Humanities and Social Sciences Review,
CD-ROM. ISSN: 2165-6258 :: 09(01):411–420 (2019)

THE PASTORAL ESCAPE: THE RESISTANCE OF PASTORAL ROMANTICISM IN UPTON SINCLAIR'S *THE JUNGLE*

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Though being considered a 'muckraker' journalist, Upton Sinclair is best known for his fictional work *The Jungle*. Muckrakers were not many in number but each had their viewpoint on how the society was to be reformed, and these were observed in their journalism. As for Sinclair, his was the clearest in *The Jungle*: reform was to come through 'socialism'. His later chapters on socialist solutions have always been criticised, even by himself, as weak. His ending invests too much in mere propagandistic scaffolding and hence ends up collapsing altogether into repugnant prattle, unable to provide a closure to Jurgis's gripping tragedy. However, it eventually serves to, together with Sinclair's deliberate marketing of it so, present *The Jungle* as a complete Marxist-socialist statement in its entirety, and conceals the inability of the narrative to square its circles with the social contradictions it initially sets out to resolve, namely corruption and injustice in all aspects of society. This inability manifests itself at the text level in Sinclair's inability to plot a socialist deliverance for Jurgis and his society from corruption and injustice at the end. Yet, although his ending fails, Chapter 22 stands out as the closest thing to salvation Jurgis attains throughout. A surfacing of the southern country life in a single Chapter 22, in contradiction to an otherwise urban Chicago setting, becomes symptomatic of the ideological closure in Sinclair's grasp of the contradictions mentioned. Resorting to Fredric Jameson's semantic enrichment, this paper aims to work through and bring into question the ideological closure of Sinclair's work by reconsidering this chapter's role in and meaning for the narrative. Working within Jameson's first semantic horizon, the paper aims to analyse how Sinclair's reading of social injustice and corruption and socialist reformation is unable to break away from the frame of the American Dream and a pastoral romance.

Keywords: Upton sinclair, *The jungle*, Fredric jameson, Political unconscious.

Talking about Upton Sinclair, there are two things that will most definitely crop up. One of these is the term 'muckraker' and the other is Sinclair's masterpiece *The Jungle*. To start with the term muckraker, one can briefly define it as the name given to certain American journalists who were writing at the beginning of the 1900s. Originally intended as an insult by President Roosevelt, the term was accepted by the journalists as a label that honours their crusade against social injustice. Muckraking is more or less equal to the modern investigative journalism. A muckraker tries to investigate and uncover political and corporate corruption and so their journalism was mostly motivated "by a moral, almost religious, belief that the exposure of ills would lead to cures" (Miraldi xiii). By exposing these ills, they expected to arouse reforms that would lead to the construction of a more 'egalitarian' or 'democratic' society.

Although being considered a 'muckraker' journalist himself, Sinclair is in fact best known for his 1906 fictional work *The Jungle*. Each muckraker had a different viewpoint on how the society was to be reformed and these were observed in their journalism. Yet for Sinclair, his was the clearest in *The Jungle*: the expected reforms were to come through 'socialism'. However, this paper aims to discuss how Sinclair's promise of a socialist deliverance fails and the narrative settles with a romantic escape instead.

The Jungle tells the story of Jurgid Rudkus, a Lithuanian immigrant who comes to America with his family with "the hope of fulfilling a version of the American dream" (Boelhower 8). As the flashbacks and recollections of the characters tell us, economy in the Lithuania the Rudkuses lived was pre-industrial. The family lived in poor conditions in terms of material wealth. However, although their lives got tedious and sterile, they lived peacefully in accordance with the cycles of nature and its quotidian tasks. Yet still, the America they hear about in the circulating stories, and their dreams related to this version of America that depends on simple hearsay start to become irresistible. According to these circulating stories, America is "where they can choose their own kind of God—where they can learn to read and write, and talk, and think like men—and have good things!" (Overland 5). And although they are not fully aware of what liberty or equality really amounts to in the budding center of capitalism, they fall prey to these shiny words from a mistranslation of the Declaration of Independence: "all men are born free and equal … among these rights are life, liberty and the getting of happiness" (Overland 5). Therefore, thinking about the happiness they will 'get' upon arrival, they set off for America.

