

## Lessons Learned

### The 12<sup>th</sup> Biennial Jack London Society Symposium

**Gina M. Rossetti, Ph.D.**

**Associate Professor**

**Saint Xavier University**

**&**

**President of the Jack London Society**

AT the end of October, the Jack London Society convened its 12th Biennial Symposium at the Berkeley City Club in Berkeley, California. Known as the Little Castle and designed by Julia Morgan, participants enjoyed a step back in time, relishing in the historical and quaint qualities of this vintage private hotel, which was built as a place for women to gather and discuss intellectual and cultural ideas, questions, and controversies. Keeping this spirit alive, the Jack London Society selected a perfect venue, then, for bringing together colleagues who examine the complexities in London's *oeuvre*. Intrinsic to these investigations is the recognition that London's fiction and non-fiction comment critically about his engagement with the socio-political and aesthetic issues of his era. Whether the participants offered papers focused on gender, class, or ethnicity, London's tramp diary, or Jack London and authorship, the dialogue that ensued spotlighted the depth and breadth of current London scholarship, while also revealing the diverse methods and approaches

to the study of this important American author.

One of the major lines of inquiry pertained to London's use of and re-definition of genre boundaries and literary conventions, which was articulated by the panelists who comprised the Symposium's opening panel. Calling into question London's classification as a naturalist author, Jonah Raskin invited participants to re-consider this definition, noting that London's use of different traditions and tropes, along with his focus on social fragmentation, aligns the author with an emergent modernism. While naturalism focuses on individuals trapped in circumstances that call attention to a lack of agency, Raskin encouraged audience members to re-consider the impact of London's fiction by calling attention to the ways in which these characters transcend and transform these social laboratories. Questioning and resisting conventional categories and definitions gained further ground in the paper Susan Nuernberg and Iris Dunkle offered, suggesting that *Martin Eden* embodies the *Künstlerroman* tradition rather than the *Bildungsroman*,

which chronicles more accurately the depths of the artist's alienation from the dominant value system. As a result, Martin's suicide at the end of the text fits more squarely in this sub-genre because it comments critically about the artist's role as social critic; his suicide at the novel's conclusion dramatizes the title character's refusal to accommodate himself to a morally bankrupt system. Such boundary-pushing also manifests itself in the final presenter's paper: For Jay Williams, London not only transforms boundaries, but he also calls into question the dividing lines themselves—blurring the barriers that separate magazines, newspapers, and fictional texts. This porousness calls attention to London's deconstruction of these categories, along with the tension that manifests itself in literary analysis, which seeks to impose order and form on that which breaks out of such boundaries.

This focus on London's construction of ideas in his time period gained further ground at the Symposium insofar as his role as a public intellectual was spotlighted. For Cecelia Tichie, London's work foregrounds his importance as one who educated the public about the impact of wage slavery. Tichie's paper delineated the nature of the era's reading public: it was an audience that wanted to be both entertained and informed. London's work came at the same time as the rise of the Social Gospel. As a result, writers such as London and Sinclair used the printed page as the medium through which they articulated corporate abuses, allowing fiction to catalog the lived experiences

## THE JACK LONDON SOCIETY

### **PRESIDENT**

**Gina M. Rossetti**  
Saint Xavier University

### **EXECUTIVE COORDINATOR**

**Kenneth K. Brandt**  
Savannah College of Art and Design

### **ADVISORY BOARD**

**Lawrence I. Berkove**  
University of Michigan-Dearborn

**Donna Campbell**  
Washington State University

**Anita Duneer**  
Rhode Island College

**Daniel Dyer**  
Western Reserve University

**Sara S. "Sue" Hodson**  
Huntington Library

**Joseph Johnson**  
Independent Scholar

**Earle Labor**  
Centenary College of Louisiana

**Louis Leal**  
Jack London State Historical Park

**Eric Carl Link**  
University of Memphis

**Noël Mauberret**  
Lycée Paul Cezanne, Institute for  
American Universities in

Aix-en-Provence, France

**Keith Newlin**  
University of North Carolina Wilmington

**Susan Nuernberg**  
University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh

**Christian Pagnard**  
Lycée Alain Colas, Nevers, France

**Jeanne C. Reesman**  
University of Texas at San Antonio

**Dan Wichlan**  
Jack London Foundation

**Earl Wilcox**  
Winthrop University

**James Williams**  
*Critical Inquiry*

### **Honorary Board Members**

**Vil Bykov**  
Moscow University

**Rudy Ciuca**  
Jack London Foundation

**Joseph Lawrence**  
Jack London Foundation

**Editor**

**Kenneth K. Brandt**  
Savannah College of Art and Design  
kbrandt@scad.edu

**Assistant Editor**  
**Dominic Viti**

of ordinary persons. Despite his attention to these socio-cultural abuses, London rarely comes to be included as among the era's leading public intellectuals, revealing an overlooked aspect of his work.

In many ways, this exclusion also represents new areas for scholarly inquiry. In particular, the Symposium participants drew critical attention to the lived experiences of London's fiction and non-fiction—for both the readers and the texts' characters. To this end, the participants were invited to attend London's great-granddaughter Tarnel Abbott's production, *A Reader's Theater Play*, which was based on London's *The Iron Heel*. The performance was also open to the public, as well, and the main ballroom was brimming with an enthusiastic and politically astute audience. This production used the novel's examination of oligarchy as a lens for understanding the current economic divide. Such an approach blended a Brechtian alienation effect with London's unmasking of oppressive social mechanisms, calling attention to the ways in which the public comes to be estranged from itself, underscoring the need for revolutionary action.

This call to arms and demand for agency also revealed itself, not only in London's fiction, but also in the work of other authors in the same time period. For example, Eric Link's paper presentation raised the question of the naturalist hero's inability to articulate a sense of self. For Link, the representation of human agency is defined by introspection and the outward expression of it. For so many naturalist protagonists, however, such expression is beyond their grasp, suggesting that their struggles are emblematic of the rank-and-file citizen's inability to throw off the shackles that imprison him/her. Drawing attention to the protagonists in "To Build a Fire," "The Apostate," and "The White Silence," Link encouraged participants to examine this sliding scale of self-expression, noting that this limited self-expression heightens the forces that ensnare the characters, and as a result, dramatizes the naturalist effects and dilemmas.

The 2014 Symposium not only drew attention to important and new areas of scholarly inquiry, but it also reminded participants of the Society's history and those who have been instrumental in its important work. Our executive director for twenty-nine years, Jeanne Campbell Reesman, passed the torch to a new executive director, Kenneth Brandt, and in doing so, we recognize that were it not for Jeanne this organization would not have attained its distinction and its collegiality. Anita Duneer (Rhode Island College), Eric Carl Link (University of Memphis), and Keith Newlin (University of North Carolina Wilmington) were also appointed to the Jack London Society Board of Directors. At the Symposium, we also paid tribute to our late colleague Greg Hayes, which occurred at the Jack London State Historic Park, reminding all of us of his love for London's work and legacy, as well as our indebtedness to Greg for his knowledge and kindness. As the new President of the Jack London Society, I am honored to be a part of this engaging and invigorating scholarly organization, and I hope to carry on the important work of those who have held this post previously. As members prepare for the 13th Biennial Symposium in Santa Rosa, we will carry forward the strong work that marked our most recent gathering in Berkeley, as we come to celebrate London's life and work on what will be the 100th year since his death. We hope you attend.

