Jack London: Landscape, Love, and Place

Kristin Yoshiko Ladd
Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd
Part of the Education Commons, and the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd/1747
JACK LONDON: LANDSCAPE, LOVE, AND PLACE

by

Kristin Ladd

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of
MASTER OF ARTS
in
American Studies

Approved:

Dr. Melody Graulich
Major Professor

Dr. Paul Crumbley
Committee Member

Dr. Roslynn Brain
Committee Member

Dr. Mark R. McLellan
Vice President of Research
and Dean of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2013
ABSTRACT

*Jack London: Landscape, Love, and Place* explores how Jack London’s life and works are critical pieces of American history and literature, which can open an avenue between literary works and place-based learning. The thesis first lays a foundation for its theoretical interpretation of London’s later works based on the idea of *agrarian masculinity*, a term that has developed since Thomas Jefferson through the Turner Thesis age and well into today as a lens for understanding Americanism and American ideals based on hard work, community, farm life, and harmony with nature. The thesis then studies two of London’s works and his biography through this framework. It follows the analyses with ways to apply these critical ideas to place-based education principles and practices including suggestions for how other literary works and authors could be viable literary options for causing significant changes in the inclusion of more classic and popular literature place-based learning curricula.
PUBLIC ABSTRACT

In *Jack London: Landscape, Love, and Place*, American Studies theories and methods formed the prime basis for analysis of London’s biography, historical context, and literary significance. Particularly, the ideas of *agrarianism*, the Turner Thesis moment, Western literature, American masculinity, Victorian ideals, and sustainable farm practices in America were used to understand London’s motivations for writing and creating his farm, his influence on American literature, and his texts’ abilities to open avenues between literature and place-based education. Key concepts that influenced how London’s works could be incorporated into and applied to didactic theory included David Sobel’s seminal works in place-based education. The principle idea behind this thesis was to analyze one author and two of his works in a wider theoretical context, and then, to use that analysis to apply the theories to practical methods of educating future students in sustainable practices, place-based learning, and future work in understanding their impact on the ecosystems of their local communities and landscapes.

Kristin Ladd
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Without the support and dedication of my supervisory committee, this work would have never come to fruition. Thank you to my thesis adviser, Dr. Melody Graulich, for her limitless energy, praise, and guidance throughout the entire process. Thank you to the tireless efforts and incomparable friendship of Dr. Roslynn Brain. Thank you for the meticulous work and boundless encouragement from Dr. Paul Crumbley.

I want to greatly thank the Utah State English Department and School of Graduate Studies for making my thesis possible. The generous funding and mentorship from Dr. Evelyn Funda, Dr. Jeannie Thomas, Dr. Keri Holt, Dr. Jennifer Sinor, Dr. Steve Shively, Dr. Barre Toelken, Miiko Toelken, and Dr. Brock Dethier helped me through my process and gave me the writing and social support I needed to see this through.

Thank you also to all those who let me present my work at their conferences and work in their archives. Especially, I want to thank the generosity and open doors from the Jack London Society, the Huntington Library, the Jack London Historic State Park, Sue Hodson, Greg Hayes, Dr. Susan Nuerenberg, Dr. Jeanne Campbell Reesman, Dr. Alison Manchester, Iris Dunkle, the Merrill-Cazier Library Special Collections and Archives, the Western American Literature Association, Brad Cole, Clint Pumphrey, and Rose Milovich.
And last, but certainly not the least, to my family and friends who saw me through the process to the end and wiped the sweat and tears from my brow and eyes even when we were thousands of miles apart. In particular, I want to thank my mom, Janice, my dad, Roy, and my sister, Jamie, for being there for me every single day. You are my rocks and I love you with all my heart.

Kristin Ladd
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUBLIC ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. A PLACE TO START FROM: MASCULINITY AND AGRARIAN IDEALS IN JACK LONDON’S BURNING DAYLIGHT AND THE VALLEY OF THE MOON</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. A RETURN TO THE SOIL: THE MAN BEHIND THE SUPERMEN</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. JACK LONDON’S PLACE IN PLACE-BASED EDUCATION</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPLICATION: INCORPORATING LITERATURE INTO THE PLACE-BASED CURRICULUM</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CITED</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. BEAUTY RANCH SERIES</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. CYPRESS TREE AND GRAVESITE</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. HUNTINGTON LIBRARY MANUSCRIPTS COLLECTION</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

There is no question Jack London influenced the times he lived in and continues to impact this age. His life was marked by magnificence that few people know or could ever match in their lifetimes, and he only lived to the age of forty. He traveled the world by dog sled, train, foot, boat, car, and horse. Wanderlust to the core, he used novels, short stories, articles, and manifestos to bring unimaginable adventures to readers all over the world. He created a persona and characters who people came to speculate were autobiographical sketches of the man he actually was. However, few know the part of his life that his wife, Charmian Kittredge London, called “his human social dream”: to run a ranch, revitalize American agriculture, and write about it for the masses (“Jack London in Sonoma County” 2).

The familiarity of the dream should ring true for any reader of Thomas Jefferson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and many other London predecessors. Jefferson, in particular, solidified what I call agrarian masculinity in the American culture at the nation’s inception. He wrote five years after drafting the Constitution of the United States that farmers are “the chosen people of God” (Notes 176). For Jefferson, farmers defined the model citizen. He wrote that these men (Jefferson always used the pronoun “he”) were industrious in
nature, efficient, appreciative of the land, superior in intellect and education, and the most vigorous, most independent, most virtuous, and most valuable of any citizen in America (Best Letters “To John Jay” 15). When he published the first edition of Notes on the State of Virginia in 1782, Jefferson effectively spread to all literate American citizens what would become a basis for the American idea of culture and American masculinity. He consciously inculcated an idea of Americanness into the minds of the American public that lasts well into the twenty-first century.

Expanding upon Jefferson’s idea, I use the term *agrarian masculinity* to describe the specific idea of manhood Jack London tried to achieve in his lifetime, especially 1905-1916. *Agrarianism* according to the Oxford English Dictionary, taken from the 1533 French *agrairien* and 1593 Roman *agrarian*, was usually attached to the word *law* to form the term *agrarian law* to refer to a specific way of understanding property and land ownership. Specifically *agrarianism* and later *to agrarianize* began to imply “theory, advocacy, or practice of equal division of land; (belief in) the redistribution of landed property, or reform of the conditions of tenure of land,” that is, land that is equally distributed among its users (“agrarian.” Def. 1, 3). Jefferson and his followers took these notions to the next level, forming the belief that all white male Americans should be able to own their own property, cultivate it, and become self-sufficient from that property. The counter to the idea of course was the landlord-peasant model of Great Britain.
Jefferson wanted to create an authentic American ideal that rejected the Mother Country’s hegemonic land-use system. London’s texts, coming a century after Jefferson’s, express how the public transformed the third president’s Americanness, especially its masculine ideals, into varied ideas on culture and societal norms in the Turner Thesis age. In particular, as F. O. Matthiessen even wrote in *American Renaissance*, the difference between American literature and other literary traditions is its authors’ “devotion to the possibilities of democracy” that is, the myriad ways to express what is “American” (qtd. in Baym 126). London delved into the possibilities of democracy on one particular point: what defined American masculinity and how could he find a place to display that masculinity as he wished?

Agrarian masculinity is an American ethos so entrenched in this society that the famous poet and theorist Wendell Berry spends an entire chapter defining the term “agrarian economy” in his book *Art of the Commonplace* (2002). The ethos even spills over into popular American culture. One of the most watched television programs in the United States, Superbowl XLVII, featured a commercial with Paul Harvey’s 1978 speech to the FFA, “So God Made a Farmer,” that sent millions of blog posts, articles, and messages rippling out across the Internet well after it aired on February 3, 2013. These examples prove that deep within the masculine archetypes of today—athletes, movie stars, pop icons—the agrarian masculine ethos remains, the same ethos to which London
held fast, especially near the end of his life.

M. Thomas Inge provides a narrowed-down list of five basic ideas I adapted from his Introduction to *Agrarianism in American Literature* as follows, which I will use to develop my term throughout this thesis: 1) to gain a spiritual connection with nature through cultivating the soil; 2) to achieve self-sufficiency and economic independence; 3) to find a sense of identity that is sustainable and not rooted in fear; 4) to deny the city and its corruption rather than love; and 5) to find brotherhood and community in a specific place (Inge iv).

A prolific reader, sometimes closet intellectual, wayward adventurer, and constant supporter of Socialism, London felt a strong connection with the basic principles of agrarianism. In particular, as is evident in many of his novels, letters, and journals, a man for London was intelligent but not an armchair intellectual; he was physically strong and able to endure cruel landscapes but never too strong to abuse romance, kindness, or camaraderie; he wanted to be self-sufficient but not to the point of denying love or a woman’s ability to be a source of similar strength and endurance; and he would appreciate human-produced art but recognize the beauty of nature beyond any of man’s creations. His masculinity combined the ideas of Charles Darwin as the most evolved man, Friedrich Nietzsche’s superman, Eugen Sandow’s physical culturist, and Ambrose Bierce’s working-class hero to form the agrarian masculine archetype. It countered the ideas that industrial workers (and industrial agriculture) had to be stratified due to economic
class. In the place of stratification was the idea that any man could work his own land and obtain freedom through natural egalitarian law.

His early works express a greater attraction to violent, indignant expressions of manliness against the government’s treatment of the working class, the confinement of urban life, and the brutality of life itself. Some of these characters carry the definitive Wild West gun, the Colt .44, which he was said to have carried himself. Near the end of his life, however, he criticized his own young London brusqueness. As it happened, many of London’s characters that he created later in his life traded in their Colt .44’s and fists for what Nash Smith calls “the supreme agrarian weapon, the sacred plow” (123). In looking at London’s changing ideas of masculinity over the course of his life, one discovers the spectrum of most deeply held beliefs in American culture in his time. Navigating these ideas of masculinity was tortuous and still is, especially at a time when Turner definitively wrote that with the closing of the frontier came “a new gospel, for the Western radical became convinced that he must sacrifice his ideal of individualism and free competition in order to maintain his ideal of democracy” (305).

In almost every American event, article, media outlet, or literary resource from gun control to food justice to economic problems, London’s spectrum is relevant to multiple facts of current politics due to the fact that most American texts up to the mid-twentieth century largely came down to understanding
American masculinity as either violent or idyllic.

Perhaps London’s scope has such a wide reach because London viewed America from both with and without it, as he traveled to myriad regions of the world, from multiple cultural perspectives. London briefly lived on a family farm before moving to Oakland as a young man. He no doubt read Jefferson’s enduring words evidenced in the way he presented his final novels. Along with the changing American landscape on the eve of the twentieth century, London’s travels led him to bring this idea of agrarian masculinity across the country, into the Yukon’s white silence, to Japan, Malaysia, and Polynesia where it grew stronger as it evolved. He found certain narratives of masculinity satisfied each new situation encountered and place visited.

From his first written memories of the “bottom tenth of the Social Pit” in the grit of East Coast cities, London developed an activist mentality that fought for the working man and against what he frequently called wage slavery, a mentality that only strengthened with time (“How I Became a Socialist” 1). Though his final works and ranching lifestyle can be linked to one of the founding fathers of the United States, London took a circuitous route to finally settle down as a Jeffersonian American farmer of land and letters. Edward Biron Payne, his close friend and first biographer (other than his wife Charmian), noted that London saw the world as a “BIG GAME … He must ever be pitting his strength against others, whether in a physical tussle or a contentious argument or the
repartee of facile wits” (12). Payne’s perception of London exemplifies an undeniable link between the author and many philosophers that influenced him and ultimately drove him away from agrarian ideals before he bought his first 130 acres in Sonoma.

Particularly, as I mentioned briefly, Darwin, Nietzsche, Sandow, and Bierce arise as key figures who would influence London’s own concept of American masculine norms and ideals. As well, the American Western genre, including the frontier thesis and pioneer journals and novels, influenced London to a certain extent on a psychological level as I discuss in Chapter One. As with Jefferson’s use of “he” and the general decision of critics until the 1950s to attend almost exclusively to male authors in defining “American writing,” most of London’s concepts of Americanness focused on the perfect man and his lifestyle (Baym 130). London explored masculinity through contemporary texts and philosophies before his rhetoric began to reflect that of Jefferson and what no American critics and few non-Americans have termed “agrarian masculinity.” The only time the term has been used is in reference to Chinese philosopher Mencius making it unique for an American thesis (Birdwhitsell 39, 43, 55).

Though he was accepted to the University of California, Berkeley, immediately after graduating from Oakland High School at seventeen, he quickly grew restless, leaving college after one semester (House of Happy Walls Plaque). Instead of pursuing a career as an English professor, he contended he would
“rather sing the one song than interpret the thousand” (qtd. in Reesman 3).

Reading and university studies did not appear to be the most masculine of endeavors in his mind. He shied away from these interests for more “manly” pursuits such as tramping, oyster pirating, working as a photojournalist in the Russo-Japanese War, and boxing, though he did carry *Anna Karenina*, *Moby Dick*, and a small journal with him on some of those journeys. It is no small wonder that his first published piece, written in January 1893, was an article in the *San Francisco Call* entitled “Story of a Typhoon off the Coast of Japan,” which invited the public to see his writing persona as adventuresome and brave, the persona he kept for many years to come (“Chronology” Hartzell, n.p.). Building upon this sense of masculinity, London hints in many of his short stories such as “The Scarlet Plague,” “When the World Was Young,” and “South of the Slot” that university professors are weak, idle philosophers who he sets as direct foils to working class or atavistic characters that are superior physically and have more common sense.

In these atavistic characters one can find the evolution of London’s ideas of masculinity and begin to trace how they all led to agrarian masculinity. Characters like Bill Totts, Billy Roberts, and Buck are deeply connected to nature, the primitive self, and the virtue of manual labor, the last of which influenced his early attraction to Socialism and later attractions to farming. These qualities can be directly connected to Darwin’s and Herbert Spencer’s theories on evolution.
and survival of the fittest. For instance, in reference to *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, London wrote that “I endeavored to make my stories in line with the facts of evolution; I hewed them to the mark set by scientific research” (“The Other Animals” 1). London often shows how a return to the wild (and notably away from the comforts of urban life) can evolve the body and mind of a person or other animal toward physical strength and unmechanized, more imaginative thought. One can also see some of Nietzsche’s influence on London cropping up in his supermen characters like Elam Harnish from *Burning Daylight* (1910) and many others. London describes Harnish, a prime example, as an “Adventurer of the Frost” and “the King of the Klondike” (*Burning Daylight* 87). Also known as Burning Daylight, Harnish endures the white silence with physical vigor and attention to the symbiotic relationships between man and nature, echoing Nietzsche’s ideas of the übermensch who, even with all his brute strength, “remain[s] faithful to the earth” (“Toward the Übermensch”). London’s works thus do not simply wonder at the physical vitality that man can achieve but at how that physicality comes from man’s interaction with his environment. The science of evolution and physical magnificence of the übermensch combined lead directly to London’s fascination with the British physical culture movement and its connections to the use of the body organically versus mechanically.

