Author under Sail

Jay Williams

Chapter 17: The Color Red: Atavisms and Revolution

Reading the Past

On 2 April 1906, three days after he completed "The Apostate," Jack London began *Before Adam,* only six months after completing *White Fang.* In the interregnum between these two novels he wrote five short stories, two book reviews, two essays, and two newspaper reports. His productivity—a superficial but popular method for testing the vitality and quality of an author's imagination—indicates no lack of story ideas, a concern raised later in the year by a national discussion (continued into this century in London studies) about the relation between *Before Adam* and an earlier novel on the same theme by Stanley Waterloo entitled *The Story of Ab.* Far from being out of ideas, exhausted, or sick from his lecture tour (or with life in general), London was as energetic and productive as he always had been. Travel, a necessary component of his authorship, stimulated, not retarded, his imaginative capability.

Another indication of the vitality of his imagination is the thematic content of his new novel. *Before Adam* moves forward along a line of inquiry into the new psychology that London had begun with, at least, "Planchette" and *White Fang.* If *White Fang* is a companion to *Call of the Wild,* then *Before Adam* is a companion to *White Fang.* The lecture tour was a kind of haitus from the rigors of self-exploration made manifest in fiction. Not only is *Before Adam* a deeply absorptive novel, but it represents a more fully

developed exploration into the nature of his imagination, building on ideas expressed in those two earlier works. Spiritualism, August Weismann and his concept of the germ-plasm, and the intersection of psychology and evolutionary science all are topics that London picked up again in early 1906.

As with the gestation of previous novels, the idea for *Before Adam* developed over many years, though it is notoriously difficult to single out a moment in time when he saw the whole of any future piece of writing. There are clues in his notes for the novel and in his library, and they indicate that *Before Adam* built up slowly in his mind;[1] unlike, say, the process for writing the Christ novel, this stop-and-start process actually bore fruit.

To begin, we need to return to the work of the German scientist August Weismann, whose influence on London's thinking I will discuss more in depth later, but

---

[1] One early book that may have helped him write the novel is Winwood Reade, *The Martyrdom of Man* (New York: Peter Eckler, [1872]). On the title page, underneath the author's name, London wrote "`Before Adam.'" I don't think he meant to indicate this book as a reference for his novel; rather, the note is a shorthand for the kind of work Reade's book is: a combination of popularized evolution concerning the origin of man (Reade repeats the narrative of man's unicellular structure evolving into modern man at least three times) and a "Universal History" of humankind, with an emphasis on the place of West Africa in that history; Reade had spent a number of years there. London made no significant marginal markings and no notes on the blank pages in the back and front. He may have marked it as something he might look into for his novel, but never did.

here we need to revisit London's earliest mention of writing a story based on Weismann's theories of heredity. In a letter to Cloudesley Johns from 1899, when first he read *Essays upon Heredity,* he said, "Funny, that `freak story,' as you called it, by Grant Allen. I had but recently finished reading some four hundred and odd pages of Weissmann's theory of the germ-plasm, was deep in the study of those who had taken up the controversy of Weissmann, and had been evolving a tale on memory something similar to Grant Allen's. You will notice he had founded his idea on Weissman too. Anticipated again."[2] "Memory," of course, doesn't mean an individual's recollection of a past person, place, or thing; London means to equate it with biologic inheritance of traits. A cell remembers in order to reproduce a previous generation's characteristics. There are a number of Allen's stories in which such a conception of biological memory operates: In "A Child of the Phalanstery," a couple who marry in belief of "the progressive evolution of universal humanity (shades of *The Kempton-Wace Letters,* a connection we will see is quite explicit in London's mind when writing *Before Adam*); in "Langalula," Christianity is

---

[2] Jack London, letter to Cloudesley Johns, 24 Aug. 1899, *Letters,* 1:104. I am not the first to notice that *Before Adam* relies heavily on his reading of Weismann. See Cecelia Tichi, *Jack London: A Writer's Fight for a Better America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 78, 87. I must, however, beg to differ with my friend. She implies that the concept of racial memory is something he garnered from Weismann, which he did not, as I explain later in this chapter. Also, she implies, at least on her first mention of Weismann, though not on her second, that he first read him while writing *Before Adam.* Tichi's excellent scholarship, however, led her to connect *Before Adam* to *The Kempton-Wace Letters* via David Starr Jordan's influence, a connection I will later make concrete.

revealed to be nothing more than veneer on a so-called savage; in "The Backslider" the focus is on the artificiality of religion in the face of a love "that had filled every heart in all [the main character's] ancestors for innumerable generations.[3] The hero is even an avid reader of Spencer. And then there's "The Churchwarden's Brother," featuring that favorite hereditary experimental subject, a set of twins. One is a murderer and ready to be hung, the other, equally bad but has maintained through sheer willpower social respectability until he goes off the rails, gets drunk, and tries to murder his wife and instead commits suicide; thus heredity wins out.

We do not know which story London and Johns are discussing; the editors of *Letters from Jack London* suppose it might have been "The Reverend John Creedy," a story collected in Allen's 1899 volume *Twelve Tales.* Creedy is a West African pastor who, despite his education at Oxford, when settled back in his African home, instantly recalls the language of his people and soon sheds all his English "civilization." If this story is based on Weismann's work—Allen had written multiple essays about evolutionary science and was a devotee of Herbert Spencer, with whom he corresponded—then it is so only in that London understood Creedy's Englishness as acquired, though there is no question of those characteristics being transmitted from generation to generation. Spencer in fact has recently been described as an antagonist to Weissman given his four essays attacking Weismann in 1893-94 and reprinted in *The Principles of Biology;* one essay even "proves" speech is an inherited acquired

---

[3] Grant Allen, "The Backslider," *Twelve Tales with a Headpiece, a Tailpiece, and an Intermezzo* (London: Grant Richards, 1899), 228.

characteristic.[4] Further, Creedy's language acquisition cannot be Weismannian because, as London told Johns in a subsequent letter, "You have muddled `acquired characters' with `fixed characters,' it is these latter which are hereditary. Language is an acquired character; a Semetic nose a fixed character. The one is acquired in the life-time of the individual, the other inherited from an ancestor."[5] On the other hand, if we posit that

---

[4] See Frederick B. Churchill, *August Weismann: Development, Heredity, and Evolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 10, and Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Biology,* 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1898), 607-8. One finds several favorable references in Spencer's *Principles of Biology* to Weismann's research on *Daphnideœ* (290-91) and the *Medusœ* (281). But Spencer rejected Weismann's basic conclusion that soma cells and reproductive cells were different: "sperm-cells and germ-cells are essentially nothing more than vehicles in which are contained small groups of the physiological units in a fit state for obeying their proclivity towards the structural arrangement of the species they belong to" (317). I believe it is this denial of the speciality of reproductive cells that in part leads Mark Francis to say Spencer "believed that biological science was not sufficiently advanced to provide an explanation of development based on heredity. . . . The object of Spencer's speculation in *The Principles of Biology* was *not* based on heredity, nor on embryology. Spencer was pursuing the facts, rather than the origins, of organic structure" (Mark Francis, *Herbert Spencer,* 190).

[5] London, letter to Johns, 6 Sept. 1899, *Letters,* 1:108. See chapter 15 for a discussion of this letter and others London wrote about language acquisition and heredity. The editors of *Letters* make the mistake of calling Allen's collection *Twelve Stories by*

London misunderstood Weismann and thought that he endorsed the reversion-to-type thesis, especially in terms of race and criminality, then he might very well have found Weismannian traces in Allen's stories, and more than just in "The Reverend John Creedy."

But because he so clearly does understand Weismann, it seems, if anything, he saw a kindred authorial practice in Allen's work, that is, expanding or exaggerating scientific fact to fit a particular genre of fiction writing. Thus, no particular story proclaims obvious Weismannian influence, though that isn't really the point. The important point here isn't even that London was frustrated by discovering a progenitor of sorts for a story based on Weismann. The point is that as soon as he had finished reading Weismann he was prompted to write a story based on his reading.[6]

Grant Allen and by saying that the four-hundred-page work by Weismann was *The Germ-Plasm: A Theory of Heredity. Essays upon Heredity* is 455 pages long. Weismann of course relies on his theory of the germ-plasm to debunk Lamarck in "On Heredity."

[6] In a memoir about Allen, Edward Clodd quotes from a letter from Allen's close friend Alice L. Bird, who writes, "There was one curious thing about him—he never seemed to read. Practically he travelled without books. . . . In his sitting-room at Antibes there was barely a bookshelf, and no sign of `literature.' . . . If he did use a book of reference, it was Frazer's `Golden Bough,' or the `Flore Française' of Gillet and Magne" (Edward Clodd, *Grant Allen: A Memoir with a Bibliography* [London: Grant Richards, 1900], 109). Given that Allen was a Spencerite, and given that Weismann's work refuted Spencer's neo-Lamarckianism, it's entirely possible that

In Boston during the lecture tour, we can tell he was mulling over a possible story about a civilized man becoming savage. His seriocomic newspaper story on the Holy Jumpers indicated indirectly that he was looking ahead to his next major writing project. In the article, he pointed out that "it is no new phenomenon, this religious excitement of theirs." It isn't significant that he was able to see a timelessness to a new form of worship. What is significant are his examples of the predecessors to the Holy Jumpers and to New Thought in general:

> The Voodoo priest and the Indian medicine man conducted similar performances when the world was very young, and man was just beginning to climb out of the trees and make fire. The Holy Jumpers attain a pitch of exaltation quite similar to that attained by the men who fasted in deserts, or by the dervishes who whirl their consciousness away. This same pitch is attained by the Hindoo sage who steadfastly contemplates his navel till all the world whirls around him, and he rises above time and space to meet God face to face, and from His lips learn the mystery of eternity. Holy Jumping, as Dr. Hudson would undoubtedly

---

London made an error in assessing the presence of Weismann in Allen's fiction. I and the editors of the *Letters* assume that Johns and London were referring to a short story. It's entirely possible that they were referring to a novel, though the one novel by Allen that David Mike Hamilton says London read, and that in 1899, was *Miss Cayley's Adventures,* decidedly not based on Spencer, Weismann, or any other scientific work; it is one of Allen's New Woman novels, something that would have resonated with London in a different intellectual register. See David Mike Hamilton, *"The Tools of My Trade,"* 12.

> call it, is merely a process of self-hypnotism, whereby the conscious mind is lulled to sleep and the subconscious mind is awakened and put in charge." (70-71).

There were still Voodoo priests and Indian medicine men in 1906 of course, but London's point is that they should be considered as atavistic as the Holy Jumpers. To see modern-day worship and then see beyond the contemporary scene to locate its origins in so-called primitive practices, he reveals not only his intention to write a novel about prehistoric man and woman but also his mounting interest, almost obsession, with the prehistoric; it will feature in a significant amount of his fiction for the rest of his career. For the holy man who fasts in the desert appears in *The Star Rover* in a short narrative that seems out of place among the stories of Lady Om, Daniel Foss, and the others. But now we see its function. Beginning in 1905 and 1906, London was most concerned about eternal time: about eternities of the past and about eternities of the future.[7] *Before Adam* is the beginning of his novelistic treatment of the former. *The Iron Heel,* composed later the same year, is the beginning of his novelistic treatment of the latter. He will never

---

[7] Bennett Lovett-Graff touches on this thesis in his essay on *The Scarlet Plague* and "The Strength of the Strong," but he is incidentally concerned with London's fictional construction of time. Still, his treatment of London's socialism in seeming unfriendly fictional settings as well as the more specific point that prehistoric settings enabled London to illustrate the barbaric qualities of capitalism coincides with my own sense of the continuous importance of politics in all his writing. See Bennett Lovett-Graff, "Prehistory as Posthistory: The Socialist Fiction of Jack London," *Jack London Journal,* no. 3 (1996): 88-104.

abandon the present and his critique of it, but at the midpoint of his career he was looking backward and then forward as far as his inner eye could see in both directions. We recall from chapter 14 that as early as 1900 he "wanted to learn how to write Present and Future all at one time."[8] As H. G. Wells wrote in *Mankind in the Making,* a book London read just before composing *The Iron Heel,* "from the idea of organic Evolution" we—meaning Wells's contemporaries—"has ensued . . . that great expansion of our sense of time and causation." Further, time "has opened out from the little history of a few thousand years to a stupendous vista of ages."[9] Time was losing its historical specificity for him. He was becoming more and more removed, not from the present as a site for political action, but from any particular time as an explanation for theories of class, race, and gender.

It was one thing to watch Bostonians exercise themselves religiously and make an analogy with ancient practices. It was more difficult to find a scientifically sound mechanism to fictively render the continuity between the sociobiology of that ancient world and twentieth-century America. One key was Thomson Hudson's popular *The Law of Psychic Phenomena,* the "Dr. Hudson" of the Holy Jumpers article. Located somewhere in the middle between serious scientific study and New Thought science of mind cure, Hudson's book can also be read as a precursor to Henri Ellenberger's history of dynamic psychiatry, *The Discovery of the Unconscious,* given its emphasis on topics such as the feud between the Nancy school of mesmerism and Charcot at the Salpêtrière

---

[8] London, "Jack London, Dramatist," interview by Ashton Stevens, *San Francisco Examiner,* 27 Aug. 1905, 47.

[9] H. G. Well, *Mankind in the Making* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), 16. See Charmian London, diary, 1906.

Hospital.[10] Hudson argued that a scientific study of the mind's operations—which would explain topics central to London's thinking like the link between poetry and madness, the operation of hypnotism, and the presence of ghosts—would also justify faith in Jesus. Hudson's science is a broad rendition, common to his era, of psychology, and it can be placed on the continuum that Ellenberger establishes between shamanism and modern-day psychiatric practice. By connecting mesmerism and spiritism, Hudson is consistent with his fellow American psychologists.[11] And to make himself even more obviously American he grafted Christianity to psychology. To a large extent Hudson is interested in placing Christian faith on a scientific basis.

But in the midst of Hudson's general metaphysics and despite much self-delusion on the part of Hudson about the rigor of his objectivity, London would have found an emphasis on truly scientific study. According to Hudson, given two facets of the mind—the subjective and the objective—and given that faith is a priori a component of the subjective mind, we simply have to turn off the objective mind and access the subjective in order to have the faith that Jesus so obviously demonstrated was right and true. We can suspend objectivity through auto-suggestion or self-hypnotism. He first establishes the validity of hypnotism as a medical procedure, differentiating it from Mesmer's experiments by a single attribute: whereas Mesmer "cured" people while they were awake, James Braid, one of the early key proponents of hypnotism, put them to sleep. It is a distinction Ellenberger marks as central in the progression from mesmerism to

---

[10] See Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 85-101.

[11] See ibid., 83-85.

psychoanalysis. But in a conceptual move that Ellenberger does not discuss, Hudson then discovered that people could fall into hypnotic sleep without the influence of another and that this sleep could be obtained without suggestion.[12] Combining these "discoveries"

---

[12] See Thomson Hudson, *The Law of Psychic Phenomenon: A Working Hypothesis for the Systematic.* Hudson's history of mesmerism and hypnotism cites the major figures and their work accurately or, at least, in agreement with later historians like Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 49-56. I've somewhat simplified Hudson's detailed account of the battles among the mesmerists, Charcot's Paris school, and the Nancy school if only because London was not interested in their various antithetical claims. Hudson, however, sought to "bind the facts of psychological science into one harmonious whole" (91). One difference between the schools would have caught London's attention. According to Hudson, Charcot believed hypnotism worked only on "diseased," that is, "hysterical" persons, especially women. The Nancy school believed hypnotism worked on healthy, "normal" individuals. The latter hypothesis suited London best. One more side note should be made: consistent with Hudson's theoretical framework, ghosts are real in that they are a manifestation of the subjective mind (it has the power to move objects, hear voices, and create immaterial objects perceptible to the senses) but not proof of the return of the dead. (That is an unresolvable claim.) Spirit photography substantiates this claim about ghosts, despite the numerous cases of fraud. He links it to astral projection. See Hudson, *Law of Psychic Phenomenon,* 288. I will discuss spirit photography in volume 3. London's copy has no markings. See Tomson Hudson, *The Law of Psychic Phenomenon: A Working Study of*

produced self-hypnosis. Further, hypnotic sleep was the same as regular sleep. "The memory of the subjective mind is perfect," says Hudson (217), and so in sleep a "freak" of evolution like London's narrator could, scientifically, recall his past life as a Stone Age being.

One gathers from London's article that Hudson would have come to the opposite conclusion, namely, that religious faith is obtained through a trick of the mind called self-hypnotism. Thus, Hudson's book did not provide London with the scientific rationale for undercutting the metaphysical beliefs in the "Voodoo priest" and "Hondoo sage." London reworked Hudson to come to the conclusion that belief in a higher power attained by intense physical exertion or not was a fallacy produced by the mind hypnotizing itself. In a way, he uses the Hudson's psychologic science of hypnotism against himself, that is, using science to undermine metaphysics. In *Before Adam,* however, the question of religious belief drops out, and London seizes on the psychical mechanism of self-hypnotism as a tool to access past lives. Psychological science thus acts as a gateway to the fictive rendering of the scientific truth of the narrative of evolution.