The story follows the family's life in America after immigration; specifically Jurgis's misfortunes in line with the deterministic formula of naturalist fiction. However, the narrative later "abandon[s] determinism, following not the plot of decline but a plot of socialist rebirth that assumes the power of the informed human will to change the world" (Taylor 169). So although the narrative starts as a naturalist tale, it ends as a romance; instead of the hero's downfall, we get his 'deliverance' from and triumph against the evils of the world. This turn from naturalistic downfall to socialist rebirth happens in the last four chapters where Jurgis happens on a Socialist rally and is immediately converted to its cause. These later chapters, nevertheless, have always been criticised for being weak since they provide an ending that is too much propagandistic talk with no real conclusion. In other words, the 'rebirth' or deliverance that the ending envisages does not really come through. The ending is unable to provide a closure to Jurgis's gripping tragedy that develops in the preceding chapters because a mere 'promise' of deliverance or the mirage of an imminent revolution—which is explained at length in intellectual conversations that last pages and pages long at the end—does not compare to the undeniably realistic presence of the physical atrocities that were going on in the preceding chapters. Compared to the physicality of the suffering, the mere promise of a better life features as unsatisfactory as the lies corrupt politicians were telling all along in the opening chapters of the story. Yet, although the ending hence fails, the mood it registers is still triumphalist. This triumphalism of the ending—which culminates in the final words "CHICAGO WILL BE OURS!" (Sinclair 328)—in fact conceals the inability of the narrative to square its circles with the social contradictions it initially sets out to resolve, namely corruption and injustice in all aspects of society. And this indicates Sinclair's inability to plot a socialist deliverance from corruption and injustice for Jurgis and his society.

But although the ending fails, Chapter 22 stands out as the closest thing to salvation that Jurgis attains throughout. A surfacing of the southern country life in a single Chapter 22, in contradiction to an otherwise urban Chicago setting, becomes symptomatic of the ideological closure inherent to Sinclair's grasp of the contradictions mentioned. In the light of Fredric Jameson's political unconscious, this paper aims to bring into question the ideological closure of Sinclair's work by reconsidering this chapter's role in the narrative. Working within Jameson's first semantic horizon, the paper aims to analyse how Sinclair's reading of social injustice, corruption and socialist reformation is unable to break away from the frame of the American Dream and a pastoral romance.

For Jameson, the relation of art to the real is never really a direct relation; a one-to-one correspondence in which the artefact reaches out and touches the real, or the real reaches in and creates its reflection in the artefact. He regards it "utterly unacceptable" when a conventional social or historical criticism tries to "show how a given artefact 'reflects' its social background" (81). Jameson designates

three concentric horizons to analyse the artwork within. In Jamesonian hermeneutics, the work of art must first be grasped "as a symbolic act" (76), as "symbolic resolution of real political and social contradictions" (80). Here, Jameson borrows the idea of 'symbolic action' from Kenneth Burke who states that an artefact is a symbolic act because there is a "radical difference between building a house and writing a poem about building a house" (8-9). For Jameson's analysis, it is important to understand the double play in the artefact's 'symbolic' nature. It is symbolic not only in the sense of building a house only in 'play' but also in the sense that its underlying concern may not be that of house construction: the successful construction of the house in the poem may be the resolution of an initially invisible desire hence making the artefact symbolically charged. It may not be that the poet was in need of a house and being unable to have it in reality decided to write a poem about it to satisfy his need. Under scrutiny, it may be uncovered that the poem was written, for example, by a young man who actually dreams of becoming a poet but is afraid of doing so since he fears he will not be able to earn a living by only writing poems. Thus, he writes a poem about building a house and symbolically resolves this contradiction by uniting poetry with material safety which the house symbolically stands for.