Though he only refers to Sandow, the father of the physical culture movement, as a point of reference in *The Valley of the Moon* (1913), London was
far more obsessed with this first of many strong men entertainers than many
know. Physical culture emphasized a need for rugged daily exercise to “harden
the body” in an Industrial Age when most men (though women were also
implicated in some magazines) were becoming soft, automated, only
strengthening parts of their bodies while forgetting the whole of the human form
(Bailey 8). A fascination with strong men in the late-nineteenth century resulted in
traveling shows over which Victorian ladies fawned—Sandow expressed concern
over the amount of fan letters he received—of strong men showing off their half-
naked bodies to emulate Greek statues and display the “natural” human body
(Todd 58; Waller 10). Sandow comes up in The Valley of the Moon, when Billy
Roberts sees Jim Hazard running exuberantly along the strand in Carmel. The
gaze of the male protagonist floats from the beauty of the sea and sand to the
beauty of the man’s form: “Down from the dark pines and across the sandhills ran
a man, naked save for narrow trunks … [H]is body was hugely thewed as a
Hercules’. ‘Gee!—must be Sandow,’ Billy muttered low to Saxon” (London,
Valley 276). Hazard comes up again and again as Billy’s trainer and member of a
Bohemian society in Carmel whose close friend, a poet farmer named Mark Hall,
leads the Saxons to their “valley of the moon” in Sonoma.

London’s fascination extended from his literary to his personal life. In
early photographs, London posed in his bathing suit in similar positions to strong
men, with his hands behind his head flexing his biceps showing off lean
musculature. Later, London told an interviewer in Boston in 1905 that “if he had a religion it would be physical culture” (Starr 211). In physical culture, London found the paradigm for masculinity he’d been searching for in all the other philosophies he read.

The primary reason physical culture appealed to London to the point of religious awakening was that it unabashedly celebrated the beauty of the human form as a whole entity and rejected the compartmentalization of that form. This celebration matched perfectly with anti-Victorian and anti-industrial virtues that both Jack and Charmian held in high regard, such as female sexual awareness and honoring the holistic treatment of mind and body to achieve adeptness of beauty and imagination. Attention to health also encouraged London to adopt plant and herbal remedies for the many maladies he contracted on his journeys abroad. Further, it supported his Socialist and working-class ideologies by emphasizing that the human physique functioned best when freed from industrial work and a disconnected existence in urban landscapes. For instance, when Sandow was recruited to train English soldiers, many of his peers noted that their opponents, Boer farmers, were “by comparison paragons of manliness: fit, lean and flexible, and uncorrupted by the pressures of office and factory existence” (Waller 165). Sandow’s understanding of the agrarian body followed suit with many other agrarian thinkers and even the early Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote, “The farmer has great health … [They are] men of endurance—
deep-chested, long-winded, tough, slow and sure, and timely” (2). In essence, physical culturists argued that the farm presented a landscape away from the city that developed manly physiques and fit directly into the development of agrarian masculinity. And, by extension, they argued that American men should take on the last of the continental frontier as an expression of that masculinity. As a core principle of the physical culture philosophy, the frontier conqueror mindset played into London’s development of the masculinity he came to align himself with most, even more than Socialism.

London replaced many paradigms of masculinity he identified with as a youth with agrarian manhood. Because he was most well known for his adventure writing, many of his readers may wonder why. Historically, physically, and intellectually, agrarianism gave a satisfying answer to many of London’s social criticisms. Burning Daylight and The Valley of the Moon display a marked shift to agrarian masculinity. In place of fighting male protagonists, though he still enjoyed sparring and intellectual debate, farming life presented a marriage of beauty and utility that London found appealing professionally and romantically.

In his essay “The House Beautiful,” London uses some of the most poignant descriptions of his agrarian philosophy near the end of his life. There is a tranquility in his words that is unmatched in his earlier texts, displaying a peace he felt on the farm and in farm work. He wrote the essay when “Wolf House,” the Londons’ dream home, was near completion. The house’s vista swept the Sonoma
Valley and mountains. Surrounded by redwoods and native California birds, the house was at the epicenter of his 1400 acres in Glen Ellen. He came to believe, he wrote, “that utility and beauty should be one, and that there is no utility that need not be beautiful. What finer beauty than strength—whether it be airy steel, or massive masonry, or a woman’s hand?” (“The House Beautiful” n.p.). The passage recalls a deep agrarian sense that efficiency, especially when it comes to land use, the development of farming, and beautiful architecture keeps people “virtuous” and “preserve[s] peace” (Best Letters “To James Madison” 46). By contrast, London makes the point in the essay that houses he saw in the city had little sense of these virtues. The city, once again, he equated with corruption, perversion of the elements, and depreciation of beauty. Though the house burnt to the ground in an accidental fire nights before the Londons moved in, its ruins still stand as a testament to London’s hard work and attachment to the place where he built his dream home.

It was at the Beauty Ranch that London was able to read, write 1,000 words a day, experiment with crops like an agriculture professor, and regale in the beauty of the masculine form like a physical culturist. London settled in California because he was native to the state and because his health was at its best in Sonoma Valley. His work living out the ideals of a citizen farmer connected him to the place in ways that people can still see today. In Burning Daylight, he writes, “[Harnish] halted his horse, for beside the spring uprose a wild California
lily. It was a wonderful flower, growing there in the cathedral nave of lofty trees. At least eight feet in height, its stem rose straight and slender, green and bare for two-thirds its length, and then burst into a shower of snow-white waxen bells.” (123). Harnish’s attention to the distinct California flora and fauna extends to its cultural history as well. A few paragraphs later, he confirms his decision to buy acreage in Glen Ellen when he comes “abruptly upon the cypresses. They were enclosed in a small square of ancient fence. … Inside were the mounds of two children’s graves. Two wooden headboards, likewise hand-hewn, told the state Little David, born 1855, died 1859; and Little Roy, born 1853, died 1860” (127). Jack London Park ranger Greg Hayes confirms that this attention is not a literary device; it is the veritable reason London came to buy land among the cypresses. The California lily blooms from time to time still, but only lucky visitors or loyal volunteers and rangers will see it about every three years. The fact that London happened upon it was a true miracle of sorts, which is probably why he had Harnish find it the exact same way he had. As well, the cypress tree still stands, marking the graves of the Greenlaw children, children of a homesteader family who lived there many years before London [pictured in Appendix B] (Hayes). The plot held such importance for London that he decided to be buried there as well. His love for the small area still extends to admirers of his literature. Though it is discouraged, many families surreptitiously spread the ashes of loved ones next to London’s grave mound. It serves as a place of beginnings and ends, the perfect
metaphor for one who so loved reading and the unequivocal ties between man and nature.

London’s development of agrarian masculinity, the experimental Beauty Ranch, his “Mate-woman,” Charmian, and the novels he wrote while there serve as primary artifacts in understanding the long-lasting influence of this author as writer, farmer, and philosopher (London “Inscription,” n.p. [London called Charmian “Mate-woman” frequently in letters to her]). He propagated a certain sense of Americanness that many readers and scholars find can cross into place-based education and understanding the still predominant question in American studies: is America exceptional? And if so, what is it to be American? Nina Baym would contend that London fit perfectly into the American ideals of his time. His ideas challenged the loss of a frontier and his language was deeply attentive to a masculine perspective. However, the knowledge that his final novels and lifestyle choice was specifically agricultural, that of a husband and lover, alludes to a shift in London that included femininity and feminine perspectives in his literature. He attempted to write from female perspectives with Saxon Roberts and other characters, though Mary Austin did not feel he did the best job, writing to him in a letter: “like most males [you have] no capacity for knowing superior women” (Mary Austin to Jack London). London was indeed a rare character for his times. It was settling on the farm that caused him to write, “laughter without air and sunshine becomes morbid, decadent, demoniac” (“The House Beautiful”). On the
farm he could reconcile his desires to express his manhood as he wished while still fitting in with a society that viewed men more narrowly than he.

It is no surprise that most London scholars use London’s personal life, as I do, as a starting point for understanding his 197 short stories, over fifty novels, several journalistic articles, speeches, manifestos, and hundreds of letters. As Sue Hodson, librarian at the Huntington Library, mentioned to me, “London may not write like Wallace Stevens, but his life was more interesting than Stevens’ ever was” (Hodson). He hardly ever allowed editors to change his work, and his audience did not seem to care much (though some critics called him out) as long as he gave them the escape they so desired.

Without his dedicated wife, Charmian, London’s quixotic visions may have never been preserved. His writing was at times repetitive, rough, and not meant to be high art, but always engrossing and thoroughly entertaining. Charmian ensured his letters, notes, original publications, and ranch were all preserved by libraries, namely the Merrill-Cazier Library in Logan, Utah, and the Huntington Library in Los Angeles, and by California State Parks and the Valley of the Moon Historical Association. In honor of her devotion, it seems appropriate to use his time with her as a focal point for parts of this thesis. Had it not been for London’s simultaneous dedication to the Beauty Ranch and Charmian in his final eleven years, the picture of Jack London could have been painted as a lone marauder and literary knight errant. His story could have ended differently,
perhaps as a poor, dying hidalgo reading and telling fantastic stories, only to discover he was fighting windmills. The agrarian masculine paradigm does have its drawbacks of course, which is why his “Mate-Woman” was a perfect complement to some of his eccentricities and kept him balanced.

When a man following the tenets of agrarian masculinity believes in violence to obtain property, losing sight of communion with the land and others, he fails, often turning into a greedy businessman, cuckold, or misdirected pioneer that overworks the land thus killing his profits and himself. Expecting too much troubles the well-balanced ethos of agrarian masculinity. It disrupts its basic egalitarian values. London recognized this, often having self-critical moments arise in his characters who were subject to over-drinking and -eating, buying more land than they could work, and going on overzealous adventures that left them ill and in debt (London’s own real problems). Yet, this does not mean London ever lost faith in that ethos. It reinforces the fact that he did. He held agrarian masculinity up as his ideal and tried his utmost to make other Americans take it up as their archetype as the “cultivators of the earth … the Chosen People of God” on London’s “Chosen Acres” (Jefferson Notes 176; Kittredge London “Jack London” n.p.).

In particular Burning Daylight and The Valley of the Moon illustrate an intention to correct the deep societal problems he fought against his whole life. Payne describes London’s aspirations to become a writer in terms of wage
economics:

To discard the life of the toiler, that was the idea, and himself to become a producer of commodity for the general open market—in short be a capitalist hereafter and whistle a cheerful good-bye to the wage-slavery which he had now beaten out. And what commodity should this new-made capitalist produce, when his day had come? … [T]he best-selling commodity in the market of the world—Brain. (15)

Though London was a self-proclaimed Socialist the majority of his life, at the very end, he resigned from the Socialist Party. He wanted to reform and to conquer the capitalist system with more equality and opportunities for self-sufficiency, not replace it. His social criticisms can be best illustrated, as his commodity was written thought, through the lenses of his fiction.

Thus, I begin with London’s vision of class struggles and, ultimately, the world, through examining his texts Burning Daylight and The Valley of the Moon. They serve aptly as London’s visionary examples as they contrast the violence of the industrialized American character against the agrarian genre, which, also part of the American character, is far more focused on community and self-sufficient use of the land. From there, I will go into depth on the man behind the myths he created, providing a more complete idea of who he was and how his passion for improving the world can still hold public attention, calling for redress of many aspects of the industrial life he lamented, but are now the twenty-first century daily reality. Finally, I will explore how examining these novels in the context of London’s ranch can be used for place-based learning in Sonoma County and serve
as an example for incorporating literary figures into place-based curriculum followed by a short discussion on key ways to apply literature into place-based education. From this incorporation, future students can read and learn how to more adequately address societal problems locally and nationally as London tried to do.
CHAPTER 2

A PLACE TO START FROM: MASCULINITY AND AGRARIAN IDEALS IN JACK LONDON’S BURNING DAYLIGHT AND THE VALLEY OF THE MOON

Jack London begins his novel Burning Daylight focused on a fictional “hero of the Arctic,” Elam Harnish (79). Of particular interest is London’s decision to concentrate on his protagonist coming out of the landscape rather than going into it. When Harnish, also known as Burning Daylight, enters the Shovel Saloon after days of traversing Arctic ice and snow, the room instantly brightens, the piano cadence tightens, the dance floor fills, and the people are enlivened by his presence. This man is no lone conqueror of the wilderness; he is deliberately depicted as a social animal. Even though this depiction in itself is not unusual, one wonders why—when there is no doubt London is so obviously trying to create a hero who can survive and conquer the Alaskan frontier alone—the hero is social to the point of being fueled by camaraderie. He does not fit the expected characteristics of a lone ranger on the frontier. He does not match the type of hero popularized by dime novels, then made into a legacy of Owen Wister’s and Zane Grey’s Westerns, in films with John Wayne and Susan Hayward, and today in the cowboy tales that fit the “Western” genre such as those described in Jane Tompkins’s West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns (1992) and Richard Slotkin’s Regeneration Through Violence (1973). The choice to make Daylight so
social and loving is prominent to the point that it begs an answer.

One answer is that London focuses his attention on the social appetite of Daylight because he is deliberately pointing out the inadequacies of one type of hero to reconfigure him into a more preferable hero. Further, he seeks to redefine acceptable ideas of American masculinity through *Burning Daylight* and, three years later, *The Valley of the Moon* at an auspicious time in American West history—the late-nineteenth to early twentieth century. The novels immediately followed the Turner Thesis moment, when Frederick Jackson Turner wrote, “The cry of scientific farming and the conservation of natural resources replaces the cry of rapid conquest of the wilderness” (294). This shift in London’s writing from the frontier adventure to one completely entrenched in farm life and revival of the agrarian ethos is important to explore because it displays in one author two primary myths that drive American polity and particularly American masculine ideals.

London expresses a complex understanding of the possibilities of democracy in America. The wide net he casts can be narrowed to a profound exploration of two diverging possibilities of democracy: the frontiersman (cowboy, homesteader, or pioneer) who justified violence of the wild frontier and the preservationist steward of the land rooted in the agrarian tradition. As mentioned in the introduction, Nina Baym has argued that early twentieth century critics’ definition of American literary merit is inherently problematic as it
excludes most early female authors and measures all American authors by the American white male experience. Understanding what those types of masculinity are, however, can drive scholars to take a deeper look at how critics’ exclusive decisions have defined American literary traditions and the American culture as a whole.

The early dime novel that later led to Westerns by Owen Wister and Zane Grey argues, to paraphrase Tompkins, for the rugged, justice-seeking individualist, who will implement violent tactics and turn against fellow men in the name of justice or a furthering of the individual’s moral conscience. Agrarianism argues for communion with the land and neighbors. As the University of Virginia’s definition of the “The Yoeman” points out, agrarianism and, by extension my term of agrarian masculinity, present alternatives to the discordance of the greed and selfishness the farmer sees in the city (n.p.). As companion novels, *Burning Daylight* and *The Valley of the Moon* together make the argument that a return to agrarian ideals would resolve economic struggles of the working class, violence in the cities, fragmentation of relationships, decrepitude of the human form, and degradation of natural systems.

Though the two texts contrast in the way the characters come to adopting agrarian masculinity, there is no argument that attaining its ideals is the ultimate goal. They achieve this goal in such a direct manner that it is almost as if London is trying to write manuals for Americans under the guise of adventure narratives.
In *Burning Daylight*, the characters are larger than life. They are conquerors of death and the struggle for dominion, whose choice to live on the farm is a dramatic gesture, throwing off the tangle of wealth and industry. *The Valley of the Moon* provides everyday, less eccentric American characters. Their choice to live on the farm is more a search for meaning away from a city that has brought only tragedy—alcoholism, a miscarriage, and violent union strikes. The Robertses see the city as a place to start from, a place where they can begin their *seeleroman* or “a spiritual journey toward the reconciliation of one’s self with one’s cultural origins” akin to a central Native American literary theme (Hattenhauer 168).

