Morehouse, who has, it seems, embraced the truth of those whom he is trying to save in ways Avis and Everhard, it seems, do not, and the mystery hinted at in the final footnote: the mystery of what happened to Everhard.

Characters

Avis Everhard

Avis is the central character and narrative of the book. Told from her first person perspective, her apparent story is one of transformation from child of privilege to revolutionary and, on some level, of redemption, in that she redeems her life of privilege by working for the good of the worker's revolution. It must be noted, however, that there is evidence that both transformation and redemption are superficial. The astute reader will perceive that this is what Avis believes has happened, but may perceive a deeper truth in her words and commentary.

In chapter twenty, Avis adopts a new persona in order to infiltrate the Oligarchy on behalf of the revolution. Her descriptions of and commentary on "the people of the abyss" in general, and her description of those people in her narrative of the events of the Chicago Commune suggest that deep down, her feelings of contempt and disgust for the lower/working classes, formed as the result of her early Oligarchic influences, remain. In other words, in the same way as she changes the part of herself she presents to the world in chapter tweenty in order to gain respect of the Oligarchy, she changes the part of herself she presents to the Revolution in order to gain the respect of its members - and in particular, the member she desires romantically: Ernest Everhard.

Ernest Everhard

Everhard is Avis's husband, and as idealistically portrayed by his wife, comes across as strong-willed, highly intelligent and articulate, and both physically and mentally powerful. There is the sense that in creating this portrait of him, Avis is striving to present him to future generations as the hero of the Revolution. While the footnotes tend to debunk and/or undercut this somewhat transparent attempt at idealization, they also acknowledge that he was, at least, an important strategist and philosopher in the revolutionary cause. Meanwhile, in the introduction, Everhard is described as a representative of the views and ideology of the author.

Dr. Cunningham, Bishop Morehouse

Dr. Cunningham is Avis's father, a well known and respected scientist. His invitation to Everhard to speak at a dinner party is the catalyst for the beginning of Avis's attraction to him and her being drawn into the revolutionist cause. Morehouse is a guest at that party. Everhard's presence at the dinner is also the catalyst for journeys into deeper social awareness undertaken by both men. Dr. Cunningham joyfully considers his journey a scientific experiment in sociology, while Bishop Morehouse, much less joyfully, considers his journey an exploration of the true spirit and intent of Christ. Late in the book, as the struggle for power between the Revolution and the Iron Heel is deepening, Dr. Cunningham disappears, like so many of the Revolutionists. Morehouse is believed

to have disappeared also, but his body is glimpsed among the thousands of other "people of the abyss" slaughtered in the Chicago Commune.

Jackson

Jackson is a worker in a factory in which Cunningham has profitable shares. He is first glimpsed by them as he passes, peddling to earn a few extra cents. When Everhard reveals Jackson's story to Avis, as well as to her father and Morehouse, Avis goes in search of the truth about Jackson's situation, realizes the essential injustice of that situation, and as a result begins her journey into the world and life of the Revolutionist. In other words, Jackson is a catalytic character, a trigger for change and transformation. His fate is detailed in chapter nineteen.

The Philomaths

The Philomaths is a sub-group of the Oligarchy, the segment of the ruling class that prides itself on a certain degree of intellectual capacity and/or accomplishment. The Philomaths, as described by Avis, are generally lawyers, philosophers, and some artists, all of whom have been absorbed into the Oligarchic way of thought.

Mr. Wickson

Wickson is a guest at the meeting of the Philomaths where Everhard confronts the local members of the Oligarchy. Wickson is the only one to rebut him effectively, and the only one whose rebuttal Everhard acknowledges. He reappears throughout the narrative as a beneficiary of the Oligarchy's influence and generosity, in other words, as one of the main antagonists of the Revolution, and, starting in chapter eighteen, is an unwitting host to Avis and Everhard, who take refuge in a secret cave in the backwoods of his property. His son stumbles upon the hiding place, is indoctrinated into the Revolution, and eventually becomes a revolutionary spy in his father's home, and thereby in the Oligarchy.

