

# Jack London's Allegorical Landscapes: "The God of His Fathers," "The Priestly Prerogative,"

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Like that of many of his fellow naturalistic writers, Jack London's response to the question of belief throughout his life and career is both complex and paradoxical. Born to a spiritualist mother whose séances were part of his earliest recollections, London read Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and Herbert Spencer's *First Principles* (1862) before leaving high school, and for the rest of his life he would proclaim his belief in materialist and determinist thought, even while quoting Bible verses to his daughter Joan and re-recommending that she study the life of Christ because "Christ was a big man" (Labor, Leitz, and Shepard 1339). A similarly bifurcated view characterizes London's approach to belief throughout his writing career. In his early tales of the Northland, the language of determinism describes the harsh interplay of natural forces pitting elemental nature against man, yet in lyrical passages London defines himself in opposition to the menacing absence pervading the landscape and shows that in the frozen landscapes of the far North, "man walks alone with God" ("White" 22). More emphatically, London's later novel *The Valley of the Moon* (1913) projects the landscape as in itself an emblem of the spiritual; here, characters become most fully human when they align themselves with rather

than define themselves against the land. In London's work are thus joined the two antithetical landscape traditions of Western writing—the depiction of an individual's struggle against the harsh landscape, present in his Northland stories, and the achievement of romantic transformation through the agency of the West's healing spaces, the subject of his California novels.

London's letters also provide clues to the ideas about faith expressed in his novels, although his statements are often more vehemently expressed than logically consistent. For example, in 1914 he reaffirmed his oft-stated materialistic principles in a letter to fellow socialist Ralph Kasper:

I am a hopeless materialist. I see the soul as nothing less than the sum of the activities of the organism plus personal habits, memories, and experiences of the organism, plus inherited habits, memories, experiences of the organism. *I believe that when I am dead, I am dead. I believe that with my death I am just as much obliterated as the last mosquito you or I smashed.* (Labor, Leitz, and Shepard 1339; italics are London's)

Yet less than two months before this letter was written, London had complained to a correspondent that literary critic Frederick Tabor Cooper had misread his works as lacking in spirituality: "Ask him if he has ever read *White Fang* [1906], and if he finds a deplorable lack of spirituality in that book." Alluding to *The Valley of the Moon*, London comments, "Of course, incidentally, there are other books of mine that have quite a lot of spirituality in them" (1313), including *The Star Rover* (1915), of which "the key-note . . . is: THE SPIRIT TRIUMPHANT" (1315). A more reliable statement of London's materialist thought, then, might be his famous Whitmanesque credo:

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 would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in magnifi-

cent 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. (Qtd. in Labor and Reesman 137)

The naturalistic emphasis on death as obliteration is still present, but here positive action replaces the passive disintegration of his earlier statement, and human agency appears as a viable force rather than simply as an illusion. London's credo thus constitutes a curiously defiant gesture of the will against the inevitability of natural process, a position seemingly at odds with his naturalism.

This particular discrepancy between positions is not an anomaly, however, for London's early fiction, as numerous critics have pointed out, embraces a multitude of such contradictions.<sup>1</sup> Commenting on London's letter to Kasper, James I. McClintock notes that London's "attachment to [Ernst] Haeckel's ideas accounts for the seemingly bizarre situation of a literary naturalist saying that 'I am agnostic, with one exception: I do believe in the soul'" (44-45). The testing ground for this soul in London's early stories is the Northland of the Yukon territories, a kind of existential Walden where a man, to quote Thoreau, not *may* but *must* "front only the essential facts of life" and "learn what it had to teach" (*Walden* 61). More important, the agent of this test is the White Silence, as London explains in a famous passage from the story of the same name:

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. . . . And the fear of death, of God, of the universe, comes over him—the

<sup>1</sup>For a good analysis of these critical perspectives, see Jeanne Campbell Reesman's "'Never Travel Alone': Naturalism, Jack London, and the White Silence." Reesman cites Earle Labor, Charles N. Watson, Jr., Jay Gurian, and Terry Whalen as commentators on London's "dualistic" system of belief.