# TRYING TO WATCH JACK LONDON BUILD A STORY: THE PROBLEMATIC COMPOSITION OF “TO BUILD A FIRE”

GEORGE ADAMS  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-WHITEWATER

James Williams comments in his chronology of Jack London's works that many of them "have a complex compositional history." That is almost an understatement when applied to his best story, "To Build a Fire." Jack London's regimen for composing short stories is well-known: he made notes for a projected story, frequently from a source; he regularly wrote 1,000 words a day; he never revised; he kept a record of when he finished and submitted a story; and although he did not keep manuscripts, Charmian did. With that much information available it should be easy to trace the compositional history of a specific story, in effect looking over London's shoulder while he composes. The documentation for the 1908 version of "To Build a Fire," for example, includes an earlier version, a note summarizing the later version, the manuscript and a copy of the typescript of the later version, and references to the story in letters to publishers and in Charmian's diary. But paradoxically, all that documentation makes it difficult to reconstruct exactly how and when London composed it. On the other hand we discover elements in the story that belie London's oft-repeated claim that he is merely a skilled worker and not an artist.

The question of how London wrote a story entails two considerations, his daily output of words in accord with his usual regimen, and his sources, also in accord with his usual regimen. By London's count "To Build a Fire" is 7,235 words. At his usual 1,000 words a day with no revisions during composition it should have taken him seven or eight days to write it. The manuscript is dated "May 29, 1907," during the *Snark* voyage; the typescript of the note on which the story is apparently based is dated "May 3," so he had twenty-six days to write it. But Charmian's diary indicates that he did not begin work on short stories until after the arrival of the *Snark* in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on May 20. That leaves nine days in which to write it, still enough time based on London's regimen of 1,000 words a day. But it may actually have taken him less than a week to write it.

Manuscripts are likely to appear continuous, as if written in one day, if they are without indications of stopping places. When I first examined the manuscript of "To Build a Fire" I thought there were such indications, showing that the story had been written in only three days, which,

given its quality, would not be surprising. But then I decided they are only word-count markers, roughly every 2,500 words. That count however is one of the problems in trying to trace the compositional history of the story. Given London's regimen we would assume that he kept a running word-count, so that on the seventh or eighth day he would already have known the total, and indeed he said that his customary "count...is done word by word as each story is composed" (*Letters*, Nov. 18, 1909).

London (and Charmian) tell us a lot about his procedures for composition and submission but there are details missing, including exactly what counted as a "word" and whether or not he sometimes deviated from his usual practice and made a word count after he had finished a manuscript. If that is the case for "To Build a Fire" why is the count in 2,500-word segments or in some other segment, since he said that his practice (at one time at least) was to write 30-300 words then type them (*Letters*, Mar. 7, 1899). And if the manuscript was completed in less than a week, as I think it was, then London's word production not only did not average 1,000 words a day, it exceeded that; more precisely, the actual composition schedule could have been roughly the usual 1,000 words the first day and 1,250 words a day after that. The indication that this might have been the actual schedule is that it was after the first 1,000 words he changed the main character from "John Collins" to "the man" and added "the dog" to the story (although he may have planned to do that before he began composing the story).

It may be quibbling to be concerned with how many words a day London produced, but if the actual schedule for "To Build a Fire" was 1+5 days, the five days represent a kind of "speed-up of the assembly-line," suggesting London had seen something in the story that allowed him to shorten the production time from seven or eight days to six, or even to three, if the manuscript markers are in fact stopping places. Where he wrote the story is of relatively little importance, although he says that while on board the *Snark* he was "doing a day's work every day" (*Letters*, July 25, 1907) and "My work goes on every day" (*Letters*, November 25, 1907). But in the November

letter he cites only *Martin Eden*, begun in Honolulu, and that suggests that he composed only long works while at sea; in fact, Charmian's diary says specifically he did not begin writing short ones until after their arrival in Hawaii.

To the question of when "To Build a Fire" was written, a letter to George Brett at Macmillan on May 28, 1907 proposing the publication of a book of "Klondike short stories" may provide an indirect answer. In the letter London claims a count of 38,000 words completed and 12,000 more (two more stories of 6,000 words each) to be completed, for a total of 50,000 words. He does not specify how many or which stories are in each count, but presumably the 38,000 words included "To Build a Fire," "The Wit of Porportuk," "The Passing of Marcus O'Brien," and "Flush of Gold." But the word-count of those four stories is only 28,690 even if it includes a completed "To Build a Fire"; the three (not two) not yet written stories ("Trust," "That Spot," "Lost Face") amount to 13,703 words, for a total of 42,393, not 50,000. And London's count of 38,000 would mean that "To Build a Fire" was completed on or before May 28; that conflicts with the May 29 date on the manuscript. If the count of 38,000 words includes an incomplete "To Build a Fire," say one of around 6,000 words (assuming around 1,250 words to be added on May 29), the word-count for the four stories is only 27,455.

Since London was selling stories to magazines by the word, why is there a discrepancy of nearly 10,000 words between what he proposed in the letter and what he actually wrote? The word count problem appears again in London's negotiations with Brett for the proposed collection of Klondike stories, to be called *Lost Face*. Brett said the word count for the seven stories was 45,000 (not 42,393) and he asked for 15,000 more words, for a total of 60,000, 10,000 more words than London's original proposal in his May 28 letter (*Letters*, November, 1909). But London insisted that the actual final count for the collection is 51,858 words, that at one point (when?) he had already written 46,494 words, and that it took "months and months" (from when to when?) to complete the title story, "Lost Face," at 4,864 words.

Obviously, nothing adds up, literally, in these discrepant word-counts, nor does the discrepancy between the two possible dates for the completion of "To Build a Fire," May 28 and May 29. There are ways to account for some of these discrepancies, for example a simple typographical error ("38,000" for "28,000"), a slight exaggeration about the completion date, or a disagreement over how the word counts were made. London says a count is done "word by word as each story is composed." What does that mean? It must not mean writing "The" at the beginning of "To Build a Fire" and counting "one" at the same time and so on until the story is finished. It must mean that immediately after a day's work the count was made. But where and how was it recorded? It appears that it was on the manuscript—but if that is the case, the markers of 2,500-word segments mean either that the count was in fact not done every day or that the composition time was only three or four days (3x2,500). Another, if minor, problem is what London meant by a "word." We can assume that he counted the determiners "a" and "the," but he inconsistently punctuates the phrases "short story" and "short-story" are both phrases two words? And are epigraphs included in a word count?

Given the problems with the time and schedule of the composition period and the word count it is no surprise there are

problems with the revisions in the manuscript, in particular two problems. London changed his practice over the years and we don't know exactly what he meant by "revise" and "rewrite" (or "emend," which he sometimes uses). He tells us that between 1899 and 1905 he revised his typescripts (and probably his manuscripts), and he also rewrote stories. He lengthened "Father Robideau's Confession," changed the title to "The Priestly Prerogative," and added an epigraph. He made similar changes to "Even Unto Death" which became "Flush of Gold." He even made a "composite of three retired Mss" to produce "The Wife of a King" (*Letters*, Aug. 10, 1899). Between 1905 and 1912 he presumably revised his manuscripts but not his typescripts and he continued to rewrite stories, including "To Build a Fire." He claimed that between 1912 and 1916 he never revised and never rewrote (*Letters*, Oct. 31, 1914).

During these three periods his method of production changed, affecting his revisions if not his rewriting. He made typescripts of his manuscripts, Bess and Charmian did the typing, and finally he composed on the typewriter or dictated and Charmian typed. Charmian in her diary tells us further that on the *Snark* voyage, when "To Build a Fire" was written, his practice was to make notes for a next story (or chapter) while she typed a finished manuscript. That means, London continued work after he had written 1,000 words, which was not his usual practice.

The manuscript of "To Build a Fire," written during the second period, is extensively revised, despite his advice to new writers not to over-revise (*Letters*, Feb. 15, 1905), assuming that "revision" for London meant "making a major difference." If you categorize what London did to the manuscript of "To Build a Fire" by the more general term, "changes," there are four kinds of change in the manuscript: 1) "emendations" (corrections of misspelled or illegible words, some examples of which also appear in the typescript); 2) "deletions" ranging from punctuation marks to whole phrases. When he changed the closing phrase "beat the hand savagely across the chest to restore the circulation" to "beat the hand savagely across his chest"; 3) "additions," for example when he inserted "eastward" into the phrase "led through the fat spruce timberland"; and 4) "replacements."

