

Tavernier-Courbin ultimately foregrounds a Jungian and archetypal interpretation of the novel and thus implicitly perpetuates the tradition of humanizing Buck, she, nevertheless, forces readers throughout the study to confront the fact that Buck, despite one's impulse to anthropomorphize him, is, nonetheless, a dog. Indeed, even as Tavernier-Courbin acknowledges how attractive it may be to see *The Call of the Wild*, in particular, and London's animal stories, in general, as "beast fables," or in Mark Seltzer's words, about "men in furs," she also repeatedly reminds her readers that Buck is "covered with a thick coat of fur" (p. 51).¹ I would argue that Buck's double status as both dog and man has produced readings of *The Call of the Wild* that obscure the hierarchical logic of evolution that grounds the novel and that erase questions about London's effort to establish that a natural and evolutionary difference essentially separates the dog from the man.

Although I cannot fully pursue the novel's foregrounding of the hierarchical logic of evolution, I would like to suggest that unless critics pursue the ways in which London's representation of Buck's evolution backwards, his de-civilization, is not continuous with human evolution but rather marks the ways in which evolution enacts the differentiation of the human and the animal, the relation between *The Call of the Wild* and London's understanding of evolutionary hierarchies and, by extension, his understanding of the natural superiority of particular human races will continue to be unarticulated. Indeed, although evolution is paradoxically imagined according to terms that seem to link the human and the animal (the survival of the fittest, for example), the process works by extracting humanity from animality. In other words, London's representation of Buck's de-evolution demands that readers ask questions about the difference between the human and the animal. The will to hierarchize and differentiate that characterizes London's account of Buck offers a structural model with which to understand the distinction between animal and human that informs the logic of London's racist thought. Thus, until the prevailing understanding of Buck as a man disguised as a dog is revised, the ways in which *The Call of the Wild* participates in London's conception of race as a system of relations structured by the hierarchical nature of evolutionary difference will remain underexplored. *The Call of the Wild* needs to be read as a book about how to define the human, rather than one that takes the category of the human as its unproblematic ground.

Eugene P. Lasartemay and Mary Rudge, *For Love of Jack London: His Life with Jennie Prentiss—A True Love Story* (New York: Vantage, 1991)

Clarice Stasz

Although all London biographers have acknowledged the presence of his African-American wet nurse and foster mother, Jennie Prentiss, none have seriously considered her role in his life. Instead, more attention is given to the genetic influences of his alleged father, William Chaney, and the psychological insecurities brought on by his cold, mercurial mother, Flora. His stepfather, John, also is given less consideration in the formation of Jack's character, though more has been written about him than of Jennie Prentiss. This book addresses that omission.

Because this is a vanity press publication by a historian and poet little known to London scholars and fans, it could easily be labelled as not worth serious notice. Indeed, in his meticulous way Russ Kingman (in an early review) identified obvious factual errors (for example, having the Londons live on the Marin coast, not the San Mateo coast) and as a result rejected it outright. Others might overlook these minor oversights only to be dismayed by the curious blend of concrete historical analysis with sometimes inelegant fictional writing.

Yet to ignore this work would be to reject important new and provocative material. The primary author, Lasartemay, was founder and president of the East Bay Negro Historical Society, hence very familiar with African-American history of the region. His historical skills are evident in his obtaining fresh and significant information on Virginia and Alonzo Prentiss. Intending the book to be "a novel...of the courageous Prentiss family and their friends, who helped shape the mind, character, and destiny of one of America's foremost writers, Jack London," Lasartemay sought the assistance of Rudge. Although invented dialogue provides the weakest feature of the book, it nonetheless displays considerable empathy with the historical characters and circumstances.

Given the blend of their historical research and invention (however thoughtful and credible), the problem of course is how to distinguish fact from fiction. The book's sections take three forms: straightforward narrative concerning the Prentisses that appears well-grounded in evidence; descriptions of the historical context, such as of daily life in Oakland in the 1890s, again based on research; and episodes of imagined dialogue and interaction. The latter are easy to discern and skip over. Lasartemay and Rudge are also careful in the acknowledgements to identify certain characters who are amalgams of

1. Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (London, 1992), p. 166.

real people. If one is also willing to work past these abrupt stylistic shifts and the interesting but less relevant discussion of such topics as Irish immigration, then a rich, meandering vein will be found.

