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Affirmation and futility: A study of Jack London's vision of struggle in selected Klondike works

William D. Baines

AFFIRMATION AND FUTILITY:
A STUDY OF JACK LONDON'S VISION OF STRUGGLE
IN SELECTED KLONDIKE WORKS

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WILLIAM D. BAINES

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Graduate Committee:

Karl A. Dahlstrom, History
Name Department

Bruce Baker, English

Thomas P. Walsh, English
Chairman

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Foreword

The period initiated by the Civil War and terminated by the turn of the century was a time of marked growth and change in the United States. Industrialism, a relatively significant factor in the national makeup prior to the war, was greatly stimulated by that event and was by 1900 a dominant force in the country, making its effect felt in all phases of the American experience. During this period of shifting national emphasis, the United States came to know the poverty of the industrial masses and the blight and overcrowding of urban centers sired by the necessity of industry. England, the "mother country," had begun to experience and deal with these industry-fostered evils earlier in the century. There existed, however, a primary difference between the two countries, a difference which would greatly alter the long-range effects on national outlook by what was primarily the same phenomenon. This difference was the American frontier and the accompanying easy accessibility to a new life, possible success, and escape from the dreary gray life of industrial poverty.

Out of this frontier and the country's place in the eyes of the world as "the land of opportunity" grew the American Dream, a semi-mythical concept which held that--in the United States--any man could succeed: "The sense of space, the sense

of a territory ahead, the sense of infinite possibility, whether material or spiritual: these are the constant of the American Dream."[1] It fed on the exceptional Andrew Carnegies and the popular Horatio Alger heroes. And the frontier--always the frontier with a pot of gold beyond the next mountain range and fertile valleys of virgin land across the next stream. So entrenched was this concept in the American character that in 1827, when a presidential cabinet member remarked that the western frontier as it was then known would continue to exist for five hundred years, few people would have thought to disagree with him.[2] When, in 1890, the Superintendent of the Census announced that the frontier had for all practical purposes ended, the effect on the country was one of "distinct shock,"[3] the tremors of which would reach all areas of the American experience: "it seemed to those who mourned the past that American life had sadly changed. Mistaking symptoms for causes and tilting at windmills, these people crossed over into the twentieth century without understanding what had taken place in their country and why there could be no return to the 'good old times.'"[4] The national

[1] Allan Angoff, ed., American Writing Today (Washington Square: New York University Press, 1957), p. 161.

[2] Ray Allen Billington, Westward Expansion (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), p. 751.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Joan London, Jack London and His Times: An Unconventional Biography (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1938), p. 54. As a source of fact and insight presented in relation to the

mind, long adjusted to life in terms of a frontier, was forced to re-appraise its values and reassess the American Dream, an ideal swiftly becoming a casualty of the actual.

On January 12, 1876, Jack London, child of the age, was born--befittingly illegitimate, befittingly conceived of a success-seeking spiritualist mother by a restless astrologer in a fleeting and stormy liason:

> 'CHANEY--In this city, [San Francisco] Jan. 12, the wife of W. H. Chaney, of a son.'
>
> Routine and unremarkable as this announcement appeared to be, it caused a certain amount of commotion in the city. The infant whose birth was recorded, somewhat inaccurately, had attained notoriety while he was still in embryo. He was to be known successively as John Griffith London and Jack London, and troubled to the end of his days by the fact that he never knew what his name should have been. The best evidence indicated that he was the son of William H. Chaney, a footloose astrologer and freelance philosopher, and Flora Wellman, a Spiritualist who often presided at séances, who apparently had neglected to undertake the formalities of marriage in their preoccupation with the zodiac and the spirit world.[5]

The shaky personal circumstances of London's birth were in step with the uncertain times in which he was destined to live: "He was born the year Custer fell at the Little Big Horn and died during World War I. Thus his whole life was

political and socio-economic background, this book by London's older daughter is valuable though affected by her life-long Socialism and Marxist approach. This edition contains a 1968 introduction by Miss London.

[5]Richard O'Connor, Jack London: A Biography (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964), p. 9. The notoriety to

enclosed by the ironbound parenthesis that vexed and bewildered all thinking men of his generation, as Frederick Jackson Turner noted, the end of the free opportunity of the Western frontier and the necessity to find in American life some . . . substitute for it."[6]

which O'Connor refers stemmed from an uproar of no small scale caused when Flora, after an altercation with Chaney, tried to commit suicide and succeeded instead in garnering a great deal of public attention; a half-column in the San Francisco Chronicle began:

A DISCARDED WIFE

Why Mrs. Chaney Twice
Attempted Suicide
Driven from house for Refusing
to Destroy her Unborn Infant
A chapter of Heartlessness
and Domestic Misery

The story is continued in complete form on pp. 9-11 of O'Connor's biography. This source also contains excellent--if not the best--backgrounds of the two principals, Chaney (pp. 11-21) and Flora (pp. 21-25). Of the three principal biographies, that of O'Connor is the best researched and profits greatly from earlier works and the effect of time.

[6] Ibid., p. 7.

I

Life as Struggle: Formation of a Concept

As Observer

It is not hard to conceive that life was not to treat well someone to whom she had already dealt such a bad hand. The child Johnny (later Jack) was to find himself constantly victimized by circumstances that--even without a temperamentally unstable mother--apparently sought to limit his alternatives to happiness. For Jack London, life was to be "a struggle for survival in a world that is cruel and grim but in which the fighting will has a chance to triumph."[7] This concept was to be reinforced again and again as London grew.

As soon as she had delivered herself of her baby, Flora was up and about her spiritualism, music, and lotteries. The physical fact of birth was accompanied by a mental delivery; the physical and emotional responsibilities of motherhood were taken over by Mrs. Jenny Prentiss, a black wet nurse.[8]

[7]Van Wyck Brooks, The Confident Years: 1885-1915 (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1952), p. 229.

[8]Irving Stone, Jack London, Sailor on Horseback (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1938), pp. 14-15. Romantic in approach, Sailor on Horseback is interesting reading, but its principal importance to literary history lies in the fact that it first introduced the facts of London's illegitimacy

Through "Mammy Jenny," Flora met John London, a widowed Civil War veteran, whom she married on September 7, 1876, and from whom her child received his surname.[9]

The addition of John London to the child's constellation of personalities was not destined to improve his lot in life. Described as "a gentle, rather ineffectual, even-tempered man,"[10] the elder London had lost his health in the Civil War and afterwards had moved from one occupation to another in a generally western trek as a farmer, railroad worker, carpenter,[11] sheriff, and sewing-machine salesman.[12] Though he had achieved a certain degree of success in some of these areas,

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and apparent suicide.

All three biographies used in this chapter draw on Charmian London's Book of Jack London (see #55, below) as well as London's own accounts of his exploits, both of which tend to perpetuate what Clell T. Peterson calls "The Jack London Legend" (in the article by that name published in the American Book Collector, v. VIII, 5, January, 1958, pp. 13-17), which he makes a half-hearted attempt to debunk; in the extremely bitter and vengeful Footloose in Arcadia, Joseph Noel makes the same effort. The Charmian London book has been called "scatterbrained but invaluable" by Earle Laber; this writer concurs with the first, but feels that it is "invaluable" only as an indirect source of insight (for an example of this see Peterson, "Legend," pp. 15-16). The fatherhood of John London is assumed; there is no mention of London't possible or apparent suicide, and, in general, all unpleasantries are excluded from this idyllic account.

[9]Joan London, p. 13. This fact differs, as do others, from Sailor on Horseback; Stone says Flora was married to London prior to the hiring of Mrs. Prentiss. In cases where such conflicts are notable, mention will be made in the footnotes.

[10]O'Connor, p. 30.

[11]Joan London, p. 14.

[12]O'Connor, pp. 30-31.

they all eventually failed him for one reason or another. From his marriage to Flora, John gained little except a more obvious reason for the failure which continued to be his lot.

After the sale of sewing machines proved fruitless, the Londons opened a grocery in Oakland. The business prospered for a while, and little Johnny and his two stepsisters were to know briefly the security they seldom again experienced. Flora persuaded her husband to take a partner into the store, and for a while they continued to do well. Later, however, John returned home from buying produce to find that his partner had disappeared, selling everything moveable and taking the store's capital.[13]

The luckless elder London then turned to farming, first in Alameda and later near San Mateo. In a period Jack was later to recall solely for the intense hunger he felt, John scratched out a living while Flora consulted the spirits for business and financial guidance. Acting upon her advice once again, John put his miserable assets into chicken farming and made an agreement with a hotel executive to supply his products to a San Francisco hotel. With his farm mortgaged and his money tied up in poultry and equipment, John failed to meet the mortgage after illness rendered his chickens dead or non-productive. The Londons were again broke.[14]

[13]Stone, p. 17. The elder stepsister, Eliza, took up the mothering of Jack and was to be very close to him until his death.

[14]Ibid., pp. 17-22. See also O'Connor, pp. 36-37.

Thus by the age of ten, young London had seen little of life that was pleasant and much of the hardship and struggle it held in store: "Jack London's mind was like a seismograph that recorded every slight tremor about him . . . and tremors there were aplenty, for the next thirteen years of the family's life were spent in poverty and defeat."[15] During this time, however, Jack had been going to school and had become an avid reader. It is of no small significance that he chanced upon Oida's Signa, "a story of an illegitimate son of an Italian peasant girl and a wandering artist, who rose from poverty and hardship to become one of Italy's greatest composers, a story which in its essentials Jack was to duplicate."[16] His embryonic concept of life as struggle hearkened to the tale of Oida's hero: "Signa was his own age and, like himself, trapped in the hardship and toil of farm life. Identification of his own lot with that of the young Italian peasant was inevitable, and that another boy, in circumstances similar to his own, had broken through all obstacles and finally won to success awakened ambition in him to do likewise."[17]

After the failure of his chicken farm, John London, now fifty-five, moved to Oakland and entered into his last significant venture, that of boarding girls employed by a nearby mill. Success once more seemed to be close when ill-luck in

[15]Stone, p. 22.

[16]Ibid., p. 21.

[17]Joan London, p. 24.

the form of Flora as financial and business manager intervened. Prospering enough to begin buying his rented property, John was again faced with a shortage when the mortgage came due and Flora had spent the money. The Londons were once more destitute.[18]

With this latest turn in the London epic of lucklessness, Jack, age eleven, became principal breadwinner of the beggared family. He began handling morning and evening paper routes, working on an ice-wagon and setting pins in a bowling alley. Though he continued reading and going to school, the rough-and-tumble of street life began to play a large part in his life.[19] It was to be another period he would later recall because of the extreme hunger he experienced.[20]

As Participant

Jack London now became a major and active participant in the struggles he had previously witnessed and of which he had been only an incidental victim. Even though his stepfather managed eventually to find work, Jack continued to toil; for example, when John was injured by a train, fifteen-year-old Jack went to work full-time in a cannery for ten cents an hour. Working at least ten hours a day and sometimes as many as

[18] O'Connor, pp. 37 and 40. See also Stone, p. 23.

[19] Stone, p. 25.

[20] O'Connor, p. 41.

thirty-six hours straight, seldom sleeping more than four hours a night and walking for lack of carfare indelibly reinforced the concept of life-as-struggle.[21]

"His curiousity about life and the world, his vitality and untried strength clamored for escape from the narrow confines of the cannery, for opportunities to know more and be more. As he groped toward a solution the situation posed itself thus: on the one hand, there was the cannery and its long hours of stupid, unperpaid work, and 'home which meant a bed and two meals a day; and on the other hand, there was the water front . . . ."[22] The notion that there must be something better in life began to haunt Jack at the time he was carrying papers and doing odd-jobs; though most of his money went to Flora, he managed to hold back a little at a time until he had accumulated six dollars, with which he had purchased a skiff.[23] Before going to work in the cannery, he had spent any idle hours he could muster sailing on San Francisco Bay, glorying in the escape to an adventurous struggle he could understand and cope with in simple, concrete terms: "He was not only fearless, he was foolhardy; the worse the weather the greater the chances he took, for he was not afraid of the sea. Floundering always in his mind to learn what he was . . . .

[21] Ibid., p. 43. See also Stone, p. 29, and Joan London, pp. 37-38.

[22] Ibid., pp. 38-39.

[23] O'Connor, p. 42.

And because he was afraid of nothing. . . he became one of the most expert small-boat sailors on the treacherous bay."[24]

His small boat expanded the breadth and depth of his world, exposing him to adversity as adventure and to a social group of like mind to the youngster, also victims to changing times: "And the iron race of 'frontier chasers' had gradually degenerated into dreamers, revolutionists, aimless adventurers, settled down to rot along the waterfronts of the continent, the end of the frontier. . . . . After a time he was all but living in the notorious water-front dives, the last frontier of the continent, where, halted by the Pacific, the tide of the westward march had settled into rottenness and despair or had turned men's restlessness into lawlessness and piracy."[25]

One of these people, an oyster pirate (or, less romantically, "thief") called French Frank, offered his sloop for sale; when Jack heard of this, he went to Mammy Jenny and borrowed three hundred dollars with which to buy the boat. With the Razzle Dazzle, London inherited a crew ("Spider" Healey) and a mistress (Mamie, sixteen-year-old "Queen of the Oyster Pirates"), and left behind the stultifying life of the canneries.[26]

[24]Stone, p. 28

[25]Fred Lewis Pattee, The New American Literature: 1890-1930 (New York: The Century Co., 1930), pp. 122-123.

[26]O'Connor, p. 45.

The struggle of life appeared anew, as the young sailor took to pirating with a zest born of a darker, drearier struggle and hours spent reading the imaginary conquests of fictional heroes. Under the cloak of darkness, Jack and the Razzle Dazzle stole into the oyster beds, loaded up under constant threat of the Fish Patrol and returned to sell the stolen wares for at least twenty-five dollars, a profit unimaginable to the boy a month earlier. Life ashore was a continual round of drinking and brawling, and London soon established himself in the eyes of his peers as an excellent sailor, fighter, pirate, and drinker. Disagreements were settled directly and on the spot, as was the case when French Frank disputed Mamie's decision to stay with the Razzle Dazzle; he attempted to run the sloop down, but Jack (purportedly steering with his feet while holding a double-barrelled shotgun on Frank) held to his course and called the older man's bluff.[27] Though he undoubtedly embellished this part of his life in retrospect, the essentials of it were true. It is a matter of history that most of London's waterfront peers were hard cases and outlaws and that many met early, violent deaths or ended up in prison. London was involved in many of the continual brawls and, according to O'Connor, once spent seventeen hours lying unconscious in the street as the result

[27]Stone, pp. 32-37. Interesting accounts and anecdotes of London's life as an oyster pirate are found in these pages, as well as in Joan London, pp. 40-46, and O'Connor, pp. 44-49.

of a fight.[28]

Eventually, London's life on the waterfront found him going over to the other side; joining the Fish Patrol, he engaged his former peer-group and other game-law violators in a struggle of wit and strength. Working both undercover and in open law enforcement, Jack received as pay a cut of the fines assessed against those he caught. On one occasion, he and another deputy arrested about sixteen Chinese, all armed with knives and threatening to rush the two patrolmen; the other man panicked and turned his revolver on Jack, attempting to force him to let the prisoners go. Jack refused and when shot at, grabbed the gun and took the Chinese in, netting almost one hundred dollars for his effort.[29]

For over a year, London exulted in the new life, assaulting it on his own terms and in his own good time, "for now he was shaping the patterns of his life as he willed, was no longer. . . catching brief glimpses of life, but a participant."[30] A pattern was emerging, a pattern to be reinforced by later experiences and recounted in later writings.

In time, however, his enthusiasm palled and "the sense that something vital was lacking in his life was beginning to be stronger. . . . But for this he might have remained a bum or, what was more likely, he might well have lost his

[28]O'Connor, p. 47.

[29]Ibid., pp. 49-50. See also Stone, pp. 37-39.

[30]Joan London, p. 43.

life in some casual water-front brawl. His experiences had hardened him physically and mentally, developed his assurance and self-reliance. Bewilderment and frustration had culminated in his attempt at suicide, and that past, all the forces that made toward life, his youth and strength, his thirst for adventure and knowledge, his stubborn determination to live fully and deeply, reasserted themselves."[31]

Just past seventeen, Jack abandoned the waterfront and signed on the Sophie Sutherland, a sealer and one of the last wind-driven ships to sail commercially. He had signed on as an able-bodied seaman, in spite of the fact that he had never sailed outside San Francisco Bay, and this bred an immediate resentment in the old salts: "All but one of the men in the Sophie's forecastle had been at sea many years, having risen through the brutal school of the ordinary seaman. It was a merciless life inhabited by men engaged in a bloody trade. As deckhand and later as boat puller when the sealer reached the hunting grounds, he would be tried in every fiber of his being. There was no room for the weakling and incompetent."[32] Jack, long used to rough life among rough people, entered into

[31]Joan London, p. 49. Recounted in Stone's biography, pp. 36-37, and O'Connor, pp. 48-49. Jack accidentally fell into the ocean one night while returning to his vessel from a drunk. Pulled out to sea by a strong tide, he contemplated death and did not try to save himself or call for help. This incident, later notes written while tramping, and the end of Martin Eden are all interesting in light of his later suicide and will be alluded to again in "Struggle as Futility."

[32]O'Connor, p. 50.

the struggle that was to initiate him in the eyes of his veteran shipmates. He had to do the simplest chore excellently, meanwhile learning the ship and sailing argot and standing ready to use his fists at all times. The process continued throughout the voyage and culminated in Jack's taking the wheel and successfully handling the ship through a long watch and a raging typhoon. The latter incident resulted in his full acceptance by the entire crew.[33] When the ship put into Yokohama, young London proudly drank and cavorted with the old salts, men who "only five months before . . . had thought him a boy who had no right to call himself a seaman."[34] He had been tested and accepted, an event of a significance not to be lost on the sensitive London.

Returning to California in 1893, Jack went to work in a jute mill, a period of toil very similar to his cannery experience and equally distasteful. He quit when a promised raise did not materialize, going to work at the power plant of Oakland Street Railway. Impressing upon the superintendent

[33]This incident is recounted by both Stone (p. 41) and O'Connor (p. 54); though essentially the same account is given by both, Stone says it happened on the third day out of San Francisco, while O'Connor relates it to the voyage home. The important thing here is the struggle-as-initiation aspect of the event, which O'Connor calls London's "happiest memory" of the trip.

[34]Stone, p. 43. Jack later submitted an account of this struggle to a short story contest in the San Francisco Call during the period he worked in the jute mill. He won and "Typhoon off the Coast of Japan" was published in the November 12, 1893 Call. The most complete account of this is in the Joan London source, pp. 66-67.

his desire to emulate the success myth *a la* Horatio Alger, the young ex-sailor was made a coal-shoveler. For thirty dollars a month with one day off, he toiled thirteen hours a day until he discovered that the job he was doing had previously been done by two men, both of whom had received ten dollars more than he for the exhausting, demanding work. He quit in disgust.[35]

Partially out of bitterness at this, mostly out of desire for adventure, Jack set out to join Kelley's Army, the California arm of Coxey's Army in the historical march of unemployed on Washington. Arriving at the departure point, he found the Army had already left. London quickly jumped a freight train and set out in pursuit.

During his days on the waterfront, Jack had spent a brief period as a tramp, an adventure replete with the challenge of initiation he was coming more and more to know and seek:

> He was given the monica of Sailor Kid. The ringleader, Bob, took him in hand and turned him from a gay-cat or tenderfoot into a punk, or road-kid. They taught him how to batter the main stem for light pieces, that is, beg for money on the main street. They showed him how they rolled drunks, preyed upon bindlestiffs [hobos], and successfully taught him how to steal a five-dollar Stetson stiff-rim from the head of a prosperous Sacramento Valley Chinaman. Arrested in a whopping street fight, he had served three days in jail.
>
> Jack had soon heard expounded the law of the Road, that no kid was a road-kid until he had ridden the blinds over the Sierra Nevadas. One night Jack and French Kid, who had just joined the push, waited in

[35] O'Connor, pp. 55-58. See also Stone, pp. 44-48.

> the darkness ahead of the Central Pacific Overland and when it went past nailed the blinds. French Kid slipped. . . and had both legs amputated.

Jack was successful in his ride over the Sierras, and was "welcomed back to Sacramento, renamed. . . Frisco Kid, and made. . . a full-fledged road-kid."[36]

He now took up the trade again as he hurried to join the marchers. Riding the rods, London and a companion overtook the Army and went with it as far as Iowa; at this point, Jack headed out on his own to Chicago, then New York. Arrested for vagrancy at Niagara Falls, he spent thirty days at hard labor in the Erie County Penitentiary.[37] Upon his release, London returned to California via Canada by the same method he had come east; he faced essentially the same hardships, making his way by stamina and wits across the three thousand miles to Vancouver, where he worked his way back to San Francisco on a ship.[38] He returned home with a life-view expanded by both his latest personal experiences and his transcontinental observations; though this broadened outlook eventually verbalized itself in an espousal of socialism, its primary importance lies in the fact that it reinforced once again the forming concept of life-as-struggle.

The need for education was mandatory in London's desire

[36]Stone, pp. 49-50.

[37]O'Connor, pp. 61-66. This source also contains an excellent background of the socio-economic aspects of the march: pp. 58-61.