The difference between the novels’ characters illustrates London’s shift in thinking from the time the first text was published in 1910 to the second in 1913. The shift is akin to the cultural changes Turner described in his thesis only seventeen years before *Burning Daylight* was published and the personal transformation London underwent in his own life. Both Turner and London felt that the country was moving toward a return to the agrarian virtues and lifestyle the early Americans expressed when establishing their new country at the turn of the previous century. With the closing of the frontier, as Turner put it, came a shift in American understanding of land and place. The nation, according to Turner, looked to the frontiers London knew intimately: Alaska, Hawaii, and California. Where *Burning Daylight* explores several types of masculinity, finally settling on agrarian masculinity as ideal, *The Valley of the Moon* is written as a directive to
the reader who desires a cultural movement characterized by experimental farming and use of the farm as a university to teach basic virtues and physical preservation of the land and its people. Essentially, it seeks to model the idea that agrarian lifestyle can begin now, in the backyard of any American, if they simply look for their plot of land as their forefathers once did.

*The Valley of the Moon* can be seen as a step-by-step manual with a beautiful narrative to follow, in which guides the Robertses meet on their journey—Mrs. Mortimer, Mark Hall, Jack and Clara Hastings—serve as markers anyone could find to help them on the path to an agrarian life. *Burning Daylight* on the other hand grapples with London’s acceptance of the agrarian masculinity, developing a character who plays out other masculine paradigms he acknowledged—the übermensch, the Klondike gold claim bonanza king, the successful businessman—but pursues only to an extent due to the fact that they could not give the same virtues and health farming does.

Though they differ, the novels’ adherence to illustrating specific, competing ideas of masculinity show a similar heightened attention to industry at the turn of the century, which produced marked changes in the American character, especially in the American West. The movement of Eastern industry into the West caused many to believe “sneaks and scoundrels” would come to the West, a place where in the past such men could not hide and were thus rooted out (“*Burning Daylight*” 15). London committed the final years of his life to
addressing this belief and finding a corrective for societal ills industry brought with it. In 1905, when he claims to have started thinking about these novels, he “tired of cities and people” and “settled down on a little farm … 130 acres of the most beautiful, primitive [farm]land to be found in California” (qtd. in VMNHA, “Brief Biography” n.p.). In several passages in *The Valley of the Moon*, London argues such a life would produce a better future for the American West than one that embraced industrial business practice because one predicated on business leads to money in the hands of the few, while “the losers” must chase the frontier for fresh stakes “like locusts” (*Valley* 307). In the early twentieth century, as that frontier disappeared, more “losers” of the industry game, London argues, still wanted to be self-sufficient, still wanted freedom, still wanted to feel that they had won at some competition of manhood. *The Valley of the Moon’s* Billy Roberts illustrates how men can maintain their sense of identity and mastery without resorting to violence, fear, or death. He adopts a new set of masculine ideals as Turner predicted, becoming a preserver of lands for years to come in the place of a conqueror.

Models from his pioneer and farming forefathers of agrarian masculinity provide Billy’s framework to meet and oppose the urban social conditions of the early twentieth century. His paradigm includes more types of ethnic groups (namely immigrants from Italy, China, Portugal, and Spain), new developments in agricultural sciences, and the understanding that land is less affordable than in the
Homestead Act (1862) days. Despite new elements, Billy seeks to access the five key characteristics I see as crucial to American agrarian masculinity, based on principal texts by Jefferson, Whitman, Frank Norris, Henry Nash Smith, Emerson, and many others. These five basic objectives are those I mentioned in the Introduction, which I adapted from M. Thomas Inge’s *Agrarianism in American Literature*; briefly—1) a spiritual connection with nature, 2) economic independence, 3) a sustainable sense of identity, 4) denial of the city’s corruption, 5) find community. In London’s terms, agrarianism draws out the “primitive, which left to itself” unharmed by “organized capital … would not harm a flea” (Baggs 8). Though several of London’s short stories also point toward agrarianism as a way to civilize without corrupting the soul of the primitive man, these two particular novels suggest that London wanted not simply to leave the world with great stories, but with a way to live. Before presenting agrarianism as the better choice, however, London shows, in the first sections of both novels, how turn-of-the-century ideals (especially when carried over into business strategy and urban life) fail.

Part One of *Burning Daylight* displays many of the common elements found in texts that argue for the conquest of the wilderness. For instance, Wister’s *The Virginian* (1901) points to a very particular type of turn-of-the-century character who responds to industry with violence and vigilante justice rather than community building. Tompkins notes in *West of Everything* that one could
identify texts like Wister’s, now more commonly known as Westerns, by particular elements: a horse, death, a bleak landscape, and the rejection of language and women (3-19). The comparisons readily present themselves in *Daylight*: the dogs and sled substitute for the traditional horse; Kama serves as the trusty companion who often dies or cannot keep up with the hero; death looms as a constant companion and foe; and the women are attractive but represent the tangled Eastern political and domestic spheres most American heroes wish to escape. Most significantly, the Arctic setting is akin to the desert landscape “defined by absence: of trees, of greenery, of houses, of the signs of civilization, above all, absence of water and shade” (Tompkins 71). These comparisons lead to one conclusion: Burning Daylight should fulfill certain expectations of early nineteenth century manhood, ones that conquer the wilderness and its native peoples as if it’s a right or duty.

Daylight meets these expectations in many ways. He artfully exudes his mastery of the wilderness, other men hold him in high esteem, he is generous of spirit and fearful of women. However, these expectations are easily corrupted when Daylight reaches the city in Part Two. Daylight becomes violent and distrustful of other men when he moves to the city-scapes of New York, then San Francisco. London ostensibly begins with the perfect example of the western pioneer/post-Civil War hero only to show how quickly that hero can lose control and become, as an unnamed reviewer for the *San Francisco Sunday Call* wrote in
1910, an “old western highwayman,” the villain, the emasculated man without capital, skills, or sense of morality (“Burning Daylight” 15). In the *The Valley of the Moon*, London further criticizes the perversion of urban life on ideas of American masculinity through Billy Roberts. In both novels, London draws attention the grit of a city to accentuate the deep problems with American expectations of masculinity, namely unreasonable violence, loss of control, and denial of love. Through Daylight and Roberts, London shows how urban life magnifies the destructive capabilities of men.

These depictions of destructive forms of masculinity call London’s characters and readers to find a new paradigm. Their agrarian lives are correctives to the “conquest of wilderness” mentality (Turner 294). Upon deeper inspection, however, one finds that indeed London’s writing “spins against the way it drives” as agrarianism maintains the conqueror’s dominion to place as it tries to commune with the land, build a sense of comradeship, and root out violence, establishing familial and brotherly (if one will, democratic) conditions so that violence is unnecessary and even denounced (Melville 95). Through these novels, London thus serves as “a kind of cultural barometer,” who questions “sexual stereotyping,” especially in how forms of masculinity rose and fell in response to cultural complexities (Robinson 77). Greed and an overzealous desire for power begin to render Daylight impotent as he tries his hand in one of the most industrialized cities in the West: Oakland.
Daylight’s first appearance comes after yet another successful traverse over and mining of the rich Yukon land. Daylight’s zeal and skill for exploiting natural material translates to a “desire for mastery [which] was strong in him” (London 43). Although this mastery earns him a title in the Yukon as “king of travelers and dog-mushers,” London undercuts Daylight’s commanding nature swiftly and subtly (41). He writes that this mastery “healthy and strong [was] unaware of frailty and decay, drunken with sublime complacence, ego-mad, enchanted by its own mighty optimism” (44). Indeed, throughout Part One, London maintains this dichotomy. He simultaneously praises Daylight’s natural strength and endurance of mind and body, while he cautions against his egotism for having abilities to deprive himself of modern comforts, a characteristic oft-praised in Western novels (Tompkins 8-9). London allows Daylight to be a man of few physical needs and wants, even going so far as comparing his look to that of “a monk” (Tompkins 41). Tompkins writes that the Western hero “parallels desert monasticism” with “small rein [given] to the body’s need for food, sleep, shelter, sex, and overall comfort. … Thirst is constant, sleep characteristically denied,” furthering the expectation that Daylight possesses the characteristics of the Western hero (84). Daylight exemplifies the potential failures of mastery over bodily needs and the land’s rawness most when he experiences near-fatal famine in chapters six and seven.

The famine devastates Daylight’s attempt to mine the land as he has so
many times before. Notably, Daylight’s and his team’s near fatal brush with
famine first displays itself in the form of a decayed spruce where they had stowed
their winter cache of food and provisions:

The big tree, with all the seeming of hardihood, promising to stand for
centuries to come, had suffered from a hidden decay. … [T]he balance it
had so long maintained with the forces of its environment had been
overthrown; it had toppled and crashed to the ground, wrecking the cache
and, in turn, overthrowing the balance with environment that the four men
and eleven dogs had been maintaining. Their supply of grub was gone.
(50)

Like the tree and the cache, Daylight reaches a moment of imbalance in which the
land could dominate him. These moments of land-over-hero dominance are often
left out of Westerns but are very present in agrarian and naturalist novels, whose
authors offer a more profound respect for and fear of nature’s abilities. This
reaches back as early as Virgil but was being re-acknowledged in works by
Emerson, who wrote, “the farmer ties himself to Nature, and acquires that
lifelong patience which belongs to her” (2). The spruce, a physical symbol of
Daylight, draws attention to an important duality in Daylight even this early in the
novel. He shows some signs of agrarian tendencies to work with nature’s cycles
and needs while also taking from the land. In the famine scenes, instead of fueling
his ego by fighting against or destroying the land, he chooses to work with the
land’s natural energy and systems.

Daylight recognizes all too briefly, London notes, the land’s dominance
and majesty, a theme that presents itself again in Part Two. For instance, the only
one of his team with enough strength to search for food, Daylight deftly, patiently hunts a squirrel for two days. On the first, “darkness came on without his getting a certain shot. With primitive patience he waited till next day, and then, within the hour, the squirrel was his” (London 53). Drawing attention to how natural systems function best when humans work with them rather than dominate them, London notes the beauty of the interaction between the human body and that of the squirrel: “transmuted to the meat of the men the same power to move. No longer did the squirrel run up spruce trees. … Instead, the same energy that had done these things flowed into the wasted muscles and reeling wills of the men, making them move” (54). Though the point is subtle, this symbiotic relationship between humans and nature arouses Daylight to appreciate the efficiency with which the energy of the squirrel can translate into energy he uses to survive the famine. The elegance of that relationship calls to mind the deep relationship pioneers, frontiersmen, and western heroes have with nature. Even though they desire to dominate it, they also recognize its “power, endurance, rugged majesty,” its “transcendence” in the beauty of the stars, the contours of the land, and the animals’ energies transmute into energy in themselves (Tompkins 72). The beauty and symbiosis of that relationship rise as central to the agrarian ideals London presents in the latter parts of Daylight and The Valley of the Moon, thus showing how certain elements of the conquest novel are important and can be maintained, but not all of them.
Despite Daylight’s ability to survive, however, the famine almost kills him. With barely strength to perform the light task of taking a canoe to the river, which will lead him and his team to safety, “it took Daylight hours. And many hours more, day by day, he dragged himself around it, lying on his side to calk the gaping seams with moss” (54). His endurance is rewarded, he survives, and he continues to his former habits of mining the land, dominating and stripping it for all its monetary worth. However, deep consequences, including losing dogs and returning with his comrade Elijah nearly dead, reinforce the argument that working with the land rather than against it proves smarter, more sustainable, and a more admirable display of masculine prowess.

The trauma of the famine puts the fear of wilderness into Daylight’s team. Daylight, on the other hand, returns, habitually, to his dominant-subordinate relationship with the land. His obstinate choice to be the domineering conqueror of nature despite the land’s clear response to such behavior London pointedly describes as foolish. London purposefully writes that Daylight’s displays of masculinity ignore his own mortality and drive him further to believe “the message that other men might die, but that he would pull through triumphant. It was the old, old lie of Life fooling itself, believing itself—immortal and indestructible, bound to achieve over other lives and win to its heart’s desire” (44). Here, the paradox of Part One, that Daylight is both a successful man of the North and a fool, readies the reader for a turn against the familiar Western hero
narrative. It points out the central problem of Western and later mechanized manhood: a blind ego driven by power that is translated into a violent sense of justice. As Slotkin writes in *Regeneration through Violence*, describing the hunter myth to which most Western heroes ascribe, the hero “possesses … a reverence for something greater than himself (God, nature) that checks the full expression of his will. … Yet this check is a precarious one. … As Lawrence says, ‘Patient and gentle as he is, … self-effacing, self-forgetting, still he is a killer’” (552). Through Daylight’s self-destructive development, London begins to contend that alternative, more sensible, and sustainable ideas of masculinity must evolve in the American character that will not kill or seek dominance but allow reproduction and preservation of land and community.

In order to represent the agrarian ideal properly, however, he takes his characters to the landscape of the Western gone awry: the city. In the city, physical absence transmutes into emotional absence. Interaction with the land is lost, and human contact only comes in the form of business deals. Though the desert and Arctic are harsh, at least they require a certain physical condition that makes man’s “nutritive processes rigidly economical and perfect. There was no waste. The last least particle of what they consumed was transformed into energy” (London 30). London makes a purposeful move from the white North to the industry-driven city of Oakland in Part Two of *Burning Daylight* and in Part One of *The Valley of the Moon*, to deny the hero physical health and love and to force
him to develop a sense of humility. The ego central to the cruel landscape of the north becomes grotesque, making agrarian representations of masculinity clearly preferable by contrast.

This move is logical since agrarian masculinity is a direct response to the Industrial Revolution. In London’s California, this shift spoke directly to Eastern industry’s invasion of the West Coast in the early twentieth century. Inge’s five principles of agrarianism, mentioned earlier, provide an understanding of American masculinity through a paradigm that looks back to the roots of democracy (as Jefferson imagined) and into the post-Industrial future of American life. London’s characters—especially when Burning Daylight reaches Sonoma Valley in the final third of the novel and for all of Part Two in *The Valley of the Moon*—exemplify this paradigm shift. In *The Valley of the Moon* especially, London represents Billy and Saxon Roberts as common working-class people. They interact with the world differently than does Burning Daylight. Where Daylight renounces his wealth for a quiet farm life, Billy and Saxon come to that life naturally. Their income remains the same, but they experience a greater freedom and sense of identity, and realize that a place in the countryside is a natural home for all people. Instead of making a radical change to their lives, they simply make the more logical, common sense one. Billy and Saxon are humble cultivators of the soil, who come to their farm in a way readers can too.