In chapter 15, we saw how thoroughly grounded London was in Alfred Binet's psychological vocabulary, and *On Double Consciousness* is most likely London's authority for replacing Hudson's terminology of *subjective mind* and *objective mind* with the modern constructs of *conscious mind* and *unconscious mind.* But two concepts appear in Hudson's book that also play important roles in the frame story of *Before*

Hypnotism, Spiritism, Mental Therapeutics, etc. (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1902), 336253, HEH. There is a slight variation in the subtitle between the copy I examined and London's own, but the pagination is the same.

Adam: the perfect memory of the unconscious and the release of the conscious/objective mind in sleep, thus creating access to the unconscious/subjective mind. These claims allowed London to create a narrator who put himself in a hypnotic state in order to discover his past life as an early hominoid.

To capture that past world in a fictive frame, London turned to a number of other books, some of which we can identify. For the first time, we have extensive preliminary notes—amounting in some cases to several pages of a rough draft—for a novel; either he departed from his usual practice or, more simply, these notes were preserved, perhaps because it is his first novel written while married to Charmian. Unlike other collections of notes—like those for the Christ novel—there are no newspaper or magazine clippings included among his handwritten notes. One book appears in his notes twice, which is more than any other source: *The Universal Kinship* by John Howard Moore.[13] I want to

[13] For biographical information on Moore, see Claudia J. Keenan, "The Anguish of J. Howard Moore," in *Through the Hourglass,* www.throughthehourglass.com/2016/07/the-anguish-of-j-howard-moore.html; "Scorning Man, He Ends Life to Thrushes' Call: Prof. J. Howard Moore Goes Back to Nature by the Cruel Artifice of Suicide," *Chicago Tribune,* 18 June 1916, 11; and Clarence Darrow, *In the Clutches of the Law: Clarence Darrow's Letters,* ed. Randall Tietjen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 499. As the headline of his obituary notes, Moore was thoroughly disenchanted by the human race, a deeply held belief in man's wrong-headed stewardship of the earth that crops up repeatedly in *The Universal Kinship.* One might say that his misanthropy motivated his writing, a misanthropy similar to but more deeply felt than that of Mark Twain, Ambrose Beirce, or H. L. Mencken. For example, he writes, "It was an easy

examine this intellectual encounter for two reasons: first, he read it during the first three weeks of writing *Before Adam;* second, it is useful for what I might call my sociological archaeology.[14] The circulation of this book among diverse cultural workers, especially in Chicago, exposes social and intellectual connections that otherwise might never be discovered otherwise. Like the ruins of some temple of which we only can see the barest of outlines, these social connections become apparent only when we strip extraneous notions like fame and canonicity and expose the similarities of reading and the exchange of ideas.

---

matter, therefore, for man . . . to convince himself that all other animas were made for him, that they were made without feeling or intelligence, and that hence he was justified in using in any way he chose the conveniences so generously provided by an eccentric providence." (106) And then in a passage heavily scored by London in the margin, he wrote, "But Darwin has lived. . . . There has been no more miracle in the origin of the human species than in the origin of any other species. . . . Man was not made in the image of the hypothetical creator of the heaven and earth, but in the image of the ape." (107)

[14] There is of course a well-developed field called social archaeology, a subset of anthropology that uses material evidence of previous cultures to talk about social organizations. I'm pleased to discover the Marxist and dialectical materialist orientation of this field, but it is not what I mean when I use the term *social archaeologist.* I use *archaeology* in the Foucauldian sense and focus on how to uncover friendship and intellectual networks that have been obscured by a focus on so-called great men and women.

Moore, a Kansas farm boy, graduated from the University of Chicago, taught zoology at Crane Manual Training High School in Chicago and the University of Chicago, married Clarence Darrow's sister Jennie, committed suicide in 1916 at the age of forty-four, and was perhaps best known for being a prominent vegetarian and author of *Better World Philosophy*. Moore and his work recently have been taken up by animal rights activists.[15]

---

[15] George N. Caylor owned the first socialist bookstore in Philadelphia and was a prominent socialist, writer, and food activist. In his autobiography, he wrote,

> Joe [Joseph E. Cohen, a friend] and I had become vegetarians as the result of reading a couple of books by J. Howard Moore. The one that principally influenced us was The Universal Kinship. I remained a vegetarian for about 10 years, but Joe much longer. During these days I patronised vegetarian restaurants, especially one run by Bernarr McFadden. I ate their protose and other meat substitutes and their bean concoctions. I especially enjoyed their medley. This was a bowl of raw rolled oats, chopped nuts, raisins, dates, and figs. Milk or cream slightly softened the oatmeal but still on had to Fletcherize.

At one point in life he and Cohen joined Scott Nearing and the Arden community and were in residence when Upton Sinclair and his wife came there to live with their son David. Caylor offered a scathing commentary on Sinclair's eating habits and marital relations.

Better World Philosophy as well as *The Universal Kinship* were published by Charles Kerr, a prominent Left publisher in Chicago and a firm very familiar to London (Kerr also published the *International Socialist Review,* edited by A. M. Simons, whom London met in 1906 and toured Chicago and the stockyards with, and routinely corresponded with); both books were reprinted in 1908 by Percy Sercombe's Chicago publishing firm, To-Morrow Publishing Company.[16] "Prof. J. Howard Moore would like very much to have you see his recent book `The Universal Kinship' and I should be particularly glad to have your opinion of it, if you think it worthwhile," wrote Kerr to London in March 1906. "I have an idea that the book is one that would really interest you, since in spite of its title it is thoroughly scientific."[17] A socialist, Moore most likely circulated in the politically active circles of Sercombe, Darrow, Oscar Lovell Triggs (and we remember from the previous chapter that both Darrow and Triggs were signatories to the founding documents of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society), Carl Sandburg, Jane Addams, and others and probably was in the audience of London's Chicago lectures. In his letter to Kerr, which was published as a book review in *To-Morrow,* the magazine

---

(George N. Caylor, *If My Memory Serves Me Right: The Autobiography of George N. Caylor,* pp. 136-37, folder 1, box 1, George N. Caylor Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, Wisc.)

[16] The connections among these cultural workers of Chicago and elsewhere are manifold and worth pointing out: Clarence Darrow was a regular contributor to Triggs and Sercombe's magazine, *To-Morrow.* For example, see Clarence S. Darrow, "Literary Style," *To-Morrow* 1 (Jan. 1905): n.p.

[17] Charles H. Kerr, letter to London, 6 Mar. 1906, JL 8730.

founded by Triggs and taken up by Sercombe, London wrote, "I do not know of any book dealing with Evolution that I have read with such keen interest," saying that he was finally able to comply with Kerr's request "after being thrown out of gear by the earthquake." He wrote notes for his letter to Kerr on the front matter of the book, suggesting that he had just finished reading the book.[18]

For London, however, the main intent of the book—to promulgate Darwinism in order to assert the equality of all animals to mankind—was less interesting than its discussion of past and future time. Serious scientists like August Weismann were acutely aware of how the study of evolution and heredity expanded scales of time and space; as Weismann concluded his *The Germ-Plasm,* "We are thus reminded afresh that we have to

---

[18] London, letter to Charles Kerr [?], 28 Apr. 1906, in David Mike Hamilton, *"The Tools of My Trade: The Annotated Books in Jack London's Library* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 208. See London, "Book Reviews: A Letter from Jack London," *To-Morrow* 2 (May 1906): n.p. I have not found this letter, though Hamilton says it is located in the Huntington Library archive. It was not included in *Letters.* The book was reviewed by Sercombe and Charles Sandburg as well. See Charles A. Sandburg, "Views and Reviews: Being Sidelights on Principles and Personalities," *To-Morrow* 2 (May 1906): n.p. Sandburg briefly noted that the book, as well as Moore's *Better World Philosophy* "are sure to prove interesting to all who hold that beautiful, simple idea denoted by the pretentious name of `cosmic consciousness.'" See also Parker H. Sercombe, "Universal Kinship," *To-Morrow* 2 (July 1906): n.p.: "The complete clearness and profound honesty of Mr. Moore in unifying all life including man is unique and worthy of the perusal of our most intelligent readers."

deal not only with the infinitely great, but also with the infinitely small; the idea of size is a purely relative one, and on either hand extends infinity."[19] Moore writes, while discussing evolution, "How hopelessly dependent we are upon the past, and how impossible it is to be really original! What the future will be depends upon what the present is, for the future will grow out of, and inherit, the present. What the present is depends upon what the past was, for the present has grown out of, and inherited, the past. And what the past was depends upon a remoter past from which it evolved, and so on. There is no end anywhere of dependence, either forward or backward. Every fact, from an idea to a sun, is *a contingent link in an eternal chain.*" (85). Man's place in this chain is a small one, a fact Moore insists on to reduce the egotism of humankind and inspire a broader ethical consideration of the rights of animals. "*Man* is *not* the *end,* he is but an *incident,* of the infinite elaborations of Time and Space" (319). A commonplace observation, albeit suffused with scientific veracity, it nevertheless confirmed London's ongoing cogitation about story writing as part of that "eternal chain."

He took notes in Moore's book for *Before Adam* and for something he called his "Far future book" (which would soon get the title *A Farthest Distant*).[20] At the same

---

[19] August Weismann, *The Germ-Plasm,* 468.

[20] I will return to this project, but for now I want to point out that when Moore discusses "The Earth an Evolution," that is, the inevitable change, decline, and extinction of the sun and earth, London marked these pages for "Far future book" (30-35). From Moore's discussion of geologic and anthropologic observations London garnered a sense of the infinity of time. It may not have been the first time he thought about the continuity of eternity, but now it was his central preoccupation.

time, he used it to create certain details. In one note for his novel, he wrote, "Old Folk, appearance—see "Kinship" p. 27" (JL 505). Another note reads, "p. 24 Kinship to show that they resembled microcephalous idiots—emphasize this idea" (JL 505). On page 24, he marked a quotation from Lester Ward in *Dynamic Sociology,* which ends, "The brain development [of "primitive man"] would perhaps be too low for the average of any existing tribe, and would correspond better with that of certain microcephalous idiots and cretins, of which the human race furnishes many examples." But the beginning of that same quotation may have furnished London with the idea to begin the novel with images: "`If before the appearance of man on the earth,' says Ward in his `Dynamic Sociology,' `an imaginary painter had visited it, and drawn a portrait embodying the thorax of the gibbon, the hands and feet of the gorilla, the form and skull of the chimpanzee, the brain development of the orang, and the countenance of *Semnopithecus,* giving to the whole of the average stature of all of these apes, the result would have been a being not far removed from out conception of the primitive man, and not widely different from the actual condition of certain low tribes of savages."[21] The "imaginary painter" easily becomes the former historical self who escapes from the germ plasm to paint the pictures

[21] J. Howard Moore, *The Universal Kinship* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1906), 24. A long section of this book is a popularization of Darwin, Huxley, and Haeckel (Herbert Spencer is mentioned once but not included in Moore's bibliography) and unfortunately affirms a number of now-discredited facets of evolutionary theory, most prominent being Haeckel's "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny." Although London too embraced this mistaken theory, it in no way invalidates his grasp of either the kinship of all animals or the significance of limitless time.

of primitive life that so torment the narrator. A definitional claim later in the book may have reinforced the idea to begin with pictures: Moore defines the imagination as "the picturing power of the mind" (199, 257). London's conception of the imagination was more capacious, but it could accommodate this general formulation. We will have to wait for a later chapter, when I discuss the relationships among film, photography, and writing, to think about what sort of pictures does the imagination rely on or create.

Moore's book may have laid the foundation for London's own inchoate, radical (at the time) ideas about the fair treatment of animals, ideas expressed in his stories featuring wolves, horses, leopards, dogs, and others, and thus was well-situated intellectually to agree with Moore. Moore wrote his book out of the realization that man was not sui generis, that he had not had "a unique and miraculous origin" (4), that their commonality of evolution made animals equals to man in many unrecognized and actively denied ways. Man "is a pain-shunning, pleaure-seeking, death-dreading organism, differing in particulars, but not in kind, from the pain-shunning, pleasure-seeking, death-dreading organisms below and around him." (5) Moore's "splendid, virile English" and "masterly knowledge of the subject" endeared this book to London, and as a result he marked it up heavily as he prepared to write *Before Adam.*

His first markings concern the orang, the chimpanzee, the gorilla, and the gibbon—their physical characteristics, especially their hair and skeleton, and their resemblance to "the lowest races of human beings." (18-26) Of course racism infiltrates this text, and London does not remark upon it. But he made a point of separating his protagonist from any association with the so-called lower races. In the middle of the comparison between humans and apes, London wrote, "Big tooth a Gibbon" next to

Moore's observation that "it is, at least, interesting that the orang and gibbon, who live in Asia and its islands, where the brachycephalic races of men supposedly arose, are themselves brachycephalic" (22). The gorilla, chimp, and black African humans, according to Moore, are all "dolichocephalic." (22). Still, the emphasis in both London and Moore is on the continuity between all apes and all humans, and when Moore writes, "Men and anthropoids live about the same number of years, both being toothless and wrinkled in old age," and "The hair on the upper arm and that on the forearm, in both anthropoids and men, point in opposite directions" (27) London double barred both, starred the latter passage in the margin, and wrote: "The one old one that looked like our gardener's grandfather. They were blood brothers in appearance—and no finer argument for the common origin." (27). This becomes, in chapter 15 of *Before Adam,* "Marrow-Bone was the only old member in the horde. Sometimes, on looking back upon him, when the vision of him is most clear, I note a striking resemblance between him and the father of my father's gardener" (BA, 194). In an earlier passage, Moore wrote, "In the manlike apes the large toe is opposable to the other four" (20), a characteristic Big Tooth singles out about his father. And Moore discusses atavisms briefly in an unmarked passage (46-47), unmarked probably because it was a concept London was already familiar with and didn't rely on Moore to create Red-Eye, the atavistic creature in *Before Adam.* In fact, in the long section entitled "Organic Evolution" London didn't bother marking a single line; he knew all this already.

The second section of *Universal Kinship* is a metaphysical claim that the "general similarity" of the nervous system of all vertebrates proves the similarity of their "mental constitution and experience" (111). "The jelly-fish and the philosopher are not mental

aliens," a line London underlined. (112). Thus Moore thought "physical evolution" substantiated "psychical evolution," another discredited material theory. One might think London skipped over this section, but, no, his interest in the psychical never flagged, and the pages of this section are as marked and underlined as the others. He picked and chose, of course, and when Moore wrote, "A struggle for existence is constantly going on, even among the words and grammatical forms of every language. The better, shorter, easier forms are constantly gaining the ascendency, and the longer and more cumbrous expressions grow obsolete" (116-17). Later in the chapter, when discussing the "vestigial instincts" (134) of donkeys, quails, dogs, and other animals, Moore connects these "useless and absurd" (134) instincts to "the vestigial parts of language," that is, the silent letters of human language. For Moore, *vestigial* had to retain its material denotation and not become metaphoric because he argued for the direct correspondence between physical and psychical evolution. London, for his part, marked the first passage on language because it coincided with his refutation of Herbert Spencer's *The Philosophy of Style* in "Phenomena of Literary Evolution." No matter that Spencer's theories of language seemed more in accordance with evolutionary theory, that is, that evolution moves toward complexity and heterogeneity. Moore, London, L. A. Sherman, and others saw the Machine Age demanding a speedier, homogeneous style, and because the Machine Age was so obviously an evolved form of human life its prose style must also be a product of evolution. The Machine Age may be a more complex time, but for London (and Moore) the hallmark of their age was speed and force, not multiplicity.

A long part of "Psychical Evolution" deals with the evolution of civilized man from "savage" man, a section one would expect to see heavily annotated; yet, he

seemingly sped through these pages because they simply affirmed what he had been writing since *The People of the Abyss* whenever he sought to deplore the supposed superiority of the modern-day capitalist to the more primitive civilizations like the Inuit or those he referenced in "Revolution." This is the beginning step in reading the "caveman" of "Revolution" and the Pleistocene era peoples of *Before Adam* as harbingers of the twentieth-century socialist. In fact, we might trace the origin of *Before Adam* to that subtle shift I discussed in chapter 15 from the First Peoples of *The People of the Abyss* to the "caveman" of "Revolution." It's also an anti-evolutionary stance, one might say, but it served London politically in a way that Moore was either unaware of or resistant to. That is, to say uniquivocally that humankind was evolving emotionally and intellectually was impossible if the highest form of human social development was understood to be the cooperative commonwealth based on altruistic, not profit, motive.

Yet in a passage marked by London and then indexed by him in the back matter, Moore asserts "altruism is older than the mountains, and selfishness hardened the living heart before the continents were lifted" (142). Moore's understanding of evolutionary theory is and is not teleological. The worm and the child and the primitive cannot think or feel the "higher emotions" (138); the twentieth-century human lives as the end product of both psychical and physical evolution. "The human soul is the blossom, not the beginning, of psychic evolution," says Moore in the same passage (142), and the corollary is that "non-human beings have souls," too, meaning that they possess "joys and sorrows, desires and capabilities, similar to our own" (146). At the same time, to counter idea of the divine origin of humanity, Moore has to assert that what we feel and think is similar to what the Bone Age humans felt and thought. There is both continuity

and progress: “How did Darwin’s dog know his master on his master’s return from a five-years’ trip around the world?” says Moore (143), and London double marked this passage because, as I said in the last chapter, it resonated so much with his own experience that he used it as a prompt to write “Brown Wolf.”[22]

To return to his thoughts about a novel of the Pleistocene: London next marked a passage on “the anthropoid races.” Not surprisingly, if one has followed Moore even inattentively, “they have the same emotions and the same ways of expressing those emotions as human beings have” (147). What a relief for the novelist writing of a time that might seem too foreign to re-create, a time about which there is so little information. Here is the fact to underpin the fiction, the science to dispense with magical thinking.