[38]Stone, p. 62.

to broach life on his own terms and to avoid the lot he had heretofore seen and shared. Jack returned to school at Oakland High in the fall of 1895. The outsized nineteen-year-old high school freshman attended classes, worked as school janitor, wrote short stories for the Aegis (a school magazine), joined the Henry Clay Society (a debating club) and quit the school at the end of his first year.[39] London had read almost constantly since a child; now his accumulated knowledge and the fact that the school was paced to the less dedicated student made continued attendence frustrating. He had approached it awed and expectant, but with certain cynicism and wariness: "Plastic though he was, however, he did not yield passively. . . . Even before he realized how deeply impressed he was by the new environment he had set about to impress it with himself, and in the resultant struggle both his strength and his weakness were fully developed."[40] The school, in his context of struggle, was a victory too easily won; impatient as he was, Jack London had no time for empty victories.

His next move was to enroll in a two-year preparatory school, in reality a cramming course for the University of California entrance exam. Established for the wealthy, the school was accordingly expensive but Jack borrowed the money

[39] O'Connor, pp. 69-75.

[40] Joan London, p. 93. Entrance into high school also marked, according to his daughter, Jack's entrance into the middle class (p. 93).

from his stepsister. London's full-bore approach to the studies was successful, so successful in fact that he was called into the headmaster's office: "Mr. Andreson was very sorry. . . . Jack was an excellent, even an extraordinary student. . . but there had been talk, and dissatisfaction. After all, the school's reputation might suffer, and the university might even withdraw its accrediting if it learned that a student had been permitted to do two year's work in one semester. . . . He was returning in full the money Jack had paid in, and he wished him all the luck in the world."[41]

Initially disappointed and embittered, Jack soon overcame his frustration and began the struggle for an education on his own. He turned the full resources of his being to the fray, and in his "sledgehammer approach of acquiring knowledge," he gave up all other facets of his life and devoted the next twelve weeks to nineteen-hour days of study; this effort culminated in his taking and passing the entrance exams at Berkeley at the end of the summer.[42]

When he returned to school at Oakland, Jack had done so with the goal in mind of becoming a writer. Education was a stepping-stone in this direction: "Returning from the road a year and a half before, he had strained toward a goal so remote in time and experience that it had been difficult to

[41]Joan London, pp. 127-128.

[42]Stone, p. 78. Fred Lewis Pattee says of this in The New American Literature that "the feat seems incredible, but the records sustain it."(p. 127)

visualize in actuality. Now the first objective had been realized, and not only was it finer than he dreamed, but from its eminence he could clearly see how close he was to the accomplishment of his ultimate aims."[43] It was, then, with eagerness that he began attending classes in the autumn of 1896.

London's enthusiasm and desire for learning were so great that he would have enrolled in virtually every course offered at Berkeley, regulations permitting; the latter not being the case, however, he settled for three courses in English, two of history, one of philosophy, and one of physical culture.[44] His approach to the university was not unlike that to high school and the college preparatory school; gradually his initial enthusiasm waned as he came to feel that the university was giving him nothing he could not get himself.[45] This undoubtedly played a part in making his first semester his last attempt at formal education, though other things entered in. His grades had all been "B" or above, and he went to work between semesters, apparently planning to return to school. However, poverty once again reared its ugly, demanding head--John London, long in poor health, could no longer support the family.[46] Thus Jack London found himself forced again into

[43]Joan London, p. 132.

[44]O'Connor, p. 77.

[45]Joan London, p. 134.

[46]Stone, p. 81. Possibly of some influence--though to

the labor market by circumstances which gave him none but that choice.

Perhaps over-optimistically, his first thought and attempt was to write for pay. When that proved non-remunerative after a time, he returned to hand labor, this time in a laundry run by an academy. At thirty dollars a month plus room and board, he began the depressingly familiar cycle anew: "Jack was so tired by Sunday, his only day off, that he didn't have the energy to do anything but read the Sunday papers and catch up on his sleep. He had brought a trunk of books along, but never opened it. Stultified by the round of mindless toil, disgusted with slaving away in a steamy hell of wet wash, he wanted nothing more than to get crapulously [sic] drunk on his Sundays off. And he would have. . . if the nearest saloon hadn't been a mile and a half away and he hadn't been too tired to walk there."[47]

Life had once again thrown him into the old, well-known and extremely frustrating arena of adversity under its terms. His spirit dulled, Jack "asked himself how long he would have

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what degree is difficult to say--is that Jack discovered his illegitimacy and the facts surrounding it during this period. It can be assumed that it was a traumatic discovery, especially in that day and age, and it most assuredly contributed to his alienation and bitterness; the influence of this discovery can be seen in many of his principal fictional characters. The discovery and London's subsequent correspondence with Chaney are covered in the Joan London biography, pp. 134-135; the Stone source, pp. 8-11 and p. 80; and O'Connor's book, pp. 19-20 and p. 77.

[47] O'Connor, p. 78.

to toil thus meaninglessly, and where the road lay that would lead him to the life he wanted."[48] History was to provide him with the answer as the gold-fields of the Klondike sounded their call. Here once again was the opportunity of struggle to his liking, a struggle in its adventure and tangible demands not unlike his period of highest exultation on the Sophie Sutherland. Borrowing money from his stepsister Eliza again, Jack--with Klondike outfit and her husband, Captain Shepard, in tow--set out for Alaska.[49]

Had London been born in an earlier America, he undoubtedly would have sought the solution, or escape, of the western frontier when faced with the tremendous burdens of his poverty-stricken youth. This is made evident by the basic types of challenge and adversity he willingly chose and endured. As has been stated, however, this opportunity was essentially denied him and his contemporaries by the unexpectedly rapid advance of civilization westward. When gold was discovered in the Klondike, it was as if time had been pushed back, and Americans--speculators, adventurers, malcontents, and dreamers--packed up and headed north; it was this, Joan London feels, and not the hope of financial success that began the rush for Alaska.[50] Jack, the adventurer, malcontent, and dreamer, saw the chance to live--that is, to face the struggle--on the

[48]Stone, p. 82.

[49]Ibid., p. 83.

[50]Joan London, p. 38.

basic, concrete terms he understood and possibly make a fortune in the process; it was his last real chance to do so in a world fast becoming increasingly complex and a life continually withholding happiness.

And he was not to be disappointed. Jack landed on Dyea Beach with Shepard and three other men--Thompson, Sloper, and Goodman--they had met on shipboard and with whom they formed a party. Their immediate problem upon landing was the transportation of their gear over the mountains and into the interior. The bulkiness (Jack and Shepard's outfit alone contained two thousand pounds of provisions, plus tent, stove, tools and heavy winter clothing), the distance, and the terrain made this a particularly difficult chore.[51]

In the early days of the rush, Indian packers, working for six cents a pound, back-packed gold-seeker's outfits from Dyea Beach over the passes; now, the rush at its height and the demand for packers exceeding the supply, prices had gone up to whatever the traffic would bear.[52] For the miniscule capital of Jack London and company, this posed one half of a two-pronged and immediate problem; the other half was the problem of crossing the mountains.

There was a choice of two passes, the Chilkoot and the White; of these the party chose the Chilkoot, which, though

[51]Stone, p. 38.

[52]Ibid., pp. 83-84.

the tougher, was "appreciably shorter."[53] Once called "the worst trail this side of hell,"[54] Chilkoot's ominous outline frightened off many would-be Klondikers, including Captain Shepard, who opted to return to San Francisco.[55] Rising quickly to a thousand feet, the rocky pass was devoid of path except for some steps cut into it earlier by Indians.[56] And this was only the initial barrier, only one problem. They had not only the Chilkoot to cross, but also dangerous rapids to shoot or portage around in the hundreds of miles of river journey awaiting on its far side, a journey which had to be completed before winter froze the waterways. Time and geography worked against them, and the party had eight thousand pounds of supplies and seven miles to move them just to reach the base of the pass.[57] It is no wonder so many quit while still on the beaches. Only fifty thousand men, a small percentage of the stampeders who had landed at Dyea, ever made it into the interior.[58]

Jack secured a small boat, and the four men began the task

[53]Joan London, p. 142.

[54]Charmian London, The Book of Jack London (New York: The Century Company, 1921), I, p. 227. Mrs. London quotes from an old sourdough. Joan London remarks: "Many maintained that the Chilkoot was in no sense of the word a trail or pass but a mountain itself."(p. 143)

[55]O'Connor, p. 85.

[56]Joan London, p. 143.

[57]Stone, P. 84.

[58]Joan London, p. 141.

of loading, transporting, unloading, and caching gear; weeks later, this completed, they began the laborious trek over the six-mile pass.[59] This was, to Jack, an event rivalling and even surpassing that when he took the wheel of the Sophie during the typhoon:

> The worst part of the portage was the six steep miles over the Chilkoot in the heat of the Alaskan summer. Hundreds collapsed in exhaustion by the trailside and lay there until they could crawl down and return home in defeat. . . . He stripped down to his bright red flannels, loaded a hundred and fifty pounds on his back, and charged up the pass. Each day he made a twenty-four-mile round trip, twelve under pack, until all his supplies were moved in stages to Lake Linderman. It was the proudest boast of his year in the Yukon that he beat the Indian porters in races up to the summit of the pass.[60]

Once the pass was conquered, things did not get any easier, as the remainder of the portage was "a series of flats, mountains, hills, water, mud, quagmires, and bogs . . . "; in spite of all this, London and his partners reached Linderman in "record time," constructed boats, and began the long water journey.[61]

[59]Franklin Walker, Jack London and the Klondike: Genesis of an American Writer (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1966), pp. 55-59. Walker's account of the trip from California to Dawson is based on a "somewhat detailed" diary kept by Thompson and on excerpts from London's works.

[60]O'Connor, p. 85. London relives this in numerous books and stories as will be mentioned later. Walker says the pass was a more difficult obstacle in the summer when London crossed it; in winter, packed snow made hiking easier on the feet, and the return trip was facilitated greatly by sliding (p. 55).

[61]Joan London, p. 143. The geographical quote was excerpted by Joan from a description by a "famous Alaskan dog-driver" named Scotty Allan.

The crossing of Linderman went easily, as did those of Lakes Bennet, Tagish, and Marsh; the latter, however, emptied into the Yukon River headwater, itself a tough obstacle constituted of narrow canyons and boiling rapids. One of these, White Horse Rapids, was especially dangerous as described by O'Connor.[62]

The majority portaged around the rapids and canyon; Thompson, Sloper, Goodman, and London elected to shoot the rapids as they had earlier taken the shorter, tougher Chilkoot. Jack's sailing background had already come in handy, but here it proved invaluable; with the ex-seaman steering and the other three men manning the boat, they took both craft through the dangerous waters in a short--though perilous--time. Their success was so unusual that London received many offers to take other's boats down the rapids. Agreeing to do so for twenty-five dollars a trip, he and his party garnered three thousand dollars, quitting only because of the threatening freeze-up.[63]

Their profit almost cost them getting into the Klondike before the freeze. As it was, they were the last in before winter struck. Grey, threatening weather loomed over Lake

[62] O'Connor, p. 86.

[63] Ibid., pp. 86-88. See also Stone, pp. 85-86. London also utilizes this in his fiction. There is no mention of the party piloting other boats in Joan London's book; Walker quotes Thompson's diary as substantiation for denial that the incident occurred. He contends any boats taken through by London were done "for kindness rather than gain."(pp. 90-91)

LeBarge, the last of the five lakes they had to cross; for three consecutive days they were forced back. Jack, again drawing on his sea-going background, constructed sails; with this and backbreaking toil on the oars, they succeeded on the fourth day, "fighting across inch by inch and watching the lake freeze behind them."[64] Had they not stopped to pilot other boats, they would have undoubtedly have reached Dawson; as it was, an Arctic storm compelled them to set in for the winter at Upper Island, seventy-five miles short of their goal.[65] This, in essence, is the story of London's actual personal struggle in the Klondike, for, when the party camped for the winter, "Jack's active participation in the gold rush came to an end."[66]

London had taken to the struggle and succeeded in his initiation into the world of the Alaskan gold rush ("one of the few. . . whose hardihood and pluck scaled the summit of Chilkoot Pass that year"),[67] and the struggle to conquer the

[64]Joan London, pp. 143-144.

[65]O'Connor, pp. 88-89.

[66]Joan London, p. 144.

[67]Charmian London, I, p. 235. This is quoted from a letter the second Mrs. London received from W. B. Hargrave, a sourdough who knew Jack in the Klondike. Hargrave says, "I find it difficult to write about Jack without laying myself open to the charge of adulation. . ." and then goes on to demonstrate this difficulty. His letter, however, is interesting in its description of Jack's life in the cabin that winter. It also serves as a good example of "The Jack London Legend" (see #8). Even Peterson, however, gives London credit for the difficult Chilkoot accomplishment.

pass and beat the freeze-up is recounted in many of his writings. It was an accomplishment which would always rank high in a life of adventure; the epic equivalent of the struggle aboard the Sophie; the aesthetic frustration of cannery and jute-mill made tangible. In spite of a lifetime of adversity, "Jack never had been part of a struggle against such tremendous odds."[68] Out of his concept of life-as-struggle, out of the Romantic London imagination, out of Alaskan characters observed during a long winter, and out of the real and imaginary anecdotes found in his primitive masculine situation was born Jack London's Klondike.

The Concept

The influence on London's writings derived from his exposure to the popular nineteenth-century philosophies of Darwin, Spencer, and Nietzsche has been the subject of discussion and scholarly criticism, and this approach is not to be denied in its essential validity. A common weakness of this school of thought, however, is the tendency to explicate London's life and fiction solely by reference to the philosophies: Nietzsche easily explains the author's penchant for intense individualism, while Spencer is the source of his almost habitual use of the "survival of the fittest" theme. Admittedly the author studied the works of these people and

[68]Joan London, p. 143.

was undoubtedly affected to one degree or the other by their ideas. But reliance on philosophical interpretation alone is to deny the influence of London's background during his formative years, the historical period in which he was born, and his innate romanticism--all of which heavily influenced his art and may even have predisposed him to accept these philosophies in the manner in which he did.

In this vein, Joan London comments: "Most histories of literature have, unfortunately, one trait in common; failing to appreciate the intricate process of the interactions between an author and his environment--and the extent of the author's awareness or lack of awareness of this--they seek to judge his literary merit with a purely arbitrary yardstick. . . . Any attempt to judge Jack London's work without appreciating the environmental forces which shaped his life and work is certain to produce unsatisfactory results . . . ."[69]

Part of these "environmental forces" was, as has been said, the passing of the frontier with its romance and relative simplicity; London understood and was affected by this, having "shrewd instinct for the chronic main currents of middle-class hallucination,"[70] an important fact often overlooked in assessing the author's perennial popularity, both

[69]Joan London, p. 379.

[70]Warner Berthoff, The Ferment of Realism (New York: The Free Press, 1965), p. 245.

then and now. The burgeoning complexity of post agrarian and post-frontier America was another force which has affected the consciousness of this country increasingly since the Civil War.

In Cavalcade of the American Novel, Eugene Wagenknecht remarks of London's sensing this effect that "To most of his readers he meant courage and adventure, the vicarious fulfillment of their action-desires in a world which seemed to be placing less and less premium on self-realization through physical activities.[71] Fred Lewis Pattee feels London is an isolated instance of this communication, that most artists reflected complexity with complexity and had forgotten the simple and the strong, qualities sought by a nostalgic twentieth century and present in the London hero.[72] Teddy Roosevelt, also both sensing and sensed in this regard, is comparable to London in exemplifying this effect; he was, of course, the last major political figure to do so, while London lives on in his own work and the undercurrent he passed into modern American literature.

Patee relates primary London qualities to the writer's life and the frontier influence, reflected in heroes born of "his Western expansiveness, his life in camp and forecastle where the masculine predominated, and from the romance of the

[71]Cavalcade of the American Novel (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1952), p. 228.

[72]Brooks, p. 231.

border that creates from the material about itself its own mythology. On the westward-looking borders always iconoclasm, always fierce individualism that erects self-reliance into a religion.[73] It is this latter quality in London's work that critics generally relate to Nietzschean influence. This inherent and environmentally-induced individualism probably also explains why London could not successfully refute that quality in his fiction.[74]

The London approach to creative writing, in its non-complex profile of the "primitive struggle for existence," also "re-emphasized the physical basis of life and appealed . . . to man's primitive love of adventurous action"[75]--unlike many of his peers.

As has been mentioned earlier, the pervasive myth of success--the American Dream--was ubiquitous in America in the nineteenth century. London was exposed to it directly, growing up in the "Gilded Age." Like most of his contemporaries, he responded to its effects during his formative years and mentions its powerful inspirational influence in John Barleycorn.

[73]Pattee, The New American Literature, p. 137.

[74]London avowedly attempted this in The Sea Wolf and, to a lesser extent, White Fang. The strength of his portrayal of Larsen leaves the reader with a distinct and strong impression of individualism, while Fang's socialization pales in comparison to the individualized Buck in Call of the Wild. Joan London discusses this attempt and its failure on p. 253, saying it "was unconvincing."

[75]Walter Taylor Fuller, A History of American Letters (Boston: American Book Company, 1947), p. 318.

It was his attempt to realize this myth, Clell Peterson says, that led London to a life of adventurous struggle which, when reflected again in his writings, gave rise to the legend surrounding the author.[76] In apparently fulfilling this myth, as in simplifying life in the mode of frontier tradition, London answered personal needs and in so doing, answered the needs of a preponderance of post-fin de siecle America.

Another highly influential factor in London's work is his inclination to what Taylor calls a "'storm and stress' romanticism"; in spite of a verbal espousal of the then-current scientific explications of life, London was by nature essentially a romantic.[77] This can be seen in his opting whenever possible for adventurous struggle and escape from the dreary realities of cannery, mill, and later civilization and in his portrayal of "larger than life" characters, reflections of the Jack London of legend. A critic calls these heroes "Fictional. . .extensions of himself, reliving his actual or desired experiences. These Adonis-like adventurers are everlastingly engaged in deeds of strength, danger, and conflict. They are eternally Byronic youths. . . ."[78] The same romantic egotism that caused London to cast characters in his own image stemmed largely from his solitude--for London

[76]Peterson, "The Jack London Legend," p. 17.

[77]Taylor, p. 315.

[78]Frederick Cople Jaher, Doubters and Dissenters: Cataclysmic Thought in America, 1885-1918 (London: The Free Press of Glenco, 1964), p. 212.

was always a loner--and from his pride of masculinity which he was "always testing."[79] This is reflected in his life and writing, especially the latter dealing with struggle-as-initiation. Kazin comments that this common bond between author and character is self-affirmation devolved from strength and violence and dependent on it for subsistence.[80] This positive though pessimistic theme, first widely utilized in American literature by London, recurs in later authors, most notably in Hemingway's "grace under pressure" heroes.

In Soviet Attitudes Toward American Writing, Deming Brown cites another aspect of London's romanticism by assaying his strong appeal to Russian audiences, calling it "optimism": "Not a reasoned, philosophic position, but an emotion, a mood which dominates the action of his stories, this optimism springs from a feeling of human energy and faith in the strength of man. The bearers of this optimism are his heroes--cheerful, bold, purposeful fighters whose iron wills have been toughened in tense struggle." This point is basically valid, but it fails to point out that London's "optimism" as defined here was only one stage in a continual cycle of romantic disillusionment, the major portions of which can be seen in a

[79]Willard Thorp, American Writing in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 162.

[80]Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1942), p. 113.

[81]Soviet Attitudes Toward American Writing (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 221.

study of the author's use of the struggle theme.

The formation of the concept of life-as-struggle has been biographically illustrated earlier, and it apparently preceded the author's adoption in part or whole of philosophy; in The Confident Years, Brooks states that Jack brought this already-formed view with him to Berkeley.[82] Though the youth had already read widely prior to his semester of college, this was to be his only formal study of philosophy. And the school of the world had pounded home, again and again, the lessons of that key concept: "He did not take time to be a theorist, and the experiences of his youth gave him no cause to be an idealist. He is constantly reaching out into life after some undiscovered happiness, but in the midst of what appears to be the height of happiness he is confronted with the picture of fate--that eternal struggle to live"--all of which, Calvin B. Houck states, London utilized as a "stepping-stone to a higher conception of things."[83]

Clell Peterson concurs in this latter view and goes on to say that London's belief in the value of individual struggle was "reinforced" by Spencer's ideas rather than being directly attributable to them.[84] Another writer apparently refutes the philosophical approach to London criticism, stating that

[82]Brooks, p. 235.

[83]Calvin B. Houck, "Jack London's Philosophy of Life," Overland Monthly, April-May (1926), 104.

[84]Clell T. Peterson, "Jack London's Alaskan Stories," American Book Collector, 9, No. 8, 15.

"these ideas are presented [by London] without any detailed argument in their support; they are only mildly academic."[85] Walker frankly states that London is not successful in works dominated by philosophy;[86] this is complimented by criticism equating the author's success with his "actual experiences" and innate "love for the struggle."[87] Quite simply stated, one is convincing and the other is not; London's heart may not always have been where his head was, but it most assuredly was where his best fiction was.