This review will eschew the facile critique of petty details and focus instead upon the new information and its meaning for London studies. Only then can the reader judge Lasartemay's claim "that Jennie Prentiss was discriminated against by those who have minimized her importance to Jack London because she was a member of the black race." Graciously, he adds that this discrimination was due to the separation of black and white communities, such that members of the latter have not sought out knowledge present in the black community. By mining the Bay area's black history, most notably through oral interviews with families whose members were associated with Jack London, Lasartemay redresses the imbalance.

The following are the key themes and often new information that Lasartemay and Rudge claim:

—Alonzo Prentiss, born in 1818, was not white, but had a mulatto mother. In his childhood town of Tiffin, Ohio he was treated as white and married a white woman, Ruth O'Connell, with whom he had three children. He was discharged from his Union regiment when it was discovered he had black blood.

—Daphna Virginia Parker, born in 1832, was raised in the "big house" of a small Tennessee plantation. Unlike most slaves, she became literate as a result of her exposure to the white children and their school books.

—At age thirty-three, as a result of the Emancipation Proclamation, she renamed herself Jennie and obtained her first paying job, as live-in housekeeper for the Prentisses, who at the time lived in Nashville.

—A year later, Ruth Prentiss took the children and left Alonzo, following which he remarried Jennie, who bore him two children. They eventually resettled in San Francisco.

—On 12 January 1876, Jennie had a stillborn daughter. Her doctor had just delivered John Chaney, hence arranged for her to care for the infant when Flora proved incapable of doing so.

—The Prentiss family was more economically and emotionally capable than the London family. Besides often taking Jack into the household up to the end of his grammar school days, the Prentisses helped stake some of the Londons' business ventures.

—Priscilla Anne Prentiss, three years older than Jack, was another important caretaker during his childhood and introduced him to black playmates.

—Oral histories identify other key black families with whom Jack associated, and he was sometimes taken to the A.M.E. Church by Jennie. He was viewed as able to get along with all ethnic groups. Nonetheless, his

mother's strident racism and taunts from schoolmates concerning his ties to blacks caused confusion.

—The black community at one point believed Jack would marry Lucy Cohen Cauldwell, of Jewish and African-American background.

—Some of *The Sea-Wolf* stories are based upon the experiences of William Shorey, the first black whaling vessel captain from the area. Accordingly, his socialism may have been influenced by Rev. George Washington Woodbey, whose writings and speeches were well known to the Prentisses.

—Jennie's children died in 1890 and 1891, hence her attachment to Jack remained strong. After Alonzo, who was fourteen years older, died in 1903, Jack brought her into his household to care for Bess and Joan.

—Jennie called London down for referring to her in adulthood as "Mammy," to which he responded that he wanted people to know he recognized her as his foster mother. In a book inscribed to her in 1916, he concluded, "And here is loving you, and always lovingly, Your white pick-aninny."

—In 1906, Jennie joined the widowed Flora to live together at 490 27th Street, which they occupied until after London's death. She continued to be active in the black community and continued her work as a midwife.

—In her remaining years Jennie moved several times on her own and died at age ninety in Napa State Hospital, where she had been committed presumably as a result of senility.

A selection of photographs, most of which have not appeared in print before, accompany the text. One of the latter, for example, shows Jennie in the midst of a large group of friends at a picnic at the ranch in 1911, clearly part of the celebrating white crowd. Other photographs include several Prentiss homes and portraits of other African-American families said to be friendly to Jack during his formative years. The light-skinned Lucy Cohen Cauldwell, in a simple tailored dress, flowered hat, and leather gloves, gazes out with frankness.

Also reproduced are many of the government records relating to Alonzo Prentiss's military career. The documents displayed do not, however, provide evidence that he was a mulatto nor that his race was a reason for his discharge from the service.