Therefore, in the first horizon of Jameson's political unconscious, *The Jungle* becomes a symbolic act that tries to resolve an originally social and political contradiction that is not visible on the surface. As Jameson maintains, the analysis in the first horizon must try to unearth this contradiction from the unconscious of the work. In this process, Jameson deploys Julien Greimas' semiotic square (Figure 1). Greimas defines his semiotic square as a tool that maps the objective possibilities of an individual's or society's thinking (87). Jameson underlines that the Greimas Square is not to be employed because it represents "the logical structure of reality itself" but is to be employed for its practical value in laying bare the ideological closure in which the subtext of any literary text is generated (46). It maps the limits of a specific ideological consciousness and marks the conceptual points beyond which that consciousness cannot go.

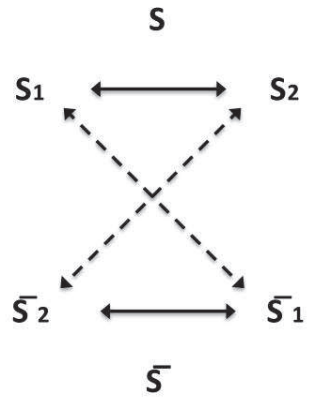

Figure 1. The Greimas Square

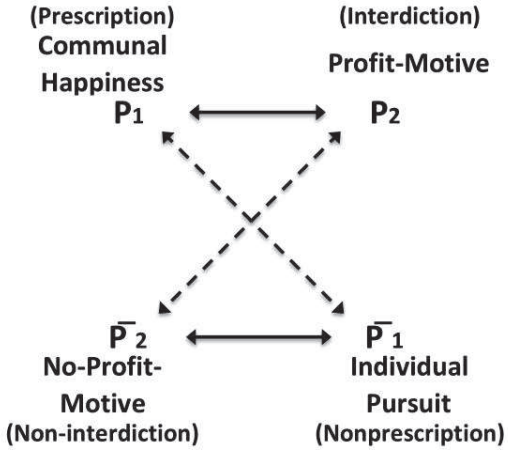

Figure 2. The contradiction underlying the text

The Greimas Square has two poles: axes S and $\bar{S}$. S is the Complex while $\bar{S}$ is the Neutral axis. Each axis features two semes: S_1 is the positive (prescribed) seme and S_2 is the negative (interdicted) seme. These two are the contraries, so it is not possible for both of them to be 'true' at the same time. These semes have their contradictories on the $\bar{S}$ axis: $\bar{S}_1$ and $\bar{S}_2$. These counterparts are also contrary within themselves but since this $\bar{S}$ axis is the Neutral axis, both of these semes may be 'true' at the same time. Investment in these seme slots starts firstly by an investment in S_1, which is the favoured or master seme, and proceeds by positing first its contrary S_2, and then generating the contradictory semes $\bar{S}_1$ and $\bar{S}_2$.

The narrative of *The Jungle* sets out with a fundamental contradiction as shown in Figure 2: Happiness (P_1) against Profit (P_2). The narrator tries everything to make the reader understand how profit motive destroys the common well-being and common good. He underlines that "What [the tycoons] wanted from a hog was all the profits that could be got out of him; and that was what they wanted from the workingman, and also that was what they wanted from the public" (Sinclair 299). Against "the incarnation of blind and insensate Greed" as such (Sinclair 300) the text positions a "message of salvation" (Sinclair 287) that is possible only by the socialist understanding of common good and happiness. As George Becker says this message creates the backbone of the work as a whole: "Underlying the book is the conviction that if [Sinclair] can only make others see what he has seen, smell what he has smelled, share the agony of suffering which he has shared with the dwellers of Packingtown" (133), he can show the public the source of this suffering (profit motive) and how to escape it to find happiness for all. According to Sinclair, "the fault lies in the refusal of the owners of industry to consider anything but profits" (Becker 136). If only he could reorient "the predominantly materialistic orientation of [this] bourgeois society" (Hornung, "The Un-American Dream" 546), the public could opt for the common good instead of the profit motive. Hence the text maintains that "it [is] the task of Socialists to teach and organize [the common people], and prepare them for the time when they were to seize the huge machine called the Beef Trust, and use it to produce food for human beings and not to heap up fortunes for a band of pirates" (Sinclair 300).