The validity of assaying London's work through a study of the theme of struggle is then based on life as he saw and imagined it. Prior to his studying or reading the philosophers, this theme was effectively illustrated to him--first as observer of the continual uphill fight of his family, then as participant as he sought to support them and later to succeed himself. That this idea fit into his basically romantic outlook reinforced by the dreams and myths of a frontier-conscious America can be seen by his decided early preference for primitive adventure. There is a Jack London who existed as an artistic entity separate from the theories of Darwin, Spencer, and Nietzsche, and it is that London with whom this paper deals.

[85]Clarence Gohdes, ed., Essays on American Literature (Durham: Duke University Press, 1967), Franklin Walker, "Ideas and Action in Jack London's Fiction," p. 261.

[86]Ibid.

[87]Blanche Colton Williams, Our Short Story Writers (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1929), p. 271.

Chapter Two

The Concept in Action--Struggle as Initiation and Purification

"It was in the Klondike that I found myself. There nobody talks. Everybody thinks. You get your perspective. I got mine." (Jack London quoted by his daughter)

Introduction

When a man journeys into a far country, he must be prepared to forget many of the things he has learned, and to acquire such customs as are inherent with existence in the new land; he must abandon the old ideals and the old gods, and often-times he must reverse the very codes by which his conduct has hitherto been shaped. To those who have the protean faculty of adaptability, the novelty of such change may even be a source of pleasure; but to those who happen to be hardened to the ruts in which they were created, the pressure of the altered environment is unbearable, and they chafe in body and spirit under the new restrictions which they do not understand. This chafing is bound to act and react, producing divers [sic] evils and leading to various misfortunes. It were better for the man who cannot fit himself to the new groove to return to his own country; if he delays too long, he will surely die.[1]

With these words, Jack London introduces one of his first Klondike tales; with them he also implies his intention to write of special people against a special background, a

[1] Jack London, "In a Far Country," in The Bodley Head Jack London, IV, ed. Arthur Calder-Marshall (London: The Bodley Head, 1966), pp. 186-187. With this and all primary sources and editions, the first reference will be footnoted and following references will be identified in short form and page numbers will be given in the text.

background against which--not unlike life itself--many cannot measure up. The frozen stage upon which London has chosen to have his characters play their parts and upon which they "acquire meaning and stature"[2] is the White Silence:

> Nature has many tricks wherewith she convinces man of his finity,--the ceaseless flow of the tides, the fury of the storms, the shock of the earthquake, the long roll of heaven's artillery,--but the most tremendous, the most stupefying of all, is the passive phase of the White Silence. All movement ceases, the sky clears, the heavens are as brass; the slightest whisper seems sacrilege, and man becomes timid, affrighted at the sound of his own voice. Sole speck of life journeying across the ghostly wastes of a dead world, he trembles at his audacity, realizes that his is a maggot's life, nothing more. Strange thoughts arise unsummoned, and the mystery of all things strives for utterance. And the fear of death, of God, of the universe, comes over him,--the hope of Resurrection and the Life, the yearning for immortality, the vain striving of the imprisoned essence--it is then, if ever, man walks alone with God.[3]

From a winter of talking, listening, and observing the Klondike of the gold rush and from his creative sensitivity grew this White Silence, an "epic dream of the North"[4] which was to be the only thing of value London carried home from the gold fields when he left, scurvy-ridden, a year later.

To the Klondike London carried his innate previously discussed view of life-as-struggle, superimposing it upon the

[2]Earle Gene Labor, Jack London's Literary Artistry: A Study of His Images and Symbols in Relation to His Themes. PhD. Thesis: University of Wisconsin, 1961.

[3]Jack London, "The White Silence," in The Bodley Head Jack London, I, ed. Arthur Calder-Marshall (London: The Bodley Head, 1966), pp. 40-41.

[4]Fred Lewis Pattee, The Development of the American Short Story (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1923), p. 352.

country, people, and things around him, "weaving a legend, creating a Klondike that never existed except in his imagination, a myth so powerful it was accepted by people who had actually lived it. He was making a fairly ordinary breed of men into a race of heroes. . . ."[5] Pattee says of London that "he was always writing from memory, without notebooks, with imagination at fullest stretch, the story of a vanished period, a brief and picturesque day in a new environment, where youth is supreme and alone, and his fancy hovers over it fondly, and heightens and exaggerates and colors it even to romance. His characters are not actual men whom he himself has seen and known: they are. . . demigods, the unsung heroes of a heroic age now for the first time put into an epic setting."[6] As is the case with most London fiction, the author uses as a backdrop a locale "where the struggle would be more obvious,"[7] and his deepest impression of the North was, in his daughter's words, the constant "struggle to exist"[8] which isolated man and set him in bold relief. Ronald Gower feels this setting is London's "most effective 'moral force'"[9] because it offers

[5]O'Connor, p. 93.

[6]Pattee, New American Literature, p. 131.

[7]Harry Hartwick, The Foreground of American Fiction (New York: American Book Company, 1934), p. 67.

[8]Joan London, p. 148.

[9]Ronald Gower, The Creative Conflict: Struggle and Escape in Jack London's Fiction, Unpublished Dissertation (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico, August 1970), p. 107.

the "harshest struggle"[10] for purification.

London siezed upon this struggle and created the myths and epics alluded to above--all by-products of a romantic sensivity tempered by a futile desire for simplicity in life, a vanished frontier, and a belief in the individual, an optimism in his innate ability to rise against adversity and grow in the process. Joan London feels that had it not been for her father's "awareness of man's ceaseless struggle against overwhelming odds, these would have been merely mediocre tales in which one-dimensional figures performed somewhat incredibly against a painted backdrop."[11]

The terms upon which life is endured in all primitive masculine environments have a certain purgative and ennobling effect, and London doubtless witnessed this and based upon it and earlier experiences a conception of struggle as initiation and purification. Though his ritualistic inconsistency cannot be denied, neither can the formulation of this concept:

> The man who turns his back upon the comforts of an elder civilization, to face the savage youth, the primordial simplicity of the North, may estimate success at an inverse ratio to the quantity and quality of his hopelessly fixed habits. He will soon discover, if he be a fit candidate, that the material habits are the less important. The exchange of such things as a dainty menu for rough fare, of the stiff leather shoe for the soft shapeless moccasin, of the feather bed for a couch in the snow, is after all a very easy matter. But his pinch will come in learning properly to shape his mind's attitude toward all things, and especially toward his fellow man. For the courtesies

[10] Ibid.

[11] Joan London, p. 148.

> of ordinary life, he must substitute unselfishness, forbearance, and tolerance. Thus, and thus only, can he gain that pearl of great price--true comradeship. He must not say "Thank you"; he must mean it without opening his mouth, and prove it by responding in kind. In short, he must substitute the deed for the word, the spirit for the letter (B. H., IV, p. 187).

Survival in the Klondike means sloughing off not only the comfortable externals of civilization, but the inbred evils also. London writes of this process as he had seen it and imagined it, always within the context of life as he knew it: "The very severity of the struggle. . . seemed to make the gold hunters kindly towards one another. The latch-string was always out, and the open hand was the order of the day. Distrust was unknown, and it was no hyperbole for a man to take the last shirt off his back for a comrade" (B. H., IV, p. 27).

Thus to London, virtue in a man "sleeps beneath a veneer of civilization and has to be awakened,"[12] a point he makes repeatedly in his Klondike works. The test is the struggle in which triumph emerges in the form of admirable qualities, both romantic and--strangely enough--Christian in nature.

> "The age of heroes was not dead, but they had emigrated to the frozen North." (Arthur Calder-Marshall)

"Men With the Bark On"[13]: The Ideal

The ideal London Protagonist is a man who has been in the

[12]Thorp, p. 163.

[13]G. Harrison Orians, A Short History of American Literature (New York: F. S. Crofts & Company, Inc., 1958), p. 275.

country so long he seems a part of it; he "comes from an unknown origin and is not tied to civilized institutions such as marriage or business. He is the spirit of the Northland human experience and is free to fulfill his promise by pitting his virtues against the cosmic odds. As a citizen of the Arctic wastes, he is not insulated by society from life's central problem of death and has faced it many times."[14] He sees beneath and beyond the actuality of the white world and interprets it within a framework of values based on his experiences. In London's mythical Klondike, this figure usually performs the function of law-giver, a function conceived of this intrinsic framework, extrinsic strength and an understanding of the White Silence. Such heroes are Sitka Charley and the Malemute Kid. Their fingers are on the pulse of the London world as they--like many of London's protagonists--are alter-egos, reacting to the situations in their scenes as their creator reacted to life. They are oracles and control points for London, giving forth the wisdom and values of author and Klondike and serving as models of the ideal man. They exist to control by their knowledge of these values (basically strength, endurance, courage, knowledge, common sense, selflessness, and love) the human situations around them; these characters will be referred to again in this regard in the

[14]James I. McClintock, Jack London's Short Stories (Unpublished PhD. Dissertation, Michigan State University, 1968), p. 85. Though McClintock makes this point about the Malemute Kid, it is applicable to all London characters of his type.

concluding portion of this paper.

Sitka Charley, the first example of these men to be considered here, appears in two short stories falling within the scope of this paper--"Grit of Women" and "The Wisdom of the Trail." The former work contains something of the genesis of the character and serves as an illustration of his type and of some basic London ideas.

In "Grit of Women," the extent to which this character has amalgamated time and country with self is seen as Sitka Charley begins the epic-like prologue to his narration: "'I have in mind things which happened when the land was young and the fires of men apart as the stars.'"[15] Joan London attributes this aspect of the London ideal to her father's disillusionment with civilization; to him, "life in the brief years before Carmack's discovery seemed Arcadian. Then, courage, strength, and intelligence. . . had determined the status of men. Weakness, cowardice, and greed, protected and perpetuated by wealth in civilization, were swiftly eliminated by nature, Indian tribal law and simple frontier justice. As he recalled life in the States his conviction grew that in the wilds men bulked larger as men than when penned in cities, were freer, and more admirable."[16]

Sitka Charley continues: "'I came into the warm and sat

[15]Jack London, The God of His Fathers and Other Stories (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), p. 162.

[16]Joan London, pp. 148-149.

among you, by your fires, and behold, I became one of you. I have seen much in my time. I have known strange things, and bucked big, on big trails, with men of many breeds. And because of these things, I measure deeds after your manner, and judge men, and think thoughts. Wherefore, when I speak harshly of one of your own kind, I know you will not take it amiss; and when I speak high of one of my father's people, you will not take it upon you to say, "Sitka Charley is Siwash, and there is a crooked light in his eyes and small honor to his tongue." Is it not so?'" (God of His Fathers, pp. 163-164).

The speaker has here established his experience, the breadth of his struggles in the Northland, and his intelligence, and concomitant insight. He has stated the value of his word, an extremely important positive trait in the London law-giver and in the London Klondike. And he has established the fact that he sits in judgement of all men regardless of race. This is interesting in light of London's avowals of Anglo-Saxon supremacy and all that has been written of his belief in it; the Indian's discourse does contain a brief and rather unconvincing apologia for his ancestry, but his creator's repeated semi-mythical treatment of him belies the sincerity of this. He has endured and he is a London law-giver. To his last question, the group of sourdoughs, "Deep down in throat, . . . vouchsafed its assent." (God, p. 164)

Sitka Charley then recounts a narrative cast--as are most of London's ritualistic Alaskan struggles--in an

archetypal journey set against the White Silence. While a youth, he had worked as a courier for the territorial mail service, and had been snowed in with the citizens of Forty Mile, a primitive outpost: "'And that winter was a hard winter. The darkness and the cold drew upon us, and with them the famine. . . .' And the dogs howled always, and there were flat bellies and deep-lined faces, and strong men became weak, and weak men died.'" (God, p. 166)

Somebody had to go for relief, and Sitka Charley was chosen. With him would go his woman, Passuk; as the two were preparing to go, "'there arose one, Long Jeff, a Yankee-man, big-boned and big-muscled. Also his talk was big. He, too, was a mighty traveler, he said, born to the snowshoe and bred up on buffalo milk. He would go with me, in case I fell by the trail, that he might carry the word on to the Mission. I was young, and I knew not the Yankee-men. How was I to know that big talk betokened the streak of fat, or that Yankee-men who did great things kept their teeth together?'" (God, p. 167) It is of no small significance that Charley began the journey as a youth of relatively narrow experience.

They moved out on the seven hundred mile mission of mercy, finally covering the two hundred miles to the first stop, a trading settlement at Pelly. Charley had looked forward to the settlement for supplies and as a place to drop off Long Jeff, who had become a constantly complaining burden; however, the people of Pelly were starving and could be of no conceivable

aid in either instance. The young Indian had learned his first lessons on the journey--the frequent discrepancy among men between "the deed" and "the word" and the fact that one could count on very little in the North: in a larger sense, the universe.

Sitka Charley continues:

> So we pulled on, light-stomached and heavy-hearted, with half a thousand miles of snow and silence between us and Haines Mission by the sea. The darkness was at its worst, and at midday the sun could not clear the sky-line to the south. But the ice-jams were smaller, the going better; so I pushed the dogs hard and traveled late and early. As I said at Forty Mile, every inch of it was snow-shoe work. And the shoes made great sores on our feet, which cracked and scabbed but would not heal. And every day these sores grew more grievous, till in the morning, when we girded on the shoes, Long Jeff cried like a child. I put him at the fore of the light sled to break trail, but he slipped off the shoes for comfort. Because of this the trail was not packed, his moccasins made great holes, and into these holes the dogs wallowed. The bones of the dogs were ready to break through their hides, and this was not good for them. So I spoke hard words to the man, and he promised, and broke his word. Then I beat him with the dog-whip, and after that the dogs wallowed no more. He was a child, what of the pain and the streak of fat (God, pp. 168-169).

The significance of a man's word on the trail is underscored here, as is the fact that--in London--strength, endurance, and courage rise above race in value. The importance of the animals lies not only in the imperative nature of the faster transportation they provide, but also in that they present a potential source of food; thus the selfishness and weakness of Long Jeff in putting creature comfort above the welfare of the all-important dogs and, ultimately, that of his comrades

and the men of Forty Mile is dealt with severely. The element of compassion also enters in the matter, as we see the first show of it on the part of the Indian. In chastising the weaker man, Sitka Charley has also begun the transmutation to law-giver.

And on they go. They come upon two travelers in like condition bound for Pelly; turning back with his pistol their attempt to eat one of his dogs, Sitka Charley and his miserable party continue their dreary march:

> I had three dogs now, and one sled, and the dogs were only bones and hair. When there is little wood, the fire burns low and the cabin grows cold. So with us. With little grub the frost bites sharp, and our faces were black and frozen till our own mothers would not have known us. And our feet were very sore. In the morning, when I hit the trail, I sweated to keep down the cry when the pain of the snowshoes smote me. Passuk never opened her lips, but stepped to the fore to break the way. The man howled (God, p. 172).

They lose the dogs crossing Thirty Mile River; their potential food source gone, they divide the provisions equally and prepare to separate: "'And I told Long Jeff that he could keep with us, or not, as he saw fit; for we were going to travel light and fast. But he raised his voice and cried over his sore feet and his troubles, and said harsh things against comradeship. Passuk's feet were sore, and my feet were sore--ay, sorer than his, for we had worked with the dogs; also, we looked to see. Long Jeff swore he would die before he hit the trail again. . . .'" (God, pp. 173-174)

It is here that the stoic Indian woman begins to take on

a symbolic role inseparable from the frozen country around her. They begin to leave and Passuk speaks: "'it is wrong to waste food on a baby. He is better dead.' I shook my head and said no--that a comrade once a comrade always. Then she spoke of the men of Forty Mile; that they were many men and good; and that they looked to me for grub in the spring" (God, p. 174). When Sitka Charley remains adamant, she seizes his pistol and kills Long Jeff: "'I chided Passuk for this; but she showed no sorrow, nor was she sorrowful. And in my heart I knew she was right" (God, p. 174). Sitka Charley has shown compassion and loyalty, but the woman has taught her man the law of necessity in the harsh land and the greater loyalty; she re-emphasizes both in a short time.

Earlier, when encountering the two travelers bound for Pelly, the narrator mentions that they had separated from an Indian in the party and had told him that the food had been fairly divided as was the custom of the trail; Charley is skeptical of this, a skepticism based on his knowledge of the Indians. Now Charley comes upon the Indian and his belief is confirmed: "'They had not whacked up fair. . . and he had no flour for three days. Each night he boiled pieces of his moccasins in a cup and ate them. He did not have much moccasins left'" (God, p. 175). The advent of the dying Indian together with Sitka Charley's comments illustrate a violation of the law of comradeship on the trail and seem to emphasize again that London's values rise above race, encompassing all

mankind. The narrator wishes to share with him, and it is at this point that the correlation between Passuk and life as mother-symbol of the North comes out as Charley likens her to a "'mother partridge whose young are in trouble'" (God, p. 175). But she again denies the lesser affinity, affirms the greater necessity, and the Indian departs. For the second time, she has given death to keep life.

> We spoke little, Passuk and I, in the days which came. In the night we lay in the snow like dead people, and in the morning we went on our way, walking like dead people. And all things were dead. There were no ptarmigan, no squirrels, no snowshoe rabbits--nothing. The river made no sound beneath its white robes. The sap was frozen in the forest. And it became cold, as now; and in the night the stars drew near and large, and leaped and danced; and in the day the sun-dogs mocked us till we saw many suns, and all the air flashed and sparkled, and the snow was diamond dust. And there was no heat, no sound, only the bitter cold and the Silence (God, pp. 177-178).

Against this austere setting--one of the most powerful descriptive passages in London--Passuk succumbs. In doing so, however, she becomes fully a symbol of life and The Law, speaking Charley narrates, "' of many things which I did not understand'" (God, p. 179). Like the frozen Silence, Passuk choses to give and take life; she has dealt death to the weakling, Long Jeff, and the dying Indian, whom she tells Charley was her brother and who had saved her life in childhood. To Charley she gives life, as she touches his hand to her abdomen where she has hoarded her share of the food for him, telling him: "'This is the end of the trail for Passuk, but your trail, Charley, leads on and on, over the great Chilkoot, down

to Haines Mission and the sea. And it leads on and on, by the light of many suns, over unknown lands and strange waters, and it is full of years and great glories'" (God, pp. 182-183). Symbolically, she has already given him life by her exemplification of strength, compassion, courage, selflessness, loyalty, and finally honor and pride as she says her last words to Charley, who has thrown the food from him in order to die with her: "'Among men has Sitka Charley walked in honor, and ever has his word been true. Does he forget that honor now, and talk vain words by the Caribou Crossing? Does he remember no more the men of Forty Mile, who gave him of their grub the best, of their dogs the pick?'" (God, p. 183). Her actions, contrasted to the death of all around her, complete the symbolism. Charley has learned the values necessary to life in the North.

As if to underline the spiritual significance of Passuk and the journey, Charley concludes:

> And when she grew cold in my arms I arose, and sought out the well-filled pouch, and girt on my snowshoes, and staggered along the trail; for there was a weakness in my knees, and my head was dizzy, and in my ears was a roaring and a flashing of fire in my eyes. The forgotten trails of boyhood came back to me. I sat by the full pots of the potlach feast, and raised my voice in song, and danced to the chanting of the men and maidens and the booming of the walrus drums. And Passuk held my hand and walked by my side. When I laid down to sleep, she waked me. When I stumbled and fell, she raised me. When I wandered in the deep snow, she led me back to the trail. And in this wise, like a man bereft of reason, who sees strange visions and whose thoughts are light with wine, I came to Haines Mission by the sea (God, pp. 183-184).

Charley has met the struggle; his body has endured and his soul been tempered by it. Through the ritual he has learned the life-sustaining values of the Northland. It represents the initiation of Sitka Charley as law-giver, a function he is now able to fulfill for the benefit of all men in the Klondike. He has learned "the law," the framework of values necessary to do so.

In "The Wisdom of the Trail," London states again this fact and its significance: "Sitka Charley had achieved the impossible. Other Indians might have known as much of the wisdom of the trail as he did; but he alone knew the white man's wisdom, the honour of the trail, and the law. But these things did not come to him in a day. . . . it was only by the cumulative evidence of years that he had finally come to understand. Being an alien, he knew it better than the white man himself; being an Indian he had achieved the impossible."[17] The importance of the time element and the necessity of experience in the formation of a London oracle, stated here, recalls the times in the foregoing narrative of his journey to wisdom when Sitka Charley said that he did not then understand Long Jeff's demeanor nor Passuk's intent and words.

In "The Wisdom of the Trail," Sitka Charley is law-giver in a tale again set on the northern trail: "When Captain Eppingwell proposed the hazardous undertaking and made him

[17] Bodley Head, IV, pp. 137-138.

an offer for his services, he had shaken his head gravely; for it was an unknown journey through the dismal vastnesses of the Northland, and he knew it to be of the kind that try to the uttermost the souls of men" (B. H., IV, pp. 139-140).

And try them it did. The wind blew, men grew faint and frostbite struck; the Indian tended the party to the exclusion of his own welfare: "Leaving the two to the drying of their footgear, Sitka Charley turned back over the course he had come. He, too, had a mighty longing to sit by the fire and tend his complaining flesh, but the honour and the law forbade. He toiled painfully over the frozen fields, each step a protest, every muscle in revolt" (B. H., IV, p. 139).