The Favored Unions, the Mercenaries

Both these groups become allies of the Oligarchy as they struggle to accumulate, maintain and manifest power over the Proletariat. The Favored Unions are those workers who, in exchange for supporting the Oligarchy and denying the influence of the Revolution, receive a greater share of the Oligarchy's profits (material benefits), while the Mercenaries are militaristic warriors with the job of physically and violently defending the Oligarchy against Revolutionist activities.

The Grangers, the Fighting Groups

These groups, on the other hand, are allies of the Revolutionists. The Grangers is the name given to members of the agricultural and/or farming communities who for a while maintain social, political and economic independence from both the Oligarchy and the Revolution, but are manipulated and broken down by the Oligarchy with what little influence and membership that remain being absorbed into the Revolution. The Fighting Groups is the militaristic wing of the Revolution, its central aims being to subversively attack the Oligarchy, and take execution-style revenge on traitors.

Pervaise

Pervaise, identified in a lengthy footnote in chapter seventeen, is the criminal manipulated into throwing the bomb into Congress that results in Everhard being framed, tried, convicted and imprisoned for treason. His identity is revealed in a footnote that reveals that his confession, sealed for centuries, confirmed Avis's belief that the Iron Heel was behind the bomb plot.

Anthony Meredith

This is the name given to the author of the Forward to the Everhard Manuscript. He is evidently a scholar from seven hundred years in the future, writing from the perspective of a society that has adopted the ideals and principles espoused and fought for by Everhard and the other Revolutionists. The narrative never explicitly says it, but there is the sense that he is also the author of the Footnotes.

Objects/Places

The Everhard Manuscript

This is the name given by the people of the future (Anthony Meredith) to the main body of the narrative. The Manuscript is presented as equal parts personal memoir (of its author, Avis Everhard), political manifesto (of the ideals of the Revolution), hagiography (biography of a "saint"- in this case, Ernest Everhard) and, from the perspective of Meredith and the people of the future, historical document.

The Footnotes

Throughout the Manuscript/novel, footnotes written from the perspective of the future, perhaps intended to be perceived as written by Anthony Meredith, comment on the manuscript's references to people, situations and ideas. Some of the shorter footnotes even give translations of idiom and slang - in chapter twenty-three, for example, a one-word footnote translates "grub" (found in the manuscript) as "food". In general, the footnotes come across as somewhat patronizing and judgmental and, in some ways, have the potential to undermine the reader's respect for the people of the future's so-called "enlightenment".

Socialism, Fascism

These are the two opposing philosophies of the Worker's Revolution. Socialism, in brief, is the philosophy that humanity should work together for the good of all humanity, that every individual should share equally in both the responsibilities and the rewards. Fascism, as defined in the (real world) Introduction, is "is the form that the capitalist state assumes when [it] feels that its economic and political power is seriously threatened by working-class revolution". In other words, fascism is an expression of the privileged class's determination and desire to maintain its politically and economically advantageous position.

The Oligarchy, the Proletariat

These are the two opposing sides in the workers revolution. The Oligarchy is composed of rich, self-serving businessmen. The Proletariat is composed of members of the labor movement, both its intellectual and political leadership, of which Everhard is one, and its uneducated masses who, in the mind and narration of Avis Everhard, become "the roaring abysmal beast" or "the people of the abyss".

The

"Iron Heel" is the name given, by Everhard, to the power, intent, and actions of the Oligarchy in suppressing the revolution.

The United States of America

The novel portrays the U.S. as the locus, or center, of the worldwide conflict between the Oligarchy and the Proletariat, making the argument that capitalism is, for the most part, nowhere as rampant, as powerful, or held in as high moral and ethical regard as it is in America.

Avis's Father's Book

The book written by Avis's father, Dr. Cunningham, that triggered his expulsion from the university. A footnote comments that the book deals with "the capitalistic bias of the universities and common schools. It was a logical and crushing indictment of the whole system of education ..."