hope of the 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. (22)

London's description exposes several antithetical positions that exist in tension with one another: The God of the Northland stories is both ultimate author of this terror and man's sole protection against it, and the White Silence in which death, or the "Noseless One," as London calls it, stalks men is also the potential means of bringing human beings into unmediated contact with God. The silence that at first seems simply absent and indifferent becomes charged with the kind of presence Stephen Kern describes in his *Culture of Time and Space*. Kern suggests that turn-of-the-century fiction reflected new theories of matter in proposing what he calls "positive negative space," or the sense that "what was formerly regarded as negative now has a positive, constitutive function" (153). Seeing silence, or "positive negative time," as a variation of this concept, Kern quotes from *Silence* (1910), a novel by Leonidas Adreiyeff: "It was not stillness, for stillness is merely the absence of sounds: it was silence because it seemed that they who were silent could say something but would not" (170). It is this feature of the landscape's silence, the willful absence and withholding of words by an indifferent nature or equally indifferent God, a God who might be there only "then, if ever," that motivates London's rejection in the Northland stories of the false language of religion and his embracing in the California novels of the true language of the spirit.

In *The God of His Fathers and Other Stories* (1901) and *The Faith of Men* (1904), London examines the implications of this silence and the meaningless words with which men attempt to fill it. These works might better have been titled "The God in his Fathers" and "Faith in Men," for transcendence in these stories results primarily from the bond between men bound by a faith in each other stronger than that in any external force. As Reesman comments, "Every word London wrote was an attempt to combat the White Logic [of alcoholic thought] and to reply to the White Silence; the belief in spirit (meaning) is in London's mind a belief first in himself and his efforts and second in humanity as a vast community spanning time and space, artist and audience in Whit-

man's 'form union, plan'" (38). Not surprisingly, the representatives of the white man's religion fare poorly as mediators of community and ambassadors to men who have known the White Silence, and London renders the language of conventional religious sentiment as a kind of noisy and ineffective counter to it.

In "The God of His Fathers," words and silence conflict in an explicit battle of beliefs. When Yankee settler Hay Stockard, his wife (a native "woman of the Teslin country" [142]) and his friend Bill travel peaceably if warily through country ruled by the mixed blood Baptiste the Red, they ask Baptiste why he has created such a kingdom. As Baptiste explains it, his ruthlessness stems from Christianity: "I love the church like a good son. *Bien!* So great a love that my days have been spent in fleeing away from her, and my nights in dreaming dreams of reckoning" (138). The causes of his hatred are clear: a corrupt priest denies Baptiste the right to marry the woman he loves, and, after the two live together and produce a daughter, denies the child baptism as well. Grown into womanhood, she is seduced and abandoned by a white man, and again the priest intervenes, this time to prevent Baptiste from exercising his right under natural law to kill his daughter's seducer. Baptiste kills the priest and the seducer, fleeing to the country he now rules under natural rather than man-made law. A tense situation finally explodes when Sturges Owen, a self-righteous missionary, invades Baptiste's domain. For reasons he only dimly understands, Stockard decides to defend Owen because he is "one of my breed." Captured and forced to recant his belief in all gods except Baptiste, Owen readily renounces his faith; the man of many words here needs only one—"No"—to deny his God. Stockard, however, refuses to follow this example and chooses death instead, telling Baptiste that he does have a god, "the God of my fathers" (150).