Early in the trek, Sitka Charley had had trouble with two of the packers; now, as he moves back to check on everyone's progress, he finds they had deserted a third man of the party to die. He tells them to go back; they pull knives, refusing, and Charley clubs them into obedience with his rifle. Realizing a critical situation exists, and attempting to regain total control of it, he speaks that night:

> "A few words, my comrades, before we sleep," Sitka Charley said after they had devoured their slim rations of unleavened bread. He was speaking to the Indians in their own tongue, having already given the import to the whites. "A few words, my comrades, for your own good, that ye may yet perchance live. I shall give you the law; on his own head be the death of him that breaks it. We have passed the Hills of Silence, and we now travel the head reaches of the Stuart. It may be one sleep, it may be several, it may be many sleeps, but in time we shall come among the men of the Yukon, who have much grub. It were well that we look to the law. Today Kah-Chucte and Gowhee, whom I commanded to break

> trail, forgot they were men, and like frightened children ran away. True, they forgot; so let us forget. But hereafter let them remember. If it should happen they do not. . ." He touched his rifle carelessly, grimly. "Tomorrow they shall carry the flour and see that the white man Joe lies not down by the trail. The cups of flour are counted; should so much as an ounce by wanting at nightfull. . . Do ye understand? Today there were others that forgot. Moose Head and Three Salmon left the white man Joe to lie in the snow. Let them forget no more. With the light of day shall they go forth and break trail. Ye have heard the law. Look well, lest ye break it" (B. H., IV, pp. 141-142).

The next day men fell, crawled, babbled, and froze as the Indian was hard put to keep the little column together. The two men ordered to see to Joe and the flour brought up the rear as they dragged their delirious charge through the snow. Exhausted, they stopped, built a fire, and began to eat the flour mixed with warm water: "Sitka Charley, looking back, saw the pillared smoke of their fire, and guessed. And he looked ahead at those who were faithful. . ." (B. H., IV, p. 144).

Moving back, the Indian comes upon the two who have gone against his edict: "'So, my good comrades, ye have again forgotten that you were men? Good! Very good. There will be fewer bellies to feed'" (B. H., IV, p. 144).

Sitka Charley kicks Joe to his senses, pointing and shoving him in the direction of march. As he does so, the two culprits attempt to flee and Charley stops them. Quietly, unemotionally and in few words he asks them how they wish their worldly goods disposed of; then, "'Are ye content to

die by the law?' 'We are,'" they reply (B. H., IV, p. 145). He wishes them well and shoots them.

And then, as if in vindication of his actions: "Hardly had they died away when other rifles spoke in the distance. Sitka Charley started. There had been more than one shot, yet there was but one other rifle in the party. He gave a fleeting glance at the men who lay so quietly, smiled viciously at the wisdom of the trail, and hurried in to meet the men of the Yukon" (B. H., IV, p. 145).

This justice of the London Klondike is a control factor rising above, though in essence like, formal justice. It is born of the meeting of primitive men and their frontier with a higher concept of equity evolved from the effect of necessity on their civilized ideas of justice. Its dispensation is generally the realm of the London oracle, the figure in whom the dictates of the Northland and the conscience of man have met to form the London value system. In the story above, Sitka Charley fulfills this position; in "To the Man on the Trail" and "The Men of Forty Mile," it is the function of the Malemute Kid.

The first of these stories opens on the Kid mixing a hearty Christmas punch for his snowed-in comrades. As with Sitka Charley, the hero's pre-stampede Northland experience is made apparent when the Kid begins a story by stating--to a man who had been in-country for two years--that "That was

before your time."[18] He is well-established as the central figure in the story by the time the night delivers up a new arrival to the cabin, a foil for the exhibition of certain London values interpreted by the Kid.

Malemute immediately knows the other is not new to the country, as he sees to his animals before tending his own comfort--a practice denoting not only the common sense priorities born of experience, but also a degree of compassion. That they are of a kind is further made apparent by the fact that "Though they had never met, each had heard of the other, and the recognition was mutual" ("To the Man," p. 178); furthermore, Sitka Charley had known the man and had vouched for the newcomer as being "square" ("To the Man," p. 180). McClintock notes that London's ideal men "instinctively know each other. It is a recognition of wholeness of character . . . ."[19]

As the newcomer, Jack Westondale, relaxes to the warmth offered him, the Malemute Kid continues as interpreter:

> Malemute Kid attentively studied his face. Nor was he long in deciding that it was fair, honest, and open, and that he liked it. Still youthful, the lines had been firmly traced by toil and hardship. Though genial in conversation, and mild when at rest, the blue eyes gave promise of the hard steel-glitter which

[18]Jack London, "To the Man on the Trail," in Best Short Stories of Jack London (Garden City: Garden City Books, 1953), p. 176. Joan London remarks that "Out of many men, especially Emil Jensen, and Jack's conception of himself as a sourdough, emerged Malemute Kid. . . ." (p. 148).

[19]McClintock, p. 91.

> comes when called into action, especially against odds. The heavy jaw and square-cut chin demonstrated rugged pertinacity and indomitability. Nor, though the attributes of the lion were there, was there wanting the certain softness, the hint of womanliness, which bespoke the emotional nature ("To the Man," pp. 178-179).[20]

Apparent to the Kid is the fact that this man had sought, endured, and been tempered--as he himself had--by the struggle. His sensitivity, a usually implied keynote of the London ideal, is stated in this passage and becomes evident as the man passes around pictures of his wife and family.

Westondale tells them that he is chasing after a stolen dog team, thus explaining his being on the trail on Christmas Eve. He goes to sleep, asking the Kid to be certain and waken him at a designated time. Malemute rousts him out early, and the traveler finds his team ready to go and his provisions restocked. When the Kid briefs him on the conditions ahead, Westondale realizes his story was not believed by all.

The perceptiveness of the Kid is born out when a Mounty arrives fifteen minutes later. Those in the cabin are evasive when asked about the latter's quarry--wanted for robbing a gambling house--until he asks the priest, "who could not lie" ("To the Man," p. 181). The lawman prepares to leave,

[20] Freudians have probably had a field day with London's heroes, but Jack was sensitive and created most of his protagonists so. This description is interesting in light of a quote, too extensive to utilize here, by Joan London in which her father describes an ideal male companion (Joan London, pp. 259-260). That tenderness, love, and sensitivity are essential traits in the London value system has only been mentioned by McClintock in all serious criticism studied relative to this paper (see McClintock, p. 87).

asking to buy a fresh team from Malemute and, when refused, threatening to requisition them "in the name of the Queen" ("To the Man," p. 182). The Kid looks significantly at his superior armament, and the Mounty leaves.

The Malemute Kid has, in his role as law-giver, seen, assessed, and passed judgement on the fugitive Westondale. That his action--and theirs under his leadership--went like Westondale's against civil law and against the code of honesty angers the sourdoughs. The Malemute Kid as oracle speaks:

> "It's a cold night, boys--a bitter cold night. . . You've all traveled trail, and know what that stands for. Don't jump a dog when he's down. You've only heard one side. A whiter man than Jack Westondale never ate from the same pot nor stretched blanket with you or me. Last fall he gave his whole clean-up, forty-thousand, to Joe Castrell, to buy in on Dominion. Today he'd be a millionaire. But while he stayed behind at Circle City, taking care of his partner with the scurvy, what does Castrell do? Goes into McFarland's, jumps the limit, and drops the whole sack. Found him dead in the snow the next day. And poor Jack laying his plans to go out this winter to his wife and the boy he's never seen. You'll notice he took exactly what his partner lost--forty-thousand. Well, he's gone out; and what are you going to do about it?" ("To the Man," pp. 182-183).

That Malemute's judgement stands is shown when the others join him in a toast "to the man on the trail" and in "Confusion to the Mounted Police" ("To the Man," p. 183). He has essentially given Westondale the gift of life and furthermore vouched for his embodying the values of the London ideal. Of this, McClintock remarks:

> . . . the Kid is spokesman for the law. . .that transcends civilized morality. Westondale is acquitted

> because he is a completed spirit who has faced the essential facts of life (the trail, the cold and misfortune) and mastered them. Moreover, he had practiced the masculine code by obeying the law of comradely self-sacrifice and remaining loyal to his tender love for his wife and child. Finally, he maintained his integrity by taking only what had been his, money lost not through natural misfortune but through a corrupt social institution--the gaming table. Westondale is justified because he is wronged in a way that society is incapable or unwilling to rectify. He, therefore, is judged by the Northland code that admires masculinity kept in spite of hardship and is found justified in his actions.[21]

In "The Men of Forty Mile," two sourdoughs get into an altercation over the physics of freezing water; the disagreement degenerates into a challenge to a duel, a relatively common occurrence in the Northland. Onto the scene of the duel comes Malemute Kid.

"The incident was repeated for his benefit, and Malemute Kid, accustomed to an obedience which his fellow man never failed to render, took charge of the affair. . . . They promised to follow his lead implicitly."[22] As before with both Sitka Charley, the London oracle becomes law-giver and control factor.

The Kid procures a length of rope, coils it around his arm, and stands by to watch the proceedings; when one of the principals asks him what it is for, he replies, "'The other man'" (B. H., IV, p. 168). When his intent to hang the survivor is so stated, one of the two men calls his bluff:

[21]McClintock, pp. 93-94.

[22]Bodley Head, IV, pp. 165-166.

> 'Lon! It's a long while since you first knew me?'
> 'Many's the day.'
> 'And you, Bettles?'
> 'Five year next June high water.'
> 'And have you once, in all that time, known me to break my word? Or heard of me breaking it?'
> Both men shook their heads. . . .
> 'Well, then, what do you think of a promise made by me?'
> 'As good as your bond,' from Bettles.
> 'The thing to safely sling your hopes of heaven by,' promptly endorsed Lon McFane.
> 'Listen! I, Malemute Kid, give you my word--and you know what that means--that the man who is not shot stretches rope within ten minutes after the shooting.' He stepped back as Pilate might have done after washing his hands (B. H., IV, pp. 168-169).

Both men back down.

The reason behind the law-giver's action is not that one man is going to kill another, an act already shown to be frequently vindicated by the London value system, but the motivation behind the act as shown by the priest's statement that "'it's not the heart, Lon. . . It's pride that bids you forth to slay your fellow man'" (B. H., IV, p. 166).

The point is emphasized symbolically by the author by the insinuation of a rabid dog in the key scenes, beginning with the Kid's arrival: the dog has been biting others of its kind and nobody has been able to shoot it: "'The dog census will be small in the spring if we don't do something'" (B. H., IV, p. 165), to which someone replies, "'And the man census, too'" (B. H., IV, p. 165). In the scene where Bettles and McFane decide against risking the Kid's odds, the dog appears again and is wounded by Malemute and killed by the two former antagonists. Men may kill men and dogs kill dogs when

both are done within the scope of the London value system. This is not the case here, and Malemute--the London law-giver--sees this and acts immediately to return things to their proper perspective.

The "significances" of things, the ramifications not immediately apparent to all men, are readily so to the London hero because he has the quality London refers to in "To Build a Fire" as "imagination." This is a gift of insight which, in conjunction with his experience, allows him "to act swiftly, instinctively, and. . . decisively. . . ."[23]

Sitka Charley and the Malemute Kid both represent the London ideal, an intended model and an oracle of the London value system. McClintock feels that London uses the Northland as a symbol of the actual--cosmic reality--which the oracle faces girded with ideals: "The explicit theme. . . is that a code practicing, rational man can achieve mastery over, or accomodation with, a hostile environment."[24]

Both law-givers are essentially ageless fixtures of the White Silence, and both have endured and been annealed by the struggles inherent in the life of the North. They exemplify the virtues of strength, courage, discipline, selflessness, honor, integrity, honesty, loyalty, common sense, insight, sensitivity, and compassion, a framework forming the "law"

[23]McClintock, p. 90.

[24]McClintock, abstract, n. p.

from which they dispense justice and give or take life. In each story in which they appear, they serve as a control center of the men and the struggles of the Klondike. Each recognizes the existent value of his peers and the innate potential of newcomers to their frozen stage. They are "doers"; they have "substituted the deed for the word, the spirit for the letter" ("In a Far Country," B. H., IV, p. 187).

> "Jack is going to make a success out of the Klondike--whether he digs it out of the grassroots or not."
> (John London, quoted by Charmian)

The Chechaquos: Winners and Losers

The struggle-as-initiation of the London oracle is usually inherent in his long time in-country. The recounting of his personal journey to wisdom by Sitka Charley is an exception and stands as an excellent example of the ritual. As has been said, this group represents the ideal; another type of London protagonist is the chechaquos, freshmen to the Klondike and potential men, and it is this group which undergoes the ritual of struggle-as-initiation in his tales. London, though he probably longed to be the former and doubtless daydreamed of life among them, likely saw himself as more clearly belonging to the second group. Many of their ritual struggles are, as Franklin Walker points out in Jack London and the Klondike, based on their creator's own journey into the interior; and, like him, "the real wealth they discover is spiritual rather

than material."[25] Their story is his in a very real sense, as anything he gained in life--whether the respect of strong men or success in writing--came only through struggle; they are like Jack London, finding truth and self-realization only in adversity.

Most of the characters in this category come, like London, from the "Southland" and are recent arrivals. A typical potential hero is seen in the opening passages of "Grit of Women" as a lead-in to Sitka Charley's narrative; he has just come to the North:

> "Damn the trail," he muttered softly, as he threw off the robes and sat up. "I've run across country, played quarter three seasons hand-running, and hardened myself in all manner of ways; and then I pilgrim it into this God-forsaken land and find myself an effeminate Athenian without the simplest rudiments of manhood!" He hunched up to the fire and rolled a cigarette. "Oh, I'm not whining. I can take my medicine all right, all right; but I'm just decently ashamed of myself, that's all. Here I am, on top of a dirty thirty miles, as knocked up and stiff as a pink-tea degenerate after a five-mile walk on a country turnpike. Bah! It makes me sick!" (B. H., IV, p. 158-159).

To which Bettles, a recurrent sourdough in London's stories, replies, "'Ye've gotter 'low some for the breakin' in. . . . You're all right, for a cub, an ye've the true sperrit. Come this day year, you'll walk all us old bucks into the ground any time. An' best in your favor, you ain't got that streak of fat in your make-up. . . .'" (B. H., IV, pp. 159-160). This newcomer has a background of physical struggle typical of

[25]Labor, Jack London's Literary Artistry, p. 65.

some of the London potential heroes, has survived the initial trek in-country, has been judged basically worthy by an old-timer, and realizes the "significances" of success in the struggle. Though his ritual is not presented in this story, he serves as a profile of his type and must be purified through struggle.

"In the beginning he was Christopher Bellew. By the time he was at college he had become Kit Bellew. Later, in the Bohemian crowd of San Francisco, he was called Kit Bellew. And in the end he was known by no other name than Smoke Bellew."[26] Thus London begins to trace the struggles of another of his potential men in the episodic Smoke Bellew as the protagonist acts to "shed the chrysalis of civilized ways."[27] Unlike the new arrival above, Bellew has lived a life of moneyed ease and relative non-struggle and is in effect, "an effeminate Athenian."

At lunch one day with his uncle in San Francisco, Bellew is reminded of his masculine shortcomings by the older man, a product "of the old hard and hardy stock that had crossed the plains by ox-team in the fifties, and in him was the same hardness and the hardiness of a childhood spent in the conquering of a new land" (Smoke Bellew, p. 6). It is from this point-of-view that John Bellew roundly chastises his nephew for his

[26]Jack London, Smoke Bellew, New York: The Century Co (sic, no period), 1912 , p. 3.

[27]Alfred S. Shivers, "The Romantic in Jack London," Alaska Review, I, #1 (Winter, 1963), p. 47.

dilettantism and his basic lack of manhood. Out of the meeting come plans for Kit to accompany the elder Bellew to help pack his sons over the Chilkoot into the Klondike. It is there in the Northland that Kit Bellew, "Tenderest of the tenderfeet" (Smoke Bellew, p. 13) and a "chekako" (Smoke Bellew, p. 15), becomes Smoke Bellew, attaining the stature of both his forebears and the London hero in the porcess.

The young San Franciscan first approaches the trip as a lark and a welcome break from the paper for which he writes a column on the arts. He confidently begins to pack his impedimentia in in what is essentially a re-creation of London's own struggle over Chilkoot. Soon, however, his attitude changes in the face of the harsh trail and he contemplates quitting:

> But he didn't. Somewhere in him was the strain of the hard, and he repeated over and over to himself that what other men could do he could. It became a nightmare chant, and he gibbered it to those that passed him on the trail. At other times, resting, he watched and envied the mule-footed Indians that plodded by under heavier packs. They never seemed to rest, but went on and on with a steadiness and certitude that were to him appalling.
> He sat and cursed--he had no breath for it when under way--and forgot the temptation to sneak back to San Francisco. Before the mile pack was ended he ceased cursing and took to crying. The tears were tears of exhaustion and of disgust with self (Smoke Bellew, p. 20).

In the days that follow, Kit begins to lose his "streak of fat" and harden. His endurance and abilities increase as he begins to learn from watching the Indian packers, making a head strap to supplement his shoulder straps after their fashion and timing his hauls and rest breaks with theirs.

The terrain becomes more forbidding as the party approaches the summit of Chilkoot, but the aching Bellew endures and, enduring, strengthens. When the summit is reached, he, like his creator, had kept up with the Indians, "and his secret pride was that he had come through with them and never squealed and never lagged" (Smoke Bellew, p. 24).

The process of adapting to the dictates of his primitive surroundings has begun; symbolically, he sheds his original romantic attitude when he tosses aside his heavy six-gun and cartridge belt. He has learned to look to the more experienced to see how they cope, and he has further begun to turn his own mind and imagination to the process: this is illustrated when he formulates a plan for a chute carved in the ice down the lee-side of the glacial Chilkoot, trading his idea to a ferryman for passage across a small lake.

Kit, soon to be christened Smoke by a girl on the trail as the result of a remark he makes, has achieved some of the basic traits of the London hero in his initial struggle. He has begun making his uncle eat his earlier words as he derides John Bellew in virtually the same phrases the latter had addressed to Kit in San Francisco: "'Avuncular, I want to tell you something important. I was raised a Lord Fauntleroy, but I can outpack you, outwalk you, put you on your back, or lick you with my fists right now'" (Smoke Bellew, p. 29); to which the other replies, "'Christopher, my boy, I believe you can do it with that pack on your back at the same time. You've made

good, boy, though it's too unthinkable to believe'" (Smoke Bellew, p. 29). When they have reached Lake Linderman, John proceeds to return to San Francisco, as it was originally planned he and Kit would do. The younger Bellew tells him "'I've got my taste of meat, and I like it. I'm going on'" (Smoke Bellew, p. 33); he has faced adversity and grown. McClintock remarks that "Values . . . the god-like in man, must be shown as the product of man, himself, responding actively to the whisper calling to completion."[28] Smoke answers that call.

Along with a diminutive former cowboy and prospector named Jack Short ("Shorty"), Bellew has hired out to take two "gentlemen" and their gear from Lake Linderman into Dawson. In this phase of his struggle-as-initiation, Smoke begins to take on through his actions some of the other values of the London hero. Accenting this is London's running contrast of Smoke and Shorty with their bosses, Stine and Sprague.

Selfishness and lack of compassion on the part of the latter are immediately apparent when Shorty tells Smoke that the two have bought a newly-finished boat built for another group by almost doubling the contract price--this in the face of the rapidly approaching freeze: "'Oh, they are real hummers, your boss and mine, when it comes to sheddin' the mazuma an' never mindin' other folks feelings'" (Smoke Bellew, p. 36)

[28]McClintock, p. 69.

and "'They ain't hearted right. They'd take crape off the door of a house in mourning if they needed it in their business'" (Smoke Bellew, p. 37).

Contrasted to this later in the trip is an incident where a man and his family, unable to take their boat through the treacherous rapids, offer to pay Shorty and Smoke to do so; Shorty refuses, saying the boat is unsafe and he and Smoke do not want the money: "Kit nodded affirmation, and chanced to look at Mrs. Breck. Her eyes were fixed upon him, and he knew that if ever he had seen a prayer in a woman's eyes he was seeing it then. Shorty, followed his gaze and saw what he saw. They looked at each other in confusion and did not speak. Moved by the common impulse, they nodded to each other and turned to the trail that led to the head of the rapids" (Smoke Bellew, pp. 51-52). Over the objections of Stine and Sprague, the other two successfully pilot the boat through and refuse the Brecks' money. At the risk of life and time, they have shown selflessness, compassion, and courage in the face of danger and adversity. Four men have just drowned when their boat capsized, and Shorty is a non-swimmer, both accentuating the bravery of him and Smoke and the cowardice of Stine and Sprague. This action in view of the possible consequences, McClintock says, is a "ritual" which "symbolically represents human control over natural forces,"[29] and it is the first

[29]McClintock, p. 86.

time in the account in which Smoke reaches out to control forces outside himself.

Earlier, Shorty had muttered that "'A boat divided against itself won't float'" (Smoke Bellew, p. 41), a facetious remark addressed to the lack of cooperation from Stine and Sprague, who were constantly bickering and malingering. The statement proves prophetic and loses its humor as they struggle to cross Labarge before the rapidly freezing water closes: "Compelled to take their turn at the oars, Sprague and Stine patiently loafed. Kit learned how to throw his weight on an oar, but he noted that his employers made a seeming of throwing their weights and that they dipped their oars at a cheating angle" (Smoke Bellew, p. 54). In the continuous Alaskan struggle, London is saying, comrades on trail must work together for the common good; Smoke and Shorty have learned this, but the others have not. Since the first, they have left the majority of the work up to Smoke and Shorty, shirked whenever possible, and been content to order their morning coffee from their beds.