But these examples show that we would be wrong to see them as "just changes" because they affect in varying degrees the quality of the story. As Jeanne Reesman rightly notes in the Introduction to *No Mentor But Myself* some changes are "very important as when he changed Vincent to the man" (xix). The example of deletion not only removes an unnecessary detail it is also thematically more precise because it suggests a disjunction between "the" hand and "his" chest. The example of addition ("eastward") makes the phrase not only more precise but also provides verisimilitude: the narrator knows the geography. It is particularly the replacements, ranging from changing "the" to "his" to the major change of "John Collins" to "the man," that could properly be called not just revision but "rewriting" and raise the question of how to categorize the relationship between the two versions of "To Build a Fire."

In an 1899 letter commenting on "The Priestly Prerogative" London calls it a "revision"; I think that it is a rewriting. I agree with Reesman (*No Mentor*, 210); the 1908 version of "To Build a Fire" is also a rewriting. London avoids catego-

# The Jack London Society Website



<http://jacklondon.society.org/>

- **Renew Your Membership Online**
- **Register for the JLS Symposium**
- **Catch up on the Latest Jack London News**
- **Get Links to Recent Publications and Reviews**
- **Find Upcoming Conferences and Calls for Papers**
- **View Society Photographs**
- **Access back issues of *The Call***
- **Calvin Hoovestol's new annotated Jack London Bibliography (2010-2014) is now available in the Bibliography tab**

rizing it entirely in his December 22, 1908 letter to R.W. Gilder, the editor of *Century* magazine. Instead he speaks only of his “treatment” of the “motif” of freezing to death in the Yukon. We can assume that when he says in the 1914 letter that he never revises or rewrites he is referring only to his practice at that time. However, even if in the period 1905-1912 he did not revise in accord with whatever he defined as “revision” there is a fairly clear implication in the letter to Gilder that he thought of the 1908 version of “To Build a Fire” as not simply the result of revising but of rewriting.

If “rewritten” is the correct category for the 1908 version then the important question becomes How did he actually rewrite it? If, as he claims in his letter to Gilder, he had in the years between 1902 and 1908 become dissatisfied with the 1902 version and had frequently thought about how to improve it that could account for both his claim in the letter that he didn’t refer to a copy of it in order to rewrite it and why he would have been able to write a new version in less than a week. However, material from an earlier story, “To The Man on Trail,” went into the 1902 version of “To Build a Fire” and London surely had a copy of the earlier story to work from; that is likely also to have been the case for the rewriting of “The Priestly Prerogative” and “Flush of Gold.” Therefore, despite his telling Gilder that he remembered little about the 1902 version of “To Build a Fire,” I think that he did in fact have access to a copy of it when he rewrote it, especially considering the following similarities between the two stories. (Similar or equivalent words are in italics; similar or equivalent phrases are in square brackets.)

1902	1908
“Never travel alone” is a precept...	Epigraph
These [ <i>springs never froze</i> ]...to make the <i>trap</i>	the coldest snaps [ <i>never froze these springs</i> ]... They were <i>traps</i> .
<i>boughs</i> above his head were [burdened]	the tree carried [a weight] of snow on its <i>boughs</i>
his slight movement in collecting the twigs had been <i>sufficient</i> to disturb the balance	an agitation <i>sufficient</i> to bring about the disaster
he...shuffled [ <i>the bunch</i> of matches] on his knees, got it into place on his palm, with the wrist of his other hand forced the nerveless fingers down against the bunch, and with the wrist kept them there. At the second <i>scratch</i> the bunch caught fire, and he knew that if he could stand the <i>pain</i> he was saved. He [choked with the <i>sulphur fumes</i> ], and the blue flame licked the flesh of his hands. [At first he could not <i>feel it</i> ], but It burned quickly in through the frosted <i>surface</i> . The odor of the [ <i>burning flesh</i> ]-his flesh- was [strong in his nostrils]. He writhed about in his torment, yet [held on].	He caught [ <i>the whole bunch</i> ] between the heels of his hands. His arm-muscles not being frozen enabled him to press the hand-heels tightly against the matches. Then he <i>scratched</i> the bunch along his leg. It flared into flame, seventy <i>sulphur</i> matches at once! There was no wind to blow them out. He [kept his head to one side to escape the strangling fumes], and held the blazing bunch to the birch bark. As he so held it, he [became aware of sensation] in his hand. [His <i>flesh</i> was <i>burning</i> ]. [He could smell it]. Deep down below the <i>surface</i> he could feel it. The sensation developed into <i>pain</i> that grew acute. And still he [endured it]...
And-[“never <i>travel alone!</i> ”] he now [ <i>lays down</i> the precept] of the north.	The old-timer had been very serious in [ <i>laying down</i> the law] that [no man must <i>travel alone</i> ]...

London does acknowledge a source for the 1908 version, Jeremiah Lynch’s *Three Years in the Klondike*, in his note for what he calls a “study” entitled “Klondike” about “a strong man, wetting his feet, freezing to death in struggling to make a fire.” The note in pencil, incidentally, was revised in the typed copy. This is the story Lynch recounts: a miner walking from Dawson to his

claim ten miles away stepped into six inches of water from the alkaline springs which never freeze and tried to start a fire to thaw out, but he had taken off his mittens and with frozen hands failed after trying three separate matches then several at once, and when fifteen minutes later his companion arrived he found the miner frozen to death.

More questions about the composition of “To Build a Fire” begin with Lynch’s story. One question is why London got the page citations wrong. His typed note for the story says “pages 64-66” but the correct citation is pages 66-67. What could account for why he got the citation almost right? If, as he frequently complained, he had a poor memory, so poor that he forgot the details of the 1902 version of “To Build a Fire,” how, from a book of 280 pages did he come so close to the correct citation? And if he had Lynch’s book at hand when he made the note referring to it, why did he get the pages wrong? And why did he make the note? The date of the typed note, May 3, 1907, is another problem. Presumably during the time he was dissatisfied about the flaws in the 1902 version he read Lynch’s story, but when? If he read it in 1904, when it was published, why did it take him another three years to write the note? And if he had been thinking about the story for five years did he really need Lynch to tell him how to rewrite it? Or did he not read Lynch until 1907?

London relied on sources for his stories but he clearly did not need one for the 1902 version of “To Build a Fire.” In fact, the details from Lynch’s and London’s stories are so similar that we could accuse Lynch of plagiarism since *Three Years in the Klondike* was published two years after the 1902 version of the story was published. Here is a situation potentially like that of London’s “Moon-Face” and Norris’ “The Passing of Cock-eye Blaylock,” in which both authors used a common source. But what was the common source for Lynch and London? London left the Yukon before Lynch heard the story of the frozen miner, but it is possible that similar stories were widely circulated and London heard one of them. Or perhaps the similarities are simply a striking coincidence.

When we try to establish the exact date of the composition of the 1908 version of “To Build a fire,” another series of questions arises. Charmian describes in her diary part of London’s regimen on the *Shark* voyage: he made notes for the next story while she typed a finished manuscript. What she does not record however is the process, including the exact time and date, whereby London composed the 1908 version. Charmian says she “copied” it on May 24. If she meant by “copy” making a clean copy of the manuscript then that would have been a significant deviation from London’s regimen so you assume she meant “typed.” But the May 24 date would also mean that she typed at least two manuscripts that day, since, as James Williams shows in his chronology of London’s compositions, “Flush of Gold” is also dated May 24. But she does not say she did that. That suggests that “Flush of Gold” is one of the stories Williams says are probably dated by time of submission and not composition. If Charmian meant “began to type” the manuscript on May 24 the composition period then was May 24-29, my suggested schedule of 1+5 days.