Ardis

Referred to only in footnotes, Ardis is one of the "wonder cities" referred to by Everhard in chapter fourteen, "one of the most wonderful of them all". Ardis, as several footnotes indicate, is where many of the historical records and artifacts of the time and situations described by Avis are preserved.

The Refuge in the Mountains

This, a natural sinkhole in the tangled backwoods of property owned by Mr. Wickson is where Avis takes refuge after her release from prison, and where Everhard eventually joins her and plots the next stage of the Revolution.

The Chicago Commune

The Chicago Commune is the perhaps ironic name given to the riot-like conflict between the "people of the abyss" (i.e., the low working class), the Revolutionaries and the agents of the Oligarchy that forestalled the first workers revolt. Avis Everhard's descriptions of the commune portray it as a bloody, violent, relentless massacre, with all three sides - working class, Revolutionaries, the Oligarchy - causing thousands of deaths in the opposing forces.

Themes

The Struggle between Socialism and Capitalism

This is the book's most apparent theme, the anchor of both its narrative and philosophical explorations; in other words, characters and events in the book's plot are driven and defined by this struggle in the same way as its consideration of socially relevant ideas and ideals. The most important thing to note about this central theme is that its relevance to the book is built upon its relevance to the world at the time the book was written.

In the early 1900s (the book was first published in 1908), the intellectual, economic and philosophical analysis of socialist thinkers like Karl Marx was beginning to make its influence felt, particularly in Eastern Europe but also in America. There, the large-scale embrace of the principles and practices of the late nineteenth century industrial revolution had entwined with the so-called "American Dream" to create an unstable, uneasy relationship between rapacious capitalism in the upper classes and deepening poverty in the lower. In that volatile environment, the author of the Iron Heel, Canadian socialist Jack London, perhaps best known for his adventure stories for boys, took what he experienced as the beginnings of a movement towards economic justice to what he saw as their logical, conclusion, such as violence, universal mistrust, corruption, and eventually wholesale slaughter. This, he contends, would result in what he believed to be the inevitable, but which the reader can see as idealized, triumph of the worker.

While the introduction suggests that the book is remarkably prophetic, it fails to note how both capitalism and socialism, and the conflict that exists between them, are grounded in fundamental human conditions common to both socialists and capitalists. This commonality of condition (which London's heroic Everhard does note, at least to some degree), is the book's underlying theme.

The Commonality of Human Experience

Throughout the book, there are references to ways in which the opposing sides of the central socialist/capitalist conflict share perspectives and take generally similar actions as manifestations of those perspectives. The first is referenced by Everhard in chapter two, in which he refers to human beings in general, and both capitalists and socialists in particular, as being fundamentally selfish. This is the only fully overt reference to humanity's ultimate commonality throughout the book, but it is not the only reference. A reference less overt, but only slightly so, is the comment in chapter twenty-one to the Oligarchy's conviction that theirs was the "right" position, and to the intensity with which it defended that right. Finally, a commonality developed entirely by implication is humanity's propensity to violence, a tendency particularly evident in the narration of the horrors of the Chicago Commune in which both sides indulge in near-mindless bloodlust and slaughter. In this context, Avis's horrified comments on the nature of the mob the

"people of the abyss", can be seen as reflecting the views of both the leadership of the Revolutionists and the full body of the Oligarchy. It's interesting to consider, meanwhile, how the book's exploration of the theme of commonality seems to contend that humanity's shared emotions and experiences of, in general, negative and destructive; in other words, animalistic. The so-called "higher" emotions, such as compassion, love, respect, tolerance, are rarely, if ever, referred to.

