to the fact that he found love and happiness elsewhere, which could only underscore her own failure as a woman and a wife. There is little doubt that there was some passive-aggressiveness in Jack's proposing to her a terrible marital bargain—"I don't love you, but I'll marry you; but, if it does not work out, you have to agree now that we'll separate amicably"—and that he was thus giving her mixed signals that could allow her to believe that he would come to love her. But she did accept the bargain and chose to believe what was most pleasant to her, if most unrealistic given her withholding what he wanted most—beauty, sex, shared amusements, and, later, his children. There is little doubt that he was complicit in her self-deception or that she was complicit in his deception of her. It must also have enraged her that, throughout her life, she was always referred to in the press as cousin to the famous Minnie Maddern Fiske or wife and then ex-wife to Jack London. No matter what she did, she was never in the limelight for herself, which underscored another form of failure for someone who was, by most accounts, very self-centered. Thus presenting herself as a victim was a way of drawing the limelight to herself, but could neither cure what really ailed her nor be considered as a personal achievement. Thus the vicious circle, which nothing Jack or Charmian did could end. The story of their marriage is indeed a sad one, but it is doubtful that any amount of counselling could have made it a successful one, given the lack of physical, emotional, intellectual and temperamental attraction between them. The questions raised by Bessie's personality and her not remarrying in Jack's lifetime or after his death will probably remain unanswered until documents on her, if they exist, are made available to scholars at large.

Charmian London, Eliza Shepard, and the Jack London Biographers: Misjudgments, Misunderstandings, and Malice

Clarice Stasz

Particularly perplexing for scholars and readers of Jack London is the swarm of claims concerning his life. Any two biographies will produce key contradictions and assertions, among the best-known examples being the circumstances of his death, his use of alcohol, and his relationship to women. The subject himself encouraged such disputations and characterizations, through conscious self-invention and shaping his presentation to his particular audience. As Jonathan Auerbach's examination of London's early life has demonstrated, his personal identity as a successful writer was carefully planned and managed to exploit the conventions of the publishing world and marketplace.[1] This conscious self-presentation is also evident in his private life, as when he shared his marketing approach to protege Anna Strunsky or when he instructed Charmian on their honeymoon how to manipulate reporters during interviews.

Apart from the confoundings created by London himself are the motives, skills, and opportunities of the key biographers. With regard to motives, some writers clearly intend hagiography or pathography. In addition, biographers vary in their familiarity with or willingness to apply established procedures in historical document interpretation, such as the credibility or purpose of a source. A further complication has been restricted access to the London's unpublished manuscripts, correspondence, ephemera, and library. In 1936 Irving Stone was the first writer permitted to examine these materials, yet later the literary executors felt he had violated their trust. Consequently, as will be evident here, to counter him they reversed course and granted Joan London access to the archives. After that the estate became very protective of its holdings, and it was not until the 1970s that many scholars were able to open boxes at the Huntington Library and Utah State University.

To gain access until 1939 required the permission of Charmian London and Eliza Shepard, who were driven by two major motives: the image of Jack London to be portrayed and financial gain. Contrary to common belief, they were not out to whitewash or beatify but to see Jack portrayed as they knew him, a complex figure with a strong commitment to agriculture and social causes. Immediately following London's death, for example, they agreed

1. See Jonathan Auerbach, *Male Call: Becoming Jack London* (Durham, N.C., 1996).

that above all else they must continue his ranching dream, no matter the cost. Charmian's efforts to persuade his friends on this matter fell on deaf ears; urban men like George Sterling and Upton Sinclair never comprehended London's rural dream. Preserving the ranch drove the second motive, that of money. Neither the publishing royalties nor the movie contracts matched the demands of mountainside agriculture. The early years following London's death were fraught with debts, and like other farmers they suffered the economic collapse in agriculture of the 1920s. During the depression, with other Glen Ellen folk, the family fed partly on game shot on the mountain and bartered for goods.[2]

In light of these concerns, Charmian and Eliza forged a partnership to assert their will on those who would exploit London's name or works. It was a well-balanced pairing, given Eliza's renowned organizational skills (which would culminate in her election as national president of the American Legion Auxiliary) and Charmian's social adeptness and ease at public events. Control is never perfect, however, because as sociologist Émile Durkheim reminds us, all is not contractual in the contract. Personality, culture, and even such ingredients as age and religion intervene. Miscommunications occur, styles clash, and disappointment results.

This paper will trace the relationship between the estate and key biographers from the time of London's death to that of Charmian's. Through this account the maturing of a point of view will be evident, as well as the creation of biographical controversies. Also apparent will be the often unrecognized role of interpersonal factors upon the creation of biography.

The first person to approach Charmian London appeared in the summer of 1917. Rose Wilder Lane, a struggling writer and journalist and daughter of *Little House* writer Laura Ingalls Wilder, recounted recent personal tragedy in her young life—two small children dead and a divorce. Now a *San Francisco Call* news reporter, she hoped assignment for an essay on Jack would spurt her career. Finding Lane young, interesting, and "with a pretty good line on mate," Charmian extended full support.[3] Several weeks later Lane wrote to say that *Sunset* really wanted a full-length serialized biography and apologized for the semblance of false pretenses, but added she could not afford to turn down this even greater offer. Although Charmian was planning to write her own

2. To understand ranching in Glen Ellen, 1900–1950, see the memoirs collected by Bob Glotzbach in *Childhood Memories of Glen Ellen* (Glen Ellen, Calif., 1992), which contain firsthand accounts of Jack and Charmian London, and Eliza, Irving, and Mildred Shepard.

3. Charmian Kittredge London, diary, 5 May 1916, JL 230, Huntington Library; hereafter abbreviated HL. I am grateful to the late Irving Shepard for permission to read all the diaries, and to Milo Shepard and to the Huntington Library for permission to quote from these and others of Charmian's unpublished writings.

biography of Jack, she assented to this expanded project out of sympathy for Lane.

In October, the first *Sunset* installment appeared under sensationalized advertising, and its contents were fabricated of seemingly sordid aspects of Jack's youth. Eliza was incensed over mention of Jack's real paternity and insinuations that his stepfather—her father—was a drunkard. When Charmian backhandedly complemented Lane on her "charming fiction," the young woman responded she was only showing the obstacles her hero had had to overcome in his struggle for success, that the information had come from Bess London and Flora London.[4] The letter played to Charmian's sympathies: how difficult it was to write on top of a full-time job, how the man she had hoped to marry had gone off to Canada to join its air force. Charmian did not realize that Lane's ex-husband was from the family that controlled *Sunset.*

Meanwhile, editor Charles Fields assented to Charmian's request for proofs of subsequent installments so she could correct factual errors. When she marked out numerous manuscript errors, he rejoindered untruthfully that Lane was forced to use other informants because Charmian had been uncooperative. As for the advertisements, yes, they were of regrettable taste, he admitted, but could anyone prove they were lies? Certainly all in the story was not true, he agreed, but he thought it more important to give something to Jack's devoted public, who were not very interested in unraveling fiction from fact. His cynical apology proffered that no hurt was intended toward the family, and his hope that some solution other than a court case would result.[5] The wrangling continued on both sides until Fields agreed to publish a statement of Eliza's objections in one issue. But when the women received the galleys for that insert, they found that Fields had appended an editorial note to discredit Eliza. When they then threatened a lawsuit, Fields removed the footnote, and assured Charmian this act only proved his good intentions toward the women.[6]

Yet only a few days later a gossip column in a Bay Area paper tattled about the brouhaha between *Sunset* and the women, adding its insider's information that the magazine was sending galleys to them only as a ruse and had no intent to use their corrections. In fact this is what happened. Charmian labored immediately upon receipt of the worksheets, returning them by next mail, only to be informed that pages were already in press by the time they arrived.[7]

4. Charmian London, letter to Rose Wilder Lane, 19 Sept. 1917, JL 10080, HL. See Lane, letter to Charmian London, 22 Sept. 1917, Merrill Library, Utah State University; hereafter abbreviated ML.