After three days and three vain attempts to cross the lake, Bellew says, "'We could make it if they had the souls of clams. . . . We could have made it to-day if they hadn't turned back. Another hour's work would have fetched that west shore. They're--they're babes in the woods'" (Smoke Bellew, p. 55), and with these words he takes control. He has passed judgement on the other two as having failed, both

as men and in measuring up to the value system of the author. It is Smoke's first action as a control point for his creator and represents a very significant step in his evolution.

London leads up to this event; earlier, at the outset of the lake crossings, Smoke displays innate perception and ingenuity in the futile toil to get the boat clear of the beach, saying "Sit down and get a good rest till a lull comes in the wind, and then buck in for all we're worth," and the author remarks that "Simple as the idea was, he had been the first to evolve it. . ." (Smoke Bellew, p. 42). Later the narrator says "Kit chuckled. Along with the continuous discovery of his own powers had come an ever-increasing disapproval of the two masters. It was not so much irritation, which was always present, as disgust. He had got his taste of the meat and liked it; but they were teaching him how not to eat it. Privily he thanked God that he was not made as they. He came to dislike them to a degree that bordered on hatred. Their malingering bothered him less than their helpless inefficiency" (Smoke Bellew, p. 44). The recurrent use of the term "meat" stems from a sneering statement by John Bellew in the San Francisco luncheon that when he was young he "lived on jerked beef and bear-meat" (Smoke Bellew, p. 11) as opposed to the diet his nephew had known. Smoke, Shorty, and London use it variously as a synonym for struggle, manhood, and the euphoric feeling of one who has achieved against odds.

Under the leadership of Smoke and in spite of the

objections of the two slackers, they cross Labarge, making the final leg at night: "Often afterward, when Kit tried to remember that night and failed to bring aught but nightmare recollections, he wondered what must have been the suffering of Stine and Sprague. His one impression of himself was that he struggled through biting frost and intolerable exertion for a thousand years, more or less" (Smoke Bellew, p. 62). They chop ice and make way by pure force, coming at last to the other side and the mouth of the river. At this point, Stine and Sprague "had surrendered, no longer gave orders, and their one desire was to gain Dawson" (Smoke Bellew, p. 63). Theirs is the last boat to reach Dawson and many more are frozen in behind them.

After they get set up in Dawson, the two employers dismiss Smoke, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Shorty upon their first meeting when he told Smoke: "I'm sorry for you, pardner. They ain't no grub in the country, and they'll drop you cold as soon as they hit Dawson" (Smoke Bellew, p. 37). Bellew had made a verbal commitment with them and objected on that ground, to which Sprague says, "'I know of no agreement'" (Smoke Bellew, p. 66). As shown earlier, the sacredness of a man's word is of tantamount significance in London's Klondike. Stine and Sprague, having failed in the struggle and its accompanying purification, add another violation of the London value system to their already long list. Shorty quits in disgust, and he and Smoke begin their Klondike careers. At this point, the continuity of the narrative ceases and the book becomes episodic--in

reality, a collection of short stories.

It is difficult to trace Smoke's growth further due to this problem, though there are two sections of relative importance. The first of these is an introspective look at the protagonist; it emphasizes his reactions to the North and its struggles. The significance of the passage is brought out by its tone and by Bellew's solitude, both of which contrast conspicuously with the continual camaraderie of Smoke and Shorty:

> He loved the life, the deep arctic winter, the silent wilderness, the unending snow-surface unpressed by the foot of man. About him towered icy peaks unnamed and uncharted. . . . He, alone, moved through the brooding quiet of the untraveled wastes; nor was he oppressed by the solitude. He loved it all, the day's toil, the bickering wolf-dogs, the making of the camp in the long twilight, the leaping stars overhead, and the flaming pageant of the aurora borealis. . . .
> . . . . . .
> At such times San Francisco, The Billow, and O'Hara seemed very far away, lost in a remote past, shadows of dreams that had never happened. He found it hard to believe that he had known any other life than this of the wild, and harder still was it for him to reconcile himself to the fact that he had once dabbled and dawdled in the Bohemian drift of city life. Alone, with no one to talk to, he thought much, and deeply, and simply. He was appalled by the wastage of his city years, by the cheapness, now, of the philosophies of the schools and books, of the clever cynicism of the studio and the editorial room, of the cant of the business men in their clubs. They knew neither food, nor sleep, nor health; nor could they ever possibly know the sting of real appetite, the goodly ache of fatigue, nor the rush of mad strong blood that bit like wine through all one's body as work was done (Smoke Bellew, pp. 121-122).

This experience is not unlike that of London, who "had time to think in that winter camp; for the first time in his life he was trying to evaluate the past, to know himself, and to plumb

his capabilities and try to decide what might be done with them."[30] Like him, Smoke has achieved his "perspective" and grown. Also, reflecting something his creator came more and more to believe, Bellew says, "'Right here is my efficiency and desire. Almost. . .do I wish I had been born a wolf-boy . . .'" (Smoke Bellew, p. 123). Smoke has amalgamated the values and qualities of the North through struggle and has in effect replaced "the stiff leather shoe for the soft shapeless moccasin" (B. H., IV, p. 187).

Smoke's acceptance as an equal by the "elder heroes" takes place after he has successfully competed in a dog-sled race for a mining claim against one of these worthies, Big Olaf, "one of the most terrible dog-mushers in the country" (Smoke Bellew, p. 151). Like Malemute Kid and Sitka Charley, Big Olaf dates from pre-rush days and is an epic figure in his own right: "'Big Olaf is the greatest traveler in the Yukon. I'd back him against Old Nick himself for snow-bucking and ice-travel. He brought in the government despatches [sic] in 1895, and he did it after two couriers were frozen on Chilkoot and the third drowned in the open water of Thirty Mile'" (Smoke Bellew, p. 153). Against this struggle-tempered giant and others like him, Smoke--a relative newcomer--is given little chance. In the long and dangerous race which ensues, however, they finish together far ahead of the field; Smoke and Big Olaf become

[30]O'Connor, p. 90.

partners in the claim. Bellew has symbolically become the equal of a London old-timer. He has, for all intents and purposes, successfully completed his ritual of struggle-as-initiation.

The unnamed protagonist of "To Build a Fire," on the other hand, fails. London gives two reasons for this failure, the first of which is the lack of what he calls "imagination" and Earle Labor calls "spiritual warmth,"[31] but what might more accurately be termed "insight":

> But all of this--the mysterious, far-reaching hairline trail, the absence of sun from the sky, the tremendous cold, and the strangeness and weirdness of it all--made no impression on the man. It was not because he was long used to it. He was a newcomer in the land, a chechaquo, and this was his first winter. The trouble with him was that he was without imagination. He was quick and alert in the things of life, but only in the things, and not in the significances. Fifty degrees below zero meant eighty-odd degrees of frost. Such fact impressed him as being cold and uncomfortable, and that was all. It did not lead him to meditate upon his frailty as a creature of temperature, and upon man's frailty in general, able only to live within certain narrow limits of heat and cold; and from there on it did not lead him to the conjectural field of immortality and man's place in the universe. Fifty degrees below zero stood for a bite of frost that hurt and must be guarded against by the use of mittens, ear flaps, warm moccasins, and thick socks. Fifty degrees below zero. That there should be anything more to it than that never entered his head.[32]

Sitka Charley, Malemute Kid, and Smoke Bellew all understand that life in the North is a struggle, and they in turn grasp the cosmic "significances" of this struggle. However, only

[31]Earle Gene Labor, ed. Great Short Works of Jack London (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965), Introduction, p. XIV.

[32]Bodley Head, I, pp. 48-49.

the immediate aspects of his journey are apparent to this man: "He was not much given to thinking, and just then particularly he had nothing to think about save that he would eat lunch at the forks and that at six o'clock he would be in camp with the boys" (B. H., I, p. 51). He sees nothing, feels nothing of the White Silence beyond the surface phenomena; it is for this reason, largely, that he perishes in what could have been a journey to wisdom. A man without insight cannot learn the values of the northern struggle, and "those who cannot live up to the moral standards. . . will not survive."[33]

The second shortcoming of this man, stemming in no small part from the first, is his ill-founded confidence in himself and the concomitant disregard for the actions and advice of those who have been involved in the struggle longer than he. Whether it be something relatively minor like not following the example of an old-timer and fashioning a nose-strap to prevent frostbite on his cheeks and nose or something as serious as ignoring advice based on experience and knowledge, this brash individual was guilty of it: "He remembered the advice of the old-timer on Sulphur Creek, and smiled. The old-timer had been very serious in laying down the law that no man must travel alone in the Klondike after fifty below. Well, here he was; he had had the accident; he was alone; and he had saved himself. Those old-timers were rather womanish, some of them, he thought.

[33]Gower, p. 79.

All a man had to do was to keep his head, and he was all right. Any man who was a man could travel alone" (B. H., I, p. 57).

His lack of insight and failure to heed experience based on time and an awareness of the "significances" lead to his downfall. Clell T. Peterson, in "The Theme of Jack London's 'To Build a Fire;'" feels that the man does not change his basic attitude in the story: "He does not even have a moment of illumination as he dies."[34] The fact is that he does "have a moment of illumination" when he eventually realizes that "The old-timer on Sulphur Creek was right. . . . after fifty below, a man should travel with a partner" (B. H., I, p. 60) and even grasps the "significances" of the surface phenomena: "A certain fear of death, dull and oppressive, came to him. This fear quickly became poignant as he realized that it was no longer a mere matter of freezing his fingers and toes, or of losing his hands and feet, but that it was a matter of life . . ." (B. H., I, p. 62). It is, however, too late; Gower points out that man has to recognize "the strength of the White Silence"[35] in order to be successful in the struggle, and this character does so only as he dies. He has dared approach the London Northland with a feeling of impunity and a total lack of awareness of the ramifications of the struggle and is made aware of his "finity" only at the last.

[34]Clell T. Peterson, "The Theme of Jack London's 'To Build a Fire,'" American Book Collector, XVII, #3, November 1966, p. 17.

[35]Gower, p. 77.

In the story, "In a Far Country," alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, two more of London's failures in the struggle are seen. The action begins on another journey, the audacity of which "took away the breath of the hardiest native, born and bred to the vicissitudes of the north-west" (B. H., IV, p. 187) and the adversity of which "lays a man naked to the many roots of his soul, and ere Lake Athabasca was lost in the south, each member of the party had hoisted his true colours" (B. H., IV, p. 188).

Two of these men, Jacques Baptiste and another called only "Sloper," prove to be of the hardy breed of London heroes who set standards and judge people in the author's Klondike. Baptiste "(having raised his first whimpers in a deerskin lodge north of the sixty-fifth parallel, and had the same hushed by blissful sucks of raw tallow)" (B. H., IV, p. 188) and Sloper, past his prime but tempered by adventurous struggle from South America to the Arctic, soon pass judgement on two others, Carter Weatherbee and Percy Cuthfert. Both have broken the commandments of the trail during the early part of the trek: they have shirked both work and their unspoken obligations to others, complained continually and shown general weakness of character.

The journey takes a critical turn due to the approach of winter; the party votes on whether to winter where they are or continue north, and the majority favors continuing on. Here someone asks Baptiste how long the journey would take, to

which he replies, "'Workum like hell, no man play out, ten--twenty-forty-fifty days. Um babies come' [indicating Cuthfert and Weatherbee] 'no can tell. Maybe when hell freeze over; mebbe not then'" (B. H., IV, p. 190). His judgement echoes that of Sloper and the rest of the group.

And, though they do so of their own choice, the two "Incapables" are left behind; it is here that Sloper says to Baptiste:

> 'Jacques Baptiste, did you ever hear of the Kilkenny cats?'
>
> The half-breed shook his head.
>
> 'Well, my friend and good comrade, the Kilkenny cats fought till neither hide, nor hair, nor yowl, was left. You understand?--till nothing was left. Very good. Now, these two men don't like work. They won't work. We know that. They'll be all alone in that cabin all winter--a mighty long dark winter. Kilkenny cats--well?'
>
> The Frenchman in Baptiste shrugged his shoulders, but the Indian in him was silent. Nevertheless, it was an eloquent shrug, pregnant with prophecy (B. H., IV, p. 192).

This judgement against Carter and Weatherbee is carried out against a background fraught with death imagery and upon which they act out the parts cast for them by them in the struggle they have failed. They begin a drama of "complete moral and emotional"[36] debilitation because, as Labor points out, they "lack that 'protean faculty of adaptability'--the capacity to slough off the callus of 'self' along with the specious comforts

[36]Sam S. Baskett, "Jack London's Heart of Darkness," American Quarterly (Spring 1958), p. 69.

of civilization--which is man's most vital protection against the Northland. Their spiritual degeneration, as they succumb to each of the Seven Deadly Sins, is hideously externalized in their physical and social deterioration. Both are hollow man--and dead--even before the pall of White Silence finally covers them."[37] They lack the "essential sense of brotherhood"[38] needed among men in the North in the face of the struggle. They are weak and fail as forecast and understood by Baptiste and Sloper, for "The Northland is the Northland, and men work out their souls by strange rules, which other men, who have not journeyed into far countries, cannot come to understand" (B. H., IV, p. 201).

In Chapter Five of Call of the Wild another group of people fail in their ritual struggles. Buck is bought by two men and a woman fresh from the States; they hitch him to a sled overloaded with unnecessary articles, luxuries like women's clothes, canned goods, and other trappings of civilization, and he is beaten when he and his team-mates can't move it. Eliminating some of their impedimenta after much bickering, they buy more dogs and are on their way. Content with "doing things in style,"[39] they never stop to think that fourteen dogs were never used on a sled because it couldn't hold sufficient

[37]Labor, Great Short Works, p. XV.

[38]Labor, Jack London's Literary Artistry, p. 26.

[39]Jack London, Call of the Wild (New York: Grosset & Dunlap Publishers, 1910), p. 137.

provisions for that many. In a symbolic way, they have already failed in "stripping off the corrupting values of civilization"[40] with their useless gear and show of vanity. This failure to shed "the stiff leather shoe for the soft shapeless moccasin," (B. H., IV, p. 187) the lack of compassion for the animals, and the lack charity for one another bode ill for a trip in London's Klondike.

Other shortcomings become apparent as the journey gets underway: "Buck felt vaguely that there was no depending upon these two men and the woman. They did not know how to do anything, and as the days went by it became apparent that they could not learn. They were slack in all things, without order or discipline" (Call, p. 138). The ability to learn and the necessity of discipline are two prerequisites for success in the North. Lacking these and others, the party begins to degenerate:

> By this time all the amenities and gentlenesses of the Southland had fallen away from the three people. Shorn of its glamour and romance, Arctic travel became to them a reality too harsh for their manhood and womanhood. Mercedes ceased weeping over the dogs, being too occupied with weeping over herself and with quarreling with her husband and brother. To quarrel was the one thing they were never too weary to do. Their irritability arose out of their misery, increased with it, doubled upon it, outdistanced it. The wonderful patience of the trail which comes to men who toil hard and suffer sore, and remain sweet of speech and kindly, did not come to these two men and the woman. They had no inkling of such a patience" (Call, p. 141).

[40]Gower, p. 109.

Stemming from their lack of adaptability, discipline, willpower, and endurance is this loss of what Labor calls "the most vital necessity for survival in the wilderness: the sense of brotherhood. . . ."[41]

The party eventually arrives at John Thornton's camp on the White River, and the men seek advice on the condition of the crossing. Thornton sizes them up immediately: "He knew the breed, and he gave his advice in the certainty that it would not be followed" (Call, p. 150); he tells them that the river is thawing, making crossing hazardous and foolhardy. They had not heeded the counsel of those who told them they wouldn't make it to White River so they confidently ignore his and move to continue.

Thornton continues whittling as they begin to beat their dogs; the team is too exhausted from lack of food and care to move and the beating increases in intensity. Finally he loses his temper at the cruelty and smallness of the action, physically stops it, and cuts the traces from Buck, the lead dog and major recipient of the harsh treatment. The sled moves out without him and, as it crosses the ice, those on the bank hear screams and "a whole section of ice give way and dogs and humans disappear. A yawning hole was all that was left to be seen" (Call, p. 157). The Northland has again claimed those unfit and failing to measure up to the struggle.

[41]Labor, Jack London's Literary Artistry, p. 59.

Strength is a general positive virtue of London's Alaskan characters; it is a value brought out by the myriad struggles against odds which are a part of the North. In Daughter of the Snows, a London protagonist states this to a man whose party has left him by the trail on the way to the Klondike: "'My friend. . . you are as strong as they. You can work just as hard as they; pack as much. But you are weak of heart. This is no place for the weak of heart. You cannot work like a horse because you will not. Therefore the country has no use for you. The north wants strong men,--strong of soul, not body. The body does not count. So go back to the states.'"[42] And most weaklings perish or fail as does the man above; most strong people in London's Northland succeed. However, it is incorrect to assume unequivocally that "Strength is good"[43] as Charles Child Walcutt seems to; to do so is to ignore the concomitant positive values gained in the struggle.

That London expected his characters to illustrate more than strength can be inferred from "The One Thousand Dozen." In this tale the protagonist, David Rasmunsen, displays great strength in a journey into the Klondike. He, however, fails. In a plan to pack in and sell eggs to the citizens of eggless

[42]Jack London, Daughter of the Snows (New York: Grosset & Dunlap Publishers, 1902), p. 38.

[43]American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956), p. 90.

Dawson, he undergoes intense struggle but is not purified. He is successful in that he meets the Spartan requirements of the trip and reaches the city, but he does not ultimately succeed because he is motivated by avarice and is totally self-centered and unscrupulous toward all others, including his wife. McClintock states that "Experience, action, strength, and expertise, although the basic virtues of the code, are not enough, however. Tenderness and love must temper courageous action."[44] Thus there are certain "ethical qualities that belong to strength"[45] which one must attain from the struggle; Rassmunsen does not, and when he reaches Dawson he discovers that all his eggs are bad. He hangs himself. An important facet of London and of the Northland world he created, overlooked by most critics and historians, is that "true manhood is defined not only through strength, but through generosity, control and compassion."[46]

> "Doctor--I don't know who made this world, but I believe I could make a damn sight better one myself!"
> (Jack London, quoted by Charmian from a remark made by Jack on the way out of Alaska)

[44] McClintock, p. 87. Only the McClintock paper, of all the research done for this work, pointed this up.

[45] Gower, p. 110. Gower speaks specifically of "honesty" and "loyalty."

[46] McClintock, pp. 87-88.

The London Klondike

What is London looking for in his Klondike? McClintock contends that it is the frontier, that London "was not ready to admit that the frontier spirit had lost its vitality" and that he saw it as a place "where a man could find the self-identifying and self-sustaining values that assured him of his nobility."[47] He further feels that the author was disillusioned with the American Dream[48] as he had found it, but used it as a basis for his protagonists in the world he created: "The operative values. . . are straight from the American Dream: The belief in the power of the human will, the legendary American common sense and ingenuity, and integrity and love and that these potent virtues are capable of affirming the dignity to the individual and restoring a humane order to human affairs."[49]

Labor makes much of London's imposition of order and feels that in his world:

> A certain cosmic orderliness nevertheless prevails in the harsh, immutable laws of this wilderness. Those who survive are made better because of their adaption to its laws; those who are weak in physical or moral character do not survive. . . . Men are drawn together in a closer bond of sympathy and brotherhood because such qualities are essential to survival, as are courage, honesty, and selflessness. The outer cold of the arctic world stimulates an inner warmth of companionship

[47] McClintock, p. 64.

[48] Ibid., p. 62.

[49] Ibid., p. 106.

> among the men who brave its hardships. And always the stern, terrible god of the White Silence is present to punish and correct those who violate his code. Finally, the man who is to endure the long arctic winter must be exceptionally gifted in that highest of faculties--imagination: he must understand the ways of the Northland so sympathetically that he can anticipate its emergencies before they occur, always adapting himself to nature's laws, never attempting foolishly to impose the frail, devious customs of society and civilization upon the inviolable wilderness.[50]

The need for order in London stems not only from the world as he found it, but also from his own personality as indicated in a letter from Anna Strunsky (with whom London co-authored the Kempton-Wace Letters) to Charmian London: "'He systematized his life. Such colossal energy, and yet he could not trust himself! He lived by rule. Law, Order and Restraint was [sic] the creed of this vital, passionate youth.'"[51]

The London value system, says McClintock, "is an artificial, sometimes inhumane, order imposed upon the rationally unknowable cosmic condition and replaces, in London's fiction, individual, logical comprehension of an orderly universe."[52] It is a moral system which can be imposed on his world, feels Gower, because of the nature of the environment: "the greater its harshness and enmity to life, the more necessary are those moral qualities to the living, struggling creature: failure

[50]Earl Gene Labor, "Jack London's Symbolic Wilderness: Four Versions," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 17 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), pp. 151-152.

[51]Charmian London, I, p. 367.