Given the problem of the May 24 and May 28 dates, you construct only a tentative history of the 1908 version of “To Build a Fire.”

1904-1907	London reads Lynch, <i>Three Years in the Klondike</i> , makes a note for a “study” sometime before May 3, 1907
23 April 1907	<i>Shark</i> voyage begins
3 May	Charmian (?) makes typed copy of the note
24 May	London writes first thousand words of the story; Charmian begins typing it
25-29 May	London finishes the story, adds epigraph
28 May	Proposes to Brett a “collection of Klondike stories,” including the not completed (?) “To Build a Fire”
7 July	Sends letter to Ninetta Eames saying the story was sent to <i>Success</i>
9 July	Sends Brett the “collection of short stories”
25 July	Sends letter to English literary agent Pinker saying he has sent him the story
?	Sends the story to American literary agent Reynolds
November	Reynolds sells the story to <i>Century</i>
August, 1908	It appears in <i>Century</i> , 76, with epigraph
25 October	London sends letter to Brett at Macmillan, saying <i>Century</i> bought it
22 December	Sends letter to Gilder at <i>Century</i> , insisting on originality of 1908 version
1910	It appears in collection <i>Lost Face</i> , without epigraph (the “definitive” version)

Implicit in this composition history is something about the story that might be surprising to many readers: the current evaluation of it as not only London’s best story but one of the best stories in American literature was apparently not London’s evaluation while he was writing it, and perhaps not until years afterward. In his advice to aspiring writers he said “don’t evaluate your work” and cited his own mistake in over-evaluating his inferior works while he was writing them (*Letters*, Jan. 17, 1913). He claimed that he could “never tell the value of anything of mine until from six months to a year have passed by” (*Letters*, Aug. 4, 1900). However, he sometimes contradicted this. For example, he said that *The Call of the Wild* had achieved the status of “a classic” (*Letters*, Feb. 5, 1915). In the Jack London Collection at Utah State University notes for projected works evaluate them as “A Great Novel” and “My Great Labor Novel.”

Significant evidence for under-evaluation of the story is in the manuscript. Since it is possible that right after he had fin-



ished writing the first one thousand words he had decided to make the main character anonymous and add the dog to the plot we might think that he had already seen the breadth and depth of the story, but the epigraph, another second thought like the man and the dog, indicates otherwise. It foregrounds the most trivial element of the 1902 version, the message that traveling alone in the Yukon winter is stupid because you can always have an accident like stepping in a pool of water and suggests that what London meant in his letter to Gilder about an “adult” version of the story was simply that “the man” is older than “Tom Vincent” in the “juvenile” version and that unlike Tom he freezes to death.

Supporting evidence for the under-evaluation comes from Charmian’s diary, *The Log of the Snark*, *The Book of Jack London*, and *The Cruise of the Snark*. In neither of the published *Snark* accounts is there any mention of “To Build a Fire,” although there is also little mention of any writing during the voyage. In *The Book of Jack London* (II, chapter 31) Charmian notes that between April 1907 and July 1909 Jack wrote *The Cruise of The Snark*, *Martin Eden*, *Adventure*, *South Sea Tales*, *The House of Pride*, *Burning Daylight*, and the stories “The Chinago,” “A Piece of Steak,” “Make Westing,” and “South of the Slot.” There is no mention of “To Build a Fire.” Perhaps Charmian forgot to include it or is just citing some examples to make her point about how active a writer London was during this period, since she also omits “A Flush of Gold,” “A Dream of Debs” and “A Curious Fragment,” all written on the *Snark* voyage. But it is also possible that neither she nor Jack thought there was anything remarkable about “To Build a Fire” and that what Jack wrote to Gilder in 1908 was mostly a sales pitch to get him to buy what could justly be seen

as a story that had already been published, a possibility supported by his insistence that there was nothing “unethical” in selling the rewritten version. While it may seem highly unlikely that a literary artist could underestimate his best story, especially since London was an astute enough critic to realize while he was writing *A Daughter of the Snows* that it was second-rate, it appears that London was not aware of what was his best work.

If we categorize London as an “artist” you come to that much-debated concept which is said to characterize an artist, “creativity,” especially its chief components “imagination” and “inspiration,” both of which I think contributed to the composition of the 1908 “To Build a Fire.” London did not consider himself an artist, as he satirically revealed in his evaluation of Haldeman-Julius as a writer, who was so inept that he “almost compelled” London “to believe that I am an artist” (*Letters*, May 21, 1913). He no doubt would reject inspiration as a significant factor in the creation of a story, given his well-known advice: “Don’t loaf and invite inspiration; light out after it with a club, and if you don’t get it you will nevertheless get something that looks remarkably like it” (“Getting Into Print,” 1903).

There is a problem with what London means by “imagination,” since there are at least two definitions of it in “To Build a Fire.” London equates it with the ability to think of plots; this is exactly what the man in the story can do, since his vision of “the boys” coming down the trail and discovering his frozen body is a narrative, an example of plot-making, ironically accomplishing something London says he himself is unable to do. The man’s lack of imagination in the story then must mean something other than plot-making, and that something other is the ability to reflect on the existential context in which humans live and act. This of course is what London can imagine, as the story demonstrates. This ability then suggests the real reason London made the note referring to Lynch’s story. It is not because he couldn’t create a plot in which a man freezes to death from failure to build a fire because it takes very little plot-making imagination to change the ending of the 1902 version of “To Build a Fire” to the ending of the later version. The reason for the note is implied in London’s categorizing the projected story as a “study,” that is, as an example of the second definition of imagination, the ability to represent a human in his existential context.

It could be argued that it is the kind of inspiration or imagination demonstrated in the story that motivated many of London’s works: it depended on his having found sources for themes or plots. In the case of “To Build a Fire” the sources were 1902 version of the story and perhaps Lynch, if the change of “John Collins” to “the man” was suggested by the nameless “miner” in Lynch’s account. Perhaps it is only something like inspiration that was at work. If London’s claim that he composed stories “to the very conclusion” before touching pen to paper” (*Letters*, Mar. 7, 1899) suggests that he didn’t need to be inspired once he began composing. Nevertheless, I think that inspiration was at work in the manuscript the moment he made that change (and perhaps added the dog as companion) and it enabled him to write the story faster than his usual rate of a thousand words a day. On the other hand the addition of the epigraph does indicate a temporary failure of inspiration, which was corrected only when the story was included in the *Lost Face* collection. (It is also possible of course that the omission of the epigraph in 1910 was not in fact another inspired decision but simply “proof” that what he wrote to Gilder was true, that the 1908 version was very different from the 1902 one.)

You have to admit that we cannot look over London's shoulder while he composes. Perhaps the attempt to do that puts us into a dilemma analogous to the one which vexed London his whole life, namely attempting to reconcile his belief in materialism with his belief that humans are free agents, more than mere organisms acting in accord with evolutionary history and physical laws. Certainly it is difficult to make sense of the materialistic aspects (the relatively full documentation) of the composition of "To Build a Fire," a story created simply by diligent craftsmanship. And we cannot say with certainty that any or all of the changes made in "To Build a Fire" between 1902 and 1910 were the result of inspiration. But if it was not inspiration then we have to presuppose an author who, despite not perceiving what he was accomplishing, somehow produced not only his best story, but a major work of American fiction. It is hard to reconcile that version of London with the one who wrote *The Call of the Wild*, *The Iron Heel*, and *Martin Eden* as well as other short stories almost as good as "To Build a Fire."