5. See Charles Fields, letter to Charmian London, 12 Nov. 1917, HL.

6. See Fields, letter to Charmian London, 2 Jan. 1918, HL.

7. See Fields, letter to Charmian London, 19 Mar. 1918, HL.

Lane also alienated Anna Strunsky, who had been encouraged by Charmian to cooperate. Although Strunsky had granted permission to quote from a letter she lent, upon receiving the galley she objected. In a feint apology, Rose explained it was too late to stop publication and added du-plicitously that Charmian had not corrected any facts on any of the drafts.[8]

During this charade Charmian reached a clearer attitude about how Jack's life should be handled. "The 'right to discuss' a famous man is a far cry to the right to misrepresent him. Rose Lane is a brilliant woman, but what woman or man, however brilliant, can be worked to death with journalistic work, and simultaneously write a biography of a great man inside of a few weeks?"[9] She challenged Fields, as she was to challenge many in the future, to prove that certain of Jack's writings, such as *Martin Eden* or *John Barleycorn,* were completely autobiographical. Hence she developed a new role, that of Jack's defender, a part she played to her dying days. As in this case, it often proved a losing battle, because writers and publishers were more determined to tell a good story than a reliable story.

Months later Lane asked for permission to publish the serial in book form and dangled a share in royalties as an incentive. Charmian not only refused, she threatened a lawsuit. In subsequent letters each woman softened her language, though not her stance, leading Charmian to believe the matter concluded. Known for her independence, Lane determined to get full benefit from her labor. In 1925 it appeared as the novel *He Was a Man* with pseudonymous characters, but reviewers treated it as a valid biography of Jack London.[10]

This bitter episode colored all of Charmian's future dealings with would-be biographers. Thus she warned one hopeful, "I have had a world of trouble and distress through unauthorized persons trying to write biographies of my husband, endless trouble that has taken us into courts. And I have edited the darnedest rot, written about my husband that you can imagine. So lady, lady, you go ahead with your German Prison and other stuff, and keep off Jack London. I'm tellin' you, as Jack used to say."[11]

The *Sunset* imbroglio set Charmian so frenetically to complete her own biography that friends feared she was injuring her health. She did not intend her work to be definitive or fully objective, but rather a platform for her and Eliza to present London as they most intimately knew him. The resulting elephantine manuscript intimidated editor George Brett at Macmillan, who urged her to cut broadly and refine the structure. Unfortunately, his wise advice arrived after that of Charles Boon in England, who thought the result

8. See Lane, letter to Anna Strunsky, 4 Jan. 1918, Yale University Library.
9. Charmian London, letter to Fields, 13 Dec. 1917, JL 9840, HL.
10. See Lane, *He Was a Man* (New York, 1925); published in London the same year as *Gordon Blake.*
11. Charmian London, letter to unknown correspondent, fragment, c. 1918, JL 10817, HL.

fine, not requiring any changes, and set the two volumes in print. Eventually Charmian dropped Macmillan and contracted with Century, which in 1921 published *The Book of Jack London,* including many photographs from her private collection.[12]

The reviews were mixed, deservedly so. As Lewis Mumford best summarized, "It is perhaps one of the best, and one of the very worst examples of the [biographical] art that has come out of America during the last decade."[13] What made the book excellent in many viewers' eyes was its utter frankness.

Charmian's architecture for the book was innovative, for it incorporated reconstructed scenes, lengthy portions of correspondence, and even psychoanalysis. But her florid style overran the content, as if staging a modern dance with costumes and music from *Les Sylphides.* Sometimes such incongruous mixes conceive extraordinary artistic births; more often, as in this case, they spawn ludicrous miscarriages. Mumford alone recognized the reason: "These two volumes, however, might have been shorted by half [had she written] . . . simple English. Had she been able to write clear, coherent prose, this titanic weakling [Jack] might have lived in the memory of men as a sort of American Cassanova."[14]

Yet as his final clause intimates, with most other reviewers Mumford was not immune from confusing the merits of the book from its subject. The many laudatory reviewers commented more on Jack's character than upon Charmian's presentation. They liked him, ergo, the book must be a good one. Some of the deprecatory reviews were similarly amiss. *New York Times* critic Archibald Henderson was the most striking here with his snobbish, pedantic tone. "There is something depressing in this recrudescence of the long-winded biography, and there is something of fatuity and futility in such works—the bulk wholly disproportionate to the merit or importance of the subject." Still, he astutely indicated how Charmian lacked all sense of proportion; having been inundated with material, she simply entered all with equal importance. Much of the review, nonetheless, was scurrilous attack upon Jack. He was criticized as sophomoric, juvenile, and "a striking illustration of what a man of mediocre brain stuff, who detested writing, could accomplish by illimitable energy, undiminished perseverance, and a colossal ego." Henderson's attitudes reflected those of the elite literary critics who helped cast London beyond the concerns of American literary criticism.[15]

Where Charmian's travel literature, notably *The Log of the Snark,* continues to satisfy, *The Book of Jack London* retains interest more for scholars.

12. See Charmian London, *The Book of Jack London,* 2 vols. (London, 1921).
13. Lewis Mumford, "Jack London," review of *The Book of Jack London,* by Charmian London, *The New Republic,* 29 Mar. 1922, p. 146.
14. Ibid., p. 147.
15. Archibald Henderson, *New York Times,* 16 Apr. 1922.

The material all the contemporary reviewers most admired—the romantic accounts of the couple's personal life together—seem saccharine and contrived. Romantic expression, which for example included baby talk, was so different then. Modern views of intimacy have changed such that its inherent cynicism implies wrongly that Charmian misread or misrepresented the relationship. Further, her deference to Jack grates against modern feminist views—one thinks of the modern example of the ever-adoring upward gaze of Nancy Reagan towards her husband. (This honorific stance was a conscious construction, for in the latter half of the marriage Charmian's growing assertion of independence annoyed Jack.) The sentences lack the lilt and charm of *The Log of the Snark*, and the chapters vary so widely in their structure as to frustrate the reader. In time the book receded into the musty corners of the libraries, unread and unacknowledged.