To examine the difference between how Burning Daylight settles in
Sonoma Valley and how the Robertses do, I will first return to the implications of the city in *Burning Daylight*, the far more intense model for how to make an agrarian life. Creeping steadily West and up through the North, Eastern industry confronts *Burning Daylight* in the Yukon before he travels to Oakland. The final chapter of Part One proves to be a critical illustration of London’s argument for the agrarian ideal. He expresses it through two competing feelings Daylight experiences as he watches Dawson become mechanized: disgust and hunger. Harnish looks over Dawson, a town he once knew to be small and intimate. Eastern financiers bring in machinery to strip the mines more quickly and with greater force. In his disgust, Daylight mutters, “‘It-all’s plain gophering.’ He looked at the naked hills and realized the enormous wastage of wood that had taken place. From this bird’s-eye view he realized the monstrous confusion of their excited workings. It was a gigantic inadequacy” (82). Though he too stripped the land of its precious metals, Daylight recognizes immediately that industrialized versions of his desire to dominate the land are far more destructive than one small miner could ever be. He sees industry breaking friendships and establishing a new order of self-preservation and labor hierarchies in which “each worked for himself, and the result was chaos” (82). Despite his repulsion, however, a stronger hunger for mastery leads Daylight to feel he can do the same as these Easterners, but better.

Following the Western trope, there can be only one hero, and so, “gazing
down on the smoky inferno of crude effort, Daylight outlined the new game he would play, a game in which the Guggenhammers [Eastern financiers] and the rest would have to reckon with him” (82). Though Daylight’s emotions are at odds, it is not a surprise that he follows his hunger for power. He has lived as a Western hero in the western paradigm of masculinity for most of his life, and “behind his magnificent free-handedness and careless disregard for money were hard, practical judgment, imagination and vision, and the daring of the big gambler” (61). Daylight moves toward a thriving metropolis to further prove his ability to dominate on a “larger table” that is akin to Slotkin’s analysis of establishing masculinity in “self-creation and self-renewal through acts of violence” and dominance (London, Daylight 82; Slotkin 556). Though Slotkin uses the western hunter exemplified in characters like Davy Crockett and Leatherstocking to illustrate his points, Daylight’s desire to abuse land and power for money expresses the same idea. The Western hero needs to prove he is better than “people who possess a certain kind of power: class privilege, political clout, financial strength” (Tompkins 51). Indeed, Daylight’s reception of “a clean million” from the Guggenhammers’s bids for his land burdens his ability to triumph over these men of the East (82). Moreover, rhetoric of improvement and progress support his motivations. With this rhetoric of progress, or, more fittingly, the rhetoric of reopening the frontier, his intentions appear justified. Beneath these justifications, however, is a deeper argument that undercuts such success.
London creates the perfect Western hero to show how quickly that hero can self-destruct in his untenable acts of violent regeneration. He essentially argues that the western model of masculinity reacts to fear. As Tompkins suggests, “[The Western] isn’t about the encounter between civilization and the frontier. It is about men’s fear of losing their mastery, and hence their identity, both of which the Western tirelessly reinvents” (45). Implicit in London’s decision to have Daylight see the Yukon become mechanized and to sojourn to the city is the idea that as soon as the East came to the Arctic, the frontier no longer existed. Fear, reactionary violence, and unsustainable ideas of power drive the form of masculinity reacting to this loss. As Slotkin says, “Believing in the myth of regeneration through the violence of the hunt, the American hunters eventually destroyed the natural conditions that had made possible their economic and social freedom, their democracy of social mobility. Yet the mythology and the value system are supported remained even after the objective conditions that had justified it had vanished” (557).

Blinded by the sense of power ingrained within them, the two main male characters in the two novels cannot come toward an alternative form of masculinity until they suffer destruction in the city where they lose their control over power. For both, a woman establishes a corrective form of masculinity in which they can still have mastery but within a framework that is sustainable and will not lead to self-destruction or violence. After setting up expectations of the
Arctic in *Burning Daylight* and rural competitions for masculine dominance in *The Valley of the Moon*, London illustrates how the desire for mastery inculcated in harsh natural settings becomes corrupt in urban spaces, where men will dominate and destroy without any sense of camaraderie or willpower.

For the first few chapters of Part Two of *Burning Daylight* and Part One of *The Valley of the Moon*, *Burning Daylight* (whom I shall refer to as Elam Harnish, his given, non-Arctic name, from this point forward) and Billy Roberts succeed according to the city’s standards. Harnish lives up to a certain idea of propriety, making shrewd investments, and forming strategic business partnerships. Roberts becomes a prime prizefighter, a reliable teamster, and provides for his loving wife, Saxon. Both will eventually show how these moves toward success, however, can quickly require violence and a denial of love.

In the absence of camaraderie, the mastery over detached social interactions defines urban success in both cases. Harnish “studies” to meet the ideals of “men [who] sat up nights and schemed how they could get between the workers and the things the workers produced” (107). London describes Harnish’s efforts to show how he replaces the absence of land with an absence of desire for camaraderie. In Part One Harnish delighted in “a great sense of humanness and comradeship” (42). When he comes back from his second sixty-mile mail delivery, greeted with a celebration of his physical endurance, he “felt melting in the heart of him, and he would have liked to shake hands with them all at once, to
gather them to his breast in one mighty embrace” (42). Similarly, Roberts expresses an aptitude for companionship and love. Like Harnish, he dances beautifully, wooing his future wife, Saxon, with “the grace of those slow-moving, certain muscles,” and, more importantly, with his ability to conserve his lithe musculature for friendly competition (Valley 16). In fact, in Part One of Valley of the Moon, Roberts left prizefighting, he says, when fans started “‘a-cheerin’ me an’ yellin’ for blood. Blood, mind you! An’ them without the blood of a shrimp in their bodies’” (60). He would rather “‘fight before an audience of one—you for instance, or anybody I liked. It’d do me proud’” for someone he loves (60).

This passion for love and camaraderie separates Harnish and Roberts from Eastern businessmen. Industry’s necessity for men with a conquest mentality is clear: business runs on conquest just as building homes on the frontier did. However, business does not end with conquering wilderness; it expresses a culture in which men strive for power over other men. It is this culture that dispossesses both characters of their sense of moral judgment and control. For instance, to meet business standards, Harnish uses his first few months on Wall Street to study “the game and its rules, and prepare himself to take a hand. He even took private instruction in English, and succeeded in eliminating his worst faults, though in moments of excitement he was prone to lapse into ‘you-all,’ ‘knowed,’ ‘sure,’ and similar solecisms. He learned to eat and dress and generally comport himself after the manner of civilized man” (87). Harnish creates a void in
his soul and effectively begins to control his natural tendency to express himself freely and to love others in this other “kind of wilderness” where absence is more significant than even in the natural starkness of the Yukon territory (86). He initiates this silence symbolizing “a massive suppression of the inner life. … [T]his determined shutting down of emotions, this cutting of the self off from contact with the interior well of feeling, exacts its price in the end” (Tompkins 66). His choice to control his speech reinforces the idea that the city produces greater loneliness and fear. For, despite the fact that he is surrounded by more people in the city, Harnish is more silent and lonesome there.

The city demands that its inhabitants resort to lonely, socially suppressed lives more than in the prairie, the desert, or the Arctic. Unlike in the Arctic, the landscape is not the primary enemy. Fellow men are. Men cannot rely on other men for survival. Instead, they compete for life, ending up lonelier and crueler to one another than in the wilderness. Though he sees this lack of camaraderie impairing his physical fitness, Harnish refuses to lose at the urban game as “there was nothing to do but play the cards he could see in his hand, and they were BATTLE, REVENGE, AND COCKTAILS. And Luck sat over all and grinned” (emphasis London’s, Daylight 140). Taking such risks without help from or trust in fellow men “corrodes and mars” Harnish to the point that it shows on his very countenance. He sees in the mirror in a scene near the end of the second section, “lines of cruelty Dede had spoken of. … [H]e found the harshness in the eyes as
well, the eyes that were muddy now after all the cocktails of the night before” (129). His body, once lithe and efficient, succumbs to the demands of the city. In the absence of natural systems and dominance over anything but economic capital, he has no close friendships, no fit body, and no heroic identity. His vocabulary of valuable, loving expression depreciates, and Harnish must turn to violence to retain any sense of the hero he once was.

The city is the only landscape in which the word “colt” refers to a gun rather than a young horse or young man. In Part Two, Chapter Three, Harnish contemplates suicide, then murder with his Colt .44. Carried and used in many Western films, television, and books by its heroes to exact vengeance or express manliness, “The Colt revolver was revolutionary. More precise than its predecessors, its barrel had a rifled interior that put a stabilizing spin on the bullet that sent it to its target” (Bucko). It was first used in the Mexican-American War by its inventor, Samuel Colt, “who single-handedly elevated the American icon of the cowboy from pastoral workhorse to gimlet-eyed gunslinger” (Bucko). I draw attention to the historical implication of this object to illustrate a point. The Colt .44 is an object attached to the violence of the Western hero. London chooses it at this point in the novel to signal a fierce change in Harnish’s character. In the Arctic, Harnish, despite his lust for dominance and mastery, had a deep love for life and comradeship. He would never have killed another man there; the landscape demanded he keep his friends close for survival. Thus, Harnish replaces
actual intimacy with a symbol of impotence, fear, and reaction. His use of the Colt .44 simultaneously symbolizes his perverse views of violence, mastery, and partnerships, and the idea that his virility has decreased physically and emotionally. His turn to violence is thus an attempt to cling to mastery and his greatest display of the fear that his mastery will disappear.

Though Harnish can adapt well to the demands of the city, he proves to be at best a mutation of his Yukon self. When Harnish contemplates suicide, the reader becomes aware that a loss of friendship and trust cuts him deeply. He has never been called to such violence. Yet Harnish’s thought process illustrates how his desire for mastery has turned to a mastery over himself. His inner struggle surfaces in self-destructive ways; his internalization of the expectations of Western masculinity battles against a desire for the intimacy he once knew:

For a while murder ate at his heart, and wild ideas and sketchy plans of killing his betayers flashed through his mind. That was what that young man [his younger self] should have done instead of killing himself. He should have gone gunning. Daylight unlocked his grip and took out his automatic pistol—a big Colt’s .44. … Lines formed in his face, and in those lines were the travail of the North, the bite of the frost, all that he had achieved and suffered. … all the long procession of twenty full years of toil and sweat and endeavor. (99)

In that moment, Harnish responds violently to the fear that Tompkins points out is present in other men who went into the interior at this point in history: the fear that he will lose his mastery and identity to men constrained by “economics, politics, and class distinctions,” the fear that intimacy with other men and trust
will no longer be a part of his life (66). When Harnish approaches his supposed business partners who tried to dupe “another Westerner,” he pulls out the Colt and keeps it in his hand as they discuss business for “three hours” on his terms (99, 104). London elaborates, “The deciding factor was not the big automatic pistol, but the certitude that Harnish would use it. Not alone were the three men convinced of this, but Harnish himself was convinced. He was firmly resolved to kill the men if his money was not forthcoming” (104). It is significant that Harnish never takes a shot. He uses the Colt only as a threat. He holds back, but from this point forward, he will always be on his guard. As he tells the businessmen he threatens, “‘When I get outside this door, you-all’ll be set free to act, and I just want to warn you-all about what to do. In the first place, no warrants for my arrest—savvee? If it gets out how you gave me the double-cross and how I done you back again … there’ll sure be some several unexpected funerals around this burg’” (105). His diction, such as the use of “you-all,” “fraid-cat,” and “savvee,” reminds the reader that Harnish has held on to his identity, for now. With violence (even the threat of it), he has regenerated and strengthened the ominous part of his character the masculine paradigm calls him to be. Yet, London notes that Harnish grows increasingly fat, tired, lonely, and suicidal, holding on for dear life. He has achieved the Western masculine ideal but is once again a fool, an unsustainable hero who must now be always on his guard, never trusting, and a slave to violence.
Comparatively, *The Valley of the Moon* begins as the demands of the city incite a rise in violent behavior among men and thus, as a companion novel, builds upon the ideas presented near the end of *Burning Daylight*. When working class conditions become intolerable in Oakland, protests and fights between protestors and scabs induce a decline of camaraderie and self-control Billy once possessed. One of the most exemplary scenes of Billy’s turn is when he fights scabs and uses his once well-controlled prizefighting skills to inflict serious injuries on them. Though he does not directly kill the men—other protestors finish the job—Saxon watches the violent fight in the street. Although she is able to soothe a wife of one of the fallen men, her psyche and physical health prove traumatized. Within days, she miscarries. The miscarriage serves as a definitive representation of how the violence and chaotic loss of control in the city lead to the absence of love and the need to escape that landscape (170).

The void between husband and wife grows as Billy begins to return home in deplorable states, or not at all, night after night. He comes home drunk and beaten beyond recognition, bloody from fights over protest lines. He meets the standards to the degree of a conqueror, a Western hero, as he uses violent acts to enforce justice. However, those deeds are neither in his control nor for good. Saxon sees him change from a hero to “another man … whose thoughts were of violence and hatred; a man to whom there was no good in anything, and who had become an ardent protagonist of the evil that was rampant and universal” (171). If
we read this passage in conjunction with Harnish’s dissolution into violence and corruption, we are reminded that the frontier conqueror only survives because his domain is open. He cannot survive in close-knit economic competition among other men too like himself. In the urban landscape, there is nowhere for this type of man to go but to suicide, murder, or eternal loneliness. When the hero rides into the sunset alone on his horse, the myth that he will continue to be a hero is perpetuated. He leaves the audience believing in an immortal legend, a hope and masculine ideal that are inhuman and faulty.

By chance, Harnish stumbles upon the Glen Ellen ranch during a horseback ride through the country, while still a rich businessman. As he falls further in love with the land, he also falls for Dede Mason, mainly for her mastery on horseback. As he builds his agrarian ethos, “the city financier [he used to be] died a quick death on the ranch,” and he reverts to “the Daylight from Alaska … The threatened inundation of fat had subsided, and all his old-time Indian leanness and of muscle had returned” (137). London’s words reflect the noticeable difference between the London of 1913 and that of 1910. Harnish does more riding than farming. Indeed, London admitted to Charmian in 1913 that he initially “bought the place mostly for its beauty, as a place to live and write in,” not to run an experimental farm as he did later (Kittredge London “Bad Year” 273). He saw it more as a place where he would regain his physical strength like the men of Sandow’s physical culture movement. The development of rider and
beauty chaser to farmer comes with the *Valley of the Moon* narrative. Where *Daylight* ends with Harnish at the height of an agrarian ethos, *The Valley of the Moon* follows through with a greater urging to return to using the farm as a classroom for agricultural colleges and developing a sense of community and place. Essentially, Harnish adapts to the fertile valley of the moon, as he did to the Arctic and to the city. He is still the character in search of home, and thus the agrarian lifestyle still seems a thing of fiction and myth to its readers. Additionally, Harnish only gains his property because he already has the capital to do so. He can buy the land and throw it away at will. He is conscientious to work as a “cultivator of the soil,” making “no effort to introduce a flower or shrub that did not of its own right belong. Nor did they protect them from their enemies. The horses and the colts and the cows and the calves ran at pasture among them or over them, and flower or shrub had to take its chance” (Inge iv; *Daylight* 226). His efforts are what modern readers might call “sustainable practices” or “conservationist,” however Harnish does not exactly fulfill all the ideals of the agrarian.