The third and final section of *The Universal Kinship,* “The Ethical Kinship,” is unannotated and carried little interest for London. Instead, he continued to draw on his science library and pulled August Weismann’s *Essays upon Heredity* from his shelf (or his memory) as he made notes for the novel. Weismann, like Moore, was a zoologist, but he also had expertise in botany, and his work still stands as an original contribution to evolutionary theory. He was friends with and corresponded with Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Ernst Haeckel, and others even though he stood apart from them on key issues like the inheritance of acquired characteristics. But they all pursued the underlying causes of heredity, and all posited a cellular-level agent. Weismann’s concept of the germplam competed with Charles Darwin’s gemmules, Spencer’s units, and Haeckel’s plastidules or

---

[22] In the previous sentence, Moore wrote, “Art is largely a manifestation of sex, and it is about as old and about as persistent as this venerable impulse” (143). London disagreed: all art is political in nature, he argued, as we saw in the previous chapter.

cell nucleus. And though "Haeckel was the first biologist to identify the nucleus as the repository of the hereditary substance," "Weismann's elaborated theory, inevitably insufficient, was a brilliantly conceived prototype of the modern conception of the systological and molecular basis of development."[23] As historians of science like Robert J. Richards and Mark Francis redeem through careful archival analysis the work of early evolutionary theorists like Haeckel and Spencer, London's own engagement with their work becomes more sensible and laudatory.[24] He even sent Haeckel a copy of *Before Adam,* who then replied by postcard: "Best thanks for your interesting book `Before Adam.'"[25] Spencer, Haeckel, Weismann, and others were the initial proponents of

---

[23] Robert J. Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 123; Joseph A. Mazzeo, introduction to August Weismann, *Essays up Heredity and Kindred Biological Problems,* trans. Arthur E. Shipley et al. (1889; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), [iii]. See August Weismann, *The Germ-Plasm: A Theory of Heredity,* trans. W. Newton Parker and Harriet Rönnfeldt (London: Walter Scott, 1893), 19.

[24] See Mark Francis, *Herbert Spencer.* For a typically dismissive treatment of Spencer in London studies, see Jeanne Campbell Reesman, *Jack London's Racial Lives: A Critical Biography* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 49, where she approvingly quotes Richard Hofstadter's assessment of Spencer: "`the metaphysician of the homemade intellectual . . . widely read by persons who were partly or largely self-educated.'"

[25] Ernst Haeckel, postcard to London, 7 July 1907, pasted inside front cover of London's personal copy of *Before Adam,* HL 5714, HEH. Another European writer,

"organic memory theory, which proposed that memory and heredity were essentially the same and that one, inherited memories from ancestors along with their physical features." We know this theory to be at best incomplete, but, as historian of science Laura Otis writes, this "wrong" theory is fascinating because it took memory out of the metaphysical realm and made it material or *"knowable."*[26] London's intellectual pursuit of the nature and meaning of memory, convinced as he was that it was somehow related to the imagination, follows exactly the history of the theory of organic memory that Otis outlines. From Darwin, Spencer, and Haeckel to Freud and Jung, European thinkers—so very influential in the US—sought to answer the fundamental question of "how does the past live in us?"[27] For London, to answer this question meant he might find an answer to a central question of his authorial life: how do I live with these haunting memories inside me?

In several letters written in the summer of 1899, as I discussed at the beginning of the chapter and in chapter 15, London told his friend Cloudesley Johns that he was

---

George Bernard Shaw, was a fan of the book as well; he was quoted in the *New York Times,* "I see that Jack London has written a book full of interest, entitled `Before Adam.'" It's a mere mote of a notice, but it indicates how widely read, and by whom, London was read (*New York Times,* 4 May 1907, clipping in London, scrapbook, vol. 8). Shaw's interest is of particular note given his influence on London's playwriting and, indirectly, on *The Iron Heel,* as we see in chapter 19.

[26] Laura Otis, *Organic Memory: History and the Body in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 2-3.

[27] Ibid., 2.

reading and promoting Weismann's essays from *Essays upon Heredity and Kindred Biological Problems.* London may have turned to Weismann a few months after reading his former teacher David Starr Jordan's book *Foot-notes to Evolution*.[28] This book is the

---

[28] See London, letter to Johns, [30] Apr. 1899, *Letters,* 1:72. Jeanne Campbell Reesman is more certain that London found Weismann in Jordan's book, though *Foot-notes to Evolution* (ironically) contains neither a footnote to Weismann nor a mention of a specific title anywhere in the text. So, London may have heard of Weismann first when he read Jordan, but he certainly had to go elsewhere to discover which book of Weismann's to read. Reesman also makes two patently untrue claims that (a) "London supplemented [Weismann's theory of "sudden reappearance of lost types"] with Jordan's notion of `memory-pictures' to describe race memories, [(b)] an atavistic feature." Jordan uses the term *memory-pictures* once and only to describe what one sees with one's mind's eye when we remember a past, forgotten event in one's own life; nowhere does Jordan connect this to a memory from a previous existence (something he would most likely dismiss as metaphysical), and London does not define his narrator's memories of his life as Big-Tooth as atavistic. He says that these memories are "vestigial" (18), that we all have them in some degree or other, that we all harbor this "other-personality," but that because "my other-personality is almost equal in power with my own personality . . . I am . . . a freak of heredity. . . . an atavistic nightmare." (18, 20). See Jeanne Campbell Reesman, *Jack London's Racial Lives: A Critical Biography* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 45.

source of London's weakly committed-to position as a "materialistic monist"[29] (a philosophical identity he learned from both Jordan and Haeckel) that "the final test of truth is this: `Can we make it work? Can we trust our lives to it?'"[30] Logically, Jordan set aside metaphysics as a serious field of inquiry. Citing William James's definition of metaphysics as "the persistent attempt to think clearly," Jordan asserts that science makes the same attempt but that metaphysics deals only with "fields where exact data are unattained or unattainable" and thus, foundationless, unreliable for truth-claims. London used Jordan's scientific philosophy to protect himself from the obvious metaphysical presence of the imagination, insisting to the public that he had no room for doubt about ontological or phenomenological matters all the while suffering from that which could not be seen but that tortured his inner life. London's scientific materialism is but a failed bulwark against the metaphysical imagination. Could he trust his life to it? It was a question he had to answer daily, exhaustingly, and, exhausted by his continuous battle with his interior life, later in life he had to abandon the Jordanesque scientific realism.

But Jordan outlined the history and development of evolutionary theory in his work and provided London with a useful intellectual framework. Though Jordan

---

[29] London, letter to Fannie K. Hamilton, 15 July 1906, *Letters,* 2:590: "The idealists and all the rest of the metaphysicians have vainly struggled to win me." He was not an idealist, but out of his fear of being mistaken for one—especially after writing a modern-day ghost story like "Planchette"—he insisted on his materialistic philosophy, an overdetermined assertion if there ever was one.

[30] David Starr Jordan, *Foot-notes to Evolution: A Series of Popular Addresses on the Evolution of Life* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1898), 342.

discussed the debate between Haeckel and Weismann concerning the inheritance of acquired characteristics, he remained agnostic, waiting for further evidence. But London was convinced from the very beginning of the central contribution of Weismann's work: "He has struck a heavy blow to the accepted idea of acquired characters being inherited."[31] From London's point of view, Weismann's initial acknowledgement and then dismissal of Spencer's *Principles of Biology* must have proved a landmark in his thought, a move from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. This was intellectual advancement. Weismann, unlike Spencer, could be trusted as a scientific source. Like Hudson's discussion of self-hypnotism, Weismann's concept of the germ plasm provided him with a tool to enter the prehistoric world and provide continuity between it and the Machine Age.[32]

In his letters to Johns, London, we saw, accurately described the import of Weismann's work. In his fiction, however, he deliberately turns Weismann into a neo-Lamarckian, as if he really did think that "Reverend John Creedy" or "The

---

[31] Jack London, letter to Cloudesley Johns, 24 Aug. 1899, *Letters,* 1:106.

[32] C. W. Saleeby discusses Spencer, Haeckel, and Weismann in his *Evolution: The Master-Key: A Discussion of the Principle of Evolution as Illustrated in Atoms, Stars, Organic Species, Mind, Society and Morals* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1906). Although London recommended this work (as well as Saleeby's *The Cycle of Life*) to Blanche Partington, with whom he argued about Christian Science for years, and he and Charmian read it out loud in 1906, he doesn't seem to have read it past page 47, where the pages of his copy remain uncut in places. See London, letter to Blanche Partington, 12 Dec. 1907, *Letters,* 2:721.

Churchwarden's Brother" or "The Curate of Churnside" were Weismannian. Thus, in his notes for *Before Adam,* he writes, "Introduction Weismann's `Continuity of the Germ-Plasm—immortality—containing the racial memory. a freak in me." In the introductory chapters of his novel, the narrator marshalls Weismann to prove that he "in this one thing, [is] to be considered a freak. Not alone do I possess racial memory to an enormous extent, but I possess the memories of one particular and far-removed progenitor." (19-20) The claim that he can relive the life of a particular person from the Mid-Pleistocene is of course the doorway from science to fiction, but the narrator insists that Weismann, not he, is responsible. "Follow my reasoning," he says, but his first assertion is already on shaky ground: "An instinct is a racial memory. Very good. Then you and I and all of us receive these memories from our fathers and mothers, as they received them from their fathers and mothers. Therefore there must be a medium whereby these memories are transmitted from generation to generation. This medium is what Weismann terms the `germplasm." It carries the memories of the whole evolution of the race." (20) But nowhere in Weismann does he use the word *memory,* and nowhere does he assert that selfhood—however primitive—is inherited.[33] In fact, in "The Duration of Life," Weismann says that from generation to generation "that which persists, is not the individual itself,--not the complex aggregate of cells which is conscious of itself,--but an

[33] Nowhere in Frederick Churchill's intellectual biography of Weismann does the phrase *racial memory* appear. See Frederick B. Churchill, *August Weismann: Development, Heredity, and Evolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015).

individuality which is outside its consciousness, and of a low order."[34] Weismann was concerned with ontogeny and the discovery of the mechanisms of heredity. In this way, we see *Before Adam* as science fiction, that is, as a fictional genre dependent on scientific fact for plot development and denouement. We can also see it as a precursor to science fiction in the sense of positing a future human environment, thus connecting it to the next novel he would write, *The Iron Heel.*[35] For our discussion of the present novel, however,

---

[34] August Weismann, "The Duration of Life," *Essays upon Heredity and Kindred Biological Problems,* 33.

[35] Nicholas Ruddick argues that the genres prehistoric fiction (pf) and science fiction (sf) are "fraternal twins, born from the marriage of science and the speculative imagination" (Nicholas Ruddick, *The Fire in the Stone: Prehistoric Fiction from Charles Darwin to Jean M. Auel* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2009), 3. Oddly, Ruddick does not mention Weismann; instead, focusing on the fact that London sent a copy of *Before Adam* to Ernst Haeckel, he discusses why Haeckel's work appealed to London. But London was not a Haeckelian recapitulationist, and thus Haeckel has no place in *Before Adam.* More distressing, Ruddick falls into the biographical trap and reads *Before Adam* and *The Star Rover* as autobiography: "Jack London did not write pf primarily out of intellectual curiosity about our evolutionary past; he was compelled to do so out of personal, emotional reasons. . . . His resort to prehistory was, as it was for his protagonist Darrell Standing in his last major novel *The Star Rover* (1915), a desparate path to self-knowledge by a man straightjacketed by society and condemned to death by his own self-destructive heredity," meaning his alcoholism. (45).

as we will see, this deliberate misuse of Weismann is a way for London to turn the story into a tale based not only on evolutionary science but on psychology as well.

The mix of these two broad social scientific fields isn't idiosyncratic to London. We often think of narratives of prehistoric times as necessarily growing out of the fields of archaeology, anthropology, or sociology. We need to remember that men like Moore considered psychology an equally apt science to understand the evolution of human behavior and that it was only because it was in its infancy that we so poorly understood our barely erect ancestors. "The data of mental evolution," wrote Moore, "are not quite so definite and plentiful as those of physical evolution. But this is due to the greater intangibility of mental phenomena and to the backward condition of the psychological sciences, especially of comparative psychology" (144). We remember London's observations of the Holy Jumpers and how they provided him with a window into ancient religious observances. Just as London relied on evolutionary theory for the writing of *Before Adam,* he was equally interested in employing theories from comparative psychology. The former gave him access to prehistoric times and its description. The latter gave him a way to better understand the origins and nature of his own imagination.

Governeur Morris's 1904 novel *Pagan's Progress*—a title, like *Before Adam,* that alludes to the superfluity of Christianity in understanding the origins of humans—gave London an example of how to embed modern psychology in a prehistoric narrative. Morris imagines his cave people dreaming, but they dream "about the ancient ages when they had not been men; of long, cool leaps from tree to tree; of feet that had the grip of strong hands, and of the great fear that had driven them to become men—fear of the other

beasts, fear of the night."[36] If emotion drove evolution, then psychology had to play a part in the recovery of what prehistoric man was and what his progenitors were. Further, the relationship—if one dares use such an anachronism in the style of Waterloo—between She Wolf and No Man is built on sadomasochism. He beats her and she loves the blows because he was dominant and from time to time cared for her in a way no one had. Like Waterloo's claim about class, Morris may be claiming that men beat their women in the twentieth century because it succeeded as an early evolutionary tool for reproduction; thus, one could argue, a wife-beater is simply repeating early human behavior and is not at fault. This kind of claim would also be abhorrent to London. Finally, London would have found the main character in *The Pagan's Progress* interesting because he is an artist. No Man is called by that name because he would not hunt or make weapons. He draws pictures on bones, scratching out whole narratives and must live on charity. But he is an unattractive figure and is killed half way through by Strong Hand, whom No Man manages to kill as he himself dies. Their two women live together until Maku goes off and leaves her child with She Wolf and her child. The two children grow up together and plan to live in a cave together, that is, get married, have children, and perpetuate the species. But Dawn is kidnapped by a nameless member of the tribe, and Sunrise her mate chases them down and kills the man, but not before Dawn dies alone from the beatings her captor inflicted. Sunrise returns to find her dead and regrets going after the man, and the naturalistic tale of love among the bones ends. It's certainly more like the love story

---

[36] Gouverneur Morris, *The Pagan's Progress* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1904), 52. Inscribed by Austin Lewis: "To Jack the Fighter from a Brother in Arms Austin Lewis Sept. 1904." The book was published in September 1904.

that London initially wanted *Before Adam* to be. But if Morris had portrayed the first bohemian in a more favorable light, the novel may have had more of an influence on London.

There are two more sources London drew on that we need to discuss before we turn to the composition of the novel: one a textbook and one a novel. "`Anthropology' Language pp. 116-117." This citation in London's notes for *Before Adam* refers to Edward B. Tylor's *Anthropology,* a textbook to a relatively new field of academic endeavor by one who is sometimes called "a `father of anthropology.'"[37] Tylor held the first chair in anthropology at Oxford University. Moore cites this work, though London may have found it on his own. London obviously was looking for scientific information to tell him how his characters may have communicated with each other, but the two pages he refers to—and which he marked in the margins—are basic information that a lay person could convey: humans commonly use hand gestures to convey meaning, and, not surprisingly, this is how "savages"—Native Americans, the indigenous peoples of Australia and Africa, and others less technically sophisticated than twentieth-century Western peoples—communicate exclusively. Sign or gestural language is not an artificial construct of our era but rather a timeless mode of expression, writes Tylor, and when it is combined with imitative or gesture sounds we have what Tylor (but not Ludwig Wittgenstein) calls "Natural Language." Natural Language is "the common language of all mankind, springing so directly from the human mind that it must have belonged to our

---

[37] George W. Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 299.

race from the most remote ages and most primitive conditions in which man existed."[38] London could easily imagine it to have been in use in the Bone Age.

The second source, familiar to London scholars, is Stanley Waterloo's novel *The Story of Ab.* Although it neither appears in his notes nor is marked more than once in the margins of his copy, *The Story of Ab* provided London with a kind of limit case or perhaps experimental piece of writing against which he could measure his own work. London may have read it as early as 1899,[39] and it gave him a jumping off point, a

---

[38] Edward B. Tylor, *Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilization* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1897), 122.