### Works Cited

- London, Charmian K., Diaries. 1907-1908. Jack London Collection, JL 221-222. The Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, CA. MS.
- . *The Log of The Snark*. New York, NY: Macmillan, 1915. Print.
- . *The Book of Jack London*. 2 vols. New York, NY: Century, 1921. Print.
- London, Jack, "Getting Into Print," in Walker, Dale L. and Jeanne Campbell Reesman, eds. *No Mentor But Myself: Jack London On Writers and Writing*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999. Print
- . *The Cruise of the Snark*. New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1911. Print.
- . Jack London Collection. Merrill-Cazier Library, Box 24, Folder 11. Utah State University, Logan, Utah. MS.
- . "To Build a Fire," in *The Complete Short Stories of Jack London*. 3 vols. Ed. Earle Labor, Robert C. Leitz III, and I. Milo Shepard. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993. Print.
- . *The Letters of Jack London*. 3 vols. Ed. Earle Labor, Robert C. Leitz, III, and I. Milo Shepard. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988. Print.
- Lynch, Jeremiah, *Three Years in the Klondike*. London: Edward Arnold, 1904. Print.
- Williams, James, "Jack London's Works by Date of Composition." Web.

## JACK LONDON'S COVERAGE OF THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR AND HIS FUTILE BATTLE WITH JAPANESE CENSORSHIP

Daniel A. Métraux  
Mary Baldwin College

Jack London came to the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 looking for excitement. Hired by the vast Hearst newspaper chain to cover the Russo-Japanese War as its chief correspondent, London eagerly accepted the assignment. He longed to be in the thick of battle, dodging bullets and risking mortality. He wished to hear the sounds of rifles and guns, the bursting of shell and shrapnel, and the voices of competing soldiers as they fought to the death. He wished to witness hand-to-hand fighting between Japanese samurai and Russian Cossacks, to view the waves of Japanese troops charging Russian fortifications and the horrible death and destruction that characterized this first of the deadly wars of the twentieth century.

London wanted to transcribe everything he saw to convey all this in glowing prose for his newspaper readers in the United States. The war would not only energize him, but also give new vitality to his writing. He could win a whole new group of readers because of the wide circulation of Hearst newspapers. London was also leaving a failing marriage and the war provided a perfect excuse to escape the difficult period of transition that often comes with divorce.

Alas, London's dreams were never fully realized. London did send a stream of feature articles to the Hearst newspapers, twenty-two of which were published along with pictures of daily life in Korea, but they contain very limited news of actual military action. He was in close proximity of several battles in Manchuria early in the war, but never saw any action and garnered very little practical information from Japanese military sources for his newspaper dispatches. The problem, London soon found, was in Japanese censorship and obsession with military secrecy. Japanese policy during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) was to totally control the flow of news and by so doing to create a great propaganda show for the West. Reporters successful in their efforts in getting away from Tokyo found themselves kept in camps far from any real action and fed a constant stream of news of Japanese victories and achievements without any firm details and no real comprehension of what was actually going on.

### London's Expectations as a Correspondent

Following Japanese troops northward through Korea up to the Yalu River where the first fighting was taking place, London reflected on the reasons he had accepted the chance offer of his present employer, Hearst, to cover the war:

Personally, I entered upon this campaign with the most gorgeous conceptions of what a war correspondent's work in the world must be. I knew that the mortality of war correspondents was said to be greater, in



proportion to numbers, than the mortality of soldiers. I remembered, during the siege of Kartoum and the attempted relief by Wolsely the death in battle of a number of correspondents. I had read "The Light That Failed." I remembered Stephan Crane's descriptions of being under fire in Cuba. I had heard—God what was there aught I had not heard of all sorts of and conditions of correspondents in all sorts of battles and skirmishes, right in the thick of it, where life was keen and immortal moments were being lived. In brief, I came to war expecting to get thrills. (Métraux 2009, 289)

Three months later he was ready to leave Korea and Manchuria. "My only thrills have been those of indignation and irritation." Even though he had spent over three months with Japanese forces as they moved northward to confront the Russians, he saw no real action and was frustrated every time he tried to pry information from Japanese officers. He grew bored of being led on fruitless walking tours Japanese camps far from the front as if he were a Cook's tourist being led about Rome or Paris. He wrote that when the correspondent has described two or three invisible battles and has had his conjectures trimmed down by the censor, he is done for. He can't go on describing the sounds of rifles and guns; the bursting of shell and shrapnel, and the occasional moving specks for a whole campaign. Nor can he go describing the transport trains in the rear; the only thing he sees too much of and which as yet have not been placed under the taboo of military secret (Métraux 2009, 289).

He sarcastically commented on what the Japanese regarded as the role of a foreign correspondent:

The function of a war correspondent, so far as I can ascertain, is to sit up on the reverse slopes of hills where honored guests cannot be injured, and from there to listen to the crack of rifles and vainly search the distance for men who are doing the shooting, to receive orders from headquarters as to what he may or may not do; to submit daily to the censor of his conjectures and military secrets and to observe article 4 of the printed First Army Regulations—to wit: "Press correspondents should look and behave decently, and never should do anything disorderly, and should never enter the office rooms of the headquarters." (Métraux 2009, 288)

### **London's Experience as a Correspondent**

London's dispatches from Korea and Manchuria make much of his annoyance with Japanese censorship and harassment. He writes at great length of his experience in Japan where he was detained by military authorities for taking what they deemed to be unauthorized pictures. Later he chafed at the inability of the correspondents to interview Japanese troops, to see any action, and to send out uncensored dispatches. Photography was not permitted even of the most benign subjects.

The Japanese in Tokyo always promised that the reporters would be able to see action in the near future, but a week or even a month later most correspondents still found them-

selves sitting in Tokyo, attending banquets and listening to Japanese government propaganda proclaiming the excellent progress of the war. Most of the correspondents seemed content to remain there, enjoying the great comforts of Tokyo, being spoon-fed propaganda by Japanese government and military officials while they grew fat on endless delicacies served at one banquet after another and chased after geisha girls whenever they could.

After only a few days after his arrival in Tokyo, London made a daring escape from the hotels and social whirl of the Japanese capital. After an arduous voyage on several small unwieldy ships, London succeeded in arriving in Seoul in late February, 1904. He surprised Japanese officials by suddenly showing up in Seoul as Japanese troops were set to begin their long march through northern Korea to engage Russian forces waiting for them along the Yalu River that divided Korea and Chinese Manchuria. He observed Japanese forces marching north, but he and the few other reporters who had worked their way into Korea had little access to the Japanese military. He found Seoul to be a most dreary place, endless rows of mud hovels inhabited by over two hundred thousand impoverished citizens and a miserable excuse for an imperial palace where coolies dug a cesspool for a latrine and brought brushwood to heat the structure on a pack train of ponies.

Finally in mid-April, London and the rest of a small group of Seoul-based reporters received word that they would be allowed to move across the Yalu River into Manchuria, but they soon found that their access to the actual fighting was still very limited. They spent much of their time in an isolation center near Antung. By early May they were finally allowed to observe some fighting from a distant vantage point as Japanese forces crossed the Yalu while receiving fire from entrenched Russian forces endeavoring to halt their progress.

Although London was traveling across Korea in the dead of winter on bad roads in tandem with the Japanese army and sorely missing the creature comforts of Tokyo, he was no closer to realizing his dream of being in or near the real action. While he and a few other reporters were in Korea and Manchuria, they sat in beautifully made up camps with nothing to do but play bridge and go swimming. Their freedom of movement was generally restricted to the confines of their camp. The Japanese told them that they were close to the front, but London remarked that they were in fact so far away that he could not be certain whether he could actually hear the noise of battle.

### **The Role of Censorship in the Russo-Japanese War**

Japanese censorship during the Russo-Japanese War provides a sterling example of the problems journalists face when a government attempts to restrict and manage the news. The Japanese government attempted to control the movement of reporters and to impose strict censorship with considerable success. The goal of the Japanese was to keep all foreign journalists as far away from the combat zone as possible. The small handful of reporters like Jack London who were able to surreptitiously link up with the Japanese military found that they were kept far from the front. When they filed reports they had to first clear them with Japanese military officials and they often found that the telegraph transmission and the mailing of their stories had

been blocked for days or weeks. The result was that much of the news that readers in the West received was little more than propaganda furnished by the Japanese.