Falling short of the agrarian ethos is best evidenced in Harnish’s perception of the farm as an intellectualized place of beauty rather than a place to live and love. Harnish and Dede waffle on a full commitment to farm life, their pursuit more recreational than realistic. Their deepest attachment to the ranch comes through memories of their childhood homes, through their love for one
another, and through novels and poetry. Harnish relies heavily on Dede’s confidence in the ranch to support his own assurance in the pursuit. As well, a few of Harnish’s last words in the novel are “‘I have things in my heart I can’t find the words to say, and I have a feeling that I can almost understand Browning and those other high-flying poet-fellows’” (219). He must still use the words of poets to express feeling for the ranch, not his own words. It is notable that he chooses Browning, whose poems mentioned in the text, “Fra Lippo Lippi” and “Caliban and Setibos,” questioned man’s place in the natural order (219). Traditional agrarian texts, The Valley of the Moon included, exude greater confidence in the farmer’s place in the natural order.

_Burning Daylight_ perhaps reflects less confidence in identifying fully with the farmer because in some of London’s first years on the farm, he did more work building the Wolf House, his dream residence, buying livestock, and fixing up the “‘badly run down’” property than actual farming (qtd. in VMNHA “Brief Biography”). Though there is no question that Harnish and Dede will stay on the farm, Harnish never was and still does not appear to be a farmer, functioning more as a surveyor or wealthy investor in land conservation. Having spent more time on the farm and undergone the loss of the Wolf House in August 1913 as he was still writing _The Valley of the Moon_ in serial form in _Cosmopolitan_, “[London] threw himself into the farming fad of the period, scientific agriculture, believing this to be a truly justifiable, basic and idealistic means of making a
living” (Walker 28; VMNHA “Brief Biography”). London probably responded also to the increasing importance of the Conservation Movement in California and the overall national character toward land use policy at the turn of the century. Patricia Limerick analyzes this transformation almost directly in conversation with London’s transition from mastery over the land to agrarian commune with nature:

> When the shift in power [of man over nature] had reached the point where it was unmistakable and irreversible, then it was all right—more important, it was safe—to admit the elements of nature were actually quite attractive and appealing … power was over, management could take the place of mastery, and nature could be persuaded, coaxed, herded, guided, led, and sometimes even learned from, rather than overpower.{173}

Harnish illustrates this transition from the conqueror to the conservationist as though to follow this trend. Billy and Saxon, however, take conservation and the agrarian ethos to heart, turning their ranch into a place where the most modern agricultural techniques are learned from books, neighbors, nearby land-grant colleges, and, of course, by working it themselves. The Robertses claim they work the land better than early pioneers did, revitalizing stripped soil and respecting the processes of natural ecosystems. Thus, the novel encompasses not only a shift in power, but a complete shift in his understanding of how Americans relate to land and one another.

In the place of the moral code of justice at all costs, Billy follows the code of agrarianism: “manliness, self-reliance, and hospitality,” evidenced in his love
for the fields and generous support of community (Inge iv). This shift as in *Daylight* points to a repositioning of the American character away from violent frontier ideas. From the frontier hero’s dominance over land and people, London puts in its stead deep intimacy with the soil. In the words of the Roberts’s Spanish neighbor, Mercedes, at the beginning of the novel, democracy is “‘a lie, an enchantment to keep the work brutes content,’” holding no weight for the impoverished people on the outskirts of Oakland (London, *Daylight* 140). Over time, the Robertses achieve a deeper understanding that their dreams of a democratic sharing and care for the soil can be realized when they reach the Valley of the Moon.

Billy first learns this new code of communion in Carmel. There, two events occur that reinforce his decision to leave the city and begin to transform his violence into controlled, productive energy. First, largely due to Saxon’s admiration of the California landscape, Billy begins to notice the beauty of the places they traverse, such as when they first happen upon Carmel Valley: “they went on across wind-blown rolling sandhills held to place by sturdy lupine and nodding with pale California poppies. Saxon screamed in sudden wonder of delight” (London, *Valley* 275). The valley is unmistakably Californian where poppies dot a coastline. Few if any other places in the world boast such a landscape, giving possible reason to why poppies are the state’s flower. Billy feels a deep connection to California places rather than a desire to overpower them.
This connection initiates his true journey toward adopting agrarian ideals of masculinity. He has “a sense of identity, a sense of historical and religious tradition, a feeling of belonging to a concrete family, place, and region,” feelings he never had in Oakland (Inge iv).

In Carmel, Billy also begins to feel a sense of brotherhood when he meets Jim Hazard, as I mentioned in the Introduction, a self-proclaimed Bohemian artist and strong man, who Billy initially mistakes for the then world-renowned entertainer Sandow (London, Valley 276). Though this mistaken identity historically places the characters, thus furthering the idea that any reader could see themselves in their stead, Saxon’s reaction to Hazard’s “farmer” form and fitness is far more interesting (Waller 26). Her wonder illustrates London’s fascination with the American agrarian masculine paradigm. Upon seeing Hazard run along the strand and then artfully dive into the sea, Saxon “was thinking of the engraving in her mother’s scrapbook and of the Vikings on the wet sands of England” (276). The natural environment and its people evoke a sense of belonging to a personal and ethnic history.

Tramping across the California coast and finding men like Hazard ushers Billy into renewing his physical fitness in playful, hospitable, and manly ways that are competitive but non-violent. He discovers how to transform that past into one that can also use other culture’s elements and the environment itself to renew his body. For instance, as Billy gets to know Hazard’s friend, Mark Hall, further,
Hall challenges him to use his body in ways that encourage what Inge calls a “cooperative relationship with nature. The standard by which an economic system is judged is not how much prosperity or wealth it produces, but how effectively it encourages freedom, individuality, and morality” (iv). In particular, Hall challenges Billy to a thrilling race across the seaside cliffs. Billy succeeds in the race and faces his fears to jump into the sea from the cliff and, from the race, feels a surge of friendly competition. Billy then challenges himself to do it just as fast and gracefully as Hall does. And indeed, over time, as they train together, “each trial found him doing it in faster time” (289). The scenes are reminiscent of Native American literature local to California. In particular, the Potawatomi Environmental and Forest Biology Professor, Robin Wall Kimmerer writes, “‘Traditional knowledge is rooted in intimacy with a local landscape where the land itself is the teacher’” and one can rediscover his “cultural identity, rooted in the land” (qtd. in Graulich 4).

As a result of their training, Billy and Hall’s companionship evolves beyond physical challenges. Hall invites the Robertses to be part of the “Tribe of Abalone Eaters,” telling the couple to never “‘pound abalone while singing this song’” nor to over fish the invertebrates (288). The couple lives with Hall and his friends in a tribal, native, and near-religious manner, getting to “know trees in much the same way Billy knows horses” as a teamster (271). Though this may seem similar to the description Tompkins gives of the frontiersman, that is, a
white man who is “Indian-like,” the Robertses do not look like or take on physical characteristics of Indians, but understand and practice native abalone fishing to cultivate “the single most important relationship they have” that is, to the land (78; Inge iv). They live off the land and understand it more deeply, developing a greater sense of communion with nature and their ancestors’ homelands, which leads them to a better understanding of how they will treat their farm. As well, as they spend time with “the crowd” in Carmel, “unique in its democracy and solidarity,” the Robertses start to understand how the country invites democratic ideals that can evolve in the twentieth century more justly and peacefully (302).

Thus, unlike Slotkin’s hunter myth in which man regenerates through violence, Billy regenerates through cultivation, communion, and a peaceful American character. He develops more efficient uses of his body and of the land, which soon turns to cultivation of the soil, “the mother of all arts” (Inge iv).

Though the Robertses enjoy their time in Carmel, learning songs, eating abalone, and improving their bodies, they recognize the spiritual historical place they are so desperate for on their seeleroman. They continue tramping to find the farm they imagine. Along their way, they meet other guides who connect them further with the landscape and their cultural past. Where Slotkin’s hunter must pass certain trials, usually violent in nature, until he finds his spiritual guide or lover, the path to agrarian life only has guides who help farmers open up more to nature, rediscover and refine their spiritual and personal identities, and practically
realize a self-sufficient way of earning a living. More importantly, especially in
the case of the Robertses, their goal is mythic, almost magical rather than violent
or self-destructive, imagined before it is reached. They come to name their
imagined destination “The Valley of the Moon” because as their friend from
Carmel, Mark Hall, who reveals that he is a farmer, lets Saxon look through his
telescope, he teases, “‘Somewhere up there in some valley you’ll find that farm.’”
Saxon responds, “‘We started out prepared to go any distance. … And if it’s to the
moon, I expect we can make it’” (306). From that point forward, the couple calls
their future farm the Valley of the Moon—notably female in metaphor, a “valley”
and a “moon,” two words with feminine etymologies, being its primary
descriptors, thus personifying and gendering elements of nature. Though it is a
mythic name for the majority of the story, in the fourth chapter from the end, they
happen upon a beautiful farm area and are told by Mrs. Hale, a fellow agrarian,
“‘This is the Valley of the Moon. This is Sonoma Valley. Sonoma is an Indian
word, and means the Valley of the Moon. That was what the Indians called it for
untold ages before the first white men came. We, who love it, still so call it’”
(364). Indian ideals of communing with the land, a paradigm built throughout the
novel, trump rhetoric of progress through violence or dominance that the frontier
ideology so promotes. As well, the reader is reminded that their dreams of owning
land are possible; in fact, they already exist and are not legends or myths at all.

At first the Robertses seek one hundred and sixty acres on which to ranch
and farm, but are soon told that the pioneer homesteads are not like they were in the old days. They emulate early pastoralism in the way they aggrandize the farm but soon find that their ideas of land size may be too outlandish, indeed of mythic proportions following “the old pioneer dream of land spaciousness; of cattle on a hundred hills; one hundred and sixty acres of land the smallest thinkable division” (366). Though they are disappointed at first, Edmund, one of their final guides, suggests Billy use a more scientific approach as he decided to do with farming. Edmund says to Billy, “I see you understand intensive farming. Have you thought about intensive horse-raising?” Billy’s jaw dropped at the smashing newness of the idea” (366). Billy once again experiences a sense of community and brotherhood as well as communion with the land. The discussions and communion rely, as with Harnish’s discovery of Browning, on poetry, another one of Hall’s many talents. Following its didactic form, however, The Valley of the Moon points to the more concrete poet-farmer, rather than only poetic words as in Burning Daylight.

The poet-farmer expertly executes intensive farming on “a matter of three acres which the poet farmed erratically to the huge delight of his crowd. He planted at all seasons” with crop rotation and attention to the soil’s need for time to regenerate (300). Though the work is hard, Billy takes joy in the virtues and challenges of the plow: “I never thought I’d like plowin’—much,” he observed. “But it’s fine. It’s good for the leg-muscles, too. They don’t get exercise enough
in teamin’. If ever I trained for another fight, you bet I’d take a whack at plowin’” (263). Each agrarian principle of manhood proves to be tied to one another, for when the farmer decides to make the cultivation of the soil his art, fellow men begin to pitch in their help knowing that a whole community needs to attend to the soil as it is all attached rather than fragmented as in the landscape of a city.

This sense of community continues until the end of the novel, culminating, as in *Burning Daylight*, with the knowledge that the protagonists have conceived a child. Billy Roberts and Elam Harnish need not fear a loss of identity or sense of power. Their identities are secure in their crops and farmland, which leave a legacy written on the land, and their children will carry on their identity in ways a business or staked claim can only do in name, if that. Especially in *The Valley of the Moon*, Billy displays a shift in his use of strength from bloody fights in the city as “the master of other men,” “like dogs wrangling over bones,” to training his horses, planting crops, and sharing ideas with other farmers of how to make the land more fertile for all and for the future (London 52, 142).

These texts attend to the prominent shifts in a newly industrialized West in the early twentieth century to shape the American character in the direction of farming and better land use. London’s novels provided critical viewpoints for the state of the environment and human interaction with it. As Limerick iterates, quoting Turner, “In a sentence he himself italicized, Turner declared his faith in presentism: ‘Each age writes the history of the past anew with reference to the
conditions uppermost in its own time” (emphasis in Limerick 149). London’s argument for understanding the land, one another, and a secure American character has even greater importance today. If we follow Western genre ideologies, we may only expect more preemptive wars and overzealous use of resources. On the other hand, an agrarian understanding of the world, with smaller plots, intensive farming, and place-based identities provides an alternative solution to mitigating political, environmental, and basic social problems. At least for London, there is no question if people should try to know the land better through agrarian principles; for him, they are the only answer.
CHAPTER 3

A RETURN TO THE SOIL: THE MAN BEHIND THE SUPERMEN

Between 1905 and 1907, Jack London settled down in the Valley of the Moon with Charmian. Though he did embark on a few adventures to Hawaii on his beloved ship, the Snark, his main goals turned to his experimental farm and new wife. He determined to know a woman and a place intimately and to work at nurturing those relationships after years of displacement. London wanted his readers to understand the macroscopic power of “Life” and the microscopic importance of man’s will and love (Daylight 9). Through examining Glen Ellen, which he also lovingly called “the Valley of the Moon,” and his relationship with Charmian alongside his novels Burning Daylight and Valley of the Moon, this chapter strives to explain the man behind the works, in all his determination, failures, and lasting legacy, a legacy mostly carried on by Charmian and his stepsister, Eliza Shepard, and very much later, through scholars and Jack London Historic Park lovers who are still fascinated with the man behind the supermen he created.

London was a chameleon: it was difficult for him to settle because he had so many interests and built many different kinds of personal relationships from those with his first wife and children to those with the ex-convicts of San Quentin he employed on his ranch. His multi-perspective stories some see as indecisive.
Yet how he wrote was how he lived: in constant motion. From a young age, London loved to physically move and meet all kinds of people. Edward Biron Payne wrote in his non-fiction work, *The Soul of Jack London*,

[Jack] was himself entertained in the homes of the rich. … yet he rode the car rods and beams with the tramps and served a term in jail as a hobo. Thus, round the circle, the rich and the poor, the virtuous and the vicious, the exalted and the lowly, fellow countryman and foreigner, the white, the yellow, the black—they all met him, and always with a facing and demeanor on the part of this many-sided man which befitted the occasion and company. (3)

The description is near Christ-like, and indeed there are some parallels there (at least with the Christ that turned over tables of tax collectors and embraced social outcasts). However, London definitely did not see himself as a Christ figure. Instead, he devoted his words and self-identification to Charmian, depicting her as Dede Mason, Saxon Roberts, and Clara Hastings who are compared to Venus or presented as saviors to the errant male protagonist. Likewise, he viewed the ranch in Charmian’s words as “our Center of the Earth, a small home-farm with a hinterland of indescribable woodland. … A house large enough to entertain Jack’s pilgrims instead of meeting them in the pandemonium of cities” (“Sonoma” 1).

Jefferson expressed that ranches like the Londons’ were “the focus in which [the cultivator] keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth” that inspired “the ambitious agrarian vision” of the “argonauts,” Billy and Saxon in *Valley of the Moon* (Jefferson, *Notes* 176; Kittredge London, “Jack London” 4).
After his first business-like marriage with Bess Maddern fizzled, London married Charmian, an independent, sexually aware stenographer from Los Angeles. Many, including London, described her as his perfect female counterpart [see Appendix C for photographs of the pair]. She fit perfectly into Jack’s life with her spirit of adventure and carefree nature. And thus, she became London’s “Mate-Woman” and was his steady companion on many of his adventures and in his working life. Charmian was a strong woman. A skilled horsewoman, she enjoyed riding over the ranch with London. When on several occasions during the cruise of the Snark the entire crew became ill, Charmian expertly fulfilled the roles as skipper, cook and nurse of the crew to keep the ship afloat (VMNHA “Jack London State Historic Park”). Charmian Kittredge London indeed fit naturally into London’s dream life as a farmer, so much so that in Burning Daylight, The Valley of the Moon, and Little Lady of the Big House and some of his short stories, aspects of Charmian’s personality appear in these female characters who often mirrored the landscape he loved just as dearly.