[39] See London, letter to Cloudesley Johns, 17 Apr. 1899, *The Letters from Jack London,* 1:62. Johns had sent him a review of the novel, and London replied that the mother of Ab "must have been" "a delightful, fascinating woman," though why he says this is unclear. Also, the past perfect tense doesn't necessarily indicate that he actually read the novel; he may have deduced Red-Spot's excellence (or his ironic appreciation of it) from the review. After being accused of plagiarism, he recalled that he had read the novel in 1900; in a funny yet angry letter to *Life,* in response to a request to tell America what book in 1906 had "instructed me most, entertained me most, and inspired me most," he nominated *The Story of Ab* because the papers had said so. In a postscript he says, "Oh,--I made a mistake. I have just recollected that it was six years ago that I read the *Story of* Ab" (London, letter to the editor, *Life,* 15 Dec. 1906, *Letters,* 2:651). In an equally double-edged fashion, Waterloo replied a week later to the same request, saying that *White Fang* was his choice: "The work is in no way inspiring, of course, but to me it was mightily interesting" (Stanley Waterloo, letter to *Life,* 21 Mar. 1907, in London,

prompt. It's a kind of literary companion who tells London how not to tell his story and thus points the way for his imagination to explore. It's a different sort of reading from that he did in *Universal Kinship* and *The Germ-Plasm,* not a search for factual material or philosophical foundations or justifications, but rather an overture to a potential literary younger friend to establish a relationship that would be mutually beneficial. This supposition of mine partially explains the pique he displayed when he was accused by Waterloo of plagiarism. "I wrote *Before Adam* as a reply to the *Story of Ab,* because I considered the latter unscientific."[40] I don't think that statement is entirely accurate, and we can see how London is codifying his relationship to *The Story of Ab* to eliminate any ambiguity of his friendly relations to that text.

Initially, and while writing *Before Adam,* he felt a filial relationship to the novel that had preceded his (and the other prehistoric novel that he had read, Morris's *The Pagan's Progress*). London obviously borrowed certain plot devices from Waterloo: the killing of an attacking animal by humans hanging down from a tree (hyena in Waterloo, boar in London); the friendship and adventurous journey of two young males (Oak and Ab in Waterloo, Big-Tooth and Lop-Ear in London); and the layout of a habitation protected by fire (Waterloo) made into a habitation by people who knew how to make fire (London). In his notes he contemplated, "They got an elephant by frightening over a

---

scrapbook, vol. 8, reel 5). London also read another novel by Waterloo, *A Man and a Woman.* See London, letter to Johns, 10 Mar. 1900, *Letters,* 1:168-69. He thought it good.

[40] London, letter to B. W. Babcock, 3 Dec. 1906, *Letters,* 2:644. See B. W. Babcock, letter to London, 27 Nov. 1906, JL 2069.

cliff," an event that would have been similar to one in *The Story of Ab;* Waterloo has his people frighten a mammoth over a cliff. The first knowledge of bows and arrows, the move from life in the trees to life in the caves, the domestication of dogs, the discovery of fire all are events that overlap between the two novels, as well as any history of the Paleolithic that the two authors would have read. London even borrowed the idea of including a map of the area where his people live, though Jack's is more detailed.

Still, this is hardly plagiarism. And, when London wrote to a reporter from the *New York Times* about the case, he grasped the significant and defining difference between the two works: "I tried to reproduce the primitive world in an artistic form, which same Mr. Waterloo did not do. His whole story is full of meat, and interesting; yet, through the use of an awkward form, Mr. Waterloo failed to create the convincing illusion that is proper to any work of fiction."[41] It is the same objection he made to William H. Dall's criticism of his treatment of northern Native American life.[42] That is, unlike Waterloo and Dall, London does not wear his science on his sleeve.

Waterloo professes to have relied on the most up-to-date, accurate information about life in the Stone Age, so great detail is spent on dress, meals, and other daily activities. He wants to teach his audience about the Paleolithic Age by relying on the best research in evolutionary science. He even makes an argument that the transition between the Paleolithic Age and the Neopaleolithic Age was much more indistinguishable than previous research had thought. But he is not interested in the evolutionary development of the mind and emotions, and so the psychological dimension, so predominant in *Before*

---

[41] London, letter to B. W. Babcock, 3 Dec. 1906, *Letters,* 644.

[42] See volume 1, 411.

Adam, is completely absent in *The Story of Ab.* Further, Waterloo routinely employs language from his age either to describe what plot developments take place ("the aristocracy of the time had gone to sleep" [25]) or to compare his age to the Stone Age ("there was no formal naming of a child in those days" [30]). In this way, Waterloo makes the cave people familiar, palatable, and understandable. So, again, unlike in *Before Adam,* the absorptive state of reading—what London calls the "illusion"—is interrupted continuously, as if Waterloo were periodically shining the light of 1897 into the eyes of a reader trying to become engrossed in the long past. One never really settles into the lives of his characters.

The one mark in London's copy of the novel is significant because it defines another major difference between his work and Waterloo's. There is a question mark in the margin in pencil next to these lines: "She was a female Esau of the time, just a great, good-hearted, strong and honest cave girl, of the subordinate and obedient class which began thousands of years before did history, one who recognized in the girl who stood beside her a stronger and dominating spirit, and who had been received as a trusted friend and willing assistant. . . . Her name was Moonface."[43] London's question mark, I believe,

---

[43] Stanley Waterloo, *The Story of Ab: A Tale of the Time of the Cave Man* (Chicago: Way and Williams, 1897), 72. It's also possible that the question mark signals a different interest (either separate from or in addition to that concerning class). London's collection of short stories *Moon-Face* would come out in the fall of 1906, but the short story "Moon-Face" was written in 1902 and has nothing to do with prehistoric fiction. The narrator may be insane, however, and in this way it may have been linked to *Story of Ab* and the planning and writing of *Before Adam* in London's mind. Also, weirdly enough,

is more of an exclamation of surprise, consternation, and disagreement: What? does he really mean to say that class structure existed then and that an "honest cave girl" necessarily would be a member of the Stone Age working class?! How repellent to London it would been to have someone justifying the concept of class on evolutionary, not a socioeconomic grounds. Waterloo's nineteenth-century concept of class was foreign to London's experience, intellectuality, and sensibility.

London may have borrowed one other plot feature from another writer, H. G. Wells; Wells, incidentally, was a friend of Grant Allen and Joseph Conrad and was familiar with the work of Edward Tylor, thus reminding us that London not only was exceptionally well read in the popular literature of both America and England (was there anyone of his generation better read?) but also was a virtual member of their circle, and they of his. In his letter to Waterloo, responding to the charge of plagiarism, London cites Wells, Andrew Lang, and Rudyard Kipling as three authors he, and, presumably Waterloo, was familiar with.[44] When George Sterling sent his friend his assessment of the

---

Moon Face is the name of "the richest man in the tribe" in Gouverneur Morris's *The Pagan's Progress.* His white whiskers encircled his baboonlike face.

[44] See London, letter to Waterloo, 20 Oct. 1906, *Letters,* 2:623-25. The editors of *Letters* suggest that Kipling's works that London intends were two short stories, "How the First Letter Was Written" and "How the Alphabet Was Made"; certainly London read those, but, given that London's primary interest in Kipling's work was his poetry—see volume 1 of the current work—then it's more likely London is referring to poems like "The Story of Ung" and "In the Neolithic Age." See Richard

manuscript shortly after it was written, he assumed London was as familiar with Wells as he was with Waterloo.[45] We don't know if Wells, Lang, and Kipling were indeed direct influences on *Before Adam,* but Wells's novella "A Story of the Stone Age" is interesting for three reasons. First, Wells is the only socialist who wrote prehistoric fiction before London. Second, the novella is, as Ruddick says, the "junior companion" to "A Story of the Days to Come," a dystopic story; they were paired in the 1899 volume *Tales of Space and Time.* By pairing *Before Adam* and *The Iron Heel,* London may have been mimicking Wells. Third, in "A Story of the Stone Age," Wells imagines a fight between a progressive (Ugh-lomi) and an atavistic caveman (Uya) over a woman (Eudena), a fight that gets reenacted in *Before Adam* between Big-Tooth and Red-Eye over Swift-One. Wells also emphasizes the importance of rivers as a mode not simply of travel but of evolutionary progress, he emphasizes the origin of fear in the darkness that hides carnivores, and he uses the term *squatting-place,* three thematic and rhetorical items present in *Before Adam.* Wells also imagines that his characters dream and that in their dreaming they can imagine things that then help them in their waking lives; thus does

---

Pearson, "Primitive Modernity: H. G. Wells and the Prehistoric Man of the 1890s," *Yearbook of English Studies* 37, no. 1 (2007): 58-74.

[45] Though later in the year when the novel was being serialized, after declaring *Before Adam* a poor work of literature in a number of letters, Sterling tells London to read "A Story of the Stone Age" to see how London should have written the novel. And then he added, "I'm wondering what Wells will think of `Everybody's' impudent (or ignorant) assumption of your pioneership in the fiction of the primitive" (Sterling, letter to London, 28 Sept. 1906, JL 19058).

Ugh-lomi figure out how to create a stone axe. But there are many differences, including Wells's inexplicable decision to re-create the interior monologue of Andoo the cave bear and other animals, making the novella more of a Kiplingesque animal story or YA novel than any of its brethren.

The Red Atavism

London boiled all his reading—except perhaps Waterloo—down to a few short paragraphs in the frame story.[46] "For your convenience," the narrator says, addressing his audience directly, as if he were a mesmerist setting his audience's minds in the proper orientation—that is, susceptible to his suggestions—"since this is to be no sociological screed, I shall frame together the different events into a comprehensive story."[47] As a side note, we might expect a different word than *convenience,* something more like *entertainment;* but part of the mission of this author is to instruct his readers, though in a much more subtle fashion than Waterloo's. To explain how an author might know what early humans and their environment were like—even if it means perverting Weismann—allows London to combine the two sciences of heredity and psychology. This combination, which no other author creates, is London's major contribution to the genre of prehistoric fiction. Waterloo, Wells, and Morris all use the third-person point of view,

---

[46] London used other sources for the novel, which I have not been able to track down. For example, one note says "p. 82-tree-dwellers"; no source I looked at discusses tree-dwellers on page 82. Another note reminds him to consult page 14 of an unknown book in reference to making the illustrations not too human.

[47] London, *Before Adam* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1908), 24.

and we feel the loss of absorption that we feel when reading *Before Adam.*[48] It doesn't matter if the explanation is unconvincing. London isn't teaching a seminar; he is writing a novel. Thus when George Sterling read the manuscript and objected to the novel, saying that "your opening chapters are so far from convincing (I hate to use that *word* on you!) that I think you'd better have left our all explanations, and approached the theme as Wells or Waterloo did," he misses the point.[49] The explanations are there to tell us about the character of the narrator, not to teach us about heredity and evolution. Still, the opening chapters will make us think about the two sciences that London has combined, innovatively. Even in his most absorptive work there lurks an element of the theatrical. As we shall see, and as I hinted at before, he hides his radical politics in the story as well.

We know that this solicitous attitude of the narrator to the audience is one of London's earliest formulations. His originary notes for the story say, "Maybe utilize this as a medium to tell a very ancient life—and love tale make it as primitive as possible—when man was in earliest stages—part ape—The narrator has inherited memory to an unusual degree—and remembers dreams after he wakes. Most primitive life, wooing, and

---

[48] Wells exhibits a more intimate relationship to his readers than either Waterloo or Morris, who sound like lecturers, Waterloo more than Morris. Wells, when describing how Eudena feels climbing out of a tree she had spent an entire night in, is "stiff, but not so stiff as you would have been dear young lady," assuming, perhaps correctly, that he is read mainly by young women (H. G. Wells, "A Story of the Stone Age," *Tales of Space and Time* [London and New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1900], 72).

[49] George Sterling, letter to London, 7 July 1906, JL 19049.

tragedy. Sometimes one dream, sometimes another—but pieces together from the different dreams a fairly comprehensive story. And yet the whole thing vague while the parts are vividly concrete. He argues his explanation of it by inherited memory—(instinct) to a remarkable degree. He tells it as a written narrative—writes it himself."[50] We don't know what the "this" is in "maybe utilize this," for the notes were attached to a piece of writing—perhaps a book page, or a newspaper, or a magazine story—and now separated from it. But whatever "this" was, in his mind it would work as a "medium," a word that could direct us in two ways. First, *medium* might denote the form the story would take, a frame story. Second, it could denote a spirit medium, like his mother; Flora being the first storyteller he knew, he might hae retained the dual concept of storyteller/medium that his mother embodied. It is noteworthy that for the first week of April (and the first week of the composition of the novel) Charmian read and corrected proof of "Planchette" (with Jack, I imagine, answering any questions); and we will remember that this long short story was an earlier fictional text that allowed London to combine evolutionary science with psychology and that it is focused on the machinations of a spiritual medium. In fact, the story was suggested by an incident involving Charmian's aunt, Ninetta, and London and her husband, also a spiritualist, argued about metaphysical subjects in the evenings of days during which London wrote *Before Adam*.[51]

---

[50] London, "Before Adam: [notes for novel]," JL 505, box 37, HEH.

[51] See Charmian London, 15 May 1906, diary, JL 217: "After supper, great discussion on Immortality between Jack and Edward." And again on 24 May: "Big discussion in evening-Edward and Mate."

Either way, the meaning is clear: the story is channeled, coming from the imagination through the medium (of text or person) and to the reader. Note the emphasis on the narrator as author. The narrator not only tells his story of his previous life as a caveman. He not only frames that story with the psycho-scientific explanation "of the meaning of the things I know so well." (2) To do so he must choose among his dream visions, ordering them, editing them, and giving them the proper descriptive language in order to transform the "screaming incoherence" of a "vast phantasmagoria" into a coherent narrative.[52] We even have the first false poet, Big-Tooth's step-father who is called the Chatterer. Here then we return to that familiar triumvirate of London's authorial construction: the author-figure, the haunting imagination, and the reader entering the author's world as if a participant in one of Flora Wellman's séances. For the roots of modern-day psychology that London found in works like Hudson's showed him how spiritism—however questionable it was as a methodology to expose human consciousness—existed on a continuum with a science he could put his faith in. London evokes the science of psychology in which he was learning, blurs it, and then uses it as a frame to make the narrative of adventure even more stark and appealing.

For adventure is a keynote of *Before Adam,* a word that we find in the unattributed, and therefore unusual, epigraph: "`These are our ancestors, and their history is our history. Remember that as surely as we one day swung down out of the trees and walked upright, just as surely, on a far earlier day, did we crawl up out of the sea and achieve our first adventure on land.'" Who could its author be who so acutely forecasted the content of this new novel? Why, the author of the new novel himself! It is in fact a

---

[52] London, *Before Adam,* 2.

passage from *The Kempton-Wace Letters,* the epistolatory discussion of the nature of love. Herbert Wace, the economics doctoral student, tells Kempton, the poet, that to understand the nature of love one must "follow me down and under the phenomena of love to things sexless and loveless."[53] One must begin at the very beginning and ask, with Herbert Spencer, What is life? Or, in Spencer's own words, "What distinguishes Life in general?"[54] Though we may laugh at Wace's sententiousness, he dares to define love in

---

[53] Jack London and Anna Strunsky, *The Kempton-Wace Letters* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1903), 110.

[54] Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology,* 2 vols. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1870), 293. Spencer repeats and enlarges on his maxim in two other works: *Principles of Biology,* 1:99, and *First Principles,* 4th ed. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1898), 86. London may have run across the maxim and its discussion in one or all of these; his copies of Spencer's works are now lost. But it is worth noting that when London wrote to Johns in March 1900, six months before beginning *The Kempton-Wace Letters,* he paraphrased part of the table of contents from *First Principles* to lecture Johns on his lack of foundational concepts: "To be well fitted for the tragedy of existence (intellectual existence), one must have a working philosophy, a synthesis of things. Have you a synthesis of things? . . . Or do you not rather build with a hazy idea of `to hell with the foundation.' In token of this: What significance do the following generalities have for you:--Matter is indestructible; motion is continuous; Force is persistent; the relations among forces are persistent; the transformation of forces is the equivalence of forces; etc. etc?" (London, letter to Johns, 15 Mar. 1900, *Letters,* 1:170). The table of contents for chapters 1 through 7

terms of the reproduction of "unicellular organisms. Such a creature is a tiny cell, capable of performing in itself all the functions of life." It is able, "as Herbert Spencer says . . . `to adjust the inner relations with outer relations,' to correspond to its environment—in short, to live." From that single cell life moves to multicellular organisms until we get to "the jelly-like organism [that] develops a bony structure, muscles by which to move itself, and a nervous system . . ." Wace breaks off his narrative of evolution——to say to Kempton, "Be not bored, Dane, and be not offended. These are our ancestors, and their history is our history," and so on with the rest of the epigraph.[55]

One might think that Spencer's influence on London continued from when he first read him to now, in 1906. But this narrative of evolution that Wace intones was a narrative told by more scientists and social scientists at this time than Spencer, and we have to remember that even in *The Kempton-Wace Letters* the name of Spencer and his definition of life (which significantly is not a part of the epigraph to *Before Adam*) tells us

---

of *First Principles* reads: "1. Philosophy Defined; 2. The Data of Philosophy; 3. Space, Time, Matter, Motion, and Force; 4. The Indestructibility of Matter; 5. The Continuity of Motion; 6. The Persistence of Force; 7. The Persistence of the Relations Among Forces" (Spencer, *First Principles,* xxiii). Obviously he was picking and choosing what he needed from Spencer because he had largely dismissed Spencer's arguments about the inheritance of acquired characteristics. As a side note in the history of ideas, Francis argues against calling Spencer a neo-Lamarckian; see Francis, *Herbert Spencer,* 387 n. 110, though he does so without referencing the inheritance of acquired characteristics.