Righteousness

Perhaps the most telling, and the most ironic, commonality in the characters and circumstances of both the Revolutionists and the Oligarchy is that both sides, in terms of both individuals and groups, come across as profoundly self-righteousness. Specifically, in the context of Avis's comments throughout the narrative on the necessity for the Revolutionists to make intense sacrifices in the name of their cause, it's not hard for the reader to see that the Revolutionists held just as tightly, and just as certainly to the "right"-ness and justness of their cause. In other words, the belief of the Oligarchy and its associates in the rightness of their cause and position is soundly condemned by the Revolutionists, who seem to be entirely blind to the fact that theirs is just as strong, just as obsessive, just as self-justifying, and ultimately just as much of a trigger for violence. It is not going too far, in fact, to suggest that the sentiments expressed in the quote from p. 196 could be expressed by opponents on either side of the central conflict. Both are locked in their perspectives that theirs is the right way, and that might will ultimately bring that right into being. Perhaps this is the reason why there are few, if any, expressions and/or explorations of the "higher emotions" as defined above. There is ultimately, in fact, the strong sense that the "heel" of the Oligarchs is not the only thing in the characters' experience that is made of iron. It would seem, for both socialists and capitalists, that iron is also the material from which is constructed their self-righteousness.

Style

Point of View

The main point to keep in mind in relation to each of the four elements of style discussed in this analysis is the way in which the novel is presented - as a historical document found at some point in the future and commented upon/analyzed within the context of that future. In other words, the story takes place in one context, one broadly defined setting, with one point of view, with one style of language usage and one intention of meaning. The commentary framing that story, equally fictional, takes place in another context, in another setting, from another point of view, with another style of language usage and another intention of meaning.

In terms of point of view, then, the story is narrated from the highly subjective, first person point of view of Avis Everhard, the wife of socialist revolutionary Ernest Everhard. There are three noteworthy aspects to this point of view. The first two are consciously and deliberated communicated by the author in the voice of Avis, the portrayal of herself as a rightly and righteously awakened social revolutionary and the portrayal of her husband as an idealized hero figure. The third is communicated consciously by the author but sub-consciously by Avis and goes unnoticed by the commentary. This is the aspect of Avis's character that hasn't changed, the part of her that holds on to the Oligarchy-defined perception, with which she was raised, of the lower/working classes as essentially animalistic. While she clearly gives lip-service to the ideals of the Revolution that the members of those classes are worth saving, her comments on actual experience of both the individuals and circumstances of that class are consistently and repeatedly tinged with disgust.

In terms of the commentary, its point of view is that of academia, several hundred years in the future, living in the "enlightened" world that resulted from the eventual success of the Revolution. In general, the commentary comes across as patronizing and frankly more than a little horrified at the un-evolved nature of the people and events portrayed in Avis's narrative.

Setting

As discussed above, there are two aspects setting that need to be kept in mind when considering this book, the setting of the story and the setting of the commentary. In terms of the former, the setting is early twentieth century America, a time in which, for both the book and the world, the stirrings of significant social upheaval were just beginning. In terms of the commentary, the setting is twenty-sixth century America, a time in which the struggle between socialism and capitalism has been resolved once and for all, with idealized socialism emerging as the dominant force in society, economics, philosophy and politics. It's important to note that for the most part, there are relatively few direct or detailed portrayals of how society in this latter context and

setting functions. There is a sense of peace, of respect, and of self-restraint, a clear contrast between the lack of peace, the lack of respect, and the powerful lack of self-restraint in the world/environment of the story. There is also a sense that those who live in the future find the life and context of the past at the least distasteful, at the most disgusting and frightening. The irony is that the future people, within the setting of their near-utopia, are on some level as judgmental and as self-protective as the people whose attitudes and actions they, for the most part, find so distasteful.

Language and Meaning

The language used in both the story and the commentary is very much tied to the point of view of their writers. Specifically, Avis "writes" with the almost poetic, at times melodramatic, at times intensely romantic language of the passionate devotee - in her case, to her ideals and to her husband. Her language is that of someone who knows that s/he is writing for posterity, with the idea of leaving behind both historical documentation and interpretation / idealization of that documentation. In other words, her language is self-conscious, self-dramatizing, and often self-indulgent.