Like many of London's stories of the period, "The God of His Fathers" flirts with a racist glorification of the white man, but the narrative voice undercuts the Kiplingesque subject. True, the story supports a positive view of Stockard, whose name announces his "good stock" and New England origins, and makes the case that being born into racial consciousness also brings a recognition of faith, yet Stockard's

transformation, as a response to Owen's denial, ironically makes a redeemer of a sorry specimen like Owen, who near the end of the tale compares himself to Christ. An unsung martyr to a faith he has only just begun to understand, Stockard seems heroic, but the practical effect of his creed is that Owen remains alive while he himself dies. Perhaps it is this recognition that conditions Stockard's final act. Like the grasshopper in Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River," which grasps the fishhook on which it is impaled and spits tobacco juice on the instrument of its death, Stockard, impaled by Baptiste's ivory-headed spear, "sway[s], laughing, and snap[s] the shaft short as he [falls] upon it" (150). The collective nature of the ancestor worship he practices, like that of the racial solidarity that leads to his death, ultimately dissolves, leaving Stockard to make the isolated, existential gesture that signifies his acceptance of death, a death for a faith that London ambiguously suggests is at best as divisive as it is comforting.

Misused words and speech are at the heart of another Northland story, "The Priestly Prerogative," which transplants to the Yukon a situation reminiscent of an Edith Wharton story, as London perhaps suggests in the surname of his hero Clyde Wharton.<sup>2</sup> Here, as in "The God of His Fathers," the wild landscape and the conditions it imposes complicate questions of ethics and belief. This eternal triangle centers on Grace Bentham, a courageous woman who breaks trail and works with a will, while her husband Edwin, a "selfish cry-baby . . . a clubman and a society man" (74), follows behind. When Grace falls in love with Clyde, a man worthy of her, the two plan to run away together. Seeing her enter Wharton's cabin, Father

<sup>2</sup>During the time he was writing the Northland stories, London read and admired the short stories in Wharton's first story collection, *The Greater Inclination*. "The Muse's Tragedy" appeared in the January 1899 issue of *Scribner's Magazine*, and London's friend Cloudesley Johns had apparently sent a copy of the story to him. James Williams dates the composition of "The Priestly Prerogative" as January 30, 1899. On March 30, 1899, London praised Wharton's story "The Muse's Tragedy" to Johns. See especially London's letters to Johns from March 1899 through February 1900 (Labor, Leitz, and

Roubeau, a “Jesuit priest who had never been known to lie” (73), follows to dissuade her. The lovers agree to let him exercise his “priestly prerogative” of speaking after they have finished plotting their escape, when Roubeau urges Grace to give up her dream and keep the husband she has taken before God. “Which God?” Grace demands hotly, before allowing Roubeau to wear away at her resolve: “And your sister? . . . Could you go before her, look upon her fresh young face, hold her hand in yours, or touch your cheek to hers? . . . Have you thought, if you should have children?” (81). Overcome by his words, Grace decides against eloping with Wharton, but before she can return home, Edwin appears at Wharton’s cabin, demanding to know if Grace is there. Cautioning Wharton to remain silent, the “wily” Jesuit asks Edwin whether he has seen Grace’s tracks, which Roubeau had “taken good care to obliterate . . . as he came up the same path an hour before” (83). This technical denial gives Grace time to get home but causes Roubeau, whose honesty is beyond question, to become downcast. During his return to the Lower Country, the Male-mute Kid, “before [whom] alone . . . the priest cast off sacerdotal garb and [stood] naked” (84) as a man rather than as a priest, believes that the lie troubles his friend, but Roubeau explains that his anguish arises from a different source: “I knew [her situation], and I made her go back” (84).

London poses Roubeau’s dilemma as a function of the same conflict between natural and socially constructed morality that Baptiste confronts in “The God of His Fathers.” As a man of God, Father Roubeau uses words to stem the impulses of Grace and Wharton; the relentless “Jesuitical” logic that he uses, a staple in popular depictions of the order, parallels the endless quoting from scripture of the missionary in “The God of His Fathers.” In both cases, an excessive number of words drowns out the human feeling that London believes should guide the actions of each religious figure. Significantly, Roubeau hides behind the strictures of his order—Edwin believes that a priest cannot lie, for example—to save Grace from her husband’s wrath, yet he artfully shifts his argument to her weakness, a longing for children, to compel a compliance that is technically correct morally but emotionally wrong. To emphasize the fundamental ir-

relevance of such externally imposed morality, London sets the last scene in the unique daylight of the Northland: "Father Roubeau . . . gazed on the red-disked sun, poised somberly on the edge of the northern horizon. Malemute Kid wound up his watch. It was midnight" (84). The reversal of day and night is natural in this country, as is the extension of both time and space; only an artificial device, the watch, serves as a reminder of the world to which both men belong and to the artificial imposition of conventional morality that condemns Grace Bentham to a miserable and loveless existence.