Because *The Book of Jack London* fails on literary grounds, it has been dismissed as a reliable source of information. It is easy to point out the whitewashed passages—the elision of William Chaney and illegitimacy, the revised chronology of the affair leading to the second marriage, among others. Yet other sections are surprisingly frank. She did not omit Jennie Prentiss's role in his life, a radical inclusion considering that even Jack had kept that racially sensitive information from public knowledge. She acknowledged his love for Anna Strunsky, who lent Charmian his love letters, some of which she quoted at length. She tracked his mercurial moods, his dark periods and the destruction they wrought, without apology. She traced in detail his development as a writer, using his key correspondence with Cloudesley Johns to document her analysis. She did not avoid candid discussion of difficult periods in the marriage, for which she relied heavily upon her diaries. In other words, George Brett was correct: a strong editor could have guided the shaping of the material into a more taut and convincing one-volume account.

It is tempting to blame Charmian's various helpers, such as George Sterling, for perhaps misdirecting her. The reason is more interesting. Namely, Charmian did not think Jack's crisp style to be an advance. As she explained, "people do not want long, perfect sentence construction any more [that is, as she attempted]. They want up-to-date, direct phraseology. Jack, though a great artist, would sacrifice form to matter. No art for art's sake with him." Art to her meant delicate twists and turns of phrase, the kind of language George Sterling preferred, and which would result in his poetic reputation not surviving his lifetime. Her biography would sell so poorly in the States that in 1930, when Century went out of business, Charmian was forced to buy the plates and remaining copies, to sell them from her home by mail or to visitors to make up part of the loss.

The next biographer was one Charmian knew well—Edward Payne, husband of her aunt and guardian, Netta. In recent years the couple had invoked spiritualism to communicate with Jack and sent both the press and

Charmian ouija board messages from him, which she discounted. Since London's death mediums had sent her letters and even stories written by "Jack," all of which she rebuked, privately and publicly. When she learned that Edward was writing a book as well, she warned him against adding a "ghostly" twist. There was nothing in the spiritual messages she "could not believe was done by the working of the unconscious mind," she admonished.[16] Payne completed the book in 1923, but the manuscript, along with all of Ninetta's signed first editions from Jack, burned in the infamous Berkeley hills fire.

After Edward died in 1924, Netta discovered a friend retained a carbon copy of the manuscript and soon found a publisher in England for what became *The Soul of Jack London*.[17] She had been assisted by that most famous of contemporary spiritualists, writer Arthur Conan Doyle, who supplied a supportive letter published in the book. (Doyle had once advised Charmian of "Jack's return to earth," information she courteously rebutted.)

Payne's preface to the channelled material comprising *The Soul of Jack London* remains today an insightful essay into Jack's way of thinking, of the battle in his mind between "the melancholy of materialism" and his "instinctive tendency toward idealism." More self-serving is the second section, which describes Payne's psychic communications. "Jack" had told the Paynes he accepted "a new understanding of the universe" and wanted to undo any follies he may have provoked by admitting to immortality and refuting materialism. Furthermore, "Jack" was very ready to discuss his personal failings with regard to the Paynes. "Jack London's habits that defiled the temple of his soul were light sins as compared to a certain occasion when he betrayed the love of his friends and neighbors by diverting their water supply into an artificial lake on his own ranch. This unhappy situation undoubtedly hastened his death and is an explanation of his many messages to us." Netta apparently spoke with him of how his battle with John Barleycorn and his phenomenal success could not cure his inner turmoil. She asked "whether you will finally and firmly lay hold on the verities." "Jack's" response was, "I am evil. The real essential in me was evil. To be great I must be good—the old platitude. I wronged you—I wronged many others." Thus could Netta and Edward prove they had been right regarding the water wars.[18]

The Soul of Jack London was too much a curiosity piece and too little distributed to trouble Charmian and Eliza. Of more long-lasting harm was

16. Charmian London, letter to Edward Payne, 3 May 1922, ML.

17. See Edward Biron Payne, *The Soul of Jack London* (London, 1924).

18. Contrary to what is sometimes stated, Jack London did not win the water fight; rather, the judge made an injunction and the following spring approved an arrangement that allowed the London ranch to keep its dam, but required it ensure sufficient water flow to the plaintiffs. Netta Payne thereafter used the threat of another water lawsuit to manipulate Charmian to meet various personal demands.

Upton Sinclair's claims in his 1925 book, *Mammonart,* where he attributed London's death to alcoholism. A closer reading of Sinclair suggests a more complicated story. Sinclair's evidence was not firsthand—he had met Jack only twice and then in settings where he was drinking.[19] Nonetheless, he offered tales of "incredible debauches; tales of opium and hashish, and I know not what other ingredients; tales of whiskey bouts lasting for weeks."[20] Less evident to the reader is that Sinclair had been told by George Sterling that Jack had committed suicide. This claim, made immediately after London's death, could only be conjecture, because Sterling was nowhere near the death scene and had recently been ostracized from the ranch, a move he blamed on Charmian. But the idea fit well with Sinclair's prissy personal morality, the dark side of his populist politics.

Charmian corresponded with Sinclair to correct his claims, but she was unsuccessful. When later he described his attending a seance where Jack appeared, Charmian unsuccessfully debunked his gullibility. He also insisted that some of London's stories were ghostwritten by Sterling, that he had been told so by George. (It is interesting that Sinclair believed the oft-besotted Sterling but not the always-sober Charmian.)

In 1929, an essay in *Bookman* resurrected Sterling's rumor that Jack's death was a suicide, provoking San Francisco reporters to call on the doctors who attended his death. Two were in Europe, but one, Alan Thomson "today indignantly denied the suicide theory," explaining "Jack London died of internal poisoning brought about through kidney trouble."[21] With this announcement Charmian felt secure that the matter was at last resolved, though she was wrong to conclude so, as later events would prove.

For years Charmian fought on behalf of London's reputation, doggedly pursuing all published inaccuracies about him, protecting the private papers from the view of what she considered to be irresponsible grave-pickers. She knew her own biography was not sufficient, and her later attempt to abridge it as one volume unsuccessful. Someone else must provide the complete and unfictionalized story while she and Eliza remained alive to pass on their knowledge.

Finding such a person would not be easy. and others continued to frustrate her. In 1931 Frederick Bamford's widow, Julie, published *The Mystery of Jack London,* a curious collage of disjointed comments about London as she and her husband recalled him. Since a large section of the book contained unauthorized reproduction of London's letters to Bamford, Charmian moved to have the book removed from circulation. Chiding Julie for not consulting

19. Mary Craig Sinclair, *Southern Belle* (New York, 1957), p. 215, corrects the impression her husband made of his relationship with Jack London.