The P axis generates its contradictories in $\overline{P}$ axis: happiness for all is prescribed in P_1 while the individual pursuit of it in $\overline{P}_1$—which the Declaration of Independence purports as an American ideal—is not prescribed since it implies P_2, that is, the profit motive. Meanwhile, P_2 creates No-profit-motive in $\overline{P}_2$ which is not interdicted because the negation of the profit motive implies common good. These four semic positions map the ideological closure of the text. The text operates according to these semes and tries to come up with a resolution that would enable it to find a way out of this lock. Thus, the narrative starts working the semes into combinations as in Figure 3.

Being the basic contradiction whence the whole apparatus of relationships as they are mapped in Figure 2 appear, the contradiction between Communal Happiness and Profit Motive represent the underlying real contradiction the text seems to be dealing with. Budding capitalism ruins the lives of masses while enriching a handful few. The ultimate wish-fulfilment the narrative could have achieved becomes available with a combination of these two (P_1 and P_2) in the complex axis. As already mentioned, the basic quality of the relationship between these two semes is their unassailable contrariness. They cannot both be true at the same time. However, the narrative still tries its hand at it with the character 'Master Frederick' in Chapter 24. In fact, 'responsible capitalism' is a fairly new concept that has been in discussion especially in the USA and Great Britain (Watt; Miliband; George) in the last decade. Therefore, it would be an anachronism to claim that it appears as a fully shaped possibility in *The Jungle*. It is used here because although it did not exist as a concept back then, its core idea—that capitalist profit motive can serve for the greater good—is useful in explaining Chapter 24 in *The Jungle*. Master Frederick is an extremely rich young man. Jurgis bumps into Frederick while begging for money on the streets. Frederick is completely drunk and wants to befriend Jurgis. He takes Jurgis to his family mansion, which is described as "an enormous granite pile, set far back from the street, and occupying a whole block. By the light of the driveway lamps Jurgis could see that it had towers and huge gables, like a medieval castle" (Sinclair 225). Jurgis is fed and receives a hundred dollar bill from Frederick. The fact that Frederick is inebriated compromises the whole episode and categorises this combination as improbable: the rich class never helps the poor unless unknowingly.