[55] London and Strunsky, *The Kempton-Wace Letters,* 111.

more about the character of Wace than it does the intellectual influences upon London. We saw him do this with Spencer's *The Philosophy of Style,* and we'll see him do it again in his next novel, *The Iron Heel,* and in *Martin Eden.* This was a pattern with London, to play with Spencer's name and quotations as if they were intellectual markers but without any real investment in the actual ideas; sometimes the play involves attributing the ideas of certain thinkers he has repudiated to fictional characters. Remember, it was already in 1899 that he had read Weismann and by now his political education was developed enough to see Spencer as a reactionary. The epigraph to *Before Adam* is thus meant as a reminder of the generic narrative of man's evolution from ocean to trees to savannah to city. To the careful (perhaps obsessive) reader of London it is a reminder that there is an intellectual continuity from his past works to his present; perhaps his audience had forgotten this, distracted as they had been by stories of the Northland, by *The Call of the Wild, The Sea-Wolf, The Game,* and *White Fang*—unless they had been affected by the presence of the primitive in all those works. Or if they had received the letter that Waterloo received after accusing London of plagiarism: "You say that you worked fifteen long years. How long do you think I have been working in my study of science? Read my *Kempton-Wace Letters,* my *Call of the Wild,* my *War of the Classes,* (especially these three)—read everything I've written, and you will find that I am firmly grounded—not in Stanley Waterloo—but in the same scientific writers that Stanley Waterloo is grounded in."[56]

Further, it is odd for him to create the expectation of a comparison of the tree-dwelling humanoids with modern-day man only to frustrate that expectation and instead

---

[56] London, letter to Stanley Waterloo, 20 Oct. 1906, *Letters,* 2:624.

compare them to our fishlike ancestors. What do we learn from that? That our "ancestors" go even further back than what the novel will portray? Yes, but the emphasis of the quotation falls on the word *adventure,* not on the beings who lived in trees or in the sea. London is insisting on a broad definition of *adventure,* and he is promising to his readers that this novel will not be a dry-as-bones re-creation of a vague though scientifically verifiable period of human history. One might expect the latter if one knew what books London read in order to write the novel. So, out of a certain lack of confidence London insists on the popular genre of his book. This will be an adventure tale, not a scientific treatise.

But the word *adventure* indicates more than London's attempt to appeal to a wide audience. *Adventure* would eventually become the title of one of his novels—eponymous, like *Martin Eden* or *Burning Daylight,* or *John Barleycorn,* or *The Little Lady of the Big House,* or *The People of the Abyss,* or half a dozen more titles if one thinks, "danger, thy name is Adventure." For the word names a living concept, full of sound and fury but signifying everything. In today's popular press and in a number of biographies, we are often told that the key to Jack London, if there actually is such a thing, is his motto: "I would rather be ashes than dust."[57] Yes, but taken out of context it sounds very much like the title to a twenty-first century self-help book. YOLO. We have to add to that his invectives against rust and crystallization—rust of the body, crystallization of the mind—his willingness, often his eagerness to exploit the limits of body and mind, to live a life of

[57] See for example, Dennis L. McKiernan, introduction to London, *Before Adam* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), xii. McKiernan links London's lust for life to his prolific output as an author.

excess, the bohemian life, not of langor but of action. That is adventure. That is what London is asking us to embark on when we read *Before Adam*.

It is an adventure of the mind, not body. The first words of the text proper are a repeated declarative that indicates a high level of mental anxiety: "Pictures! Pictures! Pictures! Often, before I learned, did I wonder whence came the multitudes of pictures that thronged my dreams."[58] We are beginning with an adventure of the mind. The narrator seems overwhelmed by these interior images, so much so that the repetition of the word *pictures* is a loud cry for help, an insistence that they stop. That London contemplated making that anxiety a never-ending constant in the life of his narrator is evidenced by the changes he made in the novel's manuscript. Initially, he wrote, "Often did I wonder whence came the multitudes of pictures that thronged my dreams." In fact, he goes on to say that "they tormented my childhood, making of my dreams a procession of nightmares and a little later convincing me that I was different from my kind, a creature unnatural and accursed."[59] Later in his frame narrative, he explains that evolution "gave sanity to the pranks of this atavistic brain of mine." (21) Clearly, here is a man in need of psychiatric assistance. The narrator wants us to understand that the inserted phrase "before I learned" indicates that he was educated in college about the true meaning of his experiences. As he says, he learned his psychological vocabulary as well as "the explanation of various strange mental states and experiences" (a learning process that sounds as much like therapy as college education)[60] But the emphasis on higher

---

[58] London, *Before Adam,* 1.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid., 13

education seems overdetermined, covering what truly happened. He actually has had some kind of medical, psychiatric help. The novel, instead of being written from inside an asylum, is written after residence in one. The narrator's first chapters are written to convince his readers that he is not mad.[61]

Unless you believe in racial memory and in his use of evolutionary science to explain what happened to him. Given the patina of learning that he provides by citing Weismann, the reader certainly wants to believe that his experiences are the unique mental constructs of an atavistic brain. But that explanation seems far-fetched, and as I pointed out earlier, Weismann's work—nor any work by any evolutionary scientist—does not support the narrator's contention. That's why his explanation seems overdetermined. He misapplies Weismann to cover his own psychiatric illness.

If one needs biographical assistance in accepting this reading, one needs only consider the case of the Londons' close friend Frederick Bamford. He was struggling with depression and spending a fair amount of time in Burke's Sanitarium close to the ranch in 1905 and 1906. In February, before London began writing the novel, he encouraged his friend to come to the ranch and "rest."[62] Two days into writing the novel, London wrote to Bamford that "we are sorry to hear that you have been down again" and insisted he come to the ranch.[63] A month later he told Bamford what he had told himself a number of times: "The sweet country cannot but refresh you, after the wear and tear of

---

[61] See Charmian London, 13 May 1906 and 18 Apr. 1906, diary, JL 219.

[62] See London, letter to Frederick I. Bamford, 27 Feb. 1906, *Letters,* 2:555.

[63] London, letter to Bamford, 3 Apr. 1906, *Letters,* 2:560.

the city."[64] Bamford visited the Londons on the ranch a number of times during the writing of *Before Adam.* In turn, in May, the Londons visited the sanitarium, whether to see Bamford or someone else is not known. Further, on the morning of the 1906 earthquake the Londons first went from the ranch to the home for "the feeble-minded," located in Glen Ellen. Depression, anxiety, and mental illness in general were not just on London's mind but in his mirror. His novel's narrator, not surprisingly then, tells us in the very first chapter how the simple act of visiting a circus prompted a "semi-disassociation of personality" and he became so "nervous and overwrought" that he had to be taken home "sick with the invasion of my real life by that other life of my dreams."[65]

Insanity is a theme that runs through London's notes for the novel (and we will see it again in a note from around this time for a short story in a projected collection called *Created He Them*). On one page, he imagines that Red-Eye the atavism is insane or partially insane: "The villain [a word London misspelled throughout the notes]—Red-eyes—rims were red and the eyes blood shot—he had terrific spells of passion. Maybe less sane than they. Work the idea of partial insanity." "Less sane than they" implies that the group or Folk were completely sane, but not necessarily. In another note, he characterizes them as similar to the residents of an asylum: "Have adumbrations of the later councils of Indians. But they only chattered and cut up. All talked at once. No consecutiveness. (Remember insane asylum)—each filled with his own ideas or impulses Yet sociability and gregariousness were satisfied by these councils."[66] We remember his

---

[64] London, letter to Bamford, 15 May 1906, *Letters,* 2:574.

[65] London, *Before Adam,* 9.

[66] London, "Before Adam: [notes for a novel]," JL 505.

note from *Universal Kinship* and Moore's claim about the size of the skulls correlating with intelligence: the smaller the skull (microcephalous) the smaller the intelligence. In a note, he wrote, "Big Tooth They had larger heads than the Tree People, smaller heads than the Fire People," and we know from the text that the Tree People are the least developed, the Fire People the most developed. It's not such a small leap for London to go from lack of intelligence to insanity. Thus, London is employing the same mix of anthropology and psychology that he had read in Moore. His rough historical timeline concerning meetings of these three kinship groups seems to have three different stages: primitive (atavistisms: bordering on or actually insane); premodern Native American gatherings (the Tree People, who were rational); and modern-day institutions (the Fire People, who were advanced enough to conduct conflict resolution and determine policy). Atavistic behavior, therefore, is less rational, more questionably sane than the psychological norm of the twentieth century. Given that the narrator describes himself as an atavism—more precisely and more troublingly, "a freak of heredity, an atavistic nightmare" (20)—we must again wonder how mentally balanced he really is.[67]

Whether the narrator is (or was) insane—a ripe candidate for Mesmer or Charcot—he is certainly haunted by his dreams and by his imagination. Late in his narrative he explains where the human fear of the dark comes from: "As imagination grew it is likely that the fear of death increased until the Folk that were to come projected this fear into the dark and peopled it with spirits." (185-86) Again, London is drawing

---

[67] As an important side note, we should remember how London interchanged Native Americans with the "cavemen" when he moved from *The People of the Abyss* to "Revolution."

connections, drawn first in his earliest stories, among the imagination and fear and spirits, infusing it this time with evolutionary theory. Rather than postpone the mental trauma of dealing with the ghostly imagination by writing theatrical and political essays, he confronts it—as he did in *White Fang,* but this time trying to assuage his fear with intellectual effort. One can see his reading and preparation for writing this novel as a way to counteract the effects of the imagination, to rein it in and contain it with other mental constructs than those that produce spirits. As with his attempt in *White Fang,* his endeavor works, but only temporarily. He will never be able to domesticate his imagination.

By devising a time-traveller as a guide to accompany us into the prehistoric age, London has no problem engaging the reader deeply in his novel's life and thus solve the problem that Waterloo could not. Then to turn that guide into an unreliable narrator—unreliable because he seems so mentally unstable—gives London the method to incorporate not only the latest evolutionary science but also the latest psychological research. London uses the new psychology both to popularize the idea of racial memory and the inheritance of basic human emotions like fear but also to help give form to the novel. It explains why *Before Adam* is a frame story. (His next novel, *The Iron Heel,* is also a frame story, and this time London's political ideology explains the need for the frame.) The narrative of Big-Tooth is the exemplum of the new theories London is teaching his readership.

London deploys two new terms: *projection* and *disassociation of personality.* The presence of these psychological terms in the novel, so familiar to us now, should surprise us. London's narrator uses *projection* nearly in its precise modern-day form, but in two,

differing ways. First, he says "my dream personality lived in the long ago, before ever man, as we know him, came to be; and my other and wake-day-personality projected itself, to the extent of the knowledge of man's existence, into the substance of my dreams."[68] Here he uses it in a generic fashion, though the similarity between its definition here and filmic projection is interesting in light of the similarity between his visions and cinema.

But its second use is the psychological one. He uses it against those who would try to explain away his memories of the Bone Age. "The doubting Thomases of psychology" would say that it is all "due to overstudy and the subconscious projection of my knowledge of evolution into my dreams." (21). Yes, that is exactly what we would say in the face of the fantastic explanation the narrator offers instead. No one can become a cave man, no one can remember being a cave man, and it's really a matter of wish fulfillment. By mistaking his dream images of trees, snakes, blueberries, and other matter as his memories of himself as a long-dead person, he actually wishes to escape the stresses and mysteries his own life. But of course our (mentally unbalanced) narrator disavows this explanation even though he admits that he was the worst student in his college class—he was too busy with athletics and billards, sure signs of him being a denizen of Clubland—and so shouldn't even be aware of these technical psychological terms. Is it too much to say that he was taught this term during his psychiatric care—what he calls college—and now refuses its applicability?

The second term he teaches us is *disassociation of personality,* but instead of following its precise meaning and so serving as an explanation for his fantasy of a

---

[68] London, *Before Adam,* 12-13.

previous life, he uses it in an entirely idiosyncratic way. He says that his second, split personality actually lived in the past. The term explains how a person of today could be inhabited by a person of the past. The narrator says that he is not reincarnated; that would be the spiritualist's explanation. Instead, he relies (mistakenly) on this psychological construct. True, the pictures that so torture him are driven by this personality split. He is actually two people, but the clue that he appropriates the term for his own uses is supplied early on. He tells us that although he becomes his earlier personality usually during his dream states, sometimes he becomes Big-Tooth in broad daylight; for example, as a child, he changes personalities at the circus in the face of the lion's challenge. We might say he suffers from Multiple Personality Disorder and, again, dismiss him as insane or unbalanced. And, as I said before, I would argue this is correct. But to simply dismiss him (and thus cease reading the novel before the framed narrative actually begins) would be to miss out on the connections among psychology, anthropology, and heredity that London wants to instruct us in. Indirectly, London teaches us something about the social construction of mental illness. The illness itself is real enough, but its reception is socially constructed to serve different aims.

Still, our surprise and wonder at London's deployment of the term should not be inhibited. Not only do we not expect such a term to be used to define the presence of a previous prehistoric life accessible to the memory and articulation of a twentieth-century person, but also the term itself did not enter the English language until 1906, when Morton Prince's *Disassociation of Personality* was published.[69] As we saw in chapter 15, Binet discussed dual personalities three years previous to Prince, and London most likely

---

[69] See *Oxford English Dictionary,* s.v. "disassociation."

was still drawing on Binet, not Prince, while writing *Before Adam;* I have found no evidence that he owned Prince's book. Further, *projection* does not appear in either Binet or Prince as far as I can determine, and it appears to have been first used as a spiritualist term, meaning the transference of a strong person's will (the medium's) into a weaker person who reads the transference as the presence of a phantasm now residing within him. This is clearly not how London uses it. But the modern psychological use of it doesn't seem to have appeared before 1909 and wasn't put into general circulation until Freud made use of it in his analysis of Schreber.[70]

Neither Binet nor Prince discuss the role of projection or disassociation or multiple personality in terms of the creative imagination. For London, however, the pictures that haunt our narrator and keep him in the borderlands between sanity and insanity are driven by, are the function of his "disassociation of personality." If we believe that the narrator is actually suffering from MPD, then London is using this new term to describe what happens to a creative artist when he creates characters. Not only does his imagination act like a ghost and haunt him. It also threatens to make him insane.

In volume one, we saw how London tackled the nexus of spiritual possession and creativity in his very first third-person narrative, "Who Believes in Ghosts!" (retitled as "The Ghostly Chess Game").[71] It was the first time he manifested his mental and spiritual discomfort with his imagination. The faculty that he had decided would lead him out of the slavery of manual labor seemed always to betray him, but in ways he did not know

---

[70] See *Oxford English Dictionary,* s.v. "projection," and Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious,* 532.

[71] See volume 1 of *Author under Sail,* 78-81.

and could not anticipate. And so he began his lifelong obsession with telling stories about stories, *Before Adam* being the latest and now most mature expression of his need to distance himself from that source of unease. In "Who Believe in Ghosts!" Damon, Pythias, and George, three friends in Clubland, tell ghost stories as exempla of spiritual possession. "In a vague sort of way," says the narrator, "he realized that he was indergoing a reincarnation. He felt himself to be rapidly evolving into some one else."[72] More than that, though, the story tells us of London's own fears of losing himself in the creation of (fictional) others.

The connection between the story and *Before Adam* is explicit, but reincarnation becomes the scientific inheritance of humans' need to bond together, a clear sign of the maturing of London's fiction. Thus, the reference to Damon and Pythias in chapter 7, the main characters from the early short story, is a reference to them as exemplars of friendship. Lop-Ear and Big-Tooth eventually become Damon and Pythias because time is erased in the face of the eternal verities about human nature. Yet the logic of the narrator of *Before Adam* breaks down if his story does not include the same strong bond of friendship. The original Greek story now becomes a generalized account of the origin of human altruism or, as the narrator says, "a foreshadowing of the altruism and comradeship that have helped make man the mightiest of the animals."[73] It comes from that moment when one caveman felt empathy for his wounded friend and sacrificed his own safety for the welfare of another: "And there rises up before me all that was there foreshadowed, and I see visions of Damon and Pythias, of life-saving crews and Red

---

[72] London, "Who Believes in Ghosts!" *Stories,* 1:38.

[73] London, *Before Adam,* 91.

Cross nurses, of martyrs and leaders of forlorn hopes, of Father Damien, and of the Christ himself, and of all the men of earth, mighty of stature, whose strength may trace back to the elemental loins of Lop-Ear and Big-Tooth and other dim denizens of the Younger World." (91-92). If we can't trace each individual of the current human race back to a particular "denizen," but instead trace human characteristics back to our ape ancestors, then the narrator's story of living the life of one particular Bone Age dude fractures, and we are again left with the strong suspicion that the narrator is mentally fragile, if not insane, convinced that he is possessed by the dead figure from the Younger World.