The female protagonists in all three novels exude sexual confidence, are economically independent, and have “boyish” qualities of freewheeling outlooks and athletic vigor unlike many other Victorian era women. The two from Chapter One, Dede Mason and Saxon Roberts, were stenographers and expert riders who led men from the city to the ranch life, almost exactly like Charmian. The third, Paula, was the center of a depressing love triangle. It is debatable how much like
Charmian this third was as her lover has never been named in London biographies or letters. Perhaps she was caught between the beast and beau Jack London could be, often described as having a dual personality, one moment pugnacious and the next incredibly loving. Perhaps she was caught between John Barleycorn, Jack London’s alcohol-induced alter ego, and her Jack, “Teacher. Builder, The Acorn Planter. The Husbandman!” (Kittredge London, “Jack London” 5). Based on London’s notes and letters, however, it is clear he was never torn in his love for Charmian. She was his constant companion and he hers.

Though Charmian and Jack tried to have children, one died in utero and the other only a few weeks after birth. London strived to be close with his two daughters from his first marriage, Joan and Becky, however, his strained relationship with Bess often hindered these efforts. Though Charmian and London’s delight in farming brightened his life, his inability to alleviate his failing health with his “strong man” self-image, spiraling debt with his determination for self-sufficient farming, and bouts of “heavy drinking” with his desire to write and exercise magnificently produced within him a paradox between the myth of California farm life and its realities (Starr 211–212). This paradox bled into London’s writing. He imagined the Beauty Ranch as a sublime place. It was more than a farm; it was the cure for his economic and physical failures. Charmian quoted him postmortem as having said, “‘when I go in silence, I want to know that I left behind me a plot of land which, after the pitiful failures of others, I have
made productive. . . .Can’t you see? Oh, try to see!—In the solution of great economic problems of the present age, I see a return to the soil”’ (qtd. in “Bad Year” 268). In creating the farm, he felt he would at least leave behind a legacy of fertility rather than despair or failure in becoming the person he imagined himself to be.

In his novels and short stories, readers see this battle against failure through the supermen characters he created: Elam Harnish, Martin Eden, Billy Roberts, Bill Totts, and many others. These characters found solace and greater strength in working their bodies and, especially in those fictions written after 1905, working on a farm expressing agrarian manhood.

As London’s father left when he was still a baby, London was raised by his mother and nursemaid, and later by a step-father he admired. As he grew up, London seemed forever in search of a paradigm for masculinity to model himself after. All accounts of his life agree that it was on the Beauty Ranch where he truly felt free to be himself. He wrote in 1914, “‘Next to my wife, the ranch is the dearest thing in the world to me. Heaven! I sit up nights over that ranch’” (qtd. in Haughey 21). Though London went through many paradigm shifts on his masculine ideal, it was the agrarian ethos that kept the itinerant author’s attention the longest and informed the writing in the final decade of his life.

He wanted to “return to the soil” through cultivating grapes, cacti, grain, and experimental crops, raising pigs, horses and cattle, and shaping a self-
sufficient, non-mechanical farm as early Californians had nearly a century before (Kittredge London, “Bad Year” 266). He became fascinated with how work on a farm hardened his muscles and sharpened his mind as he challenged himself to write two hours a day and work his farm ten hours a day, devising new techniques for land-use planning.

London invested most of the money he earned from his successful writing career to buy the ranch. More than $6,500 went into purchasing the land, the majority of which did not come back to him. Yet, the losses did not seem to matter. Akin to one of White Fang’s messages that man is a small peon compared to the rest of life, London lived out this ideal through his work on the farm and grew increasingly reflective of agrarian ideals. He wrote in The Little Lady of the Big House, after ten years on the farm (the longest amount of time he lived in one place in his adult life), “[Dick Forrest] knew himself on the moment of awakening, instantly identifying himself in time and place and personality” (1). It was a place of experimentation through which London could find solutions to social and economic ills:

No picayune methods for me, when I go in silence … Can’t you see? Oh, try to see!—In the solution of great economic problems of the present age, I see a return to the soil. I go into farming because my philosophy and research have taught me to recognize the fact that a return to the soil is the basis of economics. … I see my farm in terms of the world, and the world in terms of my farm. (Kittredge London, “Bad Year” 268)

The enthusiasm in this passage is reflected again and again throughout London’s
notes, letters, and narratives he wrote at this time, with perhaps the most famous quotes, “I believe the soil is our greatest asset” and “I’d rather be ashes than dust” (“War of the Classes”).

In essence, London’s decision to create an “experimental farm” was a physical manifestation of Jefferson’s letter to David Williams one hundred years earlier in 1803 that stated, “In every College and University, a professorship of agriculture, and the class of its students, might be honored as the first” (qtd. in Rayner, Francis, and Boardman 504). He follows in a tradition of the nineteenth century of Lincoln’s establishment of land-grant universities with the Morrill Act in 1863 and Turner’s Chapter X: Pioneer Ideals and the State University in 1893. London established a place of learning for scientists, agriculturalists, and artists to care for the land and thereby understand the local qualities of the Sonoma landscape.

In Americans and the California Dream, as mentioned in the Introduction, Kevin Starr writes that London perhaps created and recreated such supermen farmers because he saw their return to the farm and his own Beauty Ranch “as a fantasy of recuperation” as they “expressed a deep aspect of London’s Sonoma dream, the hope for health” (Starr 212). This optimistic fantasy proved unattainable in London’s short lifetime. Greg Hayes, Jack London Historic Park ranger, states that London probably died because he weakened his kidneys with alcohol and overused plant-based medicines, which he took to prove he could
medicate himself (Hayes). A man who lived in dichotomies, even after his death, his ranch, which epitomizes the marriage between conservation and literary history, can also be seen as a mausoleum of a farm. Only a portion of its land is used for a vineyard, the rest a monument to London and for recreational purposes. Despite the fact that he did not get to see his dreams come to fruition, those dreams have valuable, practical uses for current studies in ecology and land management for building a relationship to one’s bio-region and place.

Had London survived longer, perhaps some of his dreams would have been realized in his lifetime. Unfortunately, he lost money and saw his personal illnesses increase exponentially after his thirtieth birthday in 1906. The maladies included a “nervous itch, cramps, headaches, sties, dyspepsia, insomnia, dysentery, pyorrhea” and a chronic toothache from not having brushed his teeth till he was nineteen (Starr 211). To be fair, he had survived many adventures and other illnesses that killed his nineteenth century counterparts—he sustained many diseases he contracted in the tropics, the Arctic, during the Russo-Japanese War, and at sea, but died resolutely on his beloved farm. This fact, however, may have contributed to a self-delusion that his “body was a strong body [that] survived where weaklings died like flies” (Starr 211).

To continue living the way he desired, London took to the approach that Saxon and Billy Roberts do in *The Valley of the Moon*, that the farm could be the mythic cure to his difficulties, leading him to spiritual grounding, a sense of
home, and physical energy. In *The Valley of the Moon*, the Robertses chase the dream of discovering solace from city life on a rather fabulous journey, not unlike Voltaire’s *Candide*. The myth of the Roberts’s farm is based on a film they see in Oakland and passed down pioneer stories from Saxon’s mother. Both the Robertses grew up in the city of Oakland, but after enduring several protests, bloody fights, and a miscarriage, Saxon experiences a surge of “freedom and content” as she breathes in “the spaciousness” of the small farm represented in the film (211). Convinced they can achieve their goals on a thirty-acre plot with innovative “immigrant-styles” such as working with tiered systems like the Chinese or with the stone barns of the Italians, they make several moves against the traditional farming of their pioneer ancestors that stripped the soil and only allowed family with a few hands to work on the farm. The Robertses hire ex-convicts, as the Londons did, experiment with soil conservation, as the Londons did, tier their land, use intensive farming techniques, and crop rotation, as the Londons did (366).

London bypasses the overt ridiculousness of the discovering-the-valley scene by continuing with the narrative; yet, it is important to note that London would describe a place he knew so intimately with these hyperbolic details. His fiction gives readers insight into how he himself saw his farm and the dreams he had even when they were impractical.
For instance, the Robertses meet on their journey Jack and Clara Hastings, characters who could be easily replaced with Jack and Charmian. Akin to the Londons, the Hastingses sail regularly off the coast of California with Japanese skippers, Jack Hastings was a journalist in the Russo-Japanese War, and, among many other examples, the couple calls one another “mate” (321). Though the Hastingses exude support for the farm life, they are not without their opinions on how to farm, much like London was in real life. The Hastingses suggest to Billy and Saxon that they should follow the ways of the Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, and Italian immigrants, who work and produce more from the soil than the “lazy, vagabond, poor-white sort … land-hogs … that destroyed New England” (322). Indeed, London’s notions are supported with contemporaneous soil reports. The *Soil Survey of the Stockton Area, California* in 1906, for instance, states, “With more recent immigration the population has taken on an even more cosmopolitan character, and this has resulted in improved agricultural practices … has opened the way for the introduction of irrigation and a system of diversified farming” (United States 7). Though London can still be read as racist or, depending on the point of view, desirous of reclaiming his Anglo past, he often favors immigrant techniques, as mentioned earlier, over any of “old American stock” (322). Despite London’s overzealous ideals for his farm, he did check himself, often calling his farm “experimental,” rather than “working,” akin to the university farm Jefferson imagined in 1785 and Lincoln made into a reality with the Morrill Act.
London’s farm could be compared to land-grant universities. At least London intellectualized his farm as such. For instance, many of the materials from London’s home from 1905 onward archived at the Huntington are pages from agricultural journals, magazines, and letters of correspondence with professors at the local land-grant university, UC Davis. Though he never officially taught people on his farm, university and local magazine publications, some more propaganda-like than others, influenced London’s purchases of eucalyptus, alfalfa (both non-native plants and thus, in current sustainability terms, counterproductive to his water wise ideals), certain types of pigs and cows, and how he ran his farm in general. London knew writing and reading before he knew farming, and it still shows in his materials, experimental techniques, and reliance on land-grant research.

London’s voracity for reading and discussing best techniques with experts is well-documented and probably best supports any practicality he did bring to his big dreams. What we may now call sustainable agrarian techniques, London simply saw as creative logic. He built the first concrete silos in California after seeing their prototypes in his travels because they lasted longer and were suitable to the California air. He tiered his vineyard and cropland in a Chinese style to get “results which the Chinese have demonstrated for forty centuries. We are just beginning to farm in the United States” (Kittredge London, “Bad Year” 268). He denounced the stripping of top soil, a result of techniques oft-employed by
nineteenth century pioneers and early twentieth century farmers; however, despite his belief in the Chinese way, he did not spare the racialized statements so common of his age: “The Chinese knew the how but not the why,” he said. “We [Anglo-Saxons] know the why, but we’re dreadfully slow getting around to the how’” (qtd. Kittredge London, “Bad Year” 268). Taking from the Chinese as the Hastingses suggested in *The Valley of the Moon*, London rotated his crops, rather than giving into the mono-crop style of his neighbors. Such rotation current sustainable agriculturalists tout as the best way to keep the soil aerated and give time for the land to regenerate, let alone making smaller plots more profitable (“Food and Agriculture”). The author experimented with cacti as cattle feed. The cacti used less water and were native plants, which grew far better than grass or corn in the arid soil. He refused machinery such as tractors in favor of horse-driven plows and manual labor (in which he, Charmian, and immigrant laborers all took part), and he took diligent notes and clipped every article he could find on independent, sustainable farming, articles that are still filed alphabetically in boxes at the Huntington.

London became so intensely invested in his farm that even when he went on his voyage on the *Snark*, he wrote constantly to Eliza. Though his notes were demanding, they were also loving, which is reflected in Eliza’s understanding of her stepbrother and his love for the farm:
Jack’s ambition was to develop a model farm; one of the best all-round ranches in the state, combining a stock ranch, fruit, grain, vegetables, vineyard and the like. He would have accomplished his plan had he lived, for his enthusiasm was unquenchable. His intense energy simply rioted in work. Success seemed only to stimulate him to greater and wider efforts. (qtd. in VMNHA “Brief Biography”)

In many ways, London’s experiments were ahead of their time. There is substantial evidence that if others had taken heed of the techniques he researched thoroughly, perhaps the Dust Bowl could have been prevented and the damaging elements of big farm industry, including pesticide use, mono-crop soil deprivation, and other unsustainable agricultural practices may have been attended to earlier than the twenty-first century (Burns). In a short fiction story by Charles Lincoln Phifer London read and clipped out of a farming magazine, “An Invention to End Farming,” and in his own story, “The Scarlet Plague,” London read and wrote about a future time when people would decimate the soil in the name of a few big business farmers feeding the ignorant masses. One can imagine London reading Phifer’s words, “In the new process we extract at once all the essential elements, leaving it practically exhausted. But the earth is large, and the soil will no doubt last for millions of years under the new and more perfect method of using it,” and nodding with the energy of most locovore, Slow Food, and other anti-agribusiness activists today (n.p.). He constantly searched for and clipped out more articles like Phifer’s with the same intents—to improve his farm, become economically self-sufficient, and produce as little waste and pollutive
substances as possible. In many ways, he predicted the world that came to be after World War II, the world in which we continue to live, on the brink of ecological turmoil, largely due to the flawed practices of the food industry.

Despite all his well-researched ideas, however, perhaps because London died too young, his farm would never amount to more than a place of experimentation. Charmian and Eliza took London’s work and research on their shoulders after his death. Well after his death, up until her own in 1955, Charmian lived on the ranch, wrote letters to publishers, libraries, and conservation entities, and entertained there. She wrote and published several works about Jack including the beliefs they held about farming and its ability to save the true American character from decline. Clearly proud of her husband’s efforts, Charmian felt that not enough people took the time to understand her husband’s “maturer works” about farming and its benefits (“Sonoma” 5). Though the two affected many other “radical thinkers,” mostly close friends, none took their beliefs to the farm as the Londons did. Charmian once wrote in a passionate but discouraged tone a call to those other thinkers: “what is the foundation of the science of Economics but consideration of the Planet’s fruitfulness, which perforce must be intelligently husbanded?” (“Sonoma” 5). The call reflects the common problem London wrote into his works, that Americanness was being pulled in two directions: as a conqueror of nature or a steward and symbiotic partner to it.
Despite Charmian’s inability to convince others to buy acres and take up sustainable farming practices, she and Eliza were able to preserve Beauty Ranch under the care of the California State Parks. Their efforts have been passed on to the children of Eliza, and, now, the readers that have been swept into the London world time and time again. The Jack London Society pays most of the costs needed to keep the ranch open to visitors. Committed volunteers are mostly scholars or frequent visitors who have written about London and have come to love the ecological vision he had. His beliefs have passed the test of time. Therein lay the man Jack London, an ecological pioneer who we can now turn to as a literary figure to be used more directly to educate students about conservation, love for a place, and for the people in their lives.
CHAPTER 4

JACK LONDON’S PLACE IN PLACE-BASED EDUCATION:
A CALL TO WILD LITERARY FIGURES AND EDUCATORS

Jack London’s literary goal to understand and write about the benefits of knowing a place down to its soil seems to inevitably lead to practical applications for his literature. London’s final novels are useful materials for place-based education.