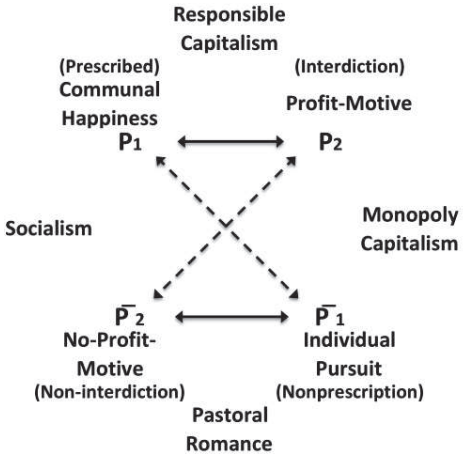

Figure 3. Combinations of the semes

Another combination the narrative conjures up and then openly eliminates as an improbable solution could be named as monopoly capitalism. It arises from a combination of Profit Motive (P_2) and Individual pursuit of happiness ($\overline{P}_1$). Here the solution offered is Jurgis's complete surrender to a capitalistic way of life. As in Marx's words on capitalist accumulation, "the larger capitals beat the smaller" (777); that is to say, the stronger and fiercer survives at the expense of the weaker. This idea is represented by Jurgis's introduction to the world of graft and crime. After meeting a criminal named Jack Duane, Jurgis starts his life as an outlaw with his first robbery with him. At first, the nature of the crimes he is committing causes "him some worriment" but soon Jurgis accepts that "it was the way of the game, and there was no helping it" (Sinclair 240); and here by 'game' Sinclair refers to the nature of capitalism and he builds a parallelism between crime and capitalist competition. Jurgis easily accepts the rules of relentless monopoly capitalism which Marx so simply explains and which Jack Duane also teaches him by saying "It's a case of us or the other fellow, and I say the other fellow every time" (Sinclair 240). Nevertheless, as mentioned, the narrative eliminates this solution as well. Jurgis starts as a petty thief and then moves on to being an armed robber, a burglar, a conman and a scab during the strikes. He also helps criminal organisations manipulate voters and rig elections. This short period helps him fill his pockets, but only temporarily. He goes back to jail for assaulting the factory owner who had raped his late wife and loses everything he got through graft and crime.

This should take us to the solution of socialism that appears in the narrative when these options fail Jurgis. This is also the solution that is openly presented as the only viable solution, the way out of social and economic catastrophe, by the narrator and so by Sinclair. Miserable again after his criminal days are over, Jurgis accidentally joins a socialist rally and gets seriously attracted by the propaganda speech given by a socialist party speaker. This marks the turning point in the narrative when all Jurgis' problems begin to be magically solved one by one. He is given a job, a place to stay, clean clothes and he is enlightened thanks to the leftist intellectuals he is introduced to:

> For four years, now, Jurgis had been wondering and blundering in the depths of a wilderness; and here, suddenly, a hand reached down and seized him, and lifted him out of it, and set him upon a mountain-top, from which he could survey it all—could see the paths from which he had wandered, the morasses into which he had stumbled. (Sinclair 299)

So the story ends on a happy note: Jurgis is saved. And there is the assurance of the inevitable socialist revolution that will surely happen within the decade. The party members calculate that "So far … one Socialist made another Socialist once every two years; and if they should maintain the same rate they would carry the country in 1912" (Sinclair 298). Sinclair even goes to lengths of maintaining a parallelism between Christian and socialist ideals: the narrator comments that socialism "was the new

religion of humanity—or you might say it was the fulfilment of the old religion, since it implied but the literal application of all the teachings of Christ" (Sinclair 299). The intellectual contemplations of what *will* socialism bring and how it will save the underdog is expressed confidently by Sinclair through the character Dr. Schliemann. Consequently, all these assertive explanations and conversations blur the novel's qualities as an object of art and turns it more into a manifesto of political propaganda where the party ideals and objectives are addressed by a third person directly to the reader of the manifesto. The work almost leaves diegesis and starts dictation. The fact that the ending, especially the last chapter, abounds with mere didactic conversation and the fact that the focus of narration shifts completely from Jurgis to this didactic talk bears witness to Sinclair's failure in putting the solution of 'socialism' to work. This makes Michael Folsom rightly observe that the "embrace of socialism in Sinclair's narrative is a psychic event, not a social or economic one, and not so much rational or logical in its development as it is emotional" (251). Alfred Hornung states a similar observation by saying that "Socialism, which Sinclair offers as the solution to all problems in the end, is however more of a social gospel than a political program of action" ("The Political Uses" 345).

In fact, Sinclair himself gives this away when he earlier makes Jurgis observe that futile talk is meaningless in the face of a necessity for practical action. After the rally that Jurgis first encounters, the narrator refers to Jurgis's initial disappointment in seeing that although everyone talked heatedly about revolution, no one actually did anything:

> someone … asked about some opinion the speaker had expressed concerning Tolstoy. Jurgis had never heard of Tolstoy, and did not care anything about him. Why should any one want to ask such questions, after an address like that? The thing was not to talk, but to do; the thing was to get hold of others and rouse them, to organize them and prepare for the fight! But still the discussion went on, in ordinary conversational tones, and it brought Jurgis back to the everyday world. … he began to realize again that he was a 'hobo,' that he was ragged and dirty, and smelled bad, and had no place to sleep that night!" (Sinclair 293-294)