So we can read *Before Adam* as either an early psychoanalytic case study in delusions of grandeur, or, given the seemingly casual reference to Damon and Pythias, it can be read as a kind of ghost story.[74] In fact, when the narrator tells his story for the very

---

[74] See Michael Newton, "The Atavistic Nightmare: Memory and Recapitulation in Jack London's Ghost and Fantasy Stories," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jack London,* ed. Jay Williams (New York: Oxford University Press, 239-58. Newton also links *Before Adam* and "Who Believes in Ghosts!" and other of London's ghost stories. "London's ghost stories hinge on themes of duality, where identity is doubled, and the present event reenacts the past" (243). Newton takes this point further and in the same direction I do, that London's concern is with using this genre of the ghost story to mix the sciences of heredity and psychology for two reasons: (a) a fuller understanding of the origin and nature of humankind and (b) to illuminate an "investigation of the writing life, an ambivalent fantasy of what it means to be inspired." I completely agree with Newton when he writes, "London turns the

first time—to his best friend at eight years old—the friend "laughed at me, and jeered, and told me tales of ghosts and of the dead that walk at night." (10) He mistook them for "feeble fancy," a failed attempt to create a convincing story. The narrator—and Jack—finds himself in Jack's familiar position of telling a story that is not believed, but is fiction so shouldn't be believed, but should be realistic enough in order to be believed enough to convey the truth of the narrator's emotions. The narrator is haunted—terrified—by his past, though it's not the past of himself but rather a scientifically proven past of all humans; he just happens to be special, like an author, and his ghosts become the story that he tells. The ghost is the imagination and the content of that imagination just as Buck was the imagination and the content of that imagination. There is no more absorptive state than deep sleep.

In sleep and in the hypnotic state there is no sense of time. This is true of London's conception of racial memories. Time ceases to matter if we can in the span of a few hours jump back to the mid Pleistocene. "There is one puzzling thing about these prehistoric memories of mine," says the narrator. "It is the vagueness of the time element." (38)[75] We saw how time collapses when we think of Lop-Ear and Big-Tooth as reliving life as Damon and Pythias, the latter being scientific inheritors of human altruism. The same inconsequential nature of time happens with the appearance of ghosts,

---

recapitulatory idea into a metaphor to explain the fact that he is a writer at all" (255).

[75] His note on this matter is close to the text: "One puzzling thing—time is bad. Doesn't know whether one yr. or 5 yrs. have elapsed between this and that. Can only tell time by judging change in appearance of his fellows."

too. What was past becomes present and forecasts the future, if only to be a memento mori. The lability of time brings together these seemingly disparate concepts, that of prehistoric lives and ghosts. It is the job of the author, so says London's narrator, to reinstall time so that a narrative can be written: "It was all a jumble. . . . It was not until I . . . had dreamed many thousand times . . . that I got the clew of time, and was able topiece together events and actions in their proper order. . . . I shall frame together the different events into a comprehensive story."[76] Our narrator-author is not only a time traveller but also a time master, one who manipulates time for his own linguistic purposes. But one cannot write a novel without first experiencing timelessness.

There is another mode of absorption and timelessness: the spiritualist's séance. Given London's constant public expression of antipathy toward all things metaphysical; given the more mature treatment of the thematics of Damon and Pythias; and given his research into the psycho-evolutionary sciences, we would expect London to disavow the séance, and in *Before Adam* he does so, but in a private, subtle way. As we saw in volume 1, one way he distanced himself from the very real debt he owed to his mother—the spiritual medium and first storyteller he knew—was to title his works with citations to every member of an immediate family—son, daughter, father—or a collective—people—but never mother. In *Before Adam,* however, the mother is a strong presence, a real departure from his previous works. In fact, the first line of his story proper is "I do not remember much of my mother,"[77] a somewhat odd thing for someone to say who has such a powerful memory that he can recall events from the Paleolithic. No matter. The

---

[76] London, *Before Adam,* 24.

[77] London, *Before Adam,* 25.

first four-color illustration in the book (by the incomparable Charles Livingston Bull) is of his mother saving her baby boy from a wild boar. In the beginning was the mother. The mother is present and powerful, and again we note London's maturation as an author. He is now able to acknowledge her as a significant influence in his writerly life. But, and here is where the disavowal kicks in, she is "old-fashioned. She still clung to her trees." The more evolutionarily advanced anthropoid apes lived in caves, but Big-Tooth's mother "was suspicious and unprogressive." By chapter 5, she disappears from the narrative, an anachronism in the more progressive scientific life of her son.

The narrator can't help but use anachronistic terminology ("unprogressive") to describe the group's members. Just as he assigns names to some (though not to his mother! another way to distance himself from her) "for the sake of convenience" (42), so he employs twentieth-century language to elucidate the sociology and linguistics of his people. Because London's modern-day language is not that of a third-person narrator, like Waterloo's, it has a diegetic function. At the beginning of chapter 11 he says that the descriptions he gives are his, not his character. He is both inhabited by Big-Tooth and in turn inhabits him. "It is by the medium of my dreams that I, the modern man, look through the eyes of Big-Tooth and see." Big-Tooth doesn't have language. He spoke in sounds of which his group had fewer than fifty. London in fact devotes several pages to the "tools of speech" and its evolution.[78] It is one more indication that this is a novel about telling stories, about the imagination and how it expresses itself. In addition we

---

[78] London, *Before Adam,* 40. His notes are filled with entries like the following: "Choruses A-bang! A-bang!" "Ha-ah, ha-ah, ba-ah-ha!" "Eh wa! eh wa! eh wa hah!" These spoken sounds are used on page 184.

come to understand something about the absorped individual. While one dreams (or while one is in an absorptive state) one doesn't have language. One has pictures, images. The things the narrator sees exist for him apart from language. The narrator is actually translating what he hears and sees in his dreams into a language we can understand; part of this thematic is represented by the placement of numerous pen-and-ink drawings by Bull in among the words, so images interrupt words, words flow around images, and so represent their interchangeability. The narrator's translations are words about pictures or word-pictures—or word-become-pictures in the reader's mind—a term we remember encountering for the first time when London published his very first story, "Story of a Typhoon," as an entry in the *San Francisco Call*'s contest for the best "word-pictures." We also remember Sitka Charley in "The Sun-Dog Trail." This isn't imagism. This is about how London (and others of his time) understood the nature of language. And, as I mentioned before, these pictures aren't paintings. They are photographs.

Thus, there is another valence to this constellation of psychological disorder-creative imagination-evolutionary theory. When London says the narrator is remembering the life of his "particular and far-removed progenitor" (20) or is dreaming of his progenitor—Big-Tooth—he inhabits his body and sees out of his eyes. Logically, then, these pictures are actually a combination of still photographs and moving images. When he dreams he watches the movie of Big-Tooth's life. When he awakes, he sees the still photographs of that life. The point is that if one took *pictures* to mean paintings, one would miss three crucial elements of how London understood the operations of the mind—especially of the imagination: the realism of a dream image that rivals that of a photograph; the cinematic quality of dreams; and the ghostly quality of both. *Before*

Adam is a textual precursor to London's involvement in early American cinematic efforts in the next decade. Just as, in this novel, he tries to distract his readers and himself from the ghostly quality of his imagination by defining it in scientific evolutionary terms, so later he will use the technology of film to try to achieve the same effect, and again to no avail. He cannot escape the ghostly nature of both the imagination and of photography and cinema.

We see then a progression of thought in his fiction as he deals with his relationship with his imagination and his interior life. In 1905, "Planchette" focused on spiritualism as a historical antecendent to psychiatry. *White Fang,* while employing modern psychological terms, emphasized evolutionary science. *Before Adam* returns to an emphasis on psychology while expounding in a more complex way his readings in two other sciences, in both heredity and anthropology. In his notes, he makes it clear that his narrator (while perhaps having undergone psychotherapy himself) analyzes himself as if he were a patient: "On looking back he weighs and analyzes emotions, motives, etc. In the actual event itself—just simple and often erratic impulses and emotions. he does a certain very inconsecutive and illogical thing in that early life. Looking back with his modern man's brain, he sees how inconsecutive and illogical the act was, and also the acts of all others."[79] In the novel itself, this note (as with all the notes he used, the wording is almost verbatim in the final text) comes late—at the beginning of chapter 11. London deliberately interrupts Big-Tooth's tale, jerking us back to a wakefulness within the absorptive state of reading. We never leave that state. But we experience a shift from dream to waking just as the narrator does. This happens to remind us that what we are

[79] London, "Before Adam: [notes for a novel]," JL 505.

holding is not a story told by a prehistoric humanoid but rather a translation of his images into words and of his actions into analysis: "It is I, the modern, who look back across the centuries and weigh and analyze the emotions and motives of Big-Tooth, my other self."[80] Once done with this digression, he says, "And now to return to my tale," as if it were a suggestion from a hypnotist or psychoanalyst for the narrator (and us) to return to the dream state.[81] The form of the novel is that of self-analysis. The narrator has discovered his unconscious and tries to make sense of it.

And then London adds another layer, that of the political.

Ernest Untermann, the translator of Karl Marx and others into English and friend to London, visited the ranch while London was writing *Before Adam.* Perhaps he gave him a copy of one of his latest translations, Wilhelm Bölsche's *The Evolution of Man.* It is not marked by London, but he would have been interested in it, for it was advertised by Charles Kerr as an affordable textbook on evolution for the laboring class. "Modern socialism is closely allied to the modern scientific theory of evolution," Kerr's blurb for the book read. "Nevertheless, there has until now been no popular explanation of the evolution of man in simple form at a low price. There is a very good reason for this. If laborers understand science, they become socialists, and the capitalists who control most published houses naturally do not want them to understand it."[82] Kerr's mission was

---

[80] London, *Before Adam,* 137.

[81] London, *Before Adam,* 139.

[82] "Catalogue of Books," in Wilhelm Bölsche, *The Evolution of Man,* trans. Ernest Untermann Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Co., 1905), 9. See also "Publisher's

pedagogic and believed that an educated working class in all intellectual fields would promote a socialist revolution; this of course was the purpose of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society as well.[83] But, more specifically, Kerr, Bölsche, Simons, Untermann, and other socialists believed that knowledge of evolution would counteract the power of the alliance between established religion and capitalism. Capitalism used traditional religion to keep the poor in place and thus frustrate class consciousness and revolution. That is why London rebelled against Waterloo's political conservatism. That is why he referred to *The War of the Classes* when he cited proof of his education in preparation for writing *Before Adam*. That is why he chose the title *Before Adam* over the other possibilities he had in mind: "The First Lovers," "The Long Ago," "In the Youth of the Younger World," "The Younger World," "The First Love Tale."[84] It's not simply a tale of prehistoric man or of two early lovers. As important as John Milton was to London, this novel's time frame precedes Milton's poem and thus succeeds it in terms of man's intellectual development.

We can thus read *Before Adam* as coincident with Kerr's mission. However mad and unreliable Big-Tooth may be, his narrative of life in the prehistory of man is meant to be instructive in the ways that collective action succeed where individual action fails. We've already seen how London subtly works into the friendship of Big-Tooth and Lop-

---

Advertisement," in Bölsche, *The Evolution of Man,* 4. Both these texts are published at the back of the volume, with separate pagination.

[83] See Allen Ruff, *"We Called Each Other Comrade": Charles H. Kerr and Company, Radical Publishers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 167.

[84] London, "Before Adam: [notes for a novel]," JL 505.

Ear the origin of human altruism, the basis for the alternative to the capitalist competitive system. London's socialism expresses itself in other ways as well. The fight between the Fire People and Big-Tooth is about technology; more precisely it is about the evolution of the technology of warfare. It is about fire versus nonfire, bows and arrows versus stone throwing. For London's readers, it might as well be about machine guns and canons that London talked about in 1902 and the British empire versus the Boers. Also, the fight with Red-Eye is about warfare with atavisms, as if there would be no war if atavistic humans did not exist. But they do and we must fight them. When Red-Eye murders Crooked-Leg and takes the Singing One, the Folk "felt the prod of the gregarious instinct," which is the source of socialism, "the drawing together as though for united action, the impulse toward cooperation," but the impulse needs language to define it, and they did not have it yet. So Red-Eye the imperialist gets what he wants because there is no collective to oppose him. Warfare is an atavism. *Modern warfare* is, therefore, a contradiction in terms. If we were really modern we wouldn't be fighting. But evolution is uneven, and this is another lesson of *Before Adam.*

Collective action could not take place among tree dwellers. When "the more progressive members" (43-44) move into caves, we can date from that moment the possibility for socialism. For if everything else about human nature finds its origins in the Paleolithic, certainly forms of government do, too. *Before Adam* is London's attempt to discover the root of his political identity.

The cave dwellers do initiate a kind of collective action, though it is not against a common enemy. After Red-Eye takes the Singing One, the Folk gather instinctively into a "hee-hee council." One of London's more idiosyncratic yet deeply pertinent notes for

the novel reads, “The `hee-hee’ council, meaning the council of laughter `Hee-hee’ parties or gatherings, where they gather to laugh.” In the novel these councils branch off in history in two directions: toward “the great national assemblies and international conventions of latter-day” (the most prominent in 1906 being national and international conventions of socialists) and, most importantly, “a unanimity of rhythm”—the gatherings were accompanied by Folk banging sticks on logs in time together—and thus the origin of music and speech: “whenever we were so drawn together we precipitated babel, out of which arose a unanimity of rhythm that contained within itself the essentials of art yet to come. It was art nascent.” Thus he locates the source of a different form of authorial identity in this Younger World.

Art and play, as I have argued all along, are a crucial combination for the creation of bohemian culture, and London’s Folk are nascent bohemians. London’s notes for the novel are filled with references to play and laughter: “Most all that they learned was in the course of play”; “Once he found a gourd, the seed rattled, had lots of fun with it.” In the novel, whenever Big-Tooth and Lop-Ear escape the very real threat of death at the hands of Red-Eye (or punishment at the hands of the Chatterer), they laughed and laughed. When Big-Tooth begins to domesticate a dog, it is a crucial moment with which London emphasizes the “inconsequentiality” of their lives. These characters would rather play than provide themselves with more than adequate shelter, with more than adequate food. They enjoy life instinctually. They find humor in everything. They are made to have fun. To domesticate the dog Big-Tooth plays with him, though it fails because Lop-Ear would rather eat the puppy. But their evolutionary progress is slow because “we played through life, even the adults, much in the same way that children play, and we

played as none of the other animals played."[85] The function of art and play, besides being instinctual, was to induce "forgetfulness"—a sense of timelessness—in the face of helplessness or strife. "We danced and sang in the somber twilight of the primeval world, inducing forgetfulness, achieving unanimity, and working ourselves into sensuous frenzy."[86] Here is the origin of Dionysius rituals and those gatherings in which London himself took a part in in Piedmont, Copa's Restaurant, the Bohemian Grove, Monterey, the Valley of the Moon, and other places. It all started with a political rage against the fascistic Red-Eye and "our rage against Red-Eye was soothed away by art."[87] Red-Eye, the atavism, whose genetic lineage does not lead to *Homo sapiens,* does not play. Humans are human, London says, because they would rather play than do anything else. This too is part of his political subtext. Humans have to learn not to be bohemian. They have to learn against their nature to be capitalists. Humans are naturally altruistic, not rapacious, greedy bastards.

Science, seen in this context, is actually a necessary evil. Evolution occurs because of threats to human kind, and playing is not an adequate response to those threats. But science counteracts the instinct to play. It turns life to seriousness. Whether it's learning about the germ-plasm, or the definition and make-up of the unconscious, or the proper formation of society into governing units, science replaces the time humans would rather spend responding to their deepest need, which is to play, to create art.

---

[85] London, *Before Adam,* 98.

[86] London, *Before Adam,* 184.

[87] London, *Before Adam,* 183, 184.

Still, the end of the novel is a warning. No amount of art or individualistic behavior will save the Folk from a warlike fascist named Red-Eye. Freedom of expression cannot survive fascism. At first, London thought the novel deserved a happy ending, though someone—and that unlucky someone is Lop-Ear—of course has to die. That death would balance the survival and perpetuation of the genetic material in which the narrator's memories inhere: "The flight of Swift One and me through the vast marshes. The stragglers arriving in the caves by the sea. Are molested no more by the Fire People Death of Lop-Ear. The end." Then London changed his mind. After "People" he drew a line to an open space on his note paper, crossed out "The end," and wrote, "until toward the end, when Swift One and children and I go to S.E. in search of a safer place Leave horde. Meet Tree People and Red-Eye, after skirting south of marsh and away from Coast—find a quiet place—End. Initially London dreamt of an idyllic ending, what we might call a Valley of the Moon ending, a "quiet place" "away from the coast." Instead, Red-Eye takes over the Tree People and the final sentence: "He is Red-Eye, the atavism" (242). the importance of the atavism is evident in Charmian's diary; whenever she notes that she has finished a day's worth of work on the novel, she calls it "the atavistic book."[88] He is the end, and he is the beginning, the omega and the alpha. For London had already plotted out his next novel and it forecasted the end of the modern-day Red-Eyes. In fact, he told George Brett that his very next novel would be *The Iron Heel,* but then he chose to write *Before Adam.* We don't know why he suddenly changed his mind, but it may be that because the two novels were thematically linked in his

---

[88] Charmian London, 10 Apr. 1906, diary, JL 219. Eventually, she starts calling it *Before Adam,* after London has decided on the title.

mind—time stretched to eternity before, time stretched to eternity after—he decided to work chronologicaly. Maybe he saw *The Iron Heel* as the happy ending he could not write for *Before Adam.* He didn't see it happening in his own lifetime, though. Red-Eyes rule the world for many centuries, Big-Tooth is dead, and Swift One tells the tale.