20. See Upton Sinclair, *Mammonart* (Pasadena, Calif., 1925).

21. *San Francisco Call,* 15 Feb. 1929.

her or Eliza first, she offered to help rewrite the material as a book about Bamford, in which his acquaintance with Jack could be put into perspective. In response Julie Bamford capitulated and stopped distribution.[22]

Similarly, in 1930, a journalist wrote of his intention to do three essays for the *Sunday School Times.* Charmian advised him to read her biography and not to make the mistake of treating *Martin Eden* and *John Barleycorn* as autobiographical. So we can imagine how she bristled to find the resulting pieces display Jack as an atheist and a drunkard, the model of depravity. Seeking advice from her editor friend H. S. Latham, she explained, "I want an atmosphere to get around of discouragement to all and sundry people writing trash about Jack London. There is a lot of it planned. I want to curb it. I want good work done on Jack London, good critical work that invites good discussion.[23]

A letter to the director of the Huntington Library was even more passionate. She decried how "authors small or great" were so ready to "biographies of dead men whose widows and families are still alive." For example, a famous writer warned her "that he had been approached by a publisher in New York City, who wanted him to undertake a biography of Jack London—and a scandalous one at that, or one written in a scandalous tone. The author wrote to them that if he did such a book, it would have to be based upon my *Book of Jack London* anyway, and what was the advantage of such a book?" She despaired that the heirs and relatives of such as London had any rights at all, for so many abused them.[24]

Like other literary heirs, Charmian and Eliza held only one right, control of publication of the author's private papers and published works under copyright. Furthermore, once someone is dead, laws of libel and slander no longer apply.[25] So far she had allowed no one to view Jack's correspondence, but by the summer of 1936 was convinced she had found the person capable of doing the "good critical work." On 2 August 1936 Charmian noted in her diary, "Everything lovely. All dressed and in house but Irv Stone's don't come. They did not verify my invitation. Too bad."

Fresh on the success of *Lust for Life,* Stone had written Charmian of his interest in doing a biography of Jack. His sudden success at 32 had been most unexpected. When graduate study in economics at the University of Southern California convinced him the academic life was not what he wanted,

22. The correspondence to and from Julie Bamford is in ML, box 10, folder 1, and box 11, folder 2.

23. Charmian London, letter to H. S. Latham, 25 May 1931, JL 10109, HL.

24. Charmian London, letter to Leslie Edgar Bliss, 29 Mar. 1931, JL 9566, HL.

25. When talking to lawyers hired by publishers to vet the three biographies I have written, I learned that telling them someone was dead dropped any further question about a passage. Thus literary executors cannot prevent invention, even when they hold proof to the contrary.

he began to write. Like Jack, for several years he wrote in various genres—novels, short stories, plays—and most were rejected. Realizing that he loved to do research, Stone concluded biography most suited his talents, hence his embarking on Van Gogh. *Lust for Life* was rejected by numerous publishers until his then-fiancee Jean took over the editing, and produced a much tighter volume that was accepted immediately. Now newly married and financially secure, one can see in retrospect why he should have identified with aspects of London's personality.

Stone could have chosen no better time to appear. In 1934 Charmian had nearly died when her horse stumbled over a piece of wire and rolled on top of her, crushing her left side. That close encounter with death, and Eliza's rapidly failing health, left both women even more anxious to see a well-crafted, definitive biography of London in print before they died. Furthermore, when Stone contacted Charmian in 1936, she had been suffering fainting spells related to the onset of arteriosclerosis. Clearly he had learned of her vanity, for an early letter praised her biography, her figure, and her riding skills.[26]

Stone finally arrived at the ranch on 17 August, and one can only guess at what transpired with Charmian's diary entry the next day: "Can't help thinking of Stone—curious situation—though not exactly a novelty for me. My *Lust for Life* is a treasure of a book." The curious situation is clear in later entries and letters. She was infatuated, "but nothing like last lovers." (Several years earlier Charmian had a brief encounter with another man less than half her age.) On September 15 she noted a "Red Letter Day" because Eliza had met her "the *whole* way about urgency of Stone doing biog. of Jack. And me."

Charmian's infatuation led her to send Stone a most revealing letter. She wrote how touched she was by his "saying that the day you spent here is one of the 'rare days' of your life," that she felt the same. "And right you are, most right, that the rapport we experienced is 'the rarest of all occurrences.'" She had felt in recent months that "some one would 'happen' to me to make me soar on my wings a little . . . . Hence, my naturalness with you." Consequently, "you blew in, 'Vincent,' at precisely the right time." Unwittingly, she added, "I have to be a child, but, oh I am wise! And a lovely thought comes to me . . . . When I am wise, I am right. 'Out of the mouth of babes,' and so forth, is not idle norm."[27] Thus she knew herself to be dominated by im-pulse, but she believed it right to acquiesce to those feelings. An astute reader, Stone grasped the reference to being "a child" and built his characterization of Charmian around that theme.

26. Irving Stone, letter to Charmian London, 6 Aug. 1936, in possession of Irving Shepard at time consulted.

27. Charmian London, letter to Stone, 1 Sept. 1936, JLS 21, HL; possession of Irving Shepard when consulted. This and other materials were first copied in 1974 at the London Ranch.

Within several days of sending this letter, Charmian felt less trusting because Stone informed her he wanted to include a discussion of her early relationship with Jack. Her mind was "seething . . . blowing hot and cold," but she finally inclined toward him because it was her "last chance" to see the biography happen.[28] Furthermore, Eliza, usually very conservative in these matters, was now receiving letters and calls from Stone that secured her confidence.

Charmian had one other motive, to stifle Joan London's project. She and Jack's eldest daughter had grown close during the late 1920s, to the point where Joan and her family vacationed at the ranch. Joan sought Charmian's counsel regarding her career and private life, and in turn Charmian found they had much in common, helped Joan financially, and particularly enjoyed Joan's small son Bart. Joan moved away in 1931, after which the relationship waned. Joan had married for the third time, to Barney Mayes, a Trotskyite labor agitator. She also became an alcoholic, and during her drinking bouts obsessed aloud about her father and his cruelty to her. Accordingly, she became resentful of Charmian, who had done nothing to spur this animosity. Hearing of Joan's new attitude, Charmian was dismayed to learn she was planning to write a biography of the father she had rarely seen. "She [Eliza] was wonderful and would do what I did not say—even rushing off publicity to stave off any shysters working with Joan."[29]

Over the next weeks Charmian met Stone in the city, sometimes she with a date, sometimes he with his wife, at times only the two alone. At night clubs Stone danced with Charmian. She remained uncertain about him, but one night he came alone, and she recorded in her diary that he said, "It seems so long since I've seen you! It wasn't the same, the four of us in Berkeley," after which he knelt down and added, "I'll sit appropriately at your feet."[30] When asked about this fawning years later, Jean Stone explained that her husband had a story to get, that flattering Charmian was necessary and effective.[31] It is, ironically, the view Charmian would have taken in similar circumstances—a writer's need to do what is necessary to get the material.