Here Jurgis is disappointed because he cannot understand how after the overwhelmingly impressive call to action he listened to people can still engage in 'ordinary conversation' about someone called Tolstoy and his ideas. Although Sinclair here criticizes those who talk instead of doing and fighting, he himself ends up doing the same with his ending. Instead of giving the reader an ending that tries to solve things or that tries to show and exemplify how to fight for that solution, he ends up with futile talk. Being under the constraint of demonstrating what socialism offers as a solution, Sinclair could only "switch disturbingly to triumph and static didacticism" (Taylor 167) in the last chapters of his novel. Matthew Morrison's observations concerning this failing ending are worth quoting at length:

> story bears many traces of the detachment of its author … from the working class it purports to help. … the tediously discursive ending of the novel reflects the lingering influence of its author's genteel background, which … induced him to render Jurgis' conversion as 'a psychic event, not a social or economic one.' This psychologization makes the newly-politicized Jurgis less threatening to the middle class reader, in that the socialism he will help bring, far from being worker-culture, will feel like an extension of 'polite society'; Jurgis' silence during the novel's final theoretical exposition attests to Sinclair's continuing concern more for the 'intelligentsia' than for 'laboring people." (52)

Morrison's conclusions about Sinclair's 'genteel background' and how this leads him to downplay the socialist revolt against the system into a mere 'psychologization' are more than suitable. This points out not only to the fact that the solution of socialism is in fact eliminated in the narrative just like the two other solutions as discussed above, but also the fact that the remaining combination on the neutral axis of $\overline{P}$ forces itself as the only viable solution over all the other combinatory possibilities.

This last combination is clearly attached to an American pastoral romance where the individual pursuits happiness ($\overline{P}_1$) in his peaceful unhurried ($\overline{P}_2$) existence in harmony with the cycles of a nurturing

mother nature. Robert Lovett stresses Sinclair's 'genteel background' just like Morrison above and adds his opinions about Sinclair's ensuing relation the romantic outlook this background equipped him with. He says that "Upton Sinclair is by nature a romantic. The grandson of a commodore of the Confederate States, the son of southern parents" (Lovett 708). Folsom and Granville Hicks are of the same opinion. While Folsom defines Sinclair as "The Anglo-Saxon Protestant petit-bourgeois intellectual" (248), Hicks draws attention to his "middle-class background and preoccupations, his moralism" (213) that keeps him from fully realising the promises of a socialist solution as already discussed above and engraves the ideas of pastoral romanticism in him.

A surfacing of the southern country life in Chapter 22 becomes symptomatic of that ideological closure in Sinclair's grasp of a resolution that can help overcome the social and political contradictions at hand. Although Sinclair seems to offer socialism on the surface, it is the pastoral romance that takes Jurgis closest to happiness. It is not possible to explain Chapter 22 as a mere diversion. Or it is not possible to explain Jurgis' exaltation in the southern country simply with Jurgis' peasant background. Patricia Laurence, for instance, indicates that although the Lithuanians "knew and appreciated the healing powers of nature … they did not adopt the romantic pastoralism of nineteenth-century" American writers like Emerson (64). Laurence goes on to explain what that romantic pastoralism is really about:

> Mainstream American writers like Emerson, Hawthorne, Melville and Thoreau … express an organic relationship not to 'work' but to 'nature', embodying the pastoral ideal in American experience. Melville writes to Hawthorne: 'The 'all' feeling ... You must often have felt it, lying on the grass on a warm summer's day. Your legs seem to send out shoots into the earth. Your hair feels like leaves upon your head.' (63-64)

Chapter 22 reveals a similar perspective. Jurgis' experience in the American southern country indicates a difference from the Lithuanian nature which is more distanced from the individual person with its "mighty forests and snow-clad hills" (Sinclair 10); which is, in other words, not really 'romantic'. The portrayal of the American country, on the other hand, embodies just what Melville wrote to Hawthorne: exaltation in the hospitality of the nature and in the organic ties to its 'all' feeling. Sinclair's depiction of Jurgis in the country indicates Sinclair's yearning (as Laurence says) 'not to work but to nature' because of his background.