Unlike these early stories which juxtapose false words with the ominous truth of the Northland setting, *The Valley of the Moon* and *The Star Rover* construct idyllic scenery using techniques that call attention to the landscape's fictive and symbolic nature. *The Star Rover*, the novel that London considered his "Christ story" (Labor, Leitz, and Shepard 1514), centers on the creation of landscapes through imaginative projection; more specifically, a portrayal of transcendent landscapes filling the mind while the body experiences physical constriction extends a trope that London had used earlier in *The Valley of the Moon*. Set in San Quentin and populated with the names of real prisoners like Jake Oppenheimer and Ed Morrell, *The Star Rover* follows Darrell Standing's travels through time and space as he lies strapped in a straitjacket awaiting execution. Darrell experiences a multitude of prior existences: the courtier Count de Sainte-Maure; a young boy killed at Mountain Meadows; Adam Stang, an English sailor in seventeenth-century Korea; Daniel Foss, a castaway; and a number of nameless other men through the ages. Through the vision of Ragnar Lodbrog, a captured Northman who becomes a Roman Soldier and witnesses the Crucifixion, London tells his "Christ story"; but the real story of faith in the novel is that of the human capacity to imagine and to endure.

A subtler version of fictive and symbolic landscape appears in *The Valley of the Moon*, which shifts modes from realism to romance as the story progresses. This novel is on one level, as Charles Crow has suggested, a California visionary romance, a quest on the part of its protagonists, Billy and Saxon Brown Roberts, to "recreate the ex-



perience of their pioneering grandparents, to redeem and justify it, and reclaim the lost home" (6). Born into a life of working-class toil in Oakland, Saxon and Billy meet and marry with high hopes for the future, but naturalistically described industrial forces exact a heavy toll. The two endure poverty, alcoholism, a brutal strike, the loss of their child, and Billy's imprisonment before Saxon decides that they will strike out for new territories where they can settle on a farm and rebuild their lives. Christopher Gair convincingly argues that at this point the novel shifts form from naturalism to sentimental fiction: "where naturalism denies the possibility of mending the rupture between the social and the moral, this act of reparation is at the heart of sentimental fiction" (153), a strategy that, as sentimental fiction demands, places women generally and Saxon in particular in a position of moral authority. The second half of the novel, focusing on their journey through Northern California in search of a home, reflects this shift of genre and contrasts strikingly with the first, as the competition for survival in the city gives way to the country's spirit of cooperation. Much of the critical commentary treats the dark underside of their quest, the racism inherent in Billy and Saxon's interest in "Anglo-Saxon" identity—the god of their fathers—that brings them together and informs their search for a land where "old stock" settlers can flourish protected from the incursions of "foreigners." However, while these attitudes are undeniably disturbing, considering their journey as a spiritual one adds a dimension otherwise lost in discussions of its political agenda.

As its incidents, conventions of naming, totemic objects, and representations of place show, the novel is less a picaresque or quest romance than a pilgrimage in which Saxon and Billy march off, packs on their backs, to seek a "promised land" that they believe is their birthright. David Fine notes that "their pilgrimage—like all pilgrimages—traverses physical spaces to reach a spiritual place, the historical ground of their ancestors" (65). Thus, in addition to its historical narrative of racial consciousness, westward expansion, anxieties about immigration, and sociopolitical visions of community, agrarian reform, socialism, and feminism, *The Valley of the Moon* invites in-ter-pretation