Following this courting, Stone drafted a permission letter, after which Charmian felt confused again. She wrote him, "I do hope it [the permission letter] will relieve the tension you have been under. But then, so have I been

28. Charmian London, diary, 10 and 11 Sept. 1936, JL 248, HL.

29. Charmian London, diary, 15 Sept. 1936, JL 248, HL.

30. Stone, quoted by Charmian London, diary, 7 Oct. 1936, JL 248, HL.

31. Personal communication, Jean Stone, 8 Apr. 1993, Beverly Hills. In a well-balanced evaluation of Charmian of that time, Ms. Stone observed her to have "no world but herself," yet was a "magnificent female animal" with strong sexual appeal even in her mid-sixties. What the Stones could not realize was how physical changes were affecting Charmian's personality, that she was in the early stages of senility.

under tension with regard to this matter. I have not got happy about it yet—it's sort of a shock—even though I am going into it with my eyes open. The sort of enthusiasm I had concerning it at first has worn off, but I shall recapture it, or something better. You see, I am being frank with you."[32] He requested a change in her rewording, which allowed that he could "use and publish about myself, in relation to Jack London, that which in our combined judgment seems necessary and suitable." Charmian then conceded to eliminate "combined" and replace it by "anything which in your judgment seems necessary and suitable." To herself, she hoped that he was "placated with her Great Gift."[33]

Following this episode, their notes and letters reverted to a chatty exchange of news. He wrote about visiting Jack's daughters—Becky, who was civil, and Joan who, at work on her own book, understandably was not welcoming. (Joan wrote Upton Sinclair her doubt that Stone, so unfamiliar with the radical movement and working with Charmian, could produce a constructive and valid account.) Otherwise the matter receded in her mind. The Stones moved back down to Los Angeles, for he had other projects as well as the London biography.

Charmian drove to Los Angeles at the end of the year, met Stone for dinner, and, finding him very nervous and jerky, concluded he suffered "from overwork." While there she learned that Martin and Osa Johnson, whom she was to meet there, had been in a plane crash landing. Martin died, and Osa was badly injured. The Johnson tragedy led to her filling her diary with "sickening news"—other plane crashes, Jean Harlow's sudden death, the Hindenburg catastrophe, word of persecution of Jews in Europe. To distract herself from this dark mood she accepted a writing assignment involving material she had wanted to organize for years. Mark Hennessey was preparing a book on the Sewall ships of steel, and asked Charmian to abridge her log of the *Dirigo,* Sewall's first big ship of its type, since it also covered the last voyage of Captain Chapman. Out of practice, she pieced together some text, enough for Hennessey's purposes. But in doing so, she felt only greater inadequacy that she could not turn the material into a real book. This would be her last snippet of biographical information on her husband.[34]

In June 1937, Irving and Jean Stone, now pregnant, at his request moved to the ranch so that he could work with the mass of materials Charmian still retained. The diary entries point to many misunderstandings and conflicts:

32. Charmian London, letter to Stone, 9 Oct. 1936, JLS 23, HL.

33. Charmian London, diary, 13 Oct. 1936, JL 248, HL.

34. See Charmian London, "Diary of *Dirigo,*" in *The Sewall Ships of Steel,* ed. Mark W. Hennessy (Augusta, Maine, 1937).

June 18: We've decided he's very young. I say he's naive, very . . . amateurish . . . awful in saddle and a poor companion.

June 22: Stone works in basement a long time. I have my house locked all over.

June 26: Eliza tells me of Stone's babbling all over Santa Rosa.

June 27: Jean Stone took some people into my old room at my cottage—My Holy Place.

June 30: Not very happy. This Stone matter is assuming proportions I do not like. He's a snake not "in the grass" but "under the pillow." Bulletheaded . . . Find Eliza letters that Stone has been howling for.

July 1: I was almost ill last night from Stoneing with Detective Stone, and his strange threat, as if I care!!! . . . Eliza sweet and worried about how I looked when Stone got through with me. She comforted me and said that if we didn't like him, we could send him down the hill.

July 4: Stone's friends come from L.A. and he overdoes everything for the benefit of friends—kissing, etc., on arrival.

July 10: Stone is trying very hard to be nice—asks if my name is Clara. Aunt Netta is telling everything she knows. And my hands are tied.

July 13: Stone comes to grill me. I choose Book Room and he types. I face bookstacks. He says Aunt N. holds I lived with Jack before marriage. What an aunt. Bunnell [a ranch hand], he says, claims evidence!! What happy souls. We work amicably enough and I stay for dinner at headquarters [the Shepard house] . . . Bring layette to Stones . . . Stone loosens up and says, "Oh, I know that Jack loved you." I almost got sentiment[al] about things.

Despite her qualms, Charmian handed over Jack's love letters, yet insisted that Stone read them in her presence. What she did not know was that Eliza would help him see other forbidden material, her diaries from before her marriage to Jack, which had been sequestered in a safe hidden behind a secret door in the bookcases. Stone noted such in the 1977 "Acknowledgements" to a reissue of his book, and added that the diaries had since disappeared. They were part of what Charmian destroyed in April of 1938, when she left a statement that "any papers, letters, or books pertaining to the Jack London estate, and to my property . . . have been so destroyed with my full understanding and special

permission."[35] Exactly what she burned was not itemized, thus leaving a large mystery regarding the completeness of the Jack London archives.

After Stone mentioned learning of Netta's simultaneous intimacy with Roscoe Eames and Edward Payne, "filth about Netta," Charmian decided to be "mutinous" and cooperate with Joan. Several factors turned her against Stone. Generational differences interfered, with age looking condescendingly upon youth, which tended to patronize in return. Personal preferences also fostered some of the growing antipathy, such as Stone's being a "poor rider." She also found him crude and lacking in manners, as did some ranch guests. Possibly these conclusions can be attributed to Jean and Irving Stone being northeastern Jews, used to a more assertive and direct style of interaction than the California-bred gentiles. Charmian also noted similarities with Los Angeles movie men who had cheated and deceived her. Although the Stones' Jewishness was not conscious to her during this time, it would enter her mind later.

Further indications alerted her that Stone was not preparing the book she had hoped for. In a letter to Blanche Partington, Charmian reported learning that Stone "picked over all the garbage heaps in Alameda County, Los Angeles County and San Francisco . . . . all that 'research' with a rather prurient mind—before coming to Eliza and me. If he had gone about it decently in reverse, it would not have been a succession of blows in the face." Continuing, she described his methods as "extremely amateurish. And yet, he contrives masterpieces." Furthermore, she believed much of the work was done by his wife, who arranged his materials and repeatedly rewrote his drafts. Nonetheless she advised Blanche to "give the man an interview and be done with it," and "embroider your friendship with Jack all you like."[36]

Charmian went to the city late in the summer of 1937. During this time Stone left—or was asked by Eliza to leave—and Charmian no longer had direct contact with him. Gradually others shared similar reports about his interviews. As Charmian's cousin Beth Baxter described of one visit, Stone appeared unannounced and "upset mother and me terribly. It looks like we are going to have one of those modern sensational biographies about Uncle Jack." They were shocked when he called "Uncle Jack a suicide, without claiming knowledge of many affairs with women, which we said, we knew nothing about, how can he know so much." When he made a remark about Charmian being "just a stenographer, glad to get a home even if it meant breaking up someone else's happy home," they countered how Charmian had been so popular in Berkeley, who had plenty of admirers and proposals. "He said he was writing the kind of a book Jack would approve of. I said that if he hurt anyone in it or caused any unhappiness that Uncle Jack would certainly not

35. Witnessed and notarized statement of Charmian London, 13 Apr. 1938, JL 25151, HL.

36. Charmian London, letter to Blanche Partington, 24 July 1937, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

approve of it at all—that Uncle Jack never hurt anyone if he could possibly help it—he did look kind of funny when I said that."[37]

Baxter intimated that Stone had been swayed by Bessie's view of things, and indeed he appears to have been. Like most biographers, on some issues he found it difficult to separate his personal values from his judgment of his subject. Or perhaps he was thinking of his readers, who in 1930s America rejected the looser morals of the 1920s. In portraying Charmian as the wicked husband-stealer, he could produce more reader sympathy for Jack. In doing so he also confronted Charmian with perhaps the most unseemly episode in her life, her false friendship with Bess during the adultery, behavior neither she nor Jack ever owned up to.