In order to observe this more closely, one can consider the contrast between Sinclair's portrayal of Jurgis's encounter with the American country and the portrayal of his encounter with socialism. Sinclair feels more at home with the resolution that pastoral romanticism offers. He expresses it as if "expressing a personal emotion" (Cowley 427). While his experience with socialism reduces Jurgis to the silent background, his experience in the country exalts and empowers him; in the country "He was a free man now, a buccaneer. The old wanderlust had got into his blood, the joy of the unbound life, the joy of seeking, of hoping without limit" (Sinclair 207). Whereas the socialist solution Sinclair conjures up denies Jurgis the chance to fight—as discussed above—and forces him to simply wait until everyone is converted to the socialist ideals year by year, his experience in the country gives Jurgis his chance to fight back: when a farmer meanly rejects Jurgis's polite request for food that he promises to pay for, Jurgis makes sure that the farmer gets what he deserves for his meanness to him: "as he walked [Jurgis] jerked up a row of [small trees] by the roots, more than a hundred trees in all, before he reached the end of the field. That was his answer, and it showed his mood; from now on he was fighting, and the man who hit him would get all that he gave, every time" (Sinclair 205). Furthermore, Sinclair's description of Jurgis's joy in nature, is a great example of 'the all feeling' Melville mentions:

> By and by [Jurgis] found a comfortable spot, and there he devoured his meal, slaking his thirst at the stream. Then he lay for hours, just gazing and drinking in joy; until at last he felt sleepy, and lay down in the shade of a bush. ... The water was warm, and he splashed about like a very boy in his glee. Afterward he sat down in the water near the bank, and proceeded to scrub himself—soberly and methodically, scouring every inch of him with sand. While he was doing it he would do it thoroughly, and see how it felt to be clean. (Sinclair 204-205)

In the way Melville feels when in nature, Jurgis devours the country. He lies for hours, drinks in joy, bathes in glee and discovers his happiness in being clean again. After a few days in the country, "his health came back to him, all his lost youthful vigour, his joy and power that he had mourned and forgotten! It came with a sudden rush, bewildering him, startling him; it was as if his dead childhood had come back to him" (Sinclair 207). Here Sinclair uses another important imagery for the romantics: childhood. Jurgis is portrayed as recovering a prelapsarian innocence that childhood as a romantic imagery connotes.

The fact that Sinclair's narrative reinforces a pastoral romance more than a socialist deliverance changes the novel's meaning completely. In accordance with Fredric Jameson's first horizon of semantic enrichment, this discussion reveals *The Jungle* to be a symbolic resolution of the contradiction capitalism brings with itself: the profit motive and individualism in the pursuit of happiness leans on a social Darwinism and costs thousands of people their happiness. In the attempts to resolve this contradiction, Sinclair locks himself in the binary oppositions of communal happiness vs. individual pursuit of happiness and profit motive vs. no-profit motive as was shown in Figure 2. This ideological closure blocks his chances to come up with a deconstructive approach that can help him transcend this binary impasse. As long as this ideological closure resists, Sinclair cannot but consider communal happiness of socialism and individual pursuit of the American Dream as two exclusive ideals. As the discussions about his background revealed, forced to sacrifice the individual in order to reach a socialist ending, Sinclair acts cautiously and refrains from a complete socialist realisation. The symbolic resolution the novel hence ends up creating in its narrative escapes into a pastoral romance in the neutral axis that neither gives up the individual's American Dream (because it hold onto $\overline{P}_1$) nor completely surrenders to a profit motive (because it embraces its negation in $\overline{P}_2$) thanks to its ability to move the society from the industrial/financial capitalist metropolis into the peaceful quiet of the pastoral setting. In other words, although *The Jungle* purports to be a complete Marxist-socialist statement in its entirety, it is unable to break away from the frame of the American Dream and a pastoral romance.

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