The language of the commentary, meanwhile, is for the most part more academic and more objective in tone - at least, there is the sense that it is intended to be. Words and phrasing both tend towards clinical and analytical, explanatory and instructive. It must be noted, however, that on several occasions the horrified perspective of the time on the (animalism? barbarism?) events being commented upon comes through.

In both contexts, then, language communicates both directly (in terms of narration of event and perception) and indirectly (in terms of commenting upon and/or revealing attitude towards the events and the reasons BEHIND perception). The success of this complex layering of language and meaning is, in no small way, a testimony and compliment to the scope of the author's narrative and thematic vision, and to his technical skill in communicating the complexities of that vision.

Structure

In terms of the main body of the story, its structure is essentially linear. While the first chapter sets the narrative up as a memoir - that is, a "present day" recalling of past events that offers insight into and explanation of those events - the events of the story are essentially presented in traditionally linear (this happened, then that happened) fashion. Only occasionally does "Avis" get ahead of herself and discuss outcomes before event. This occurs most notably in chapter nineteen, "Transformation". On the other hand, because this "memoir" is in fact a novel, the linear structure of the main story also serves to move the narrative along in traditional "novelistic" ways - through a progression of incidents, reflections and confrontations that results in a high point of climax - in this case, the Chicago Commune.

In terms of the commentary, an initial glance suggests that its structure is essentially tied to that of the main body of the story, commenting on events as "Avis" brings them

up in the manuscript. Upon deeper consideration, however, there emerges the perception that in its own way, the commentary is telling its own story, moving in a structurally linear fashion from event to event to its own particular climax - in this case, the very last line in the book, which contains the revelation that no one knows what happened to Ernest Everhard. In other words, this particular structure resulting in this particular climax tells the reader that, while one has been reading a prophetic social commentary, without knowing it, one has also been reading a mystery.

Quotes

"This is the apocalyptic battle imagined in 'The Iron Heel', which foresees the struggle between the impoverished masses who do most of the world's work and the privileged minorities who live off the profits raging without resolution for three hundred years."
Introduction, p. i.

"Everhard is physically a replica of London, who places in his mouth fiery socialist speeches which he himself had given."
Ibid, p. v.

"London's uncanny prophetic vision came from the ability to explore and project the realities deep inside himself, a being created - and torn - by the contradictions between the extremes of life in capitalist society."
Ibid, v

"London, like his contemporary socialist comrades, was still a long way from understanding that the non-white peoples of the world were destined, in the second half of the twentieth century, to LEAD the revolutionary forces."
Ibid, vi.

"Nowhere do we find more vividly portrayed the psychology of the persons that lived in that turbulent period embraced between the years 1912 and 1932 - their mistakes and ignorance, their doubts and fears and misapprehensions, their ethical delusions, their violent passions, their inconceivable sordidness and selfishness."
p. 1

"As Ernest talked ... his face glowed, his eyes snapped and flashed, and his chin and jaw were eloquent with aggressiveness. But it was only a way he had. It always aroused people, his smashing, sledge-hammer manner of attack invariably made them forget themselves."
p. 10

"How can you know anything about the working class? You do not live in the same locality with the working class. You herd with the capitalist class in another locality. And why not? It is the capitalist class that pays you, that feeds you, that puts the very clothes on your backs ... and in return you preach to your employers the brands of metaphysics that are especially acceptable to them ..."
p. 16

"The working class has done without you ... the working class will continue to do without you. And furthermore, the working class can do better without you than with you."
p. 17

"'We say that the class struggle is a law of social development. We are not responsible for it. We do not make the class struggle. We merely explain it, as Newton explained gravitation. We explain the nature of the conflict of interest that produces the class struggle.'"
Everhard, p. 22