Stone's surviving research notes substantiate some of these claims.[38] He had a gift for obtaining telling details from his respondents. Yet some of the notes with the same individual have odd contradictions, which lead one to infer he may have directed questions to support preconceived views. For example, early in her interview Mrs. Robert Hill described Charmian as intelligent, well-read, and accepted in the community, where at the end she was portrayed as talking about childlike and trivial things and considered high-handed. Of course, he was venturing in new territory to fulfill a vision he had of biography. London was one of a long list of individuals he wished to illuminate for a large reading public as a conduit to bring history to those uninterested in scholarly tomes. Still new to the game of historical research, he had to create his rules as he went along, and cannot be faulted for the attempt. He was persistent and thorough if perhaps too eager to force others' to bend to his views.

Though well-meaning, Stone's letters to others included the same cloy adulation that he had expressed in his first notes to Charmian. Cloudesley wrote back with strong objections to Stone's inaccuracies; Anna rejected his flattery. But others did not. Jimmie Hopper, one of the few surviving members of the Crowd, wrote Stone that a physician at Jack's death found a piece of paper upon which Jack calculated the number of morphine tables necessary to a fatal dose. Yet Hopper lived in Carmel, and was apparently elaborating George Sterling's gossip. Another woman, not of the Crowd, wrote that she knew gossip and speculation concerning another probable divorce and a third wedding for Jack.

Two persons in particular deprecated Charmian. Her aunt and childhood guardian Netta Eames, who had always belittled her niece did not fail in this circumstance. Most tellingly, she wrote, "I always use the same appella-

37. Beth Baxter, letter to Charmian London, "Thursday the 26th," c. 1937, JL 2188, HL.

38. These materials were at UCLA when I saw them in the 1970s, but I was refused access later when I hoped to review and reevaluate the materials. This obstacle necessarily prevented my account here being less one-sided than I prefer.

tion, "Childie" . . . .This is my pitying way of picturing her, as the 'Childie' I raised from infancy left to me when her blessed mother died." In fact, Netta had not used the name in years. She swore that she had known nothing about the love affair between Jack and Charmian, a forthright lie she reversed later when he confronted her. Inflating her own importance, she claimed that Jack and Bessie had come to her "two days after the marriage" for help on sexual problems, again an implausibility, for they were nowhere near her at the time.[39]

The other disapproving informant was apparently Eliza,[40] who made passing references to Charmian going to the haystacks one day with Allen Dunn, said the dinner table discussions had been above Charmian's head, and most astonishing of all, disclosed her fear at the end that Jack was going to leave her alone on the ranch with Charmian. This last comment is incomprehensible out of context. If Eliza indeed was so fearful, then why did she join in partnership with Charmian so willingly from the beginning? A talented, competent woman, she could easily have left and supported herself well, if indeed not better, than through taking on the ranch with its persistent indebtedness. If Eliza did in fact say such things, what can explain them?

Certainly Eliza was more favorably taken by Stone. He wrote to her as "Mama Shepard" and intimated that he considered her, not Charmian, to be the expert and reliable witness.[41] Trusting Stone, she admitted to some of her negative feelings. Eliza could little see that a clever journalist would ingratiate people to obtain such information. It was Charmian who had always handled media people, not Eliza, and it was Charmian who knew ultimately to be distrustful of any journalist, however personally appealing he be. Finally, Eliza was ill from diabetes and angina, which left her frail and needy of reassurance.

Angry over Stone's behavior, in mid-1937 Charmian made up her differences with Joan, invited her to the house, and agreed to let her examine papers both at the ranch and at the Huntington Library.[42] This reconciliation was critical to Joan because she had no right to see or quote from her father's writings and withheld her true feelings of animosity toward her stepmother. By December of 1937 even Eliza was privy to Charmian's arrangement and cooperated in preventing Stone from knowing. Joan in turn reassured them that her mother was similarly frustrated over Stone's interviewing, and reported that Bess discovered photographs missing from family albums, taken

39. Netta Eames Payne, letter to Stone, 2 July 1937, UCLA.

40. I was privy only to letters Stone wrote Eliza Shepard, not to his research notes with her or any she may have written him.

41. Irving Stone's letters to Eliza Shepard are in HL.

42. Virtually all of Joan London's letters to Charmian London are at ML, box 14. Copies of Charmian London's letters to Joan were provided by Helen Abbott, Joan's daughter-in-law.

by him apparently while she left the room.[43] Consequently, Joan spent several periods of up to a week on the ranch, where Charmian let her see the same personal files she had provided Stone.

When Charmian had sent material to the Huntington, it included only business or impersonal papers, but she knew from the stories that Stone must have found otherwise. Consequently, she asked Joan to make note of anything significant while she was going through the archives there. Joan wrote from the Huntington of finding Stone's notes pencilled onto folders, and her surprise over "what he considers important."[44] She also reassured Charmian that the letters there were either of business or "semi-personal" nature, apart from letters concerning the purchase of Sinclair Lewis plots. When Joan wrote of finding the "Amy" telegram, an anonymous message suggesting Jack was having an affair in New York, Charmian responded with how she knew Stone had already seen such. Having been forewarned, she introduced the item "quite naturally and laughingly" and was amused she could do so when "he had no idea I knew he had seen it."[45] By now a cat-and-mouse game was in full force, with Charmian and both biographers manipulating and at various points deceiving one another.

In April 1938, Charmian sent Joan a permission letter to quote from Jack's writings, advised her on dealing with publishers, and even sent her money. In May, Charmian left for Europe on business, but not before seeking a way to cut Stone out from potential film income. In September her agent struck an agreement with MGM to make a film based on *The Book of Jack London.* Furthermore, she arranged that Bess, Becky, and Joan would receive $5000 each from the contract.

By now Charmian had prepared herself for the worst, but Eliza, who had retained some sympathies with Stone, was shocked by the first installment in the *Saturday Evening Post* of *Sailor on Horseback.* Where Rose Wilder Lane had uncovered the facts of Jack's illegitimacy years before, she had not made much of the man thought to be his real father, William Chaney. In contrast, Stone elaborated an extensively detailed portrait of the astrologer, for he believed Jack to be a reproduction of the man. Doing so challenged what Eliza may have inculcated in her son Irving, who believed he was a blood descendant of London. However, unlike Lane, Stone drew John London as a sympathetic, gentle, simple man whose faults rested in being too subservient to the manic whims of Flora. Stone was also a more skillful fictionalizer than

43. While looking over an album with Helen Abbott, she pointed to places where photographs had been removed and said Joan had told her those were the ones Stone had taken.