In the late 1980s–early 1990s with texts like William Cronon’s *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (1983) and David Sobel’s *Children’s Special Places: Exploring the Role of Forts, Dens, and Bush Houses in Middle Childhood* (1993) and the development of work like the Annenberg Rural Challenge, place-based education emerged as a way of teaching outdoor and environmental education. Those efforts have since started to include many other movements such as locovore ideals, sustainability education, and teaching children nutrition on edible landscapes. According to Sobel, one of the foremost educators in place-based learning, this type of education is:

the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their communities, enhances students’ appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens. (qtd. in “What is Place-Based Education?”)
Essentially, place-based education uses a connection to place to create a community-aware environment in the classroom. From the work that has grown out of Sobel’s theories and educative practices, students and teachers have learned to use their bioregions to create common ground for critical thinking discussions and ensuring an appreciation and care for local communities.

Critics may argue that this type of education is idealistic, especially in urban, fragmented spaces or at universities where many students plan to leave the places where they are educated after they graduate. However, the results produced from place-based learning are myriad, practical, and productive, enhancing the health and cultural longevity of communities. The only aspect that seems to be lacking in most place-based curriculum is the connection communities have to their stories. Many place-based models include collecting local oral traditions but many still need to more directly bring out the obvious connection between the local and the global story. For instance, the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress dedicates large sections of their website to “Heritage Projects and Place-Based Education.” Teacher and student resources promote “heritage studies” and “field projects” with local musicians, interviews, and exploration of historical neighborhoods through several of their pamphlets, texts, and sister organizations while also functioning as an international hub for folklore from around the world (“Heritage Projects”). Internationally recognized authors and
bio-regionalists such as Gary Snyder and Peter Berg create images of certain places to establish the importance of a sense of place in daily life and education. In *Turtle Island*, Snyder writes that people are only violent to the land, including not knowing its flora, fauna, people, and soils, because they do not connect to it. “If man is to remain on earth he must transform the five-millennia-long urbanizing civilization tradition into a new ecologically-sensitive harmony-oriented wild-minded scientific-spiritual culture. Wildness is the state of complete awareness. That’s why we need it” (99). If he had been born in our time, London would have been one of these bioregionalists for Northern California. He recognized the importance of his place on a global scale mainly due to his travels and how much he read. His stories brought the beauty he saw in one place to the world. Within those stories is research of the soil and science of farming that also directly connect him to a landscape students can still visit, touch, and take action to ensure its preservation. His ranch and final novels are ripe for place-based curriculum showing contemporary readers how the man, his farm, and his works can still serve to understand American culture, masculinity, ethos, and history.

Growing up in a city of which Gertrude Stein once said, “There is no there there,” London became determined to leave his hometown and discover other places (298). Despite his best efforts to truly find home, it seems London only found that place in the last few years of his life. He traveled far from the city that so many since his time have described (in one way or another) as “an Othered
space, an industrial wasteland, a suburban nonplace, or an urban ghetto” (Gamber 168). London, as noted in the previous chapter, called Oakland both “the man \textit{trap}” and “a place to start from,” but it was never the place he wanted to stay, to know, to contribute to as a citizen (emphasis in London, qtd. in VMNHA “Brief Biography”; Valley 201).

As elaborated upon in Chapter Two, London worked as a journalist, which led him to the Klondike, Russia, Japan, Canada, Hawaii, New York, the Tropics, and England. Though London did settle down in 1905, his determination to stay and work the farm as a farmer in order to achieve the physical culture or agrarian life he so avidly advocated for in his writing and interviews got distracted from time to time by his inherent peripatetic nature. He never did forget the farm, however. Almost every day of the journey, he wrote to Eliza with several commands from the boat deck. In one three-page letter January 26, 1915, for example, he typewrote thirty-one requests with spaces below each for Eliza’s responses, which she did in fact fill in for her micro-managing stepbrother to keep the ranch, his herds, and plant life growing. There are also hundreds of letters and files of carefully kept correspondence, notes, and articles about self-sufficient, sustainable farming from his time on the \textit{Snark} and at the ranch which are now housed at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. The trip was cut short by five years after London became gravely ill in Australia. After this trip, London finally came back to the Beauty Ranch and bought hundreds of more
acres over the next eight years, purchases that supported a resolve to stay put for once and construct an identity rooted in place.

Despite some of his best intentions, however, London never got to know Sonoma as home as much as he would have liked due to his early death. His trial-and-error methods with his plants and experimental farming only got so far. In many ways, with hindsight on our side, London was still learning the ropes of sustainability and balancing between understanding place in the context of good business practices. Chapter 3 focused on the details and implications of these failures for London readers, however, here, I mention these failures to highlight the determination with which London worked to know Sonoma and create a home there.

Though the farm currently is non-working (apart from a small vineyard on the property, which Kenwood Winery owns), as iterated in Chapter 3, it serves a memorial to the agrarian aesthetic he attempted to create near the end of his life. The vistas around the ranch are sweeping. London’s experimental farming, concrete silos (the first two, though he wanted to build at least eight more), stone barns, “Pig Palace,” and ranch house where he and Charmian lived before and after the Wolf House burnt down, pictured in the Appendix A, are well-kept for visitors, mostly lovers of London’s novels, though that community has expanded as of late. In essence, the park is ripe for place-based education. Student groups are encouraged to explore London’s novels and life in the actual place he wrote,
lived, worked, and fell in love with the land.

Commissioned by Eliza after London’s death as a gift to Charmian so she would not have to keep living in the home she shared with London, the House of Happy Walls now stands as a testament to the relationship Eliza and Charmian maintained after London’s death. Charmian wanted people to know about London’s love for the farm and its surrounding lands. If he had lived longer, he would have built a post office and a school on the property so that more people would come to visit. The House of Happy Walls was Charmian’s attempt to get more people to visit as London wanted. It was built to be the museum and entrance hall for the Jack London Historical State Park though Charmian ended up living on the second floor after London’s death as the cottage held too many memories. It is now a place where people can know his literature intimately, physically, and experience the words on a page with all their senses.

Hikers, Sonoma Valley residents, Sonoma Valley High School and Community College students, volunteers, and of course Jack London aficionados from all over the country and world visit the park regularly. Though many come to hike, the park in the past few years has revitalized its connection to the community, serving as the intersection site for place-based education, London scholars, and lovers of the outdoors. A Sonoma Valley high school teacher, Alison Manchester, Poet Laureate and Sonoma Valley Community College professor, Iris Dunkle, and former professor, Susan Nuerenberg, in particular, have begun to
concentrate their curriculum around teaching Jack London’s literature with place-based learning techniques. The educators mainly use *The Valley of the Moon* to engage their students as it is a fairly easy narrative for all reading levels and is one of the few London novels that calls California valleys, beaches, cities, and towns by name. As well, students, especially those from Northern California inner cities, identify strongly with the class issues, unemployment, race relations, cultural attachment, ecological devastation, and California beauty that are described so intensely in the novel (Dunkle).

Dunkle, Manchester, and Nuerenberg have their students read and discuss *The Valley of the Moon* in their classrooms, which are located in the actual Valley of the Moon, and then take those students to the park itself. The students are encouraged to get to know the state park and other places mentioned in the novel such as Oakland and Carmel. Their final projects focus on how they can use the novel as a basis for how to discuss issues they personally see currently in the same locations London described one hundred years earlier.

Though many scholars can probably point to several novels that also focus on a particular landscape, such as California in John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, the Southwest in Mary Austin’s *Cactus Thorn*, or Nebraska in Willa Cather’s *My Ántonia*, there are few educators who use prominent literary figures and novels to construct place-based curriculum. Most of this type of education translates into science, environmental, and outdoor education with a minimal
amount of work (mostly journaling or short poems) on the “language arts” component that Sobel mentions in his definition. For instance, two of the most well-developed websites on place-based learning, *PLACE: Place-based Landscape Analysis and Community Engagement* and *Promise of Place: Enriching Lives Through Place-Based Education* incorporate several school subjects in their curriculum, but language arts seems to be left by the wayside. At its most basic, place-based learning is holistic. If place-based educators exclude literature from their curriculum, the sense of a whole, fuller understanding of a place can be lost. As well, for place-based education to become viable for a wide-range of classrooms (from private to public schools), it is pertinent that place-based curriculum attend to basic requirements in reading and writing in addition to the work they do for science and math.

Despite the fact that most curriculum designers have put less focus on integrating literature into place-based work, there is general agreement that arts and outdoor education work well together as humanities and arts are being increasingly explored in place-based classrooms. Sobel notes, “Lessons incorporating the arts can enhance the emotional connection to the outdoors, and give the students techniques to internalize the experience and revisit it at will” such as through songs, recalling passages from books, or remembering pieces of visual art they associate with certain places (*Place-Based Education* 91). The incorporation of the literary arts gives students starting phrases and words to
verbalize their experiences with place and the environment so that they can express their feelings about a place more deeply and metaphorically. Resources abound beyond Sobel’s seminal book for such incorporation in an age where educators are seeing the increasing need to cultivate the importance of environmental stewardship in their students, especially those who live in places like Oakland where dense smog obscures the sun because it is “trapped between two major highways;” water resources are scarcer than most other places in the nation; and there is a rise in children’s obesity especially in minority and low-income populations (Apatoff et al. 1; Stockdale et al. 1; Ricketts et al. 7). Such resources include The Children in Nature Network, the Teton Science School, Sonoma State University, and the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment. As these resources become more abundant, more educators are seeing the benefits of using literature in collaboration with environmental studies. One of the most convincing reasons is it enhances educators’ abilities to meet school standards while entrenching their students in their bioregion, tactile learning, and an enhanced sense of place and self.

Designing new curriculum in any instance is difficult, but the increasing demand from the federal government for schools to follow “higher” standards and meet standardized test requirements makes it arduous for schools to design curriculum any way they choose (Peterson and Lastra-Anadon “State Standards”). Thus, though place-based education “provides teachers and students with diverse
viewpoints, access to resources, facilities, and financial support as well as a broader base of skills and knowledge” in everything from geographic mapping skills to better behavior and confidence, reading and writing get a bit lost, creating a void in most place-based curriculum, stunting its expansion (Powers 21-23). The Promise of Place website looks to folklore for its language arts aspect. Oral and folk literature is indeed central to the history of a place, its importance to community members, and how outsiders view its significance, symbolism, or value. Many students, however, are also required to learn more canonical and widely published literary texts and figures. Focusing on classic literary figures and texts that are still region-specific achieves the goals of understanding a place and of meeting national curriculum standards.

To successfully incorporate literature into place-based curriculum, educators need only to look to the subject’s name: language arts. Looking into the language and the artfulness of texts can lead students to deeper understandings of writing, reading, and regions. For instance, on a linguistic level, London’s The Valley of the Moon, as with most regional texts, seeks to understand a place by the name it is given. In the novel and mentioned in some of his short stories and interviews, London focuses a great attention on the name “the valley of the moon.” As noted earlier, this valley begins as a place that Saxon Roberts desires and mythologizes. Saxon looks at the moon through a telescope at a stop on her journey. Since she and Billy have searched for months for their farm of perfect
standards, her friend, Mark Hall, jokingly says, “Somewhere up there in some valley you’ll find that farm” (306). The couple does find their farm. The myth comes true, making the farm an all the more magical and magnificent aspect of the story.

London’s conscientious attention to understanding the etymology of Sonoma Valley can also be a point of interest for the classroom. In looking into the root of the word sonoma, one will find that it tells a great amount about the history of the region. According to Nellie Van de Grift Sanchez’s Spanish and Indian Place Names of California, “In the native dialect of that region there is the constantly recurring ending tso-noma, from tso (the earth), and noma (village),—hence, tsenoma (earth village or earth place)” (175). In all London’s confidence, he apparently did not know all the true etymology of his beloved valley’s name. Sanchez notes on the following page, “The one thing that is quite clear about this name is that its origin is undoubtedly Indian. It has been said that Sonoma means ‘valley of the moon,’ in reference to the shape of the valley, but there is probably more of poetry than of truth in this story” (176). This revelation provokes interesting questions. In a classroom setting or for a student project, such a simple understanding of the word allows for new interpretations of the text and the region. Did London not do his research or did he base his definition on hearsay? Does this change our understanding of the region as more terrestrial than celestial? Does it change the symbolism in the novel? Does it make it less artistic
or more? What does this say about knowing native names of places and should we get to know those better? What other native aspects of the land can we know more about? Did any other literary figures come from here?

Even those educators who choose to attend to the more urban places in London’s novel can find an abundance of rhetorical teaching points. For instance, Oakland represents a lamentable place, “just a place to start from” for Saxon, London, and many others (an interesting etymological study in it of itself). The name represents early settlers’ attention to native plants and the importance of the oak (Sanchez 201). Alameda, a nearby city, and Encinal, the name of schools and streets, translate as “an avenue shaded by trees” and “the place of oaks,” respectively (Sanchez 149-151). As well, Encino translates to “live oak” and is a city in Southern California (Sanchez 151). The oak itself, is a native plant of California, the state tree, but endangered, produces one of the primary products of California: acorns, and is symbolically a representation of “strength, beauty, adaptability, and longevity” (McCreary v). In learning the connections between literature and landscape, students should be encouraged to look even further into London’s works on acorns and oaks. Most notably, his play *The Acorn Planter* describes the moment when California Indians had their first contact with white men. The acorns and oaks relate directly to Chumash culture in California not only as a major food source but as a part of their mythologies and cultural memory (Graulich 5-7). Upon even further investigation, students find that though
London was writing about native history on the surface, the inspiration came from World War I. Charmian wrote of the play,

He was sorely shocked and depressed by that unthinkable catastrophe, the Great War, which threatened to involve the world. The profound motif of his prehistoric play, THE ACORN PLANTER lies in a sound plea for the Acorn, symbolizing the Planting, toward increased and fuller life, as against the Sword, which typifies waste of substance and nullifying of life. (“Jack London” 4)

From a simple word study, students can learn a great amount about historical context, symbolism, the importance of land in different eras, and the connection their place has to the rest of the world. Oakland proves to be a much more attached, significantly named place, debunking its reputation as a place of riots, destitution, and pollution—a no place. Though there is truth to some of these representations, like any place, as place-based education seeks to show students, there are parts to take pride in. This can begin with a name.

This pride leads to the growing idea that people will take care of a place better if they respect it or identify with it personally. As Brandon Schrand, author of “Eleven Ways to Consider Air,” once noted about his hometown Soda Springs, Idaho, if people see others littering on their land and no one taking the time to clean it up, they will do the same. If there is no attachment to that landscape, then there is no pride in or attention to taking care of it (“Nonfiction Writing”). Though some students can cultivate this attachment with outdoor activities, such access is not always readily available. Books are much more accessible in urban areas.
They can introduce students to their nearest natural areas and engender passion for a landscape inviting attachment to descriptions, illustrations, and the poetry of a place. Through this attachment, the idea is that students will then take greater care of their local places and extend that to every place they go.