Composition and Charmian

On 26 March 1906 he told Brett "I think I shall write this summer a book to be entitled *The Iron Heel.*" On 2 April, he began writing *Before Adam.* Neither his correspondence nor his manuscript material indicate why in the short span of five days he changed his mind; he even had a title for his novel of the future but not for his novel of the past. Perhaps because he projected the latter to be only 30,000 words—about the length of *The Call of the Wild*—he thought he might first knock that off and then devote himself to a novel that would be more complicated and much longer. Ironically, once he reached the 20,000-word mark in *Before Adam* he saw it would be 10,000 words longer than he had anticipated; this time the writing did get away from him, and the ghost within seemed as untameable as ever. He took his time. He allowed himself to be interrupted. Again, because London so often insisted—and so many London scholars and members of the reading public, including Oscar Micheaux, have repeated London's fabrication—that he wrote one thousand words a day, it's useful to see how much he did write a day. On 8 April he says he had the first two chapters done, about 3800 words, about one thousand

words a day since he had taken 6-7 April off to lecture at the Ruskin Club.[89] Then he spent 8 April writing his essay on the Moyer, Pettibone, and Haywood trial. He also had been assisting Charmian in reading page proof for *White Fang* and "Planchette." He sent off the newly determined table of contents of *Moon-Face* to Brett. He resumed writing on the ninth, but more slowly now, and on 13 April he had finished only another two thousand words, or about four hundred words a day.

The next interruption, unplanned, came on 18 April at 5:14 in the morning. He could easily have been up by then, and his manuscript at approximately the seven thousand-word mark has a note to himself, as if he had been ready to write, but was called away: "(remember being chased, cuffed, bitten—mother rushed in. family quarrels [no closing parens]," and then left his desk to see how bad the earthquake had been.[90] It's the only note of its kind in the manuscript and represents a notable departure from his usual practice, which was to write a note on a separate piece of paper and include it with the notes and drafts he had written before embarking on the actual writing of the novel; for example, before he began work on chapter 7, he wrote, "Must work in shortly—the tree People—who were apes—nothing more." Perhaps when he resumed writing on the 21rst or 22d he wrote a single note, a kind of reassurance, which he contemplated using in *Before Adam* but never did: "There were more earthquakes in those days—more

---

[89] See London, letter to Brett, 8 Apr. 1906, *Letters,* 2:563, Charmian London, entries for Apr. 1906, diary, JL 217, and Russ Kingman, *Jack London: A Definitive Chronology* (Midletown, Calif.: David Rejl, 1992), 64.

[90] London, manuscript of *Before Adam,* JL 506, box 37, HEH.

frequent and more terrible."[91] On the 24th, he wrote "Story of an Eyewitness," his account of the earthquake, and on the next day he said he had thirteen thousand words completed. He had begun speeding up, writing two thousand words a day. He took a break after reaching the twenty thousand mark on 2 May, slowing down to a thousand words a day. He and Charmian then rode horses throughout Sonoma County, from Glen Ellen to Fort Bragg and back south, arriving home on the 14th and beginning writing the next day. There was just one more interruption—a two-day trip to Oakland and San Francisco to see the dentist and take a three-hour car ride through San Francisco—and then he finished the novel on 7 June, his final stint being twenty-one thousand words in twenty-five days. He wrote 41,230 words in seventy-three days, about 560 words a day.

Before Adam was the first novel he wrote married, and for the first time Charmian collaborated on the writing. On page 10 of chapter 14, we read the sentence, "Red-Eye seized her by the hair and dragged her toward his cave." Charmian, on her own, added "of the head" just after "hair," and that change stayed in the final version. Also, in chapter 17, she changed the word "smashed" to "broken" in the sentence "His old bones must have been sadly smashed." And in the same chapter she added "in their faces" to the sentence "They fled silently and swiftly, and with alarm in their faces." In the final chapter's second paragraph, she changed "snakes" to "serpents" in the sentence "Large trees are about us, and from their branches hang gray filaments of moss, while great creepers, like monstrous serpents, curl around the trunks and writhe in tangles through the air." These are small textual changes, but they represent a momentous change in her and her spouse's professional relationship. Before this moment she never suggested

---

[91] London, "Before Adam: [notes for novel]," JL 505, box 37, HEH.

additions or deletions to the manuscript. It may be somewhat of an exaggeration, but it seems possible that with the presence of Charmian's hand in his manuscript for the first time, London was inspired to create his first female narrator, Avis Everhard of *The Iron Heel.*

Charmian had another task to perform related to the novel's composition. When he wrote his last words of his novel of prehistory and psychiatric illness, Charmian scheduled every minute of his day "to circumvent the blues he had once forewarned he might be subject to upon the day of completing a long manuscript." Thus, "there was little or no depression."[92] The act of writing was an aporia. It triggered the presence of the ghostly imagination that in turn created an anxiety and depression that only more writing could alleviate. As with the Folk in *Before Adam,* art was a salve, but only temporarily. Art is always a life-and-death matter for Jack London, and as David Starr Jordon wrote in *Foot-notes to Evolution,* "the test of sanity is its liveableness, for insanity is death."[93] But now we see how London used writing as a kind of therapy, as a hedge against going insane, being driven mad by the ghost within.

As he had done with *Moon-Face* and *Love of Life* in 1906, and before and after those works with nearly every thing he wrote, London sent the completed typescript of *Before Adam* to George Sterling for commentary. Perhaps their literary friendship was

---

[92] Charmian London, *The Book of Jack London,* 2 vols. (New York: The Century Co., 1921), 2:137. She wrote the following entry in her diary: "Finished Before Adam—copying, everything. Jollied up Mate all day for fear he might get the blues" (Charmian London, 7 June 1906, diary, JL 217).

[93] Jordan, *Foot-notes to Evolution,* 340.

founded on a similar distrust of and torment by the imagination; Sterling once described his muse as "the Fiend."[94] Sterling was honest, if prone to his usual romantic hyperbole, in his assessments of Jack's writing, and London could trust him. In May, after reading Edwin Markham's essay on the California earthquake, Sterling told London, "you make most of your contemporaries seem like men of paste. They can never be fit pen-mates nor pen-adversaries to you."[95] He thought "What Life Means to Me" "a fine thing. . . . If only I could deserve to write anything half as good!" He was immediately engrossed by *Tales of the Fish Patrol* and read it in one sitting.[96] But he thought *Before Adam* "punk." No longer was London outdistancing his contemporaries; "Waterloo and Wells have both done better with that subject," a remark that would have stung if London remembered it after the Waterloo plagiarism charge in the fall. Finally, "your opening chapters are so far from being convincing (I hate to use *that* word on you!) that I think you'd better have left out all explanations, and approached the theme as Wells or Waterloo did."[97] Sterling was

---

[94] George Sterling, letter to London, 22 Feb. 1906, JL 19044.

[95] Sterling, letter to London, 27 May 1906, JL 19048.

[96] As odd as this might strike us—*Tales of the Fish Patrol* is not a book readers of our century typically read or applaud when finished—another friend of London's was equally effusive. Charles Warren Stoddard wrote to London in 1906, "the other day I chanced upon a copy of your Tales of the Fish Patrol—and how I did snap at it and run away home with it and I've read every line of it with as much joy as if I were a boy again. It's fine and dandy" (Charles Warren Stoddard, letter to London, 3 July 1906, JL 19084).

[97] Sterling, letter to London, 7 July 1906, JL 19049.

cautious in using the word *convincing* because he knew how many times editors had accused London of being the opposite even when a story was based on real events; in fact, when London sent the manuscript to Sterling, he wrote, "it's just a skit, ridiculously true, preposterously real,"[98] so Sterling had to be careful in treating the story's veracity. London had also just told Sterling that his Petrarchan sonnet "In extremis" was "unconvincing" because he "took the first four lines of the sestet to complete the foundation of the octave, thus making an orphan of the final two lines." "I may be all wrong," concluded London, and of course he was. Saving the volta for the final couplet was typical of the Shakespearean sonnet, and Sterling might have winced when he read his friend's critique.[99]

Sterling probably winced again as he read the theatrical framing of *Before Adam,* but he did manage one compliment: "I must admit that the story possesses to a considerable degree the element that's *never* lacking from your work, and that is *interest.*"[100] We remember that interest—a vague but compelling term—was the hallmark of *McClure's Magazine*'s aesthetic*,* and London had mastered it. Interest, besides denoting freshness and excitement, was in essence another word for absorption, and Sterling had been hooked and drawn in deeply despite the novel's preposterousness. Later, Sterling reported that their mutual writer-friends Jimmy Hopper and Jim Whitaker liked *Before Adam* more than *The Call of the Wild,* and Bamford loved it. Sterling commented, "I'm sorry for them. I concede its scientific value; but you can give so

---

[98] London, letter to Sterling, 9 June 1906, *Letters,* 2:579.

[99] London, letter to Sterling, 22 Mar. 1906, *Letters,* 2:557.

[100] Sterling, letter to London, 7 July 1906, JL 19049.

greater literary value. I don't want crab-apples, however good, from a pippin tree."[101] Porter Garnett, however, found ten scientific errors in the first chapter, said Sterling later, so the bohemians of the bay were divided on the book's value.

George Brett also had reservations, though he had faith in his western author now that he had written *White Fang,* a "masterpiece."[102] He was confident in recommending the yet-to-be-completed *Before Adam* to E. M. Ridgway, editor of *Everybody's Magazine* via Paul Reynolds, the agent. Reynolds had told Brett that Ridgway was looking for a thirty- to forty-thousand-word serial from London, and the possibility struck London as an answer to his most vexing problem in his current publishing relations. Just five days after returning to Glen Ellyn from his lecture tour—an indication that the matter was foremost in his mind—he had written to Brett that because "magazines [are] practically all owned by book-publishers" he was not getting the best price for serialization. Negotiating with Robert Collier, S. S. McClure, and Casper Whitney had been arduous. McClure, especially, tried every trick to bring London back to his magazine and thus to his book firm. (The latter was failing and would be absorbed by Doubleday, Page, and Co. in 1908.)[103] He had held up the publication of "Love of Life" to get another story. When London told him in early March 1905 that "there are no more short stories," he asked for the first look on anything longer. "I shall always feel that McClure's is the proper place for your work," he argued, without realizing what kind of competition

---

[101] Sterling, letter to London, 7 Aug. 1906, JL 19053.

[102] Brett, letter to London, 23 May 1906, JL 3066.

[103] See McClure, letter to London, 12 Nov. 1908, JL 14238. This is a form letter sent to all of McClure's authors notifying them of the change.

Collier and Whitney represented.[104] McClure, when he heard that London would be visiting New York City during his lecture tour, even told London that "from now on I am going to be in the office myself most of the time," hoping that London wouldn't notice the qualifier "most of the time"; they actually did meet, though, in January 1906, and then McClure complained that they hadn't talked long enough "about your future work."[105] When he heard that *Outing* had first look at *White Fang,* he insisted on getting first look at the next long piece of writing, which turned out to be *Before Adam.* As we will see, London agreed and thus began a bit of trouble.

Brett, always the careful thinker, agreed and disagreed with London's analysis about serial publication. London had analyzed the situation correctly but left out a determinant factor: his fame. "With your fame," Brett coolly surmised, "there ought not to be, I think, the slightest difficulty in selling your serial rights at good prices for you at any time." He sensed London's chief unspoken complaint—that he was devoting too much time and energy to the matter—and offered to take over.[106] He didn't mean that he himself would sell the stories. He would bring Reynolds on board. Previously, Reynolds had worked with McClure to dispose of stories that Big Daddy did not want for his own magazine. From now on, though, Reynolds would be working directly with London, who didn't realize at first that this was the arrangement. He was just relieved that he didn't have to do it any more and mentioned to Brett that selling serial rights to his projected output from the *Snark* voyage to both McClure and Whitney had foundered on the

---

[104] McClure, letter to London, 1 Mar. 1905, JL 14224.

[105] McClure, letter to London, 31 Jan. 1906, JL 14232.

[106] Brett, letter to London, 20 Mar. 1906, JL 3057.

question of book rights. Thus, hearing that Brett and Reynolds had quickly secured the interest of a magazine for a book not yet completed was sweet.

But London unintentionally complicated things. For the first time in his career, he encountered the concept of a kill fee, which must have struck him as a rarified aspect of the publishing game available only to the most sought after authors. In May Reynolds told Brett that he had given *Before Adam* to Ridgway who would pay either five thousand dollars or a kill fee of five hundred.[107] The magazine could afford it; in 1907 the circulation was over half a million and between 1908 and 1911 it led all general interest monthlies in the volume of advertising.[108] In fact they were doing so well that they solicited material from London for a new magazine called *Ridgway's,* a short-lived publication that London did not contribute to.[109] But in April, without of course knowing that Reynolds, Brett, and Ridgway would come to this agreement, London had offered S. S. McClure a chance to read and publish the novel. I'll return to their discussions shortly, but Reynolds, when he heard about the London-McClure discussion, blew a gasket because Ridgway's kill fee (and Reynolds's own 10 percent commission) was based on getting the "first look." "I am sorry you made this promise to McClure because while I can see where McClure gained, I do not see where you gain," Reynolds wrote to London. "You made a present to McClure of an option that was worth $500.00," you idiot. To add more salt, a different magazine, said Reynolds, would pay a kill fee of $100.00 based on

---

[107] See Paul Reynolds, letter to Brett, 23 May 1906, JL 16898.

[108] See Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1905-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 82.

[109] See Erman J. Ridgway, letter to London, 1 Aug. 1906, JL 17192.

the reading of a synopsis. Let me handle your serialization offers, he practically begged, and either McClure will back away from your promise, or he will pay what others are willing to pay.[110] London stuck to his promise, which led Reynolds to propose a somewhat shady course of action: If McClure takes it—and Reynolds imagined that he would—then the deal is done. But if he refused it, then don't tell Ridgway that you have given McClure first look. We could not "honorably" take the $500 if Ridgway rejects it, but there is no need to tell Ridgway that McClure turned it down "as this always tends to prejudice a man."[111] Then Ridgway contacted Reynolds for an update while McClure had the manuscript, forcing Reynolds to implement the plan without London's approval: "I told Mr. Dennison [Ridgway's assistant] of Everybody's . . . that you would have preferred to sell the story without previously submitting it," and that the first look option was no longer available, but *Everybody's* would be able to read the manuscript if London chose to send it out. Reynolds laid out the ethics of the situation: "I think this satisfies all the demands. We do not tell lies, and yet we leave the matter open so that, if McClure declines the story, we can still submit it to Everybody's without their having known that McClure had declined it."[112] It seems fantastic that Ridgway wouldn't figure out that the first-look option had disappeared because Reynolds or London had given it to someone else. But Reynolds believed in telling only as much of the truth as necessary to keep from

---

[110] Reynolds, letter to London, 6 June 1906, JL 16928. See London, letter to Reynolds, 31 May 1906, JL 13260, and London, letter to Brett, 31 May 1906, JL 11070, in which London tells both men that he has to honor his promise to McClure.

[111] Reynolds, letter to London, 23 June 1906, JL 16932.

[112] Reynolds, letter to London, 29 June 1906, JL 16933.

lying. London, who felt honor bound to McClure and also not as driven by profit as Reynolds, gave Reynolds free rein. McClure rejected the manuscript; London telegraphed Reynolds to move the manuscript from McClure to Ridgway, and he did, giving Ridgway a week deadline.

In mid July, Reynolds informed London that Ridgway accepted it for $5000. And then Ridgway found out about the McClure business—natch!—but Reynolds "told them what was the truth, that the story seemed to be an exceptionally good one and I did not want them prejudiced against it by learning in the first place that McClure had declined it." And then he slammed McClure: "This is a fact to be remembered about McClure, by the way, that he sometimes talks a little too much!" Reynolds didn't think much of Daddy McClure. As far as getting money from them, "they're slower than cold molasses."[113] While McClure was still considering *Before Adam,* Reynolds told London, "The only reason that I suggest the possibility of their declining it is that McClure seem to me to be looking for the perfect serial, and when they see any actual serial, they always seem to question whether it won't offend somebody among their precious readers."[114] London would have immediately remembered that McClure had accepted but never published his socialist essay "The Question of the Maximum," that McClure rushed to grab onto the latest thing, like London after he had been published in the *Atlantic Monthly,* but routinely let it go as he moved hurriedly onto the next latest thing. Nothing could have warmed London's heart more than to realize that other professionals would have agreed that having McClure terminate their contract in 1901 had been in his best interests.

---

[113] Reynolds, letter to London, 5 Nov. 1906, JL 16946.

[114] Reynolds, letter to London, 18 June 1906, JL 16931.

Reynolds, for his part, was eager to take on more work from London. Five hundred dollars was a hefty commission.