44. Joan London, letter to Charmian London, 1 Jan. 1938, ML, box 14, folder 3.

45. Charmian London, letter to Joan London, 3 Jan. 1937, copy of Helen Abbott. Placed in the context of other letters, it is clear the actual date was 1938, a common clerical error having been made at the start of the new year.

his predecessor, more adept at rhythmic narrative and lively description than Lane. Like her, however, he used selections from London's fiction as biographical fact, a fallacy easy to commit given the apparent similitude.

Sensitive to the distortions of her early family life, particularly the images of poverty and family disorganization, Eliza was so indignant over Stone's seeming disloyalty that she asked Charmian to send him a letter terminating their agreements. Charmian asserted she had granted him full access to write "a free and untrammeled judgment of him and of myself in relation to him" in expectation he would "use that privilege fairly, cleanly, and with the sensitive understanding of an intelligent and cultured man." Instead, he "abused that privilege; and you have converted what you assured me would be a distinguished appreciation of Jack London and his place in Life into a scandal-mongering serial aimed to secure sensationalism without justice."[46] Even then Stone did not stop his efforts with the estate, for in early 1938 he wrote about a possible movie based on his book, to be called "A Giant in the West." Eliza replied that his earlier permission included no movie rights.

As the installments of *Sailor on Horseback* appeared in the *Post,* Charmian felt successive waves of disgust and shame over seeing the most intimate details of hers and Jack's life painted rather garishly for anyone's ready gossip. A woman of an earlier time, she failed to anticipate the growing frankness in journalism. Although their affair had taken place during the height of yellow journalism, when local lovers' comings and goings pushed national news to the second page, Charmian and Jack had always carefully managed their activities or cajoled friendly reporters to prevent disclosure. (They even sacrificed Anna Strunsky's reputation in self-protection.)

Probably the most disturbing material for her was that concerning Jack's death. Dr. Allan Thomson, the same man who in 1928 swore to the world that Jack died of uraemic poisoning, allegedly asserted that the gossip about Jack committing suicide was true. Thompson publicly denied he had said such, yet a surviving letter to Stone has gossipy hints of a vendetta against the two women. As he did with many situations in the book, Stone had cleverly reported some of the facts, and by omitting others, perhaps fabricating some, constructed a most convincing argument for the gullible reader, one that has not held up under the scrutiny of subsequent scholars.[47]

When book reviews appeared, Charmian had further proof that the book she expected to introduce Jack once more to the public was in fact a "perpetration," not deserving of popularity. *Sailor on Horseback* was featured

46. Charmian London, letter to Stone, 2 Aug. 1938, Jack London Ranch.

47. See Earle Labor, "An Open Letter to Irving Stone," *Jack London Newsletter* 2 (1969): 114–16; Winifred M. Middagh, "Jack London, Sailor on Horseback: Biography or Fiction?" *Jack London Newsletter* 15 (1982): 132–157; and Alfred Shivers, "Jack London: Not a Suicide," *Dalhousie Review* 49 (1969): 43–57.

on the front page of the Sunday *New York Times,* a review by Hassoldt Davis that emphasized London's "unfortunate alliances with women," his "failure at nearly everything," and his "continuous and secret drinking." Stone's praise of such works as *The Iron Heel* or *Martin Eden* was concluded to be "nonsense." While hailing Stone's vivid account, Davis questioned the appropriation of London's own writings without quotation and "overenthusiasm" for the subject. Similarly, the *New Republic* found Stone "overworshipful and unduly romantic about a mere adventure writer . . . a febrile he-man faker," whose "decline as a writer" went unmentioned. One senses from the reviews that Stone's intentions had been sincere, that he wished to extol London, yet failed in allowing his emphasis upon the tawdry to overwhelm his laudatory message. Consequently, Stone was so effective at exposing London's weaknesses that he convinced his reviewers that the man was lacking in virtue.[48]

Despite news of negative reviews and meager sales, *Sailor on Horseback* poisoned Charmian's thoughts, seeped in to spoil her daily pleasures. Being a trusting person, one inclined to think well of Stone, she could not understand why he should have written as he did. Consequently she accounted for his actions by suggesting he was slightly off-balance, confused. When even that did not hold up as a reasonable explanation, she took up another. As Jack had fallen upon anti-Semitic feelings to express his grudge toward Judge Samuels in 1910, so Charmian grasped the same the day she discovered Stone had likely been, in her odd spelling, a "Stine." She dogged for evidence, hounding several academic people for proof that his college fraternity, Sigma Nu, had been "a Jewish fraternity." Thus the same woman who agonized over the fate of European Jews felt exploited by "that shyster" and failed to recognize her own anti-Semitism.

Eventually Charmian ceased distorting Stone's name in her diary and letters. Though she considered a lawsuit, she eventually rejected the notion, concluding it would only bring much unwanted publicity to the book—she would rather it die on the shelves. Before it did, however, the second printing bore a new subtitle, "A Biographical Novel," the publisher's response to the reviews critical of its fictionalizing.

Because of the delay in gaining access to her father's papers, Joan London's *Jack London and His Times* did not appear until 1939, by which time Stone's book had cornered the market. Only three of twenty-five chapters cover London's life after 1906, and one of these is more about the Mexican Revolution than her subject. Then caught up in the Trotskyite wing of San Francisco waterfront labor activities, Joan was at her most idealogue stage and

48. Hassoldt Davis, "Jack London's Abundant Life," *New York Times Book Review,* 18 Sept. 1938, and John Chamberlain, "Homage to Jack London," *The New Republic,* 96 (1938): 192.

determined to evaluate her father by her narrow standards of political correctness. Thus the oddity, noted by almost all the reviewers, of her writing in the objective case, as though she had no personal relationship with her father. That objectivity was however the muffle over a *cris de coeur,* her as-yet-unresolved suffering over her father's seeming unfairness and abuse.[49]

Though a thorough and meticulous researcher, Joan was not always able to let the facts rule. For example, she wrote many of his friends still alive and asked very specific questions of them. Regarding Jack's socialism, she received pages of intricate accounts from Ernest Untermann, who took great pains to shift Joan's less subtle understanding. After receiving her book, he thanked her with the cryptic observation about "the sparing use which you made of my material."[50] Another example is how Joan's own predilections led her to state without proof that Benjamin Kidd had been a major influence upon her father. Consequently, although coverage of Jack's socialism appears the book's strong point, Joan's treatment is not error-free.

Being a close friend of George Sterling, Joan was persuaded by his suicide story, although she claimed otherwise to the press after Stone's book appeared. In her own work she argued London was suicidal, the result of his subordinating his socialism to false capitalist values. As evidence, she noted how both doctors Porter and Thomson agreed he had taken a large amount of morphine, with the latter believing it was a purposeful overdose. Since her book lacked references, a reader would not know that her source was *Sailor on Horseback* and that Dr. Porter had strongly countered that claim in a letter to her.