The Japanese saw the dissimulation of news as a form of propaganda that would only benefit their cause. They endeavored to control the flow of news stressing the importance of national security. They contrasted their practices with those of the Russian military which allowed the Russian press to post information about military maneuvers which were of crucial interest to the Japanese. The Japanese military attaché in the Japanese embassy in Berlin routinely read Russian newspapers and telegraphed their news to Tokyo to the benefit of the Japanese military.

London's personal notebook, which he kept throughout his stay in Korea and Manchuria, is full of examples of Japanese censorship. First, there was the process of trying to get news from the front back to the West. Reporting from the front in the Yalu River region between Korea and Manchuria, London would write a dispatch and give it to a Japanese censor who would take his sweet time before handing back an emasculated version to London for transmission. London would have to hire a Korean runner to take the dispatch 200 miles south to Pin Yang (now Pyongyang) where there was a Japanese-manned telegraph station. There the dispatch would be wired to Tokyo where another censor might examine it before allowing transmission to San Francisco.

That process was already slow, but Japanese authorities very often put temporary bans on the flow of ordinary mail and telegrams from Korea to Japan. There were also bans on personal travel out of Korea which meant that no Western reporter could carry news on his person for outside dissemination. One such delay occurred between April 27th and May 6th, 1904 when the first fierce battles were occurring along the Yalu between Japanese and Russian forces.

At the same time, dispatches from the Japanese military were sent immediately and directly from the front to Tokyo. Western reporters in Tokyo would hear about a battle very quickly, a full week or more before highly censored dispatches from London and his colleagues would begin to arrive. The problem with the initial reports, of course, is that they came directly from Japanese military sources without any independent verification from more objective Western correspondents.

In his personal notebook, London comments that Japanese censors wanted the correspondents' dispatches to reflect a Japanese point of view. While Western reporters in Tokyo very quickly got a Japanese version of some major event, censors were very interested in having dispatches from correspondents like London to verify and further develop the points of view expressed in the initial reports. If the correspondent's report differed from the official Japanese line, the transmission or mailing of the article would be held up or even returned to the sender. At other times London felt that the Japanese deliberately garbled messages from the correspondents so as to make them "unintelligible."

### **Everything Is A Military Secret**

Another matter that greatly annoyed London and his colleagues was trying to pry information from the Japanese military. Everything about the Japanese military mission was a virtual state

secret. London commented that:

This [situation] would not be so bad if they did not consider practically everything a military secret. Apropos of this, on his way up country, [this writer] arrives at the village of Kasan. A month has passed. The front had moved up a hundred miles. The correspondent saw a few graves on the hillside. "How many Japanese were killed?" he asked an officer. The officer was a major. He replied, "I cannot tell you. It is a military secret."

This may seem far-fetched, but it is not. It is merely typical. On every side is the military secret. The correspondent is hedged by military secrets. He may not move for fear that he will pop on a military secret, though what he may do with a military secret only the Japanese know. (Metraux 2009, 285)

Once when the Japanese were confronting the Russians near the Yalu, London and his colleagues waited four hours for a briefing from an intelligence officer who finally came to inform them: "At some place, not indicated, ten Japanese cavalrymen saw two squadrons of Cossacks and charged them with drawn sabers. The Cossacks fled" (London Notebook).

The reporters had to be very vague about what they wrote, but at times these restrictions reached the ridiculous. Even the most benign statement could be interpreted as spreading a military secret. London uses as an example the Japanese building a bridge over the Yalu in plain sight of the Russians. It was in fact a Trojan Horse-style decoy as the Japanese were secretly building another bridge downstream, but London could not write about the decoy bridge. Ironically, he could say that the Japanese were working with timbers by the river—which even the slowest of readers should understand to mean that they were involved in bridge construction.

By late spring London concluded that it was useless to waste one's time trying to cover the war at our near the front. His frustration comes out in his notebook when he writes: "Japanese authorities in repeatedly censoring dispatches at successive points causing great delay [with] letters and rendering messages unintelligible, with restrictions making independent observation by correspondents impossible except in small area." The idea of sending reporters to cover the war was good, but if their coverage was greatly restricted and they were fed nothing but propaganda, then it was hardly worth the great expense of sending a correspondent to the scene and a total waste of his time.

### **The Japanese Mind**

London blamed Japanese intransigence when dealing with foreign correspondents with the idea that Japanese and Westerners come from very different cultural traditions which makes intercultural understanding difficult at best. In his personal notebook, he writes that there is no tradition of Western journalism in Japan and that the traditional role of the media is very different in Japan than in the West. Japanese, according to London, have an Asiatic mindset that readily accepts Western science and weaponry, but very little else. These cultural barriers make fruitful communication very difficult and honest unbiased re-

porting virtually impossible.

London thought long and hard as to why the Japanese behaved in such an odd manner in their treatment of foreign correspondents:

The Japanese does not in the least understand the correspondent or the mental processes of the correspondent, which are a white man's mental processes. The Japanese is of a military race. His old caste distinctions placed the fighting man at the top; next comes the peasant; after that the merchant, and beneath all the scribe. These caste distinctions are practically in force to-day. A correspondent from the West is a man who must be informed by printed instructions that he must dress and behave decently.

The Japanese cannot understand straight talk, white man's talk. This is one of the causes of so much endless delay. The correspondent talks straight to the Japanese, but he cannot realize that it is straight talk. He feels that there is something at the back of the correspondents' mind, and the Japanese must have a day or a week to meditate on what is at the back of the correspondents' mind. Having done this, he has another talk' but again he must go away and meditate upon what is behind this new talk, and so nothing is accomplished from the correspondent's point of view. (Metraux 2009, 285)

### The Value of London's Wartime Reporting

Although London was clearly bitterly disappointed that he missed out on the fighting in Korea and Manchuria, his twenty-two dispatches provide a detailed look at life in Korea and Manchuria at the turn of the last century. London was also a brilliant photojournalist whose pictures also give one a good impression of the poverty and backward nature of Korean society in the early 1900s (Reesman 2010). What we have in these articles is an example of very able feature writing and an in-depth view of the daily lives of Koreans and of Chinese in Manchuria, the disruption that the war brought to the Korean countryside, and the attitudes of the common Japanese soldier as he marched northward toward his confrontation with the Russians.

Over a year before London went to Korea, he had accepted a job offer to cover the Boer War in South Africa, but the war ended by the time he reached England en route to Africa. Rather than returning to the United States, he spent a month living in London's impoverished East End to observe living conditions there. His experiences there led to perhaps his most brilliant book, *The People of the Abyss*. At the time when London wrote this book, the phrase "the Abyss" was used to refer to the lower strata of society. London here exposes the poverty, starvation and desperation of tens of thousands of people living in the wealthiest city in the world, the very heart of the British Empire.

London was a professed socialist whose own impoverished background drew great sympathy for the poverty and hardships of the common laborer in every region he visited. His literature presents a very sympathetic view of the common man and a general castigation of the wealthier classes that exploited him.

London clearly develops this point of view in *People of the Abyss*. A careful reading of London's Russo-Japanese dispatches will show that they closely parallel the themes of the *Abyss* and if published together as a book could rightly be called *Koreans of the Abyss*.

In his pictures and dispatches, London gives a highly sympathetic view of Koreans in the final years of the Yi dynasty (1392-1910). The Yi dynasty had a rigidly hierarchical class system composed broadly of four social classes: *Yangban* (aristocracy); *chungin* (intermediate class); *sangmin* (common people) *ch'ŏnmin* (lowborn people). London saw ordinary Koreans as the wretched victims of social and political corruption. Korea was governed by a rigid conservative elite class (*yangban*) that totally dominated every aspect of life in Korea. They owned most of the land, controlled all levels of government, held most of the wealth, and dominated the economy. The common class people and lowborn servile people lived in poverty and had whatever resources constantly taken from them by the local *yangban*.