[52]McClintock, p. 122.

of morality means death in the Northland."[53] The struggle ritual in London's fiction "serves not only as the initiatory rite into manhood. . . but also as symbolic means of getting control over and imposing momentary order upon the otherwise overwhelming and chaotic forces of the cosmos."[54]

Struggle is the constant of London's life and world. Through adversity, man is purified, imposes some order on that around him and attains a system of values which makes this order possible. Failing the struggle and thus lacking this perfected state and this control, man fails and all is chaos. The Northland and its inherent struggle provide the simplicity London sought: it "is the uncharted land of the spirit where man seeks his identity by facing death, by participating in life's essential contest for preservation of meaningful selfhood. It is not merely the place to escape from civilization; instead, it is the place where men could confront the essential facts of life (actuality) and undertake a romantic quest for identity (ideals)."[55] This, then, is what London is looking for in his Klondike.

[53]Gower, p. 73.

[54]Labor, Jack London's Literary Artistry, p. 12.

[55]McClintock, p. 68.

Chapter Three

Regeneration and Fulfillment--
Additional Aspects of the Klondike Struggle

The struggles of existence in the London Klondike are, as has been shown, the focal point of a ritualistic process of attaining an ideal system of values. They also serve in some instances as a source of regeneration and rejuvenation, as, for instance, in "Argus of the Ancient Times," and as an ideal level of fulfillment in themselves, as in The Call of the Wild, two other facets of the author's concept of life as struggle. Both aspects and their accompanying rituals serve basically--as with most London struggle ritual--as positive acts resulting in the attainment of a certain amount of power and control in the lives of the characters involved.

> "With unshed tears in the patient gray eyes, he had even begged Jack to take him along; he could go into Alaska on a sled as well as not--'Why, if you could only get me up there in the shows, Jack, I'd get strong right off.'" (Charmian London of John London)

As Regeneration

"Argus of the Ancient Times" was written in the year London died, an interesting point in view of the fact that it deals with impotence and struggle as regeneration. In this

story, John Tarwater, a California septuagenerian, sets out on the romantic path to adventure and struggle in the goldfields of the Northland.

The initial part of the tale describes Tarwater as a former pioneer and miner who has become a figure of impotence in his old age. He had left his homestead in Michigan in 1849 at the age of twenty-two, heading west to California and facing the adversities of the continental crossing and of life in the new land. Much like Smoke Bellew's uncle, he delights in telling of his experiences in the younger America: "And Bill Ping and me used to rope grizzlies out of the underbrush of Cache Slough in the Sacramento Valley."[1]

When Tarwater decides to head north in hopes of finding enough gold to buy back his California lands, his idea is discounted by his family as a symptom of senility. He is told by his daughter that "'The time's past for you to cut and run for a place like the Klondike'" (B. H., IV, p. 206), to which his son later adds, "'Them times is past, like roping bear with Bill Ping. There ain't no more bear'" (B. H., IV, p. 206). They show him a newspaper and tell him: "'What do those Klondikers say? There it is in cold print. Only the young and robust will stand the Klondike. It's worse than the north pole. And they've left their dead a-plenty there themselves.

[1]B. H., IV, p. 205. All subsequent references to the above story will be from this text and will be noted in the body of the paper.

Look at their pictures. You're forty years older'n the oldest of them'" (B. H., IV, p. 207). But the old man sees only the dream, a dream born of the struggles of his youth: "'Now if I was only in the Klondike--'" (B. H., IV, p. 207).

Never a man content to sit and dream, John Tarwater acts and soon finds himself on Dyea Beach, as "the sub-arctic winter gloomed near at hand. All knew it, and all knew that of the twenty thousand of them very few would get across the passes, leaving the rest to winter and wait for the late spring thaw" (B. H., IV, pp. 208-209). At Dyea, he joins four other men--Anson, Wilson, Crayton, and Liverpool--for the trip in.

At this point fact once again joins fiction in a London narrative. The character of Tarwater stems in no small part from an elderly miner who joined London and his party in Alaska; the other four characters are loosely based on the author and his partners. Liverpool, the sailor, is, of course, London. The section of the narrative in which the old man is with the party is another instance of London utilizing the struggles of his own Alaskan experience, with imagination playing a key role in the characterization.[2]

The spirit of Tarwater, the drive that makes him a "doer," is illustrated when he first joins the group and tells them that "'I set out for Californy and I got there. And I'm going to get to Klondike. Ain't a thing can stop me, ain't

[2]Walker, p. 65. See also pp. 232-234.

a thing. I'm going to get three hundred thousand outa the ground, too. Ain't a thing can stop me, ain't a thing. . .'" (B. H., IV, p. 212).

And it is with this spirit that he enters full force into the struggle:

> Old John Tarwater became a striking figure on a trail unusually replete with striking figures. With thousands of men, each back-tripping half a ton of outfit, retracing every mile of the trail twenty times, all came to know him and hail him as "Father Christmas . . . ." None of the three men he had joined could complain about his work. True, his joints were stiff--he admitted to a trifle of rheumatism. He moved slowly, and seemed to creak and crackle when he moved; but he kept on moving. Last into the blankets at night; he was first out in the morning, so that the other three had hot coffee before their one before-breakfast pack. And, between breakfast and dinner and between dinner and supper, he always managed to back-trip for several packs himself. . . .
> Work! On the trail where hard-working men learned for the first time what work was, no man worked harder in proportion to his strength than Old Tarwater. Driven desparately on by the near-thrust of winter, and lured madly on by the dream of gold, they worked to their last ounce of strength and fell by the way. Others, when failure made certain [sic] , blew out their brains. Some went mad, and still others, under the irk of the man-destroying strain, broke partnerships and dissolved life-time friendships with fellows just as good as themselves and just as tired and mad.
> Work! Old Tarwater could shame them all, despite his creaking and crackling. . . (B. H., IV, p. 213).

And so it goes in the struggle where "Men broke their hearts and backs and wept beside the trail in pure exhaustion. But winter never faltered" (B. H., IV, p. 216).

Eventually, age catches up with the old man and he takes cold. The group has been working around the clock building its boat, and the five men are ready to cross Lake Linderman.

At this point, Liverpool takes Tarwater aside, telling him that he has found a buyer for the old man's place in the boat; Tarwater can sell it and use the proceeds for the return trip to California. To this offer, the wheezing man replies, "'Son". . . .'I just want to tell you one thing. I drove my four yoke of oxen across the Plains in Forty-Nine and lost nary a one. I drove them plumb to Californy, and I freighted with them afterward out of Sutter's Fort to American Bar. Now I'm going to Klondike. Ain't nothing can stop me, ain't nothing at all'" (B. H., IV, p. 218). To which the other says, "'By God, dad!'. . . 'You're sure going to go then. You're the real stuff.'. . . . 'They don't seem to make your kind any more, Dad'" (B. H., IV, p. 218).

They begin the journey and move on through to Lake LeBarge, where their attempts to cross are rebuffed three times in succession by an arctic storm. Finally, in a last terrible struggle, they advance through the night to the far shore.

At this point, the party separates. Crayton, the business manager for the party and the only member to harbor ill will against Tarwater, informs the Committee of Safety of the old man's age and his lack of outfit and grub, all of which is sufficient to make the elderly stampeder a persona non grata in starving Dawson. He is rounded up and taken with a boatload of fellow indigents on barges to Fort Yukon, where the food supply boats are frozen in. Here Tarwater goes to

work chopping wood for the shipping firm. Fortified with the spirit of earlier struggles, he has faced the initial adversity of the north and survived.

Scrounging up a rifle and some traps, the old man quits the wood-chopping job and begins to trap and hunt in an attempt not only to support himself, but also to exercise away the effects of scurvy. One day while running his traps Tarwater quite accidentally finds himself at the mercy of the North in what is to prove a ritual of regeneration.

Discovering that a large animal has stepped in one of his traps and run off with it, the old man gives chase, following the creature's tracks in the snow. A sudden snow storm occurs, and Tarwater not only loses the tracks, but also becomes lost himself. He does not panic, as he is well equipped and has managed to kill a large moose. However time, his illness, and the intense cold combine to effect a semi-comatose state and the elderly trapper enters into what is essentially hibernation, a half-dream world of the unconscious:

> . . . in the vast and silent loneliness of the North, Old Tarwater, as in the delirium of drug or anaesthetic, recovered, within himself, the infantile mind of the child-man of the early world. It was in the dusk of Death's fluttery wings that Tarwater thus crouched, and, like his remote forbear, the child-man, went to myth-making, and sun-heroizing, himself hero-maker and the hero in quest of the immemorable treasure difficult of attainment.
> Either must he attain the treasure--for so ran the inexorable logic of the shadowland of the unconscious--or else sink into the all-devouring sea, the blackness water of the light that swallowed to extinction the sun each night. . . the sun that arose ever in rebirth

> next morning in the east, and that had become to man man's first symbol of immortality through rebirth. All this, in the deeps of his unconsciousness (the shadowy western land of descending light), was the near dusk of Death down into which he slowly ebbed (B. H., IV, pp. 225-226).

Like Sitka Charley, Tarwater is involved in struggle to live, the basic fact of life in London's North; like the Indian, he too is undergoing a spiritual experience. He is startled back to his senses by the snort of a wounded moose which stumbles into his fire; the old man moves slowly, warming his frost-numbed fingers in his armpit, raises his rifle and fires: "At the shot, of the two shadow-wanderers, the one reeled downward to the dark and the other reeled upward to the light. . . ." (B. H., IV, p. 227). Tarwater, with this act, completes a ritual of symbolic death and rebirth.

Thus the old man enters once again the world of reality, the world of seventy-five degrees below zero: "Slowly Tarwater's brain reasoned to action. Here, in the vast alone, dwelt Death. Here had come two wounded moose. With the clearing of the sky after the great cold came on, he had located his bearings, and he knew that both wounded moose had trailed to him from the east. Therefore, in the east, were men. . ." (B. H., IV, p. 227). Heeding the life symbolism revealed to him in his murky vision, the old man has survived the struggle with death. Tarwater begins to travel, packing meat from the moose he has just killed: "Then, an Argus rejuvenated, albeit lame of both legs and tottery, he

turned his back on the perilous west and limped into the sun-arising, re-birthing east. . ."(B. H., IV, p. 227). That London is equating the struggle with life and regeneration is made evident by this passage.

Tarwater's journey to the east brings him to a mining settlement, the inhabitants of which have been cut off from the outside world so long they are unaware of the Klondike gold strike. The attitude they take toward the old man is a marked contrast to those of the always semi-hostile Crayton and the Tarwater family: "They hailed the advent of Tarwater with joy, never tired of listening to his tales of Forty-Nine, and rechristened him Old Hero. Also, with tea made from spruce needles, with concoctions brewed from the inner willow bark, and with sour and bitter roots and bulbs from the ground, they dosed his scurvy out of him, so that he ceased limping and began to lay on flesh over his bony framework. Further, they saw no reason at all why he should not gather a rich treasure of gold from the ground" (B. H., IV, pp. 228-229). Tarwater has ceased to be a figure of impotence and man and spirit receive the respect due those tempered by struggle; the contrast between his treatment here and earlier in the Klondike to that received from his offspring underlines this essential fact.

And gather gold Tarwater does, taking it from grassroots in a claim staked for him by the miners and eventually selling his property to a mining company for a half-million dollars.

The gold Tarwater sets out determined to find is in a symbolic sense the vanished America of simple virtues and great struggles. His object in seeking the gold is to buy back his California land, in itself symbolic of all he was and all he had done crossing the prairie and roping grizzlies with Bill Ping.

Interestingly enough, Tarwater is depicted throughout the story as a life source, a positive and vital entity, only when involved in--or as the result of--struggle. References are made to the Tarwater Mill, which as a young pioneer he constructed to feed local Californians. In Alaska, he saves Anson from drowning and on the trip in is constantly shown cooking food or keeping the fire for the others. Those packing over the Chilkoot to Lake Linderman stop to rest and listen to his song of Forty-Nine, calling it "real heartening" (B. H., IV, p. 214) and moving on revitalized physically and spiritually. Any affirming value the old man has is related directly to the struggle. His treatment as a liability and as a senile figure of powerlessness at the hands of his family occurs when he is not actively involved with it, and ceases upon his return when he has been rejuvenated by adversity.

This and concomitant aspects of the tale are brought out on the voyage home as Crayton--the business manager of the earlier party and the old man's betrayer--is serving as a steward to earn his passage back, "greyish-haired, pain-ravaged of face, scurvy-twisted of body" (B. H., IV, p. 230).

The physical contrast of the much younger man to the vital septuagenarian is reinforced by the spiritual contrast, as the benevolent Tarwater pays Crayton's passage and offers him work on the ranch when they reach California, telling him: "'Sure, son, you done your best, which ain't much, you being naturally irritable and hard from too much business'" (B. H., IV, p. 230). When Crayton offers to manage his business affairs, Tarwater tells him, "'No, siree,'. . . . 'But there'e always post-holes to dig, and cordwood to chop, and the climate's fine. . .'"(B. H., IV, p. 230).

It is a romantic message and John Tarwater, its carrier, is for all intents and purposes the lost spirit of America--London's lost America. His being and his actions serve to illustrate the author's belief that the source of life (all that is positive) and rebirth lies not in modern society but in the aforementioned great struggles and simple virtues of the primitive American past. With character as with creator, struggle is the only hope of escaping impotence in the twentieth century.

". . . it got away from me. . ."
(Jack London of Call in a letter to his publisher)

Struggle as Fulfillment

Another facet of the theme of struggle in London's fiction is that of fulfillment. Of all his Klondike heroes and their

stories, the most satisfactory and believable climax appears in The Call of the Wild. The dog Buck undergoes a long ritual of initiation, eventually assuming--as much as is possible for an animal--the status of such heroes as Sitka Charley and the Malemute Kid. He, however, is taken a step further and realizes total fulfillment in the struggle.

The fact that The Call of the Wild is, as Van Wyck Brooks writes in The Confident Years, "Jack London's story symbolically told"[3] was lost on the author; Joan London remarks that "even when it grew to more than thirty thousand words he still believed that he was writing merely the experiences of a dog in the Klondike."[4] That the book was in reality "written directly from his unconscious"[5] is attested to by London's statement, when asked of the allegory and symbol inherent in his greatest work, that "I plead guilty, but I was unconscious of it at the time. I did not mean to do it."[6] The significance of this will become apparent later on in this paper.

Buck first appears living "the life of a sated aristocrat"[7] on the country estate of a wealthy Californian. His

[3]Brooks, p. 232.

[4]Joan London, p. 252.

[5]Brooks, p. 232.

[6]Joan London, p. 252.

[7]London, The Call of the Wild, p. 18. All subsequent references taken from this source will utilize the same text noted earlier and will appear with the text of the paper as "London, Call, p. xx."

is a princely dignity, and he assumes the respectful treatment of all men; when he is stolen and sold to a dog-buyer for shipment to the Klondike, his initial reaction is mild, based as it is on the trust born of his coddled experience.

The dog's imperial self-esteem is soon violated as he undergoes taunting, rough treatment, and the impotence of caged life. He snaps in vain at his tormentors through the bars until taken from the cage, snarling, and beaten into submission by a man with a club, "his introduction to the reign of primitive law. . ." (London, Call, p. 32.). This becomes, when the animal capitulates, what Earl Labor calls "his first test: that of adaptability."[8]

And things get no better for Buck when he reaches Dyea Beach, "suddenly jerked from the heart of civilization and flung into the heart of things primordial" (London, Call, p. 43). Life as he knew it in the Southland has ceased to be; gone is the order, gentleness, and respect he had known then: "Here was neither peace, nor rest, nor a moment's safety. All was confusion and action, and every moment life and limb was in peril. There was imperative need to be constantly alert; for these dogs and men were not town dogs and men. They were savages, all of them, who knew no law but the law of club and fang" (London, Call, p. 43). Buck's ritual journey began with the lesson of misplaced trust and that of the

[8]Labor, Jack London's Literary Artistry, p. 54.

club, and it will continue throughout the Northland and its many struggles and attendant lessons. It is to be a journey to individual fulfillment in what Kenneth S. Lynn calls, symbolically speaking, "the vanished American past. . . ."[9]

Immediately upon reaching Alaska, Buck is sold and soon introduced to traces as a sled dog for the mail service: "Though his dignity was sorely hurt by thus being made a draught animal, he was too wise to rebel. He buckled down with a will and did his best, though it was all new and strange" (London, Call, p. 46). As Buck begins to grow wise in the ways of his creator's Northland, one of the drivers, a half-breed named Francois, remarks, "'Dat Buck for sure queek as anyt'ing'" (London, Call, p. 52). And through it all, London's dog hero "watched and learned" (London, Call, p. 59), continually "drawing upon qualities of courage and hardihood."[10]

One day, Buck--always hungry--observed one of his teammates steal a slice of bacon from the drivers' supply; the next day he himself stole the entire piece. The narrator says of this that "This first theft marked Buck as fit to survive in the hostile Northland environment. It marked. . . his capacity to adjust himself to changing conditions, the lack of which would have meant swift and terrible death. It marked,

[9]Kenneth Schuyler Lynn, The Dream of Success (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1955), p. 91.

[10]Charles Child Walcutt, Jack London, "Pamphlets on American Writers," (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), p. 21.

further, the decay or going to pieces of his moral nature, a vain thing and a handicap in the ruthless struggle. . ." (London, Call, p. 59). The Van Dorens refer to London's own efforts to adjust to the North, saying he felt he could only survive the struggle if he utilized "every trick. . . he had,"[11] while Gower calls this ability to shed "the veneer of civilization" part of the "moral rules" of London's Alaska.[12] As in the opening passages of "In a Far Country" alluded to in the last chapter, the author is here referring to the absolute imperative to shed civilized conventions and pretty ways in the North, heeding instead the primary morality of necessity dictated by the frigid struggle. Buck essentially begins this process when he steals the bacon, and London "persuades the reader to admire him"[13] for so doing.

The inner tempering of Buck is accompanied by a physical toughening as "His muscles became hard as iron, and he grew callous to all ordinary pain" and his "sight and scent became remarkably keen, while his hearing developed such acuteness that in his sleep he heard the faintest sound and knew whether it heralded peace or peril" (London, Call, p. 61). Buck is, like London before him, adapting to the demands of the struggle, profiting from the daily toil and harshness

[11]Carl and Mark Van Doren, American and British Literature Since 1890 (New York: The Chataqua Press, 1926), p. 51.

[12]Gower, p. 78.

[13]Floyd Stovall, American Idealism (Port Washington: The Kennikat Press, Inc., 1965), p. 131.

around him and gaining both composure and control in the process.

The trek inland is rugged, and the day the team covers the worst part of the trail, the dogs are wounded and sore after a sleepless night when the camp was attacked by a pack of hungry and half-wild Indian dogs. This portion of the journey consists of only thirty miles, but "every foot of them was accomplished at the risk of life to dog and man" (London, Call, p. 74). Both dogs and drivers break through the thin ice of Thirty Mile River many times; one day they make only a quarter-mile of progress--that at a terrible effort on the part of all. When they reach sound trail, all are exhausted but must push on to make up for lost time.

Through it all, Buck gives his all and grows. The team leader, a bellicose old veteran of the North named Spitz, begins to feel in Buck a threat to his leadership: "And strange Buck was to him, for of the many Southland dogs he had known, not one had shown up worthily in camp or on trail. They were all too soft, dying under the toil, the frost, and starvation. Buck was the exception. He alone endured and prospered, matching the husky in strength. . . and cunning" (London, Call, pp. 79-80). The jealousy festers, fed by overt acts of insubordination by the newcomer and continued bullying by the leader. Finally, the inevitable occurs and they fight; in a long and bloody struggle, Buck--utilizing his superior intellect ("imagination," p. 97) and breaking Spitz

down, leg by leg--emerges triumphant.[14]

Then "Buck took up the duties of leadership; and where judgement was required, and quick thinking and quick acting, he showed himself the superior even of Spitz, of whom Francois had never seen an equal" (London, Call, p. 107). And "it was in giving the law and making his mates live up to it, that Buck excelled" (London, Call, p. 107). He has, like his human counterparts in the London world, faced the struggle, gained strength and cunning in the process, and risen to the status of law-giver, a furry dispenser of the law of necessity to lesser creatures.

And under Buck's leadership the team works as it had never worked before. On the return leg of their journey, they make a record run. After another harrowing trek back to Dawson and out again, however, the dogs become debilitated from the terrible toil and must have rest, and the couriers sell the team. It is at this juncture in his career that Buck passes into the ownership of the ill-fated party of chechaquos discussed in Chapter Two of this paper; and it is, as has been seen, from their ownership and abuse that he is finally delivered by John Thornton, whom O'Connor calls "the only decent human in the book."[15]

[14]Jaher, in Doubters and Dissenters, p. 203, remarks that Buck "attains Manhood through physical battle. . .", a statement indicative of the relationship of the dog to his creator in the eyes of many critics.

[15]O'Connor, p. 74.

Having endured struggles representing essentially the initiation rituals of all London's human heroes, Buck has like them learned and grown to completion and the status of law-giver. Like some of them, he finds love--though not of the romantic type which his creator could never quite bring off believably with his human characters. The love Buck finds is the all-encompassing goodness of Thornton, a virtue stemming from the man's "kindliness and largeness": "Love, genuine passionate love, was his for the first time. This he had never experienced at Judge Miller's down in the sun-kissed Santa Clara Valley. With the Judge's sons, hunting and tramping, it had been a working partnership; with the Judge's grandsons, a sort of pompous guardianship; and with the Judge himself, a stately and dignified friendship. But love that was feverish and burning, that was adoration, that was madness, it had taken John Thornton to arouse" (London, Call, p. 163).