Despite certain deficiencies, *Jack London and His Times* remains useful today. Although she covered what appeared in earlier biographies, Joan London produced the most lucid and coherent account. Significantly she had known some people, such as Flora London, Jennie Prentiss, and the Madderns more intimately than Charmian, and in adulthood had been befriended by many of Jack's associates. In addition, she was a careful, accomplished social historian, who contextualized London's life in a manner no one else has since achieved.

Jack London and His Times received consistently positive reviews and was compared favorably to *Sailor on Horseback.* The *New York Mirror* referred to Stone's work by comparison as having left London "more or less in the

49. She resolved her feelings later in life while composing *Jack London and His Daughters,* which was uncompleted at her death and failed to include her statement of that closure. For more on Jack's relationship with his daughters, see my "Jack London's Delayed Discovery of Fatherhood," *Jack London Journal* 3 (1996): 146–61.

50. Ernest Untermann, letter to Joan London, 1 July 1941, Wisconsin State Historical Society. Untermann's account has yet to be given in-depth consideration by scholars of Jack's socialism.

shadows." One praised her "special emphasis on West Coast events and personalities; and her industry and shrewd insight." *The New Yorker* noted how the work avoided "soft-pedalling" and was "absorbingly handled." Consistently held up for commendation was the writing and organization. Unlike reviewers of *The Book of Jack London* or *Sailor on Horseback,* the subject was little confused with the value of the work; *The New Republic* even concluded she "underestimated his achievements." Perhaps the most perceptive review was by a Berkeley student, future movie reviewer Pauline Kael, who acknowledged the "first-rate biography," Joan's "fairness, objectivity, and good taste," but found "less justifiable is the condemnation of a man whose actions seem incomprehensible to her."[51]

The immediate consequence of *Sailor on Horseback* on London scholarship was to make the literary estate pull up the drawbridge. After Eliza Shepard died in 1939, Charmian handed control over to Eliza's son Irving. Her gradual cognitive deterioration is evident in her diary entries, where passages are blocked off and written in different directions, words misspelled. Having experienced firsthand the toll *Sailor on Horseback* had taken on his mother and Charmian, Shepard became fiercely protective of their memory as well as London's. Consequently, years later biographers such as Franklin Walker and Richard O'Connor were not able to gain Shepard's approval for their work, and O'Connor was not even permitted into the Huntington. The irony is that restricted access furthered perpetuation of errors and misrepresentation of London because now *Sailor on Horseback* became the standard source, particularly once paperbacks came into fashion, putting it through dozens of printings. Charmian's destruction of papers also forced later researchers to rely upon Irving Stone's accounts of those materials and his pejorative characterization of her.

This case illumines the complexity of biographical research when a literary estate's permission is required. When executors are also relatives, private issues naturally arise. Not only do relations believe they have a special "truth," which of course they do, they also have their own actions exposed to public account. London's death left Charmian and Eliza especially vulnerable because others discounted their capabilities and wisdom. That derogation was partly a reflection both of sexism and their being so overshadowed by London's charismatic personality. Movie producers, publishers, actors, and others as well as would-be biographers sought to benefit from the estate, in several instances to the point of crookery and sheer venality. Normally they saw the signs to

51. *New York Mirror,* 26 Sept. 1939, MI 1472, JL; Roberts Tapley, "Jack London," *The Nation,* 25 Nov. 1939, p. 584; anonymous [Clifton Fadiman?], *The New Yorker,* 4 Nov. 1939, p. 87; *New Republic,* 13 Dec. 1939, p. 241; and Pauline Kael, *California Grizzly* (Apr. 1940), MI 1114, HL.

prevent exploitation, but the consequence of years of duplicitous dealings made trusting anyone difficult.

What those approaching the estate, including the well-meaning and ethical, overlooked was the presumptiveness that often followed. Once one gained favor, the service went in only one direction, from the estate to the recipient of the largesse. Used to guests on the ranch, Charmian and Eliza did not draw a clear line around themselves, which meant beneficiaries even took food and board, a situation fraught with potential trouble because of the confusion of business and personal roles. The violation of agreements over the years included the trivial, such as assuming an authority that was not granted, to the serious, as failing to pay according to contract and leaving the women financially strapped. Were it not for their intelligence and acumen against the nefarious forces, the ranch would surely have been lost.

While it is tempting to cast blame, depending on one's point of view here, it is more appropriate to reflect upon the inherent conflict existing between the estate and the researchers. Unwritten in their contracts were private interests. Lane and Stone wanted a springboard to further success in publishing; the Paynes and Joan London wanted a last word against Jack. Charmian and Eliza expected others to agree with their views of London and the significance—or not—of various people in his life. What resulted was an intricate and multilayered interaction, with instances of manipulation misleading on each side, as well as sincerity. As conflict built, malice would be imputed to the other (or, in the case of Joan London, reduced). Ultimately, in the case of both the Jack London and Irving Stone archives, complete openness from the start likely would have prevented the tangled tale that confounds understanding today.

Book Reviews

Christopher Gair, *Complicity and Resistance in Jack London's Novels: From Naturalism to Nature* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997)

Ian F. A. Bell

As the history of any writers' reception will tell us, the way we read conditions what we read—or, more specifically in the contemporary academy, the texts we choose to teach and to write about are frequently those which are hospitable to particular critical tools and precepts. What we choose to notice and to value in a text is as conditioned as the text itself. Christopher Gair is right to ascribe the academic neglect of London to twentieth-century styles of reading that have been inherently hostile to popular and to naturalistic literature (styles persuaded largely by the formalist preoccupations of classic modernism and of the New Criticism, and by the moralism of Leavis, Trilling, and their followers). For Gair, these styles produced the "socio-critical hegemony that inspired the elevation of Henry James to the status of central American novelist." This is of course true in terms of its specific example only up until the early 1970s when James the aesthetic Master began to be redescribed within more materialist and historicist discourses; but Gair's general point holds, and it is only very recently that such discourses have been brought to bear upon naturalist and popular fictions generally, and focussing usually on Dreiser or Norris rather than London. It is Gair's project here to redress the ideological neglect of London, and his stance is direct: "London was a professional author writing for a particular market. Thus, his work is both a revolt against, and a product of, rationalization and reification." Gair's stance is advantaged by the procedures of poststructuralism and the New Historicism in order to read London's novels as representations of a particular moment in American history, that moment of intense and unsettling change at the turn of the century when thought, culture, industry, and commerce were experiencing intimate restructuring as the rapid developments in corporate capitalism were becoming most vividly felt within society at large.

To these ends, Gair foregrounds throughout what he calls the "constant tension between dominant and counterhegemonic voices" in London's fiction and persuasively reveals naturalism as a form of writing that is simultaneously adverse to, and representative of, the conditions of capitalist culture. In the process, not only is London freshly and invigoratingly reread, but naturalism itself is rehistoricized in highly generative ways—recasting, for