Though there are only a few educators and organizations that use literature in place-based learning, there is a great potential for educators to show the deep attachment between literature and care for a place. One exemplary program in Amherst, Massachusetts, the “City of Stories,” taught eighty students to conduct oral history interviews with local immigrants, which students transformed into personal projects such as artists’ books filled with illustrated narratives and poetry about the immigrants’ homelands, journeys to the United States, and transitions to American life. The books were then built to represent city blocks and architecture (“Promise of Place”). According to the “City of Stories” website, their program “One Heart Arts” was featured in the local paper, library, and introduced bookmaking, interviewing skills, and the principles of world citizenship to middle school students (Hunt “City of Stories”). The founders at Amherst Middle School added toolkits and instructions that other teachers can follow to the site. They point to children’s books *Seedfolks* by Paul Fleischman and *Madlenka* by Peter Sis as inspiration for other educators to take on similar projects. However, each program could do more to focus on greater literary figures and incorporate literature and writing requirements into the place-based curriculum.
The focus on folklore, though valuable, and the two inspirational children’s books are the only incorporation of literature into this curriculum. As well, “City of Stories” is geared toward only a few age groups mainly K-8. On the other hand, literature attached to more well-known authors like Jack London engages students from the very young to university-level. Canonical and critically-acclaimed literature begs for close readings, encourages close analysis with textual support, and engenders myriad benefits of reading for critical thinking, discussion, and developed writing. As well, works like *The Valley of the Moon* and *Burning Daylight* read as guidebooks to the places California has to offer that students visit physically and thus connect with the literature on a deeper level. They can learn personally about intensive farming, crop rotation, and conservation, which he describes in a didactic fashion.

At the Jack London State Historic Park, volunteers lead school field trips and encourage students to come visit the park for educative tours. As pictured in Appendix A, upon entering the House of Happy Walls Museum and Welcome Center, students find educational videos about the park and a display about London’s voyages on the *Snark*. Next to this room, students find versions of London’s novels in several languages from around the world. Students are then led to see a rendering of the London’s original dining room, kitchen, closets, and more information about the man behind their texts. In that moment, students realize the significance of what they read. Beyond his words is a man who loved a
place and chose to dwell in its beauty. They are told he chose Glen Ellen as a place to write and live because of its inspirational qualities. Students picture the place they live in in a new light. It is a muse, a place where myth and reality can become one.

Exiting the House of Happy Walls, students are led on tours that hike around the ranchland, visiting the Wolf House, London’s cottage, the tiered vineyards, pig palace, and eucalyptus groves. They learn that London did not want any machinery used on his landscape, employed former San Quentin prisoners, and became interested in eucalyptus due to turn-of-the-century California business interest in the non-native plant’s wood.

Being able to see this history come alive can bring about a whole new meaning about Sonoma for its students. Also taught in lessons on citizenship, professional development, and sustainability, students can directly apply literature to their own lives and what they believe about caring for places. Most of London’s experimental farm focused on the use of sustainable and preservation concepts that students can see first-hand at work on the farm. The Kenwood Winery continues his work on the vineyard located within the park with a commitment to “Sustainable Business” practices including soil analysis and conservation, wildlife preservation, and water use reduction—all qualities London paid sharp attention to as well. For instance, as mentioned before, the Huntington Library London archives show that he kept articles related to how alfalfa could
revitalize the soil and reduce costs. Other articles show an attention to the most up-to-date soil conservation analysis and farming science that also helped create self-sufficient farmers, that is, those who did not rely on machines or other companies for their production.

A visit to London’s farm illustrates just how ahead of his time he was. From his sustainable farm practices to his attention to immigration issues and land conservation in California, the place where he wrote has become not just another landmark but a philosophy come to life. For higher level students, this philosophy can be traced in the deeper intricacies of the text such as exploring other literary references to Greek myth and poetry by Browning and Kipling. As well, Saxon Roberts is referred to as a California finch, a native bird of the region. The finch in Tennyson poems, which London read, is often referred to as being locked in a cage, the same feeling Saxon experiences. Saxon’s background is also endemic to California. Her grandparents and mother came over with the pioneer wagon trains, and she seeks the diaries her mother wrote on those wagons. Local students could look into their own histories and track how their families came to California or the diaries that their relatives may have kept. The windows for literary exploration open in great abundance in London’s works.

Cultural topics in *The Valley of the Moon* are as applicable as sustainability, personal histories, state history, and good business practice for students. Union protests, racial inequality, and immigration prominent in
London’s writing continue to be topics that apply to students’ daily lives. Poet, educator, and London expert Iris Dunkle noted in her presentation that students become engaged in the places and topics they already know and can relate to (Symposium Presentation, October 4, 2012). Literature can transform from something remote or only for the good writers and readers to art, historical references, and guides for ways to solve current problems. Knowing the places described and discussing them makes literature accessible, inspirational, and applicable, which helps students understand current social issues and devise ways to fix those issues at a local level. In being able to visit the place where the story occurred, students can first imagine, and then see up close the places they have come to know in their heads and through language.

Though London and other writers have not been used to their full extent in place-based curriculum, there is a great void they can fill in connecting students through significant discussion, critical thinking exercises, activities, and of course improving meeting reading and writing standards. Being able to visit those places and support land conservation and sustainable practices brings the literature to life and provides a greater attachment and care for land in an age when the earth is reaching its maximum capacity for the human population. Any way educators can get their students to become more rooted in their landscape should be taken advantage of so that our lands will continue to be cared for, preserved, and admired as London once did for his own Beauty Ranch.
CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPLICATION:

INCORPORATING LITERATURE INTO PLACE-BASED CURRICULUM

There are several ways to incorporate literature into place-based curriculum. A sample is outlined here to lay a foundation for future application.

Critically-acclaimed Texts Directly Connected to Places

Though there are several more that educators can think of depending on their location and familiarity with local texts, I provide a sample below, accompanied by short summaries of the texts and places mentioned in the novels to visit with students. These books are common on middle and high school reading lists around the United States.

1.1)  *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck (1939). This novel depicts the travels of the Joad family from Oklahoma to California during the Dust Bowl and Great Depression era. The novel describes several locations in California including Pixley, Tehachapi, Bakersfield, Santa Monica, and Mojave that are physically and intellectually accessible, especially with the help of the Steinbeck Institute in Monterey, California. One student group has even put together a simple Google Map on *The Grapes of*
\textit{Wraith} locations (Boris n.p.). Programs like Google Maps make it easy for students to enhance their understanding of places they are reading and writing about as discussed further under “Tools for Online Discovery Before Site Visits.”

1.2) \textit{The Joy Luck Club} by Amy Tan (1989). This multi-perspective narrative flashes back and forth between post-World War II and 1980s San Francisco chronicles the lives of four mothers and their daughters across time, cultural transition, and place. Mostly, the stories take place in several neighborhoods in San Francisco connecting cultural pockets of the city to their origin countries and locations such as mainland China.

1.3) \textit{The House on Mango Street} by Sandra Cisneros (1984). A work of short fiction presented in vignettes, \textit{The House on Mango Street} gives the story of a young girl, Esperanza Cordero, growing up in Chicago. It mostly follows her time in the Puerto Rican neighborhoods but also moves to other parts of Chicago. The book could be read at many levels and places could be visited easily for Chicago students. At higher education levels, students could engage with critical writers such as Julia Alvarez and Gloria Anzaldúa to analyze the Chicana movement in literature and several cities throughout the Americas.
1.4) *A Walk in the Woods* by Bill Bryson (1998). An out-of-shape author chronicles his journey on the Appalachian Trail to discover more of America’s past through its preserved lands. A more modern and memoirist perspective could be used to help students tell their own stories of journeys through their hometowns or nearby nature areas.

1.5) *Zeitoun* by Dave Eggers (2009). *Zeitoun* narrates the story of Abdulrahman Zeitoun, a resident of New Orleans living in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina who refuses to abandon his neighborhood. The cultural, economic, and political conflicts that surround natural disasters could be easily incorporated into several types of lessons while also visiting the streets and neighborhoods Eggers discusses in the book.

*Tools for Online Discovery Before Site Visits*

Most National and State Parks, like the Jack London State Historic Park [www.jacklondonpark.com](http://www.jacklondonpark.com), provide pictures, information, planning of visits, and resources for teachers and students for before and after visits. As well, as mentioned in Chapter 4, more universities and organizations are putting their educational resources online to discover places, create curriculum, and explore how to integrate local communities into a wide array of subjects. To supplement
this thesis, I keep up a small website for educators to begin thinking about how to incorporate texts into place-based curriculum at http://kyoladd.wordpress.com/. I would like to see more educators add to it or build their own in the future as a way of networking and building upon the ideas presented here.

Key Applications from Place-Based Learning Initiatives For Literature Courses

In addition to finding texts to teach that relate to local communities, teachers can also develop themes for classes that require local site visit components. Incorporating literature into place-based education is not limited to using novels. For instance, at Utah State University, Dr. Evelyn Funda teaches the course “Literature of the Farm,” which includes a wide array of novels, census data, visual rhetoric, and anthropological resources to study how the farm works into the American ethos. As a component of this class, students visit local farms and are encouraged to explore different cultural and historical contexts of the farm. This includes looking at the visual rhetoric of local farmers’ markets, trying local food, and having students bring in family recipes or recipes they’ve discovered in books to share.

In application, students can use what they learn in place-based literature courses in personal, academic, and professional ways:

1) On a personal level, place-based literature courses drive home the point to students that their neighborhoods, communities, and local
plant and animal species matter culturally, beyond the text. Place-based education breeds a deeper care for environments including making cities more nature-friendly, encouraging local businesses, and reducing waste and pollution. Stewardship is a key component to place-based education and showing that one’s town is written and read about brings new meaning to them and why they need care.

2) Academically, students that value place encourage others to value place through their writing, teaching, and being able to share places with books and literature. Literary and scholarly efforts that attend to place attention to the art of communities.

3) Students that consciously connect words to places gain a deeper understanding of the novels they read. When they are able to use all their senses to engage in readings, texts take on more meaning and will stay with students more fully.

4) Professionally, students can bring a fuller understanding of places to any future job. Connecting literature to physical places instigate various levels of critical thinking and encourage students to engage with their communities in the future.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

London’s and other authors’ messages about place, the use of London’s ranch as a place for educational connections, and London’s legacy internationally can help us to view sustainability and preservation of local landscapes from a different angle. With so many ecological uncertainties, academics and professionals would greatly benefit from incorporating the importance of places and conservation into their particular fields. I would like to conclude with some specific areas where this research could develop and find more avenues.

The research presented in this thesis explored relatively unexamined ground in Jack London studies. An increasing number of London scholars are becoming familiar with his ranch life, the narratives that came from that time, and how he could be viewed through an ecocritical lens. His novels and short stories from this period have gained new significance in our generation of disappearing small farmlands, increasing technology, and detachment from our foodways and landscapes. His works, quotes, and fame are known the world over, providing a solid foundation for international sustainability, soil, agricultural, historical, and conservation efforts to build upon.

Jack London is known as one of the most widely published American authors of the early twentieth century and for having one of the most romantic
lives of any American author. Though his works are often only seen as adventure stories in fantastical places, some of his best-selling novels and short stories (arguably his best form) provide a backdrop that many organizations with similar conservation, fair trade, and free market values to London’s *The Iron Heel, Burning Daylight*, “South of the Slot,” and others can use to support formative discussions on these issues. Along with other authors who evince a certain aptitude for improving society with their activist words, London’s name exudes a persona that many Americans and non-Americans recognize and can understand deeply.

In particular, my term “agrarian masculinity” serves as a useful tool to analyze London and other authors for their ecological significance, their connections to their landscapes, and their understanding of sustainable relationships both human and non-human. From Thomas Jefferson to Ralph Waldo Emerson to John Steinbeck, and more presently, authors such as Wendell Berry and Michael Pollan, the ideas behind “agrarian masculinity,” which foster the human relationship with the land, away from the consumerist and detached culture of urban spaces to a rediscovery of human-to-human and human-to-environment connection through an agrarian sense economy rooted in home rather than capitalist economics (to borrow from Wendell Berry’s *Art of the Commonplace*), spirituality through cultivation of the soil, and through love of a community in a specific bioregion.
Though the roots of agrarian masculinity come from the opening and closing of the frontier period or Turner Thesis moment, its applications are myriad, its definition and people who can identify with it varied. As a versatile term, agrarian masculinity can engender new theories and even be applied to the ways in which women as well as men are exploring how agrarian masculinity actually blurs the lines between genders, morphing white male American farmers at times into midwives for the birth of calves, polyglots to communicate with international and immigrant farmers with different farming knowledge, and women who no longer simply garden to support the farming family, but also are the fastest growing demographic of Americans starting their own farms (United States 1). These facts transform agrarianism into the present age to include even more authors such as Barbara Kingsolver, Leslie Marmon Silko, and May Swenson. A broader understanding of agrarian masculinity allows the term to cast a wider net across international borders, genres of literature, types of authors, and of course types of learners and classrooms.

Finally, most importantly, educators can implement his literature into their classrooms, especially in Sonoma County, to teach sustainable business practices, sustainable agriculture, personal investment in the land, science, and of course place-based literature. Other educators are encouraged to do similar research on authors who show a particular love for and attachment to the places their students know and call home. From there, as suggested in Chapter 4, students can visit
those places and learn to care for the earth and their communities in practical ways. The goal of this research in many ways was to improve the interconnectivity and attention to critical thinking in American classrooms using London as an exemplary foundation. As many educators believe, education has the great potential to create better local and world citizens. If there is a greater emphasis on this goal in all subject areas of students’ lives, I believe we can reach that potential. Focusing on literary figures is one way to begin infusing all subject areas with place-based and service-learning curriculum.
WORKS CITED


Bucko. “Colt’s .44; or Western History Triggers Countdown.” *Cowboylands*.


Graulich, Melody. “Unearthing the Chumash Presence in The Sharpest Sight.”


Hodson, Sue. Personal interview. 20 Dec. 2012.


—. The Little Lady of the Big House.


Rayner, B. L., Alfred Francis, and William Boardman. *Sketches of the Life, Writings, and Opinions of Thomas Jefferson: With Selections of the Most Valuable Portions of His Voluminous and Unrivaled Private


Edition.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Beauty Ranch Series, August 2012

Top: The Londons’ Cottage
Above Left: Jack London’s vineyard, now owned by Kenwood Wineries
Above Right: Entrance to the Pig Palace
109

Right: Ruins of the Wolf House, Front View

Below Left: Ruins of the Wolf House, Side View through Redwoods

Below Right: Ruins of the Wolf House, Swimming Pool
APPENDIX B

Cypress Tree and Gravesite, January 2013
Photographed by Author

Above Left: Cypress tree where London writes he found the Beauty Ranch
Above Right: London’s Burial Mound
Right: Greenlaw Children’s Graves
APPENDIX C

Photographs Courtesy of the Huntington Library Manuscripts Collection
Director: Daniel Lewis
A Special Thanks to Huntington Librarians: Sue Hodson and Natalie Russell

Charmian and Jack London on the Beauty Ranch, c. 1915.

Charmian Kittredge London on deck of the Snark, c. 1907.
London riding at the Beauty Ranch, c. 1906

Jack London on horseback, gazing out over the Sonoma Valley and Mountains, c. 1906.
Jack London and one of his new Red Duroe Jersey hogs, c. 1913.