"'The working men on the street railway furnish the labor. The stockholders furnish the capital. By the joint effort of the working men and the capital, money is earned. They divide between them this money ... Capital's share is called "dividends". Labor's share is called "wages" ... the working man, being selfish, wants all he can get in the division. The capitalist, being selfish, wants all he can get in the division ... this is the conflict of interest between labor and capital. And it is an irreconcilable conflict.'"
p. 23

"The man was a beast. I hated him, then, and consoled myself with the thought that his behavior was what to be expected from a man of the working class."
p. 30

"I knew that I loved him, and that I was melting with desire to comfort him. I thought of his life. A sordid, harsh and meager life it must have been ...all my heart seemed bursting with desire to fold my arms around him, and to rest his head on my breast - his head that must be weary with so many thoughts; and to give him rest - just rest - and easement and forgetfulness for a tender space."
p. 42

"... as he spoke he extended from his splendid shoulders his two great arms, and the horse-shoer's hands were clutching the air like eagle's talons. He was the spirit of regnant labor as he stood there, his hands outreaching to rend and crush his audience."
p. 55

"A low, throaty rumble arose, lingered on the air a moment, and ceased. It was the forerunner of the snarl, the brute in man, the earnest of his primitive passions ... in that moment, as I saw the harshness form in their faces ... I realized that not easily would they let their lordship of the world be wrested from them."
p. 56

"'Our reply shall be couched in terms of lead. We are in power. Nobody will deny it. By virtue of that power we shall remain in power ... we will grind you revolutionists down under our heel, and we shall walk upon your faces. The world is ours, we are its lords, and ours it shall remain.'"
p. 63

"Love alone is stronger than sin - stronger than death. I therefore say to the rich among you that it is their duty to do what I have done and am doing. Let each one of you who is prosperous take into his house some thief and treat him as his brother, some unfortunate and treat her as his sister ... the prisons will be turned into hospitals, and

the criminal will disappear with his crime."
p. 74

"Let us not destroy those wonderful machines that produce efficiently and cheaply. Let us control them. Let us profit by their efficiency and cheapness. Let us run them for ourselves. Let us oust the present owners of the wonderful machines, and let us own the wonderful machines ourselves. That, gentlemen, is socialism ..."
p. 86

"...you, and labor, and all of us, will be crushed under the iron heel of a despotism as relentless and terrible as any despotism that has blackened the pages of the history of man. That will be a good name for that despotism, the Iron Heel."
p. 98

"'There is a greater strength than wealth, and it is greater because it cannot be taken away. Our strength, the strength of the proletariat, is in our muscles, in our hands to cast ballots, in our fingers to pull trigger ... it is the primitive strength, it is the strength that is to life germane ...'"
p. 99

"There was grave talk about the bacillus of violence that infected all men who embrace socialism and father, with his long and peaceful life, was instanced as a shining example of how the bacillus ... worked ... it was asserted by more than one paper that father's mind had weakened under the strain of scientific study, and confinement in a state asylum for the insane was suggested."
p. 114

"Father ... looked upon our catastrophe in the light of an adventure. No anger nor bitterness possessed him. He was too philosophic and simple to be vindictive, and he lived too much in the world of mind to miss the creature comforts we were giving up."
p. 115

"I made Ernest happy. I came into his love ... as one that made toward peace and repose. I gave him rest ... it was the one infallible token that I had not failed. To bring forgetfulness, or the light of gladness, into those poor tired eyes of his - what greater joy could have blessed me than that?"
p. 116

"'You led me from theories about life to life itself. You pulled aside the veils from the social shams. You were light in my darkness, but now I, too, see the light ... only the persecution. I harm no-one. Why will they not let me alone?'"
p. 126

"It was the Plutocracy, weighing and balancing , that defeated us by dividing our strength. It was the Plutocracy, though its secret agents, that raised the cry that socialism was sacrilegious and atheistic; it was the Plutocracy that whipped the churches ... into line ..."
p. 132