And it was this driving force that motivated an intense level of faithfulness and selflessness in Buck, causing "the subordination of strength and courage to kindness and love . . . ."[16] In the days that follow his rejuvenation at the hands of Thornton,[17] Buck repays his diety by almost killing

[16]Walcutt, Jack London, p. 21.

[17]Labor refers, not unsignificantly, to Thornton as "the high priest of lovingkindness." (See p. 61 of Jack London's Literary Artistry.)

a man who jumps Thornton in a Dawson saloon, by saving him from drowning, and by winning sixteen hundred dollars in an idle bet, pulling a sled loaded with one thousand pounds of flour.

It is with this latter act that Buck "made it possible for his master to pay off certain debts and to journey with his partners into the East after a fabled lost mine, the history of which was as old as the history of the country. Many men had sought it; few had found it; and more than a few there were who had never returned from the quest. This lost mine was steeped in tragedy and shrouded in mystery" (London, Call, p. 193). The import of this dramatic introduction to the section emphasizes quest, and it is in this section that Buck achieves fulfillment. And as it was previously with John Tarwater, the east is once again the source of life.

The quest takes them through two years of wandering in the Northland and eventually to an edenic valley where the men find their gold and Buck finds an ultimate satisfaction denied most London characters.

Throughout The Call of the Wild, the author has made allusions to the dog's dreaming of a pre-historic existence with an early form of man. This is the inception of his "call of the wild," which Walcutt says, "represents the yearning toward freedom and purity. . . ."[18] As it progresses, the

[18]Walcutt, Jack London, p. 21.

narrator states that, "He linked the past with the present, and the eternity behind him throbbed through him in a mighty rhythm to which he swayed as the tides and seasons swayed" (London, Call, p. 168). The effect becomes so powerful "that each day mankind and the claims of mankind slipped further from him. Deep in the forest a call was sounding, and as often as he heard this call, mysteriously thrilling and luring, he felt compelled to turn his back upon the fire and the beaten earth around it, and to plunge into the forest, and on and on, he knew not where or why. . ." (London, Call, pp. 168-171. Through the narrative is continuous, pp. 169 and 170 are missing in this edition). Only the love for John Thornton retained in Buck an allegiance to the civilized.

That this other existence is itself marked by great struggle is apparent; the narrator says, "The salient thing of this other world seemed fear" (London, Call, p. 198). At another point this harshness is alluded to again when Buck answers the call of a timber wolf; the animal he finds is described as being in "poor condition" (London, Call, p. 203) compared to the dog.

As Buck draws closer to the wild, he begins to hunt his own game, not purely out of necessity but largely out of the instinct that prevails over him while he is on his increasingly longer sojourns into the woods. He begins with small game and ptarmigan, but as his stays in the forest become longer, he kills larger game. At one point, he harries an

arrow-wounded bull moose for four days, kills the huge animal, and lives off his quarry for twenty-four hours.

Returning after this long foray, Buck senses something amiss as he approaches the camp. A band of Indians, Yeehats, has attacked and killed all the men and dogs. Seeing this, Buck ferociously assaults the Indians, wreaking a terrible vengeance as he smashes, rips, and tears his way through the shocked band; as they recover their senses and begin to run, he chases and drags them down as he would animals.

The significance of Thornton's death is two-fold: it takes Buck a step further than other London heroes by removing a love source, and it also irrevocably dissolves the animal's sole remaining tie to civilization. Labor feels that the death is necessary, as Thornton has fulfilled his function of "great guide"[19] after he leads the hero to the valley. In avenging it, Buck furthermore "had killed man, the noblest game of all, and he had killed in the face of the law of club and fang" (London, Call, p. 223); this marks the ultimate point in his shedding the codes of civilization, a process which began with Buck's stealing Francois' bacon. The death and Buck's revenge leave him free to answer the call.

Whatever his motivation, Buck has sought the greater struggles of the wild state; the life of the "call" is markedly contrasted with the idyllic existence of life in the

[19]Labor, Jack London's Literary Artistry, p. 63.

camp, but it has attracted him more and more. As he has moved away from civilized life and its values, he has become stronger and finally the strongest of the strong when he kills man. He now turns his life on that life and those values, and enters fully the life of the primitive--the life of struggle and of fulfillment in that struggle:

> There is an ecstasy in life that marks the summit of life, and beyond which life cannot rise. And such is the paradox of living, this ecstasy comes when one is most alive, and it comes as a complete forgetfulness that one is alive. This ecstasy, this forgetfulness of living comes to the artist, caught up and out of himself in a sheet of flame; it comes to the soldier, war-mad on a stricken field and refusing quarter; and it came to Buck, leading the pack, sounding the old wolf-cry, straining after the food that was alive and that fled swiftly before him through the moonlight. He was sounding the deeps of his nature, and of the parts of his nature that were deeper than he, going back into the womb of Time. He was mastered by the sheer surging of life, and the tidal wave of being, the perfect joy of each separate muscle, joint, and sinew in that it was everything that was not death, that it was aglow and rampant, expressing itself in movement, flying exultantly under the stars and over the face of dead matter that did not move (London, Call, p. 91).

It is this escape that represents a fulfillment achieved by few if any other characters in London's Klondike; Buck enters into nature in a manner impossible for a human,[20] totally breaking any ties to society.[21] Gordon H. Mills, in "The Symbolic Wilderness: James Fenimore Cooper and Jack London," says that this total regression represents the only

[20]Clell T. Peterson, "Jack London's Alaskan Stories," American Book Collector, v. 9, 8 (April 1959), p. 22.

[21]Ibid., p. 21.

fulfillment available in the author's wilderness as depicted in the Alaskan stories.[22] Walcutt remarks that, "Since perfect escape is inhuman, it is not so extraordinary that his hero should be a dog."[23] And that London's story of Buck, "the story of his own fierce struggle,"[24] is a story of excape is--as will be seen in Chapter Four--a tragedy; yet its success stands as testimony to a need in both country and author.

[22]Gordon H. Mills, "The Symbolic Wilderness: James Fenimore Cooper and Jack London," Nineteenth Century Fiction (March 1959), p. 335.

[23]Walcutt, Jack London, p. 22.

[24]Joan London, p. 253.

Chapter Four:

Struggle as Futility

> "A long life deprives a man of his optimism. A short life is much better." (Ernest Hemingway)

In this chapter, the recurrent element of futility in London's fiction will be dealt with; this will round out with struggle as futility the consideration here of facets of the author's use of the struggle theme in the Klondike. Two tales, "An Odyssey of the North" and "Love of Life," will be utilized to this end. In the former can be seen both the inability of the London oracle to interpret his world and also the failure of a man following a history of struggle in which he exemplifies the basic rudiments of the London value system. "Love of Life," equally pessimistic, deals with a strong man who survives a terrible struggle at the expense of his humanity.

"An Odyssey of the North" is another Malemute Kid story, though the Kid is not a principal protagonist. It involves a man named Naass, dubbed Ulysses by Malemute, who sets out on an odyssey in pursuit of his stolen wife. Naass first appears as one of many men of the North who are spending a cold winter night in the cabin of Stanley Prince and the Malemute Kid. He attracts attention because his odd appearance and taciturn demeanor, both of which make it difficult to put him into any of

the distinct categories of men within the cabin. From the beginning he is a figure of mystery, an enigma that only he can elucidate.

He does so later on in the story, and the puzzle discovers itself in a wierd tale of great struggle and great loss--Naass' odyssey of the north. This comes about one night as Prince and the Kid are playing chess and hear a knock on their cabin door. It opens and a figure stumbles in, its appearance such that the startled Prince reaches for his revolver. After the initial shock and an attempted interrogation of the frostbitten and delirious being, the two realize it is "Ulysses." He passes out from exhaustion and starvation, and upon awakening begins his narrative.

Naass was born on Akatan, a remote Aleutian island. He is the son of a chief and later becomes the chief of his people. He courts and eventually marries Unga, daughter of a family with which Naass' people had been involved in a feud. On their wedding day, Axel Gunderson, "'with the mane of the sea lion. . . , so tall and strong that one looked to see the earth shake with the fall of his feet,'"[1] and the crew of his schooner land on the island to repair their ship. Deluded by the apparent friendliness of the white seamen, Naass invites them to partake of the festivities. They do so, Gundersson

[1]Bodley Head, IV, p. 123. All subsequent references to this story will be from this source. Notations will appear in the text of the paper as "B. H., IV, p. xx."

the while eyeing Unga. That evening, the wedding night, he goes to Naass' dwelling and in an apparent gesture of friendship, gets the credulous youth drunk. The big intruder attempts to barter for the bride, then makes known his intent to leave and take her with him; a scuffle ensues, and the drunken Naass is thrown against the wall and dazed. Gunderson departs with the resisting Unga, laughing as he does so "'with a sound like that of the big bull seal in rut'" (B. H., IV, p. 124). In this incident is the inception of Naass' odyssey: the beginning of worldly knowledge ("'You see, I was only a stripling, and had lived all my days on the edge of the world'"--B. H., IV, p. 123) as he realizes the deception and nefarious intent; and the beginning of the quest for the bride of his unconsummated marriage.

Naass leaves Akatan in search of Unga, significantly pointing his kayak east as he does so. In the following days, Naass continues, "I saw many islands and many people, and I, who had lived on the edge, saw that the world was very large'" (B. H., IV, p. 124). That his quest is also to be a journey to wisdom becomes increasingly obvious as the "stripling" chief of Akatan continues "'to the east, with the world growing ever larger. . .'" (B. H., IV, p. 124).

Naass finds work loading a ship with ore and signs on as a deckhand when the heavily laden schooner departs. He hopes to find Gunderson in the white man's land; the immensity of his task begins to dawn on him when the ship pulls into port.

Expecting to locate his quarry by the simple device of asking bystanders of the big man's whereabouts, he is confronted with the sight of many ships and multitudes of people from many nations. He proceeds on across the United States and the world continues to open up before him: "'And all the while my people of Akatan hunted and fished, and were happy in the thought that the world was small'" (B. H., IV, p. 125). His original ignorance is becoming apparent to Naass as he moves on, driven always by a vision of the beautiful Unga.

Naass' search carries him again to the sea, where he sails on sealing ships north to the Pribiloffs and eventually to the islands of Japan. Always just ahead of him are Gunderson and Unga. The striking couple leaves distinct impressions everywhere, so Naass' task is becoming easier. In a bit of foreshadowing that later proves ironic in its note of deluded hope, the questor says, "'She had learned the ways of his people, they said, and was happy. But I knew better--knew that her heart harked back to her own people by the yellow beach of Akatan'" (B. H., IV, p. 126).

Later, while poaching seal in Russian waters, Naass' ship is pursued by a Russian warship. At this moment, he sights Gunderson and Unga on another sealing schooner, itself under attack by the Russian vessel. Gunderson's ship escapes, but Naass' does not fare as well. The ship is captured and the crew sent to the salt mines of Siberia, where "'some died, and--and some did not die'" (B. H., IV, p. 128). At this

point, Naass bares his back to his listeners, and the terrible whip-scars there emphasize the ordeal he has endured.

Eventually, he and some of the other prisoners overcome the guards and escape. Observing that all previous escapees have headed south and subsequently been recaptured, Naass and his party turn north: "'And the land was very large, with plains, soggy with water, and great forests. And the cold came, with much snow on the ground, and no man knew the way. Weary months we journeyed through the endless forest--I do not remember, now, for there was little food and often we lay down to die'" (B. H., IV, p. 128). But Naass endures, survives, and returns to the States to continue the hunt. The Siberian internment and the struggle of the escape are but episodes in his epic chronicle of struggle.

The increasing wisdom and knowledge Naass has attained in his search is still at this point controlled by the hope in his heart: "'I journeyed far, and came to know many things, even to the way of reading and writing from books. It is well I should do this, for it came upon me that Unga must know these things, and that someday, when the time was met--we--you understand, when the time was met'" (B. H., IV, p. 129). This passage is the first instance that Naass relates the two aspects of his odyssey to one another; the fact that the one--knowledge--may preclude attaining the other--life on Akatan with Unga--does not occur to him.

However, his hope is once again justified as he hears

from a newly-returned miner that Gunderson and Unga are in the Northland, where they have discovered gold. Naass sets out anew and locates their house ("'like a palace. . .'"--B. H., IV, p. 129) in Alaska, only to be told that they have gone to England. He follows the two to England and eventually through Europe until--hearing that they had lost their wealth--he returns to Alaska, knowing they will return to seek more gold. There, after years of Sisyphean struggle motivated by obstinate hope, he finds the two.

The effect of time on Naass and Unga is emphasized when he is hired by the couple as a sled-driver: "'She did not know me, for I was only a stripling, and her life had been large, so she had no time to remember. . .'" (B. H., IV. p. 130). And he proceeds to effect the realization of his quest. Naass continues, saying, "'I had it in my mind to do my own way, for I read back in my life, through all I had seen and suffered, and remembered the cold and hunger of the endless forest by the Russian seas. . . . I led him into the east--him and Unga--into the east where many have gone and few returned. I led them to the spot where the bones and the curses of men lie with the gold which they may not have'" (B. H., IV, p. 130). That this is not to be a journey to fulfillment and self-realization is significant in light of London's standard symbolic use of the east for these ends as seen earlier in this paper. A supreme irony exists in that it was originally in journeying to the east that Naass gained the

knowledge which would preclude him from finding in this later easterly trek the ultimate fulfillment of his quest. In this irony can be seen London's pessimistic sentiment that he himself would have been better off if he had never studied.[2]

The small party moves out into what is to constitute the final phase of the struggle, a phase which is to mirror the facet of futility repeated frequently in London's life and writing. Naass continues, "'we went on into the east, we saw no men; only the sleeping river, the moveless forest, and the White Silence of the North. As I say, the way was long and the trail unpacked. Sometimes, in a day's toil, we made no more than eight miles, or ten, and at night we slept like dead men. And never once did they dream that I was Naass, head man of Atakan [sic] and righter of wrongs'" (B. H., IV, p. 131). This passage contains all the elements of this final journey and its non-positive culmination; the struggle, usually a source of positive values or ends, is at this point in the control of Naass and his driving quest for the return of Unga and vengeance upon her captor. The images of death in nature may be viewed as underlining the pessimism of the conclusion, but more likely serve to emphasize the struggle itself.

In his slow, deliberate revenge Naass moves the caches of food he and Gunderson have placed along the trail for the

[2]The significance of this will be clear as the textual critique is concluded. This attitude is conveyed most powerfully in Martin Eden, a book by London in which the hero essentially duplicates his creator's rise to success.

journey back. Like a cat playing with its furry meal, he is determined to eke the terrible years of his odyssey out of the soul of Gunderson, subjecting him to a long, painstaking, frustrating torture not unlike his own.

They arrive at their destination, a valley contrasting greatly with the valley of Buck and John Thornton:

> To reach that place--and the map spoke true--in the heart of the great mountains, we cut ice steps against the wall of a divide. One looked for a valley beyond, but there was no valley; the snow spread away, level as the great harvest plains, and here and there about us mighty mountains shoved their white heads among the stars. And mid-way on that strange plain which should have been a valley the earth and the snow fell away, straight down toward the heart of the world. Had we not been sailormen our heads would have swung around with the sight, but we stood on the dizzy edge that we might see a way to get down. And on one side, and one side only, the wall had fallen away till it was like the slope of the decks in a topsail breeze. I do not know why this thing should be so, but it was so. "It is the mouth of hell," he said; "let us go down." And we went down (B. H., IV, pp. 131-132).

The edenic beauty and peace Buck and Thornton find at the end of their two-year trek is thus not to be the lot of Naass, Unga, and Gunderson. They will not find the fulfillment of the earlier London valley, a fact inferred from the description of this "strange plain which should have been a valley" (p. 131) and from Gunderson's statement likening it to hell. It is also possible to read London's attitude toward the futility of existence into the description, as the strange and terrible object of the journey goes "'straight down toward the heart of the world'" (p. 131).

The trio descends and finds a cabin and evidence of all

who, like them, have come seeking gold: "'on pieces of birch bark which were there we read their last words and their curses,'" and later, "'the worthless gold they had gathered yellowed the floor of the cabin like in a dream'" (B. H., IV, p. 132). The significance of all this stands in mute mockery of Gunderson, who wants "'to go away quick, before it gets into our eyes and steals away our judgement,'" because "'in this way we may return in the end, with more grub, and possess it all'" (B. H., IV, p. 132). Even in the heavenly valley of The Call of the Wild, the grail-like gold--the fulfillment--men search for is ultimately denied them. This is an essential London message.

And they leave to return to civilization for supplies. The journey out is, as Naass had planned, a terrible struggle. The caches are missing, and the party turns eventually to boiled moccasins for sustenance. The Indian eats lightly from the caches he had moved and feigns weakness so that his strength will not be noticeably greater than that of his companions. He and Gunderson leave Unga by the fire and go hunting. Naass narrates:

> He was a great man. His soul lifted his body to the last; nor did he cry aloud, save for the life of Unga. On the second day I followed him, that I might not miss the end. And he lay down to rest often. That night he was near gone; but in the morning he swore weakly and went forth again. He was like a drunken man, and I looked many times for him to give up, but his was the strength of the strong, and his soul the soul of a giant, for he lifted his body through all the weary day. And he shot two ptarmigan, but would not eat them. He needed no fire; they meant life;

> but his thought was for Unga, and he turned toward camp. He no longer walked, but crawled on hand and knee through the snow. I came to him, and read death in his eyes. Even then it was not too late to eat of the ptarmigan. He cast away his rifle and carried the birds in his mouth like a dog. I walked by his side upright. And he looked at me during the moments he rested, and wondered that I was so strong. I could see it, though he no longer spoke; and when his lips moved, they moved without sound. As I say, he was a great man, and my heart spoke for softness; but I read back in my life, and remembered the cold and hunger of the endless forest by the Russian seas (B. H., IV, p. 133).

This passage emphasizes in Gunderson the essential London values of strength, courage, endurance, and compassion, positive qualities also illustrated by Naass throughout his odyssey; these are attributes generally precipitated by struggle, generally assuring the success or fulfillment of the struggler. In this story, however, they only confirm in Gunderson a certain pathetic nobility as he is reduced from a proud and strong being to an animal-like level.

The two men eventually reach the camp and Unga. Naass reveals his identity to the dying Gunderson, who reacts not with the fear of the impotent but with weak anger; this lessens, as have all his recent actions, the long-sought and just triumph of Naass' vengeance. The Indian then tells Unga who he is and offers her food. She laughs hysterically. When he tells her they are returning to Akatan she sardonically replies, touching on the crowning irony of Naass' dream--

"'Yes. . . we will go, hand in hand, to Akatan, you and I. And we will live in the dirty huts, and eat of the fish and

oil, and bring forth a spawn--a spawn to be proud of all the days of our life. We will forget the world and be happy, very happy. It is good, most good. Come! Let us hurry. Let us go back to Akatan'" (B. H., IV, p. 137). Unga realizes that--even if she cared for Naass--neither of them can ever again be happy in Akatan; this is the price they must pay for their knowledge of the world, a wisdom gained by both in the ensuing years since Akatan. This fact is part of the futility of Naass' quest and his creator's vision. Later the Indian is to say, "'Akatan is small, and I have little wish to go back to live on the edge of the world'" (B. H., IV, p. 137).

Throughout his ordeals, Naass continually keeps alive what he calls the "promise" of Unga's eyes, the main factor motivating his marriage and a sustaining force in his quest. This "promise," it must be remembered also, was never realized in his short marriage. Now he tells her of his life since Akatan, and sees once again this promise as he seeks to successfully conclude this quest: "'And as I spoke I saw the promise grow in her eyes, full and large like the break of dawn. And I read pity there, the tenderness of woman, the love, the heart and the soul of Unga. And I was a mere stripling again, for the look was the look of Unga as she ran up the beach, laughing, to the house of her mother. The stern unrest was gone, and the hunger, and the weary waiting. The time was met. I felt the call of her breast, and it seemed there I must pillow my head and forget. She opened her arms

to me, and I came against her. Then, sudden, the hate flamed in her eye, her hand was at my hip. And once, twice, she passed the knife'" (B. H., IV, p. 136). This concludes the futile quest of Naass, the Ulysses of London's Klondike.

Though he survives the knife wound and a terrible struggle through the arctic chill which takes him to Malemute's cabin, the scene of his narrative, Naass has failed. Axel Gunderson, in the latter part of the story a hero in the best London tradition, struggles grandly and valiantly only to meet his end in the cold of the arctic waste. Unga, the motivating and sustaining object of Naass' odyssey, turns on the Indian and rejects verbally and physically the life he offers, doing so symbolically by refusing in the last to accept his food and fire. She perishes next to Gunderson's body. Naass alone emerges from the White Silence as the miserable creature who enters the cabin of Prince and the Kid. He whose hope has helped him endure years of frustrating struggle, now sees the futility of all struggle: "'Yet is there small use in life'" (B. H., IV, p. 137). He is a hollow man. The journey to knowledge concomitant to his quest has disallowed even partial fulfillment, and his effort has been for nought. Like his creator, knowledge has revealed futility to him.