London in his dispatches went to great lengths to describe the material poverty of the common man in Korea. He discusses their impoverished villages, starvation diets, lack of education, and poor health. He criticizes their timidity, their lack of a hard work ethic and the like, but does not blame them for their lowly state. The fault, London declares, lies with the corrupt and greedy *yangban*. London cites as an example the case he witnessed where a company of Japanese soldiers requisitioned some grain and livestock from the peasants of a small village. The Japanese come back to the village to pay for the things they took, but they are told to pay the money to the local *yangban* ruling official. The official keeps a major portion of the money, only remitting a small pittance to the villagers who sold their goods to the Japanese. London, who was staying in the village at the time, went to the official's residence and scolded him. He promised London that he would give the rest of the money to the villagers, but deep down London knew that this was a lie.

Readers interested in the military history of the Russo-Japanese War are advised to peruse Frederick Arthur McKenzie's 1905 book, *From Tokyo to Tiflis: Uncensored Letters from the War*. McKenzie, a special correspondent for the British *Daily Mail*, arrived in Korea around the time London came to Seoul, but he stayed much longer and was able to get a much deeper sense of the actual combat than did London. Overall, however, London's dispatches are of much greater interest because of his focus on the people and living conditions of Koreans and Manchurian Chinese and the effect that the war had on them.

### Works Cited

- McKenzie, Frederick Arthur. *From Tokyo to Tiflis: Uncensored Letters from the War*. London: Hurst & Blackett, Ltd. 1905.
- Métraux, Daniel A. *The Asian Writings of Jack London: Essays, Letters, Newspaper Dispatches, and Short Fiction by Jack London*. Lewiston NY: Edwin Mellen Press. 2009.
- Reesman, Jeanne Campbell, Sara Hodson and Philip Adam. 2010. *Jack London, Photographer*. Athens GA: U of Georgia Press. 2010.

DOCUMENTS: Jack London Collection. Merrill-Cazier Library. Utah State University, Logan, Utah.

Jack London notebook. 1904. Personal notebook of observations made while in Japan, Korea and China during the Russo-Japanese War. London kept a small spiral notebook where he jotted down his thoughts and bits of information for his dispatches. Unlike his dispatches which were censored, his notebook contains a good compendium of his true thinking.

Regulations for Press Correspondents. Instructions for conduct of Western journalists published by the Japanese military, 1904.

#### REGULATIONS FOR PRESS CORRESPONDENTS: THE FIRST ARMY HEADQUARTERS:

##### Imperial Army of Japan: Korea, 1904

**Art. 1.** All the press correspondents with this Army shall act according to these regulations.

**Art. 2.** The general affairs concerning press correspondents shall be under the management of Adjutants, and their supervision and the inspection of their correspondence shall be under the Staff Department. Lodging and subsistence of press correspondents in the field shall be directed by the Quarter-master.

**Art. 3.** Press correspondents shall be commanded by the supervising officer, obey the orders of this Army headquarters and act according to the instructions given by it.

**Art. 4.** Press correspondents should look and behave decently, and should never do anything disorderly.

**Art. 5.** Press correspondents should take care not to do anything harmful to the troops and never enter the office rooms of the headquarters.

**Art. 6.** When thought necessary by the Army headquarters, press correspondents may be attached to some of the Army's detachments, in which case press correspondents shall be commanded by the commander of that detachment or by the supervising officer and obey his orders.

**Art. 7.** Press correspondents shall not go about in the battle field except at the time and place shown by the supervising officer or the detachment commander.

**Art. 8.** All the correspondence of press correspondence (including their reports, private letters, telegrams, etc.) must be inspected by the supervising officer before sending. The supervising officer, after inspecting such correspondence shall seal (if enveloped) and stamp "passed inspection" upon the envelope, the note paper, or the telegraph application paper, and then give it back to its sender.

The name of the correspondent and of the press he represents must always be written on the envelope or the front page of the report.

**Art. 9.** Correspondence without the inspector's stamp is not allowed.

**Art. 10.** Correspondence in a foreign language may in some case be requested to accompany its Japanese translation, or the kind of language to be used may be limited.

**Art. 11.** Correspondents must pay particular attention to the following items:

1. Things liable to disturb the public peace or to dispirit should not be written.
2. Only the facts of the past may be written in regard

to the actions of troops and never the things to happen in future or of mere supposition.

3. Strength of our troops, their numbers, their locations, and the time and place of dispatching correspondence must not be written, unless it is allowed by the supervising officer.

**Art. 12.** One representative shall be chosen each among the Japanese and foreign correspondents. These representatives are to go between the headquarters and the correspondents in regards to matters concerning the correspondents in general.

**Art. 13.** These regulations are to be applied to the interpreters and servants of press correspondents.

---

## Jack London Society Panels The American Literature Association 26th Annual Conference May 21-24, 2015 Boston MA

### Jack London: Composition, Context, and Song

Chair: Kenneth K. Brandt, Savannah College of Art and Design

1. "Kill it with a Club: The Composition of *The Call of the Wild*," Jay Williams, *Critical Inquiry*
2. "London's *The Iron Heel* as Postmodernist Narrative," George R. Adams, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater
3. "'Sing Now, and Raise the Dead': Sailors' Work Songs in the Writings of Jack London," M.K. Bercaw Edwards, University of Connecticut

### Jack London: Esotericism, Biography, and Accusation

Chair: Jay Williams, *Critical Inquiry*

1. "Jack London's Working-Class Esotericism," Sarah G. Sussman, The University of Texas at Austin
2. "Jack London's Life in German Biographies," Alfred Hornung, Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz
3. "A Strange Account of Plagiarism: Houghton Mifflin and *The Son of the Wolf*," Thomas Harakal, Cambridge, Mass.

For more information visit the ALA website at:

<http://americanliteratureassociation.org/>

# Corrections to *The Letters of Jack London*

Jay Williams

It's the unfortunate task of researchers to offer corrections to previous scholarly work, unfortunate because such corrections may to the amateur scholar be an academic game of gotcha. In reality, scholars make corrections in the spirit of fellowship, knowing full well that omissions and mistakes are facts of the researcher's life.

In that spirit that I offer the following account. *The Letters of Jack London*, edited by Earle Labor, Robert Leitz, and I. Milo Shepard, documents how some letters are missing first pages or are incomplete in some way. The editors' footnote to London's first letter to Charmian indicates that reproducing his letters to her was tricky: "This letter and many of the subsequent letters to CKL exist in typescripts prepared by her. The letters appear sequentially, without salutation, complimentary close, or signature" (*Letters* 1:367). They might have added that some seem fragmentary and at least one is undated. Charmian's biography offers no help. Two fragments (or whole letters; it's impossible to say) appear in her book and don't appear in *Letters* (see *Book of Jack London*, 2:80-81). It's a bit of a mess. We want complete, dated, holograph manuscripts, we don't have them. It's no surprise to discover that in *Letters* the first page of a letter from Jack to Charmian had been inadvertently transferred from one letter to another and that it had happened a second time as well.

## The First Pair of Letters: 18 June 1903 and [early] July 1903

After talking it over with Sue Hodson, Huntington Library's curator of literary manuscripts, we can reconstruct these two pairs of letters in their proper form and order. In the first case, the two letters in *The Letters of Jack London* that concern us are from 1903. One is the first letter from Jack to Charmian (the first that we know of, that is, published in the *Letters*). It's dated 18 June 1903, listed as JL 12426 in the Huntington's collection, undated but whole and correct in Charmian London's *The Book of Jack London*, (2:78-80), appearing incorrectly in *Letters* on pages 365-67. The second is dated [early] July 1903, listed as JL 1430, and appears on pages 371-72 of the *Letters*. The 18 June letter should end at the end of the penultimate paragraph on page 366, after the words "their convictions alone." That is the end of the first page of the letter in typescript. (The second, missing page of this letter is reprinted below.) The remaining paragraphs (from "I tell you this..." to "about me now") are the second page of the [early] July 1903 letter and should be placed after the last line of the letter on page 372.