"'These great works will be the form [the Oligarchy's] expenditure of the surplus will take, and in the same way that the ruling classes of Egypt of long ago expended the surplus they robbed from the people by the building of temples and pyramids.'"
Everhard, p. 143

"Men were weak ... and because of their weakness we were compelled to make the only other reward that was within our power. It was the reward of death. Out of necessity, we had to punish our traitors. For every man who betrayed us, from one to a dozen faithful avengers were loosed upon his heels."
p. 157

"The Revolution took on largely the character of religion. We worshipped at ... the shrine of liberty. It was the divine flashing through us. Men and women devoted their lives to the Cause, and newborn babes were sealed to it as of old they had been sealed to the service of God."
p. 158

"We must accept the capitalistic stage in social evolution as about on a par with the earlier monkey age. The human had to pass through those stages in its rise from the mire and slime of low organic life. It was inevitable that much of the mire and slime should cling and be not easily shaken off."
Footnote, p. 159

"We were creating a new art, and we had much to discover. But the work was going on everywhere; masters in the art [of disguise] were developing, and a fund of tricks and expedients was being accumulated. This fund became a sort of textbook ... a part of the curriculum, as it were, of the school of the Revolution."
p. 174

"We were not mere gloomy conspirators...through all the labor and the play an interplay of life and death we found time to laugh and love. There were artists, scientists, scholars, musicians and poets among us; and in that hole in the ground culture was higher and finer than in the palaces or wonder cities of the oligarchs."
p. 185

"...for the great majority of the religious, heaven and hell are incidental to right and wrong. Love of the right, desire for the right, unhappiness with anything less than the right - in short, right conduct is the prime factor of religion."
p. 191

"Never mind the destruction of life and property. Let the abysmal brute roar and the police and Mercenaries slay ... it would merely mean that the various dangers to us were harmlessly destroying one another. In the meantime we would be doing our own work, largely unhampered ..."
p. 196

"[The people of the abyss] surged past my vision in concrete waves of wrath, snarling and growing carnivorous, drunk with whisky from pillaged warehouses, drunk with

hatred, drunk with lust for blood ... dim ferocious intelligences with all the godlike blotted from their features and all the fiendlike stamped in ... festering youth and festering age, faces of fiends, crooked, twisted, misshapen monsters ... the refuse and the scum of life, a raging, screaming, screeching demoniacal horde."
p. 207

"Death meant nothing, life meant nothing. I was an interested spectator of events, and, sometimes swept on by the rush, was myself a curious participant. For my mind had leaped to a star-cool altitude and grasped a passionless transvaluation of values."
p. 208

Topics for Discussion

What aspects of the tension between socialism and capitalism do you see manifesting in today's society - economically, socially, politically, philosophically? Do you foresee contemporary tensions taking the same confrontational course as the tensions in the book? Why or why not? If not, how do you see those tensions resolving?

Consider what has happened vis-à-vis the dynamics and relationship between socialism and capitalism over the years since the book was written. Do you agree with the Introduction's suggestion that The Iron Heel was profoundly prophetic about how the relationship between socialism and capitalism, specifically in the United States? Why or why not?

What do you think the author intends by having Meredith's introduction and footnotes suggest that much of what Avis says about her husband and their goals is less than entirely correct?

Discuss whether Avis's transformation from daughter of the Oligarchy to revolutionist is motivated more by desire for Everhard or by personal belief.

Discuss the metaphorical implications of the names "Ernest" and "Everhard" as they relate to his character as defined by his wife's narrative.

Do you agree with Morehouse's opinion that government, that society in general, and the church in particular, have moved away from Christ's original teachings of compassion? Why or why not? Consider not only the book, but current contemporary society.

What do you think are the metaphorical meanings associated with Avis's finding sanctuary in the backwoods of Wickson's deer park - in other words, in a natural environment far away from urbanization and cities?

Consider the quote from page 191. Avis here is writing about the Oligarchy, but in what way can it also be seen as applying, perhaps ironically, to the Revolution?