as a spiritual allegory, a pilgrim's progress after John Bunyan's classic of the same name. Several suggestive parallels support this comparison. Like the extended dialogue of *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678, 1684), Billy and Saxon's conversations with each other and with many of the guides in this novel help to sort out false from true information even as they test the couple's sense of mission. As Reesman has pointed out, the novel contains a great deal of dialogue, particularly between Billy and Saxon as they talk their way to the Valley of the Moon. In her analysis of the novel's use of representations of gender, Reesman further shows that "in general, dialogue among women is more productive than among men in this novel" ("Jack" 185), a characteristic that supports London's determination to show that "the woman gets the vision. She is the driving force" (qtd. in Reesman 183). Boiled down to their essences, these extended conversations focus on hard work, the meaning of life in and beyond the world, and faith—faith in the couple's "old stock" heritage and its quest. As if to extend this teaching function to his readers and make the work a useful guidebook for right living, London inserts a number of other lessons as well, ranging from vignettes of western history to several brief practical treatises. His subjects range from the abstract—how to avoid nagging and keep a husband's love—to the eminently practical—how to wash woollens, roast a duck, cook a steak in a dry pan, plow, prevent blisters, finance horse-trades, and draw customers to a farm market. All suggest a pragmatic didacticism at odds with the professed aims of naturalism but in keeping with the teaching functions of sentimental allegory.

The novel's choice of incidents also suggests this allegorical component. For example, in the Oakland sections of the book, London depicts Saxon in a virtual Slough of Despond as she loses her identity in the salt marshes of the shore. In such a place, she is perilously close to both death and a different sort of "fate worse than death." As her mentor Mercedes repeatedly explains, the bodies of pauper women are immersed in vats of brine after death for the ultimate violation, dissection (or worse) by medical students (132). In one such episode prior to Billy's release from prison, Saxon, bereft of child, husband, and money, descends to the marsh near the Rock Wall and questions her fate: "No,

God was not responsible. She could have made a better world herself—a finer squarer world. This being so, then there was no God. God could not make a botch. . . . And now she sat crushed in greater helplessness than when she had included God in the scheme of injustice. . . . With God missing, the world was a trap. Life was a trap” (204). In an image that suggests the similarly significant caged canary in *McTeague*, Saxon sees herself as “a linnet, caught by small boys and imprisoned in a cage” (205). Despondent and desperate, Saxon finds herself beset by rats and a rapidly rising tide when Jack, a twelve-year-old boy who knows his way around a boat, miraculously appears, rescues her, takes her fishing, shares his lunch with her, and liberates her from Oakland with a single phrase: “Oakland is just a place to start from” (215). From this point of renewed vision, Saxon sees Oakland rather than life itself as a trap, a judgment confirmed when she meets her old friend Mary, whose turn to prostitution has improved her fortunes but kept her in the city and destroyed her identity. Here as elsewhere, the symbolic pairing of opposing choices forces Saxon and Billy to make decisions and to continue their journey.

The boy Jack is only the first of several characters who appear from nowhere to rescue Saxon and Billy and give them guidance. He is also one of several London avatars and near relations to appear in the novel, as are Jack Hastings and his wife Clara, stand-ins for Jack and (Clara) Charmian London. Further, London uses the naming conventions of allegory as an interpretive signal to the reader about the nature of true and false guides. When Billy and Saxon are tempted to stay in Carmel (the land of lotus-eaters where one day and one season are much like the next, food and play are equally abundant, and natural physical prowess counts for much more than it does in the man-as-machine culture of Oakland), the dangers of this land are evident in the names of its rulers. The man who challenges Billy to a death-defying obstacle course along the cliffs is called Jim Hazard; similarly, the Iron Man, whose epithet covers his “old American French” background and “devil of a temper” (317), boxes with Billy in a battle that reverses the verdict of Hastings in 1066, when the Normans overcame the Anglo-Saxons, in that this time the Anglo-Saxons’