The internal evidence of these letters that prompted me to check them at the Huntington (they are correctly assembled and dated at the Huntington) can be found on page 367 of the *Letters*. When Jack recalls for Charmian: "Ah. I remember so

many things. When we rode side by side, on a back seat, and I suggested "Haywards," and you looked me in the eyes, smiling," and said, no, Jack, we're not going to have sex, I thought this seemed out of order because I remembered that the "Haywards" incident had occurred after 21 June. Their relationship was moving very quickly, and it's difficult to track their every movement.

## The Second Set of Letters: 7 January 1903, [? mid-January 1903], and 6 April 1903

The second case resulted first from the same kind of switch of first pages and, second, from a process still unknown. There are three letters from Jack to Anna Strunsky of concern. One is dated in the *Letters* as 7 January [03]; the bracketed 03 indicates that London forgot about the turn in years, as we all often do, and misdated the letter; it appears on page 335. The second letter is dated [mid-January 1903?]. See pages 336-37 of the *Letters*. When one looks at the physical letters themselves, the two-page 7 January letter is dated on its first page, but the second page is not. The [mid-January 1903?] letter is undated because it is missing its first page. Again, after consulting with Sue Hodson, I realized the [mid-January 1903?] letter is actually the second page of the 7 January letter. The first page ends after the third paragraph on p. 335. The second page (now separated from the first page of the 7 January letter), beginning with "Shall send fotos," is actually part of a letter missing its first page and can only be dated [after 25 March 1903].

There is a fair amount of internal evidence in the first two letters to support the reordering and re-dating that I am offering.

First, in the second page of the 7 January letter (as printed in *Letters*) London asks Strunsky, "tell me whether you care for the *People of the Abyss*." (*Letters* 335). She is in New York City with Gaylord Wilshire, who receives the manuscript for *People* in order to serialize it after 21 January. See Gaylord Wilshire, letter to London, 2 Jan. 1903 (JL 20517 HEH). The first installment of *People* appears in March 1903. Thus, it is impossible for London to ask Strunsky how she likes *People* on 7 January.

Second, London says that in Wilshire's "last letter" to him "he said finances were such that" he wouldn't pay for the rest of *People*. Wilshire says this in a letter to London dated 2 March 1903 (JL 20521 HEH).

Third, London tells Strunsky not to tell Wilshire about the \$2000.00 "I received" from George Brett for *The Call of the Wild*. He didn't accept this offer until 25 March 1903.

To make things extra confusing, Charmian mistakenly uses the second page of the 7 January letter (beginning with "Shall send photos of Joan & Bess") as part of a two-page letter that appears in different form in *Letters* on p. 359, dated 6 April 1903, but leaves out the date (Charmian 1:391). Charmian's version, which conflicts with the ver-

sion in the Huntington is four paragraphs long with two ellipses. The first two paragraphs (containing one ellipsis) forms the first three paragraphs of the 6 April letter in *Letters*. The next two paragraphs in Charmian's version are the paragraphs that the *Letters*' editors mistakenly included in the 7 January letter. The final paragraph of the *Letters*' 6 April letter does not appear in Charmian's biography. It tells Anna that he has developed photos taken by her brother Hyman; Charmian may have been confused by the similar content of these two portions (one being about sending photos of Joan and Bess and one being about sending photos that he had developed for Hyman).

The second page of the letter that we now know doesn't belong to the 7 January letter or to the 6 April letter can only be dated as sometime after 25 March 1903. Perhaps it was written between 6 April (the date of a letter from JL to AS) and 12 April (Easter Sunday, when London sliced off a part of his thumb and couldn't write until 24 April). Or maybe it was written shortly after that. It and the 24 April letter both mention *The Call of the Wild*.

The internal evidence of the [mid-January 1903?] letter lets us join it to the first page of the 7 January 1903. In this page, London tells Strunsky that Brett was against including Strunsky's newly composed prologue to *The Kempton-Wace Letters* and that he concurred. Brett had just visited London in Piedmont. They'd discussed *The Kempton-Wace Letters* and *The People of the Abyss*. (The fourth paragraph of this page begins, "From our talk," which indicates that this written shortly after the visit, and it follows directly from the opening paragraph of the 7 January letter [*Letters*, p. 336].) London's letter to Strunsky on 20 January says he was sorry to decide against the prologue.

Then there is the matter of the accident. London apparently dropped a box on his foot sometime in December 1902. (I'm only conjecturing that the "vital place" London refers to in the 20 January 1903 letter to Strunsky is his foot [*Letters*, p. 339]. If the accident happened the final week of December 1902 and he was only "on the road to health" on 20 January, "unable to jump, box, or ride a bicycle for some months to come," it seems likely that the "vital place" is his foot. The feet seem the easiest "place" on which to drop a heavy box.) In the 7 January letter, the part that really is from 7 January—the dated first page—London tells Strunsky that he is laid up in bed. In the [? mid-January 1903] letter he doesn't mention the accident at all because he had just mentioned it. In the 20 January letter he explains the accident in response to her query. "My accident?" he writes. This also supports the contention that Strunsky wrote only one letter between 7 January and 20 January, and, though it doesn't survive, as far as I know, it must bemoan the loss of the prologue and ask after his poor (left?) foot.

The final six paragraphs of the [mid-January 1903?] letter detail revisions London made to *The Kempton-Wace Letters*. This follows directly from the second and third paragraphs of the 7 January letter. It makes little sense for London to tell Strunsky that he has completed a thorough

revision of *The Kempton-Wace Letters* and wait approximately two weeks to tell her what some of them are absent any prompt in his letter indicating (as he had done with the accident) that she had a had a question about them. She would have had the manuscript in front of her so that actually he would not have had to tell her what they were. But if these paragraphs actually belong to the 7 January letter then they represent a selection of general corrections or suggestions for corrections to accompany the revised manuscript and help guide Strunsky through London's revisions.

The missing second page of the 18 June 1903 letter, Jack London to Charmian Kittredge reads as follows; this text is from JL 12426 and Charmian London's *The Book of Jack London*, 2:79-80 (copy and insert the following in between pages 366 and 377 of *Letters*):

And now the threads of my tangled dis-coursedraw together. I have experienced the greater frankness, several times, under provocation, with a man or two, and a woman or two, and the occasions have been great joy-givers, as they have also been great sorrow-givers. I do not wish they had never happened, but I recoil unconsciously from their happening again. It is so much easier to live placidly and complacently. Of course, to live placidly and complacently is not to live at all, but still, between prizefights and kites and one thing and another I manage to fool my inner self pretty well. Poor inner self! I wonder if it will atrophy, dry up some day and blow away.

This is the first serious talk I have had about myself for a weary while. I hope my flood of speech has not bored you.

The chance is that I shall run down say the middle of next week. May I see you?

### Works Cited

- London, Charmian. *The Book of Jack London*. 2 vols. New York: Century, 1921. Print.
- The Letters of Jack London*. 3 Vols. Eds. Earle Labor, Robert C. Leitz, III, and I. Milo Shepard. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1988. Print.
- London, Jack. Letter to Charmian Kittredge, 18 June 1903, JL 1242, the Jack London Collection, The Henry H. Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.
- London, Jack. Letter to Charmian Kittredge, early] July 1903, JL 1430, the Jack London Collection, The Henry H. Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.
- Robinson, H. Perry. Letter to London, 30 Mar. 1903, JL 17254, the Jack London Collection, The Henry H. Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.
- Wilshire, Gaylord. Letter to London, 2 Jan. 1903, JL 20517, the Jack London Collection, The Henry H. Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.
- Wilshire, Gaylord. 2 Mar. 1903, JL 20521, the Jack London Collection, The Henry H. Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.