It is here that the style of the book most frustrates the open-minded reader. The details at some places suggest careful research, yet cite no references one can verify independently. If Lasartemay used census records to determine Alonzo's race, for example, his noting such would satisfy most historians as to the validity of his claim. But if he used local Ohio history based upon more informal sources, then the scholar knows it is necessary to go to the census as a follow-up verification. The reliability of the oral interviews is unclear, for we do not know who did them, whether they were taped or transcribed, or whether the results were deposited at an archive in a

library or museum. On the other hand, oral transmission of history is more prevalent and practiced in black communities, and thus has higher overall accuracy than in comparable white city neighborhoods where ethnicity no longer rules culture. So one cannot totally discount this evidence as invention. (And why should East Bay African-Americans want to invent a connection to Jack London anyway?)

What kept me engaged with this troublesome narrative was "the irrefragable fact" that Jenny Prentiss continued a relationship with Jack throughout his life. Consequently, the story provided hints for further understanding of Jack's complex, often contradictory personality. For example, his writings evince familiarity with Christianity beyond a disinterested scanning of the Bible, yet we know his parents were not pious, nor was he. That he had some exposure to Christian practices through the Prentiss family is thus credible. Or consider his valuation of strong, independent females. Certainly it was not shaped by his relation to his domineering and capable mother, whose coldness should if anything have driven Jack away from self-assertive women. Jenny Prentiss incorporated competence and pride with warmth and nurture. Or what of his very unbohemian desire for a companion-ate marriage and a family? Why did he not continue the life of the single adventurer? Were the Prentisses an example to him that not all families were such as his own?

Clearly, to accept even a portion of this material is to require a reconsideration of the cultural influences upon London's thinking and temperament. Certainly it helps to explain the running ambivalence in his mind concerning Social Darwinism and the victory of "the inevitable white man," a scientific view he accepted yet with some regret. It suggests rereading certain of his works for clues of his possible experiences with black culture of the time. Could his purported attraction to a woman of black and Jewish heritage account for his unusually sympathetic view of native women in the Yukon and South Seas? And why does this most racialist of writers expunge African-Americans from his California stories?

The reader quick to dismiss this material should consider that the evidence is as substantial as, and sometimes more so, than that for other accepted claims about London's life. As with any historical reconstruction, some points have more evidence and credibility than others. Nonetheless, Lasartemay challenges previous biographies that often unconsciously excluded the role of the Prentisses from his story, just as in real life the Prentisses faced social discrimination. Serious literary and biographical scholars cannot neglect his thesis. They may reject some of it, but they should not ignore it. May we never again see Daphna Virginia "Jennie" Parker Prentiss referred to as "Mammy Jenny"!

A Tentative, Classified, Partially Annotated Bibliography of Material in English about Jack London for the Years 1993 and 1994

Hensley C. Woodbridge

Bibliographers do not work alone and therefore it gives me great pleasure to acknowledge the assistance of Winnie Kingman, Karen Lunsford, Susan Nuernberg, Jeanne Campbell Reesman, and Tony Williams.

The most important works to appear during this two-year period are *The Portable Jack London*, the Stanford edition of *The Complete Short Stories of Jack London*, Labor and Reesman's revision of *Jack London*, Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin's volume on *The Call of the Wild* and the *Jack London Journal*. These will be discussed in my following remarks.

Books

Jack London (rev. ed. by Earle Labor and Jeanne Campbell Reesman [NY: Twayne, 1994]) is probably the single most important critical volume published on London during this period.

Amanda Bunt, *Jack London Foundation Newsletter* 6 (July 1994), p. 2, has high praise for this volume and declares that "if anything, the strength of the revised edition is its power to prove, through gender studies and close textual reading, that London was much more than previous critics were willing to allow."

Gary Scharnhorst reviews this volume in the Jack London Society's newsletter *The Call* 4 (Fall-Winter 1994), p. 5, and finds that it is "updated in light of London scholarship of the past twenty years." He states that "the new study, even more so than the original, makes the case for London's formal versatility and ecological and culture sensitivity." It concludes by stating that it "belongs in every research library as well as the personal library of every scholar who either specializes in the period or aims to."

The Jack London Journal (1994) is an outstanding book-length journal that deals with Jack London and his times. It publishes articles, notes, cultural documents, and reviews. All libraries and individuals interested in London should subscribe to this most interesting periodical.

The Portable Jack London, edited by Earle Labor (NY: Viking Penguin, 1994), has been reviewed by Susan Nuernberg, *Choice* 32 (Jan. 1995): 782, who