representative, Billy, triumphs over the Normans. Failing to win in physical combat, the members of the colony turn to intellectual challenge when Hall, a spiritually empty poet whose way of life (like his name) is a passage rather than a destination, suggests that the ideal existence is “a compromise of Nirvana and life. Least irritation, least effort . . . the ideal existence: a jellyfish floating in a tideless tepid, twilight sea” (328). The vision of devolution instead of evolution in fact represents life, or its ideal, at the colony, but Billy demurs, saying that he would sooner be himself “than have book indigestion” (330). Resisting the pleasures of a purely physical existence, and spurning as well Hall’s defeatist characterization of American democracy as a gambler’s game in which all the chips have already been won, Billy and Saxon move away from false guides and toward true ones. Their real helpers are those whose names resonate with Anglo-American history: Mr. and Mrs. Edmund Hale, whose name recalls both Nathan and Edward Everett Hale, and Jack and Clara Hastings, who not only resemble Billy and Saxon but also suggest the historical context from which the novel derives its ancestor worship. Early reviewers noted the novel’s lack of realism as Billy and Saxon wander about Northern California being offered jobs, houses, land, and advice; and later critics have observed that Billy and Saxon encounter no difficulties in finding markets or credit.<sup>3</sup> However, the novel’s dreamlike, or, as Crow suggests, fairy-tale quality has a kind of logic all its own, especially when considered as allegorical representation (8).

To guide her on her journey, Saxon also possesses “totem objects,” as David Fine calls them (66). They represent for her not only her pioneering parents but also the trail of ancestry that serves as an object of worship in this novel, much as it does for Stockard in “The God of

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, “Jack London Writes Genial ‘Back to the Land’ Book—Latest Fiction Crop,” which comments that “they are treated with great kindness by many people, including that inevitable group of Bohemians” (8), or Helen Bullis’s more acerbic remark in the *New York Times*: “Here and there the colors are laid on so lavishly that it occurs to the reader that he must be perusing a romance written by Miss Marie Corelli under the direction of the Department of

His Fathers.” When Saxon contemplates her mother’s picture early in the novel, the narrative voice comments, “Her thoughts of God were vague and nebulous . . . [and] she could not vision God. Here, in the daguerreotype, was the concrete. . . . She did not go to church. This was her high altar and holy of holies” (38). Fine also identifies as totem objects Saxon’s parents’ “chest of drawers carried across the plains, bullet holes in the face of it from Indian warfare, a scrapbook containing her mother’s published verses about pioneering life, and a number of old illustrations” (66). All of these connect Saxon with both her parents and Billy, who resembles the Anglo-Saxon warriors in the illustrations. Saxon keeps baby clothes in the chest of drawers, and sending for the chest at the end of the novel is her way of telling Billy that they will have another child to replace the baby they lost. The poems, too, take on additional meaning as they inspire Saxon to retrace her mother’s pioneering path and to search for other poems, lost in vanished periodicals, that contain metaphoric clues to the land Saxon seeks. They are an incomplete guidebook that informs the work, the romantic ur-text for which London’s novel provides the annotation of Saxon’s quest.

As significant as the objects mentioned by Fine that link Saxon to her parents intellectually are the talismans that link her body physically to their long dead bodies. Seeking “the clue among the cherished fragments of her mother’s soul” (39), Saxon finds and, “with the deep gravity and circumstance of a priest before an altar,” opens the package containing a

little red satin Spanish girdle, whaleboned like a tiny corset, pointed, the pioneer finery of a frontier woman who had crossed the plains. It was handmade after the California-Spanish model of forgotten days. The very whalebone had been home-shaped of the raw material from the whale ships traded for in hides and tallow. The black lace trimming her mother had made. The triple edging of black velvet strips—her mother’s hands had sewn the stitches. (39–40)