The concluding note that men's fortunes are beyond their control is emphasized when the Kid, always a spokesman and a figure of control for his creator, quiets Prince's allegations of murder as he says, "'There be things greater than our wisdom

. . .'" (B. H., IV, p. 137).

"Love of Life" is another of London's chronicles of pessimism. With the essential namelessness and isolation of the protagonist in this story, the author demands that the reader see in him mankind and in his struggles and circumstances those of humanity. The message thus encountered is a grim one, another of the recurrent instances of struggle as futility in London's fiction.

Deserted by his companion after suffering a sprained ankle, the man overcomes his initial fear and is at this point in as full control of his circumstances as he will ever be. He is assured in the knowledge of his location, the proper direction to follow, and the existence of a cache at the end of his journey. As with most journeys in London's Northland, however, things are not as simple and easy as one might wish.

An understanding of the man's drama of struggle can be gained through a study of the physical attitude or posture of the protagonist as the tale progresses. Initially, the man is pictured walking upright, though bent under the weight of his pack and the hardship of his trek. After the injury to his ankle, he limps painfully but continues walking.

Unlike many of his other Klondike stories, in "Love of Life" the author does not leave this man's strength of character to be inferred from his actions in the face of adversity: as the partner continues on, ignoring the plight of his disabled companion, the injured man cries out; the narrator says,

"It was the pleading cry of a strong man in distress. . . ."[3] The man then takes stock and gains some control over himself and his situation, as has been stated above. At no time does London leave in doubt the caliber of his hero, a fact to bear in mind as the tale progresses.

The deserted individual lurches on his solitary way until he stumbles and collapses from fatigue. The man lies where he has fallen, builds a fire, and assays his situation. The next morning he awakens. His growing impotence in his predicament is symbolized by the empty rifle with which he attempts to shoot a caribou for food. Failing in his effort, he angrily throws the gun and begins to arise: "It was a slow and arduous task. His joints were like rusty hinges. They worked harshly in their sockets, with much friction, and each bending and unbending was accomplished only through a sheer exertion of will. When he finally gained his feet, another minute or so was consumed in straightening up, so that he could stand as a man should stand" (B. H., IV, p. 298). In the last part of this quotation, the author openly states the significance of posture to the story. Its pattern evidences the import of the tale.

Loosely paralleling this posture pattern, though not nearly as consistent, is London's emerging use of animal

[3]Bodley Head, IV, p. 294. All subsequent quotations from this story will be from this source and will be noted in the text as "B. H., IV, p. xx."

imagery in describing the individual and his actions. After his failure to procure food with his rifle and after unsuccessful attempts to satisfy his driving hunger with muskeg berries, the man begins throwing rocks at ptarmigan; this proving futile, he gives chase on all fours, "as a cat stalks a sparrow" (B. H., IV, p. 299), to no avail. In the initial stages of this growing comparison, predator images dominate the usage of imagery. Shortly thereafter, the man shouts at a fox which had in its jaws a newly-killed ptarmigan, hoping to shock the smaller animal and cause it to drop its meal. This too fails.

Next, he finds some edible roots and "He threw off his pack and went into the rush grass on hands and knees, crunching and munching, like some bovine creature" (B. H., IV, p. 300). This passage significantly unites physical attitude and animal imagery, a union which will come into play again late in the story.

After digging for worms and achieving negative results, the lone protagonist attempts to catch a minnow in a pond. He fails and then "crumpled up and sank down upon the wet earth. At first he cried softly to himself, then he cried loudly to the pitiless desolation that ringed him around, and for a long time after he was shaken by great dry sobs" (B. H., IV, p. 301). Though he is emphatically a strong person, all the man has endured in isolation is beginning to have its deteriorating effect on his composure and control. At this point he also

begins to lose his positive sense of direction, a fact which emphasizes symbolically his growing loss of control as it earlier symbolized his basic composure and control.

The story begins to take on aspects of the absurd, as the individual manages to capture three minnows and then puts aside one "for breakfast" (B. H. IV, p. 303). He next flounders into a nest of baby ptarmigan and ingests them like so much popcorn. Managing to wound the protesting mother bird with a rock, he gives chase, yelling, limping, and throwing stones. His increasing impotence is evident as the injured bird remains always just outside his reach. Try as he can, the debilitated man is unable to capture the crippled and equally exhausted bird, even though they are separated by scant feet. He loses the bird in the night, and with it goes the sense of position and direction, his last tenuous control over his situation.

The only thing of value or significance that the miserable individual has to show for his struggle at this point is his gold; earlier he divided and cached half of it; next he threw away half of that; he now discards the remainder.

At this point his heretofore relatively clear mind begins to fail him and he hallucinates, "strange conceits and whimsicalities gnawing at his brain like worms" (B. H., IV, p. 305). A short while later, the correlation of posture to theme is reiterated as the man comes face to face with a brown bear: "He drew himself up to his most imposing stature, gripping

the knife and staring hard at the bear. The bear advanced clumsily a couple of steps, reared up, and gave vent to a tentative growl. If the man ran, he would run after him; but the man did not run. He was animated now with the courage of fear. He, too, growled, savagely, terribly, voicing the fear that is to life germane and that lies twisted about life's deepest roots;" then, significantly, "The bear edged away to one side, growling menacingly, himself appalled by this mysterious creature that appeared upright and unafraid" (B. H., IV, pp., 305-306). Later, hunting wolves also avoid "this strange creature that walked erect. . ." (B. H., IV, p. 306). These two incidents are the last wherein the man bears any semblance to a symbol of power, and they are the last depicting him in an upright position. They underline his humanity one last time.

A bit of what can only be London's own philosophizing is inserted at this juncture into the narrative; it not only serves to underscore the theme of the story, but also lends insight into the artist's conception of struggle-as-futility. As the hero proceeds to grind up and eat the bones of a caribou calf killed by wolves, he ponders: "Could it possibly be that he might be that ere the day was done! [sic] Such was life, eh? A vain and fleeting thing. It was only life that pained. There was no hurt in death. To die was to sleep. It meant cessation, rest" (B. H., IV, p. 306). This attitude of futility is voiced by many London characters, including

even the potent Sitka Charley; insinuated into that hero's musings in "Grit of Women" (Chapter One of this paper) is the following:

> Life is a strange thing. Much have I thought on it, and pondered long, yet daily the strangeness of it grows not less, but more. Why this longing for life? It is a game which no man wins. To live is to toil hard, and to suffer sore, till Old Age creeps heavily upon us and we throw down our hands on the cold ashes of dead fires. It is hard to live. In pain the babe sucks his first breath, in pain the old man gasps his last, and all his days are full of trouble and sorrow; yet he goes down to the open arms of Death, stumbling, falling, with head turned backward, fighting to the last. And Death is kind. It is only Life, and the things of Life that hurt. Yet we love Life, and we hate Death. It is very strange.[4]

The only feasible explanation of these two unnecessary interjections is that they are representative statements of a line of thinking with which London was concerned throughout his life. Their import and the concomitant tremendous despair serve to illustrate an omnipresent undercurrent in the creative vision of Jack London.

And it is this perverse attraction to life that drives the twisted, tortured figure forward in an insane struggle to survive:

> Came frightful days of snow and rain. He did not know when he made camp. He traveled in the night as much as in the day. He rested wherever he fell, crawled on whenever the dying life in him flickered up and burned less dimly. He, as a man, no longer strove. It was the life in him, unwilling to die, that drove him on. He did not suffer. His nerves had become blunted, numb, while his mind was filled with wierd visions and delicious dreams.

[4]Jack London, The God of His Fathers, pp. 176-177.

> But ever he sucked and chewed on the crushed bones of the caribou calf, the last remnants of which he had gathered up and carried with him. He crossed no more hills of divides, but automatically followed a large stream which flowed through a wide and shallow valley. He saw nothing save visions. Soul and body walked or crawled side by side, yet apart, so slender was the thread that bound them (B. H., IV, p. 307).

The terrible ludicrousness to which London and this powerful desire to live expose this miserable creature as he grubs for worms, chases minnows, yells at a fox, and eats grass like a cow is brought to a black-humor climax as he is joined on his arctic stage by a sickly wolf bearing an uncanny resemblance to that contemporary all-time loser of the animated cartoon, Wile E. Coyote. The object of this lupine derelict is to eat the man, a desire reciprocated by his human quarry. The narrator comments, sans irony, that, "Then began as grim a tragedy of existence as was ever played--a sick man that crawled, a sick wolf that limped, two creatures dragging their dying carcasses across the desolation and hunting each other's lives" (B. H., IV, p. 311).

The protagonist has now progressed in the posture pattern to where he is totally incapable of walking: "he found he could not rise to his feet. He tried again and again, then contented himself with crawling about on hands and knees" (B. H., IV, p. 309). In light of London's earlier statement (see B. H., IV, p. 298), he has ceased to be a man. The degradation is emphasized by the presence of the dynamic wolf, a creature usually symbolic of power and strength in London's fiction, and his unmistakable comparison to his human companion.

Of the driving force that brought the hero to this level, Maxwell Geismar says, "the will to survive--all that was left here of men's appetites and joys--was often viewed as another kind of phobia, ironical, insane."[5]

Though he eventually overcomes the wolf, sucks his blood, and survives to crawl to rescue from a whaler in the ocean, he has been totally dehumanized. When "members of a scientific expedition on the whaleship Bedford" (B. H., IV, p. 313) spot him, they go ashore to see what he is: "And they saw something that was alive but which could hardly be called a man. It was blind, unconscious. It squirmed along the ground like some monstrous worm. Most of its efforts were ineffectual, but it was persistent, and it writhed and twisted and went ahead perhaps a score of feet an hour" (B. H., IV, p. 313). Geismar comments that "'Love of Life' was typical of a series of London's stories in this vein: the solitary, obsessed individual; the self-enclosed world; the macabre struggle to survive; the ironic note of 'success' which obliterates everything the individual has stood for."[6]

This is the lot of a man who has in the face of tremendous struggle shown courage, strength, endurance, and even a form of love and loyalty (the latter two seen when the starving man comes upon the remains of his unfaithful comrade and

[5]Maxwell Geismar, Rebels and Ancestors (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1953), p. 145.

[6]Ibid., p. 188.

refused to eat them and to take his gold-sack). He has endured as have the most admirable London heroes, only to be denigrated to the category of a "monstrous worm." He, like Naass, is an embodiment of the futility of the struggle, a seed of despair lying dormant in his creator's world-view.

Chapter Five:

Conclusion

"Let us agree not to sit up with the corpse. . . ."
(Jack London, quoted by Adela Rogers St. Johns in Final Verdict. Italics hers.)

In Chapter One of this paper, the formation in London of his concept of life as a continuous struggle was discussed, and the validity of a study of his works from the thematic approach of struggle was established. All the facets of this theme in London's fiction are apparent in his Klondike tales, and, as Harry Hartwick writes, "His heroes, whether wolves or dogs or prize-fighters or sailors or adventurers-at-large, have all of them approximately the same instincts and the same careers."[1] It must be added that the aspects of that theme should be viewed as just that--aspects; the frustration of looking for consistency in London is self-evident, and may have a great deal to do with the fact that no critic or historian has convincingly pinpointed this author's place in American literature.

"Struggle as Initiation and Purification," Chapter Two in this study, deals basically with what Gower calls London's examination of "the moral characteristics necessary for the

[1]Hartwick, p. 67.

success of life in this bleakness."[2] This examination grew from the author's awareness of the futility and despair existing in an America without traditional values, and it represents his efforts to counter this hopelessness.[3] He does so by presenting idealized alter-egos like the Malemute Kid and Sitka Charley as examples of and spokesmen for a visionary set of values with which they symbolically confront the cosmos as they struggle in the Northland; this confrontation is what McClintock calls "an optimistic affirmation of man's power to conquer actuality."[4] These heroes have been tempered by the struggles of life, but lesser men must be tested. The success of these uninitiated chechaquos is directly relative to their actions in the face of the adversity of life in the North; more often than not, this is illustrated by the extent to which they do or do not embody the points of the London value system exemplified by the Kid and Sitka Charley: strength, courage, endurance, intelligence, insight, common sense, selflessness, love, and loyalty. Only by successfully enduring struggle, London shows in these stories, can man hope to become whole, to impose any order or to exercise any control over his universe: "The Northland, presumably, is the place where an integrated spirit is possible and annihilation

[2]Gower, p. 76.

[3]McClintock, pp. 62-63.

[4]Ibid., Preface, pp. V-VI.

circumvented."[5]

Two other positive phases in London's vision of struggle are discussed in Chapter Three, "Regeneration and Fulfillment--Additional Aspects of the Klondike Struggle." "Like Argus of the Ancient Times," one of the author's last works, shows London's belief in the rejuvenative effects of the Northern struggle and unmistakeably relates them to frontier America; it represents the author's innate wish "to escape into the dream of an earlier and happier society."[6] In a broader perspective, it represents a problem common to many twentieth century writers in America--the problem of finding and defining a viable substitute for the frontier myth in this country.

That London was searching for this answer is evident from most of his fiction. His daughter Joan detects a pattern reinforcing this in her father's life-style; as he became a successful writer, London began a series of physical moves to dwellings in increasingly rural surroundings.[7] This culminated in his ill-fated Beauty Ranch in Glen Ellen, where the author hoped to establish "a self-subsisting colony. Then, indeed, his escape would be complete from the world, whose demands from him. . . he could shut out in no other way."[8]

[5]McClintock, p. 64.

[6]Kazin, p. 115.

[7]Joan London, p. 231.

[8]Ibid., p. 360.

This desire to seek simplicity in a nature roughly coterminous with the simplicity of the frontier was a futile one, though when presented in The Call of the Wild, it could be interpreted as representing fulfillment in the struggle. And Buck is for all intents and purposes, "a thinly disguised portrait of London, in conflict with civilization and fleeing to a happier life in the cold North. . . ."[9] This idea is echoed by Joan London when she writes of the author and the book that "he fled from the unbearable reality" to "a clean, beautiful, primitive world. . . ;" she relates the escape theme of The Call of the Wild directly to London's living in English slums while researching for another book.[10] The Call of the Wild represents in essence a flight from contemporary reality to an older world where life was lived in terms of simple struggle. If, as Kazin feels, this book "was London's greatest burst of splendor, his one affirmation of life that can still be believed,"[11] it is tragic that "his hero was animal, uncomplicated by the web of civilization, and free to respond to the forces of nature which could make him whole."[12] Fulfillment characterized by the escape of an animal from reality

[9]Wallace Stegner, The American Novel (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1965), p. 137.

[10]Joan London, p. 252. The book referred to is The People of the Abyss.

[11]Kazin, p. 116.

[12]Robert Ernest Spiller, The Cycle of American Literature (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), p. 205.

belies its own essential validity for realistic human application. It marks the height and at the same time the limit of optimism in London's world-view. Its fallacy lies in the fact that it symbolizes, as Fred Lewis Pattee states, "the soul of Western individualism, the spirit of the young, free West of our America."[13]

Chapter Four, "Struggle as Futility," deals with two men who, by London's own standards, should emerge from the struggle successfully and with some semblance of control over their fates. Such is not the case.

The lone protagonist of "Love of Life" set against a background story where "the atmosphere was that of pure nightmare; the central situation was that of a trap. The central mood was of impotence,"[14] endures a terrible struggle but gains for his effort only the grace to live a while longer. He loses his humanity and becomes essentially a sick joke in an uncaring universe, controlling his circumstances only to the extent as does the worm to which he is compared.

Of "An Odyssey of the North," another example of despair in the London vision, McClintock writes that, "Neither the simple imagination that weds common sense to American ingenuity nor the imagination that through intelligence, instinct and experience senses disaster and sponsors the active code

[13]Pattee, New American Literature, p. 138.

[14]Maxwell Geismar, ed., Jack London: Short Stories (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), p. XV.

to mitigate the threat are adequate concepts. . . . Naass' adventure does not make him a whole man, the journey and the code do not provide men with self-completion. There are indeed 'things greater than our wisdom' and man cannot 'see it all around.' Man is limited. Consequently, London's perfect man, the Kid, ceases to exist."[15] The empty success of the enduring Naass shows the failure of the London value system; this is overshadowed only by the passivity of the Malemute Kid, an "idealized extension"[16] of London himself, who--as McClintock points out--"had a great personal stake in this character who embodied what man could hope to achieve . . . ."[17] And if what the Kid stands for is fallacious, then "despair and death are the inevitable alternatives . . . ."[18]

A study of London and his works would then make it very difficult to agree with the judgement of Lavon B. Carroll, who states that, "Although he acknowledged the presence of evil in the world and the reality of powerful and impersonal forces as a constant threat to humanity, he refused to succumb to the view that man was a helpless victim in a hostile world. His novels, one and all, are an affirmation of life,

[15]McClintock, p. 203.

[16]Ibid., p. 83.

[17]Ibid., p. 84.

[18]Ibid., p. 83.

the dignity of man, and the power of love."[19] To assume this as a total statement of London's objectives would seem at best ironic.

The apparent futility of man's condition in the twentieth century is a problem still confronting writers in the United States. Much of London's confusion doubtless stemmed from the fact that he had an intellectual foot in two centuries. Born in the nineteenth century, he was like most of his contemporaries ill-equipped to cope with the complex problems twentieth century man is still facing. That many of the causes of London's turmoil are still extant is evident from a statement by the contemporary statesman, Henry Kissinger: "I believe the cause of our anguish is deeper. Throughout our history we believed that effort was its own reward. Partly because so much has been achieved here in America, we have tended to suppose that every problem must have a solution and that good intentions should somehow guarantee good results. Utopia was not seen as a dream, but as our logical destination if we only traveled the right road. . . . The realization of our essential loneliness accounts for so much of the frustration and rage of our time."[20] London's mental state had been foreseen by Charles and Henry Adams: "London's very life and mind is a demonstration of the multiplicity of the modern mind

[19]Lavon B. Carroll, "Jack London and the American Image," American Book Collector, v. 13, #5, p. 27.

[20]Time, February 7, 1972, p. 19.

that they had predicted. . . . restless and ever traveling, the last of the first lost generation. . . ."[21] He felt the loss of the semi-mythical values of young, pre-industrial America "personally, temperamentally, rather than as a cultural abstraction,"[22] while he "engaged twentieth century concerns: alienation, disenchantment, ironic ambivalence, and impotence."[23] That this greatly influenced his fiction can easily be ascertained from a study of his works. Of its reflection in his life, O'Connor states that, "He signalled a change in stereotypes. Before World War One, the successful man, it was widely believed, lived happily ever after. Since then, the heroes of the Success Myth have been condemned to a tragic, frustrated end; their struggles generally dissolve in alcohol and diffusion."[24]

Life to Jack London was struggle on its starkest terms. Beginning in poverty and illegitimacy in San Francisco, he fought his way to success as a writer; much of what was good, bad, and great in London is reflected in Kazin's assessment that, "The greatest story he ever wrote was the story he lived. . . ."[25] Of her father's meteoric rise, however, Joan

[21]Jay Martin, Harvests of Change (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), pp. 238-239.

[22]McClintock, p. 62.

[23]Ibid., p. 113.

[24]O'Connor, p. 7.

[25]Kazin, p. 111.

London writes, "As he moved from obscurity toward the bright place in the sun that was to be his, he was sometimes uneasily aware that his victories were failing to satisfy him, that his hunger was yet unappeased."[26] Jack London's life was always closely related to his writing, and it has been seen that his writing reflected this failure of struggle to provide answers, satisfaction, or stability.

Through the minds and mouths of his characters, he descried the futility of life, feeling that death was preferable to that human condition. That this belief ran deeply and consistently in his own psychological and emotional make-up can be inferred from the aforementioned statements of Naass and Sitka Charley; from some of London's notes regarding suicide;[27] from the attempted suicide discussed in Chapter One of this paper; and finally, from this statement by Joan London, who writes that in her father's youth, "The thought of death as annihilation, the cessation not only of living but of consciousness and individuality, constantly intrigued him. His youth and unscarred love of life made this solution very remote, but all his life it was to be his ace in the hole, the one sure escape when frustration, disappointment and confusion had become finally unendurable."[28] Eric Howard sees in this the motivation for

[26]Joan London, p. 193.

[27]For an account of this, see Stone, pp. 55-56.

[28]Joan London, p. 87.

London's entire struggle-view as discussed in this paper; he says, "the death impulse was always strong in him. His was a constant fight against it. He desired to die so much that he had to make of life a glorious struggle, a mighty conflict, a thing big and grand and impressive."[29] And this failed him, so what was left? With unintentional irony, Charmian London quotes her husband as saying that, "I have always been true to myself. This is my highest concept of right conduct. It is my measure of right conduct."[30]

On November 23, 1916, Jack London committed suicide. Had he written an epitaph to sum up his life and fiction, he could have done no better than the following, often repeated to his daughters: "I would rather be ashes than dust. . . . I would rather that my spark should burn out in a brilliant blaze than it should be stifled by dry-rot. I should rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in magnificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent planet. The proper function of man is to live, not to exist. I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong them. I shall use my time."[31]

[29]Erich Howard, "Men Around London," Esquire, 13 (June 1940), p. 62.

[30]Charmian London, The Book of Jack London, II (New York: The Century Company, 1921), p. 223.

[31]Quoted in Joan London's biography, p. 372.

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