Just as Darrell Standing in *The Star Rover* travels through time and space when his body is constricted by the straightjacket used to punish

prisoners, Saxon likewise travels in time when she puts on the girdle, for the constriction of its twenty-two inch waist completes the process of identification with her ancestors: "Hers was her mother's form" (40). Body, identity, ancestry, and landscape merge in this moment and evoke an extraordinary and transcendent vision for Saxon of crossing the plains and the fight at Little Meadow when her mother, "a ribbon sash about her waist," carries pails to the water hole "through the sunshine and the wonder-inhibition of the bullet-dealing Indians" (41). On a less personal level, the corset is one of the few symbolic objects in the novel that acknowledges by inclusion rather than exclusion the Spanish contribution to California. It also serves as a potent symbol that links east and west, land and sea through the plains crossing and the use of whalebone. Its color and fabric suggest luxury, exoticism, and sexuality, and the triple insistence on its beauty and method of manufacture—"handmade, home-shaped" and hand-sewn—opposes both the industrial blandness of Oakland and the mass-produced goods that Saxon creates in the factory job. Saxon completes the connection to her past by purchasing her father's sword from her half-brother, Tom: "a rusty, steel-scabbarded saber of the heavy type carried by cavalry officers in Civil War days. It was attached to a motheaten sash of thick-woven crimson silk from which hung heavy silk tassels" (91). With its red silk covering and its gendered associations with her father's masculinity and bravery, the sword reinforces and completes the symbolic associations of the girdle. Saxon kisses it as she kisses the girdle when returning it to its place, consecrating herself to these objects and to the life that they promise her. Although she will not venture on her pilgrimage for a few years to come, she is, metaphorically speaking, now armed with the cuirass—the girdle—and the sword that will ensure her ultimate survival. She has become a pilgrim who can turn crusader when the need arises.

Finally, the general trajectory of movement in the book, like the novel's landscapes, confirms the allegorical connection. From the confining working-class pits of labor in which they toiled in Oakland (Saxon in an underground laundry and Billy in the fight ring), the two find the land they have been seeking when they climb the

highest mountain they have yet encountered. From this vantage point, they look upon the Sonoma Valley:

To the left they gazed across a golden land of small hills and valleys. . . . All the eastern sky was blushing to rose, which descended upon the mountains, touching them with wine and ruby. Sonoma Valley began to fill with a purple flood, laving the mountain bases, rising, inundating, drowning them in its purple. (386)

In finding her “golden land” and watching her valley being inundated with the purple that signifies riches, Saxon moves from being nearly drowned in salt water to being nearly drowned by beauty. Descending into the valley, Billy and Saxon meet the guardian spirits of the place, Mr. and Mrs. Hale, who live in a hand-hewn octagonal cottage, an American original in construction and design. As Saxon symbolically claims ownership by naming this their true “Valley of the Moon,” Mrs. Hale confirms her title by saying, “Sonoma is an Indian word, and means the Valley of the Moon” (394). By her faith, Saxon has, in effect, called this place into being. Having avoided pitfalls and persevered in the true path, Billy and Saxon find themselves showered with rewards, from their luck at farming and horse-trading to the treasure mountain full of high-quality clay they discover on the land shortly to be theirs. If the scene at the top of the mountain suggests, as in *Paradise Lost*, that “the world was all before them” (12.646), the last scene verifies the wisdom of their chosen path. Surrounded by an Edenic forest, Saxon tells Billy of her pregnancy, while a doe and fawn, symbols of fertility, look on.

In these works, then, Jack London's landscapes suggest more of transcendence than the painstaking accumulation of detail associated with his materialism and naturalism. If Northland stories such as “The God of His Fathers” and “The Priestly Prerogative” reject the snares of organized religion as a means of confronting the White Silence, the landscape itself forces recognition of an ultimate human truth on those whose lives it surrounds and touches. In a similar manner, London infuses his California landscapes with a regenerative power that is

in its own way as unreal, potent, and didactically compelling as the destructive power of the frozen North. In short, for London the landscape is a landscape of memory coexistent with a West that (like Mary Austin's) has the power to effect physical and psychological transformations. Through this use of landscape, London can evade if not reconfigure the materialist framework of his literary naturalism.

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