"I am glad you fellows liked *Before Adam,*" wrote London to the other editor of *Everybody's,* John O'Hara Cosgrave, London's friend and correspondent from the early aughts, "the most conservative and conventional of editors," as London had once described him.[115] "I've got a sneaking kindly place in my heart for that yarn."[116] "Sneaking," because he was not at all confident that it would do well. He told McClure much the same thing after he rejected it: "I have a sort of genial regard for that skit, myself, and it is so damnably, healthily innocent."[117] He was more frank to Brett; he was neither hopeful for its prospects nor willing to revise the book to make it more appealing to a wider audience. Once Brett had read it, his publisher wrote that it needed something more. For one thing, it lacked appeal to women readers, and because Brett remembered he had made the same objection in the past, he couched his criticism in a suggestion that London should incorporate somewhere in the novel the fear of rats and other rodents that men rarely if ever shared. He ventured, perhaps after discussing the matter with a university professor, that women had inherited this fear from the Bone Age because rats and mice threatened cave babies, something that cave men would not care particularly about; he didn't need proof, but he did learn from Reynolds in June that a woman's magazine had turned down an opportunity to read the novel.[118] But, more than its lack of

---

[115] See volume 1, page 365, of the present work.

[116] London, letter to John O. Cosgrave, 21 Aug. 1906, *Letters,* 2:601.

[117] London, letter to McClure, 19 July 1906, *Letters,* 2:595.

[118] Reynolds, letter to London, 8 June 1906, JL 16929.

appeal to women, the story lacked "a certain human connection between the story and present day readers," an "everyday appeal to present day readers not specially interested in the science or psychology of the situation."[119] The battles between Big-Tooth and Red-Eye and the Huck Finn-like raft and walking journey of Big-Tooth and Lop-Ear was not enough to interest readers, male or female. Still, as much as London agreed with Brett's assessment, he was not about to revise it. "Concerning what you say about the certain lack of human connection between the story and present-day readers, that I should be compelled practically to write another story, in order to establish that connection." And then to mask his minor annoyance that Brett could not accept the book for what it was, he switched gears and reminded Brett how difficult it had been to revise *The Game.* "It was a sort of nightmare to me," he said, linking perhaps unconsciously his own writing to the nightmares of his narrator in his new novel.[120] Brett knew when to cease offering advice, and no further word was said about revising it.

While in the midst of writing *Before Adam,* S. S. McClure wrote to London about an accusation of plagiarism concerning "Love of Life," a case I will discuss later in the chapter. But, as I mentioned previously, London used this opportunity to pitch his current writing project, emphasizing its "interesting" qualities. It is "the most primitive thing every written, and I think I am doing it in a lively and interesting fashion. There is a love-motif! a hero! a villain! rivalry!"[121] McClure was initially enthusiastic, writing that a mid-Pleistocene plot "would, I should think, be a theme you could handle with wonderful

---

[119] Brett, letter to London, 19 June 1906, JL 3068.

[120] London, letter to Brett, 24 June 1906, *Letters,* 2:584.

[121] London, letter to S. S. McClure, 25 Apr. 1906, *Letters,* 2:572.

power."[122] And then he asked for the book publication, too, if he accepted the manuscript for a serial. And, repeating an exchange that had occurred a number of times from 1901 to 1906, London sent the manuscript, and McClure demurred, thus making London's dealings with magazine-book publishers even more frustrating. London's fame, as he had always suspected, was never enough to guarantee acceptance. But McClure probably sensed what Brett came to know. The "love-motif" simply never developed. In fact, the narrative's emphasis, when it came to love, fell on Red-Eye's brutalization of his spouses, not on the tepid romance between Big-Tooth and the Swift One. It just wasn't interesting to women, Brett knew it, and London told Brett there was nothing he could do. He admitted that the "human connection between the story and present-day readers" was missing. He couldn't fix it because he had written it with a different goal in mind, and he was willing to accept the consequences. Perhaps, he told Brett in a rhetorical move that he hoped would placate his publisher, that "it might develop, after the grown-ups are done with it, into a sort of stand-by boys' book. I should imagine boys would delight in reading" a book without a strong love interest and adult scenes of action.[123] In fact, in 1915, he considered writing a series of stories based on Red-Eye and "the two young, primeval gentlemen," obviously focusing on the boyish adventures of these three,

---

[122] McClure, letter to London, 30 Apr. 1906, JL 14234.

[123] London, letter to Brett, 24 June 1906, *Letters,* 2:584. Perhaps too he was remembering that both Sterling and Charles Warren Stoddard loved *Tales of the Fish Patrol.* If grown-ups could enjoy a boy's story, perhaps boys could enjoy adult fiction.

though it would be "a scientifically correct and philosophic and humorous treatment."[124] These characters could not be made into something they were not, that is, appealing to women readers. Instead, before he thought of doing that series, he would write *The Valley of the Moon,* which incorporated all those elements he had promised McClure, plus rats. Women loved it, and still do.

When *Before Adam* was published, in 1907, the cover was deceptively simple. It featured the title and author in red letters outlined in white. Given the metaphoric meaning of *red* in the novel, the color subliminally tells the reader that this is what Charmian called the "atavistic novel." Further, a series of three pairs of footprints track from the bottom of the spine to the top right corner of the front cover across the sandy colored binding.[125] The feet clearly belong to a prehistoric person, part human, part ape. The effect is uncanny. The footprints are of ghosts, our ancestors from the Paleolithic. Because they look fresh, by seeing them we automatically become one of the people who left them, or one of the people who would see them during that time period. Or we are put in the curious position of Robinson Crusoe, stranded on our island planet. We thought we were alone, but, no, someone from our past is still here. We want to find who. We are immediately drawn into the novel without a conscious act of belief.

---

[124] London, letter to George Sterling, 28 Oct. 1915, *Letters,* 3:1511.

[125] In one of his rare suggestions for improving a cover, he wrote to a Mr. Walton, who had sent him the "stamped cover" for the novel, "the color of the cover itself should be of the color of sand, thus completing the illusion of the footprints being actually made in sand,--prehistoric sand, if you please" (London, letter to Walton, 23 Nov. 1906, *Letters from Jack London,* 2:639).

As if all that signification were not enough, there is in fact a political dimension to the footprints in the sand. We remember the epigram from "Revolution," lines from James Russell Lowell's long poem "A Glance behind the Curtain": "The present is enough for common souls. / Who never looking forward, are indeed mere clay / Wherein the footprints of their age / Are petrified forever." We see yet again London's preoccupation with infinite time stretching backward and forward. Revolutionaries, not "common souls," leave permanent footprints in the sands of history, and so we see who belongs to those footprints on the cover of *Before Adam.* As London told the critic Philo Buck, "Get up; wake up [you somnambulist!]; kick in; do something. . . . A hundred thousand socialists are men who can get up and fight on their hind legs like me. Who do not criticize but who do."[126] Revolutionaries and authors, we might add, are men and women of action. So often do biographers mistake London's call to arms as a testosterone-laden, manly insistence on action as opposed to thought (London also instructed Buck to read all his books and the ten thousand books he himself had read.) In reality, London's insistence on action is the socialist dream of taking apart society in order to put it together correctly. To do that is to leave your footprint in the sand forever.

Red Flag of Revolution

When we considered *White Fang,* we saw how London mobilized various meanings of red. White Fang's coloring changed between red and white, and red could be a neutral color, the color of a primitivism hidden deep within our heredity. In *Before Adam,* that red heredity is no longer neutral; it is simply brutal. Red is the color of

[126] London, letter to Philo M. Buck, Jr., 1 Mar. 1913, *Letters,* 3:1134.

atavism and rage, of savagery. To get a bit ahead of ourselves, in Charles Morris's account of the 1906 earthquake, "the twin terrors of earthquake and conflagration . . . with the red hand of devastation [swept] one of the noblest centres of human industry and enterprise from the face of the earth."[127] Red is the color of resistance to modernity, as Red-Eye fights the Fire People with their advanced technology. But, like the color yellow, red is labile enough to denote a different, positive sort of rage. Red is the color of political revolution. There was worldwide revolution in the air in 1906; Bob Dylan's song should have been entitled "Tangled up in Red." London was born only five years after the Paris Commune. Bloody Sunday was a mere year gone. We remember London's "When God Laughs," written just a few months previous to *Before Adam.* Carquinez Monte's red tie "stood for the red flag (he had once lived with the socialists of Paris), and it symbolized the blood and brotherhood of man." Red was the color of anarchism, guaranteed to act as a prompt for the capitalists' powers, especially the police—the bulls—to attack. It was most indelibly the color of the flag of the revolutionary working class first flown from the Hotel de Ville on 18 March 1871. We cannot forget Louise Michel, the Red Virgin or Red She-Wolf, a prominent Communard. On 8 April, a famous riot in San Francisco at Lotta's Fountain was instigated by policemen who, seeing a red banner above a crowd—including William McDevitt—gathered to protest the incarceration of Charles Moyer, Bill Haywood, and George Pettibone, tore it down from

---

[127] Charles Morris, *The San Francisco Calamity by Earthquake and Fire* (1906; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 17.

the fountain and were then themselves attacked by the crowd.[128] It is the color of revolutionary writing, the cover color of London's book *"Revolution" and Other Essays*. Red is both a bonding and destructive color, but also the color of the sacrifices working men and women have made to combat the capitalist enemy.

After a week of writing *Before Adam,* London paused to contribute to the national dialogue about the wrongful imprisonment of Moyer, Haywood, and Pettibone. The novel writing was going well, and he was inclined to take breaks now and then; later, as I've said, he would "celebrate" reaching the 20,000-word mark and take a ride north with Charmian all the way to Fort Bragg. So when Jack Barrett of the *San Francisco Examiner,* London's principal contact at the paper, called him the first week of April, asking him to cover the imminent trial of the three members—Moyer was president and

---

[128] See "Display of the Red Flag Starts Riot on Market Street," *San Francisco Call,* 9 Apr. 1906, 2. The slogan imprinted on the flag or banner was variously reported as Workingmen Unite and The Constitution Be Damned, So Say the Corporations. See "Bloody Riot in Frisco: A Red Flag Causes Riot between Police and Mob," *Los Angeles Herald,* 9 Apr. 1906, 1. But in fact, as a photograph taken before the riot confirms, the banner read Workingmen of the World Unite. A man in the crowd carries a placard reading, Habeas Corpus Be Damned, Post Mortem You Get [undecipherable word] Gen. Bell. Another reads, Governors of States Are Pledged to Carry Out The Constitution. There were probably other placards, perhaps one about the Constitution and corporations. See T. H. Watkins and R. R. Olmstead, *Mirror of the Dream: An Illustrated History of San Francisco* (San Francisco: Scrimshaw Press, 1976), 176-77.

Haywood, secretary-treasurer—of the Western Federation of Miners, he said no, but he agreed to Barrett's request to write a quick report on the affair as he saw it.[129] On the day

[129] Barrett never published the essay; London and various people at two Hearst papers—the *San Francisco Examiner* and the *New York Evening Journal,* including Barrett and Arthur Brisbane at the New York paper—argued with London about payment both for this essay and for his review of *The Jungle,* which they published in a "garbled version" (London, letter to Jack Barrett, 7 Oct. 1906, *Letters,* 2: 615). London's version had Barrett asking for the texts. Barrett's response to London's offer of a review of Sinclair's book seems unequivocal: "My Dear London: By all means let us have your review of "The Jungle" soon as possible" (*San Francisco Examiner,* letter to London, early spring 1906 [HEH cataloguer incorrectly dates it 1907], JL 17469; the letter is actually signed by Barrett, so I don't know why it is catalogued as written by the *Examiner.*) And, as for the Moyer-Haywood-Pettibone article, London wrote to the business manager of the *Examiner,* W. S. Bogart, that "this article I had written by request. It had been ordered through Mr. Barrett by the NEW YORK JOURNAL. And Mr. Barrett told me that he would see I got paid for it" (London, letter to business manager of *San Francisco Examiner,* 11 Feb. 1907, JL 13370). W. S. Bogart responded saying that, no, the review had been written and published as a favor to Sinclair and that the Idaho article was simply offered and rejected; see *San Francisco Examiner,* letter to London, 6 Mar. 1907, JL 17467. See London's response in which he asserts Barrett called him with, first, the offer to go to Boise, and, failing that, an offer to publish an essay. See London, letter to Mr. Bogart [*SF Examiner*], 7 Mar. 1907, JL 13372. See also London, letter to Mr. Bogart, 2

Apr. 1907, JL 13373, *San Francisco Examiner,* letter to London, 3 Apr. 1907, JL 17468, London, letter to William R. Hearst, 15 Jan. 1908, and London, letters to Brisbane, 3 May 1909 and 2 Sept. 1909, *Letters,* 2:726-27, 2:802-3, and 2:833-34. London's version seems the most plausible, and like the *Cosmopolitan* with "Revolution," the Hearst organization simply got cold feet and tried to cover them.

In early August 1906, Barrett asked London to take on an investigative reporting job for the paper; there was a strike among sailors, and Barrett wanted London to sign onto a ship sailing between Eureka and San Francisco as a scab. He also promised that if London would just come to his office they would be able "settle up the matter of the Steunenberg killing and the review of The Jungle" (Barrett, letter to London, 17 Aug. 1906, JL 2140). Neither happened. London wasn't sore with Barrett, and he forgave Brisbane by saying, in 1909, "DAMN the $200.00! After having settled the question of principle [in the end none of the newspapermen contradicted his version of the events], I'd rather have friendship than the cash" (London, letter to Brisbane, 18 Sept. 1909, JL 11236). And he settled on good terms with the publisher of the *Examiner,* telling Dent Robert in 1910 "I see clearly that the major responsibility lies with the N. Y. people. But please remember that I haven't any feelings against anybody. . . . Don't I know the chaos and anarchy of newspaperdom enough to understand how such things will happen!" (London, letter to Dent Robert, 27 Mar. 1910, *Letters,* 2:880). Here is yet another example of London's bohemian, authorial economics. Personal relationships were more important than money. And, no, he never got his two hundred dollars.

of the protest meeting in Woodman's Pavillion (a popular boxing venue in San Francisco) that was followed by the riot over the red flag, London, who had been invited to speak, instead wrote an essay.[130]

He had been thinking about the fearsome threesome. (Big Bill was considered second only to Eugene Debs as the most dangerous lefty in America.) He mentioned the case in "Revolution" ("The Constitution of the United States [does not] appear so glorious and constitutional to the workingman who has experienced a bull pen or been unconstitutionally deported from Colorado"), and, as I also mentioned in the previous chapter, during a speech he gave at Oakland's Dietz Opera House on 18 March—the thirty-fifth anniversary of the beginning of the Paris Commune—entitled "The Rising Tide of Revolution," he "dwelt upon" their arrest, even though he was so hung over that

---

"Something Rotten" appeared twice in socialist newspapers: "Jack London Scores the Idaho-Colorado Conspirators, *Socialist Voice* (Oakland), 19 June 1906, and "Something Rotten in Idaho," *Sunday Socialist* (Chicago), 4 Nov. 1906; London gave the Chicago socialists his text to show his support for socialist candidates for local offices in Illinois.

[130] For the invitation, see John Sandgren, letter to London, 28 Mar. 1906, JL 17485; Sandgren says at the beginning of the letter that London had consented to speak at the event, but the letter closes with the hope that London will show up. For the published announcement of London's participation, see "Shall Our Brother's Be Murdered: Monster Indignation and Protest Meeting against the Kidnapping of Moyer, Haywood and Pettibone," *Socialist Voice,* 7 Apr. 1906, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 7.

friends doubted he'd be able to speak.[131] According to one report, "the most sensational features of the hour and a half discourse were his references to the Moyer and Heywood cases." The lead quotation included, "If they are found guilty on evidence no better than that which convicted the Haymarket martyrs, I believe it will take the whole United States army to carry out their execution." Socialists, said London, are the only organized

---

[131] "Author London Talks about Revolution: Tells of His Recent Trip in the East and How He Dined with the Rich," *Oakland Tribune,* 19 Mar. 1906, Jack London scrapbooks, vol. 7, p. 123. *Socialist Voice* (Oakland) ran the text of the entire speech in four installments, from 24 March to 14 April. All but the last is in volume 7 of the scrapbooks. After several installments of *John Barleycorn* had appeared in 1913, a fellow Oakland socialist, Chris "The Dane" Bergenhammer, wrote to London to correct his memory of that weekend: "You say that a band of revolutionist invited you to a `beer bust' (or `beer blowout') and that steam beer was served. Now it is a fact that Pabst Café where we congregated do not handle steam beer we had lager beer by the ceg [his spelling is uneducated], and two or three of the `inner circle' drank nothing else but whiskey. We also had sandwiches and frankfurters at about 1 o'clock in the morning we had to send for more beer and a reporter from one of the papers came down as a waiter and wrote us up as anarchist and nihilist. It was Frank Chester Pease who shed tears because you weren't drunk enough and it was Andrew Saunders who put you on the streetcar. The following day was Sunday and you was to speak at a Moyer-Haywood and Pettibone protest meeting you made your address ok but I do not think that you felt any better than the rest of us" (Chris Bergenhammer, letter to London, 19 May 1913, JL 2276).

group in America—including religious and other political groups—that have "declared against war," but they would fight for a just cause like that of the Boise Three.[132] Note too the link between the Boise Three and the Haymarket "martyrs." London couldn't have known that half of Haywood's ashes would be buried next the monument to the Haymarket victims in Chicago (the other half was buried next to John Reed's under the wall of the Kremlin). He might have found out later—or felt so himself—that a number of socialists had hoped the three would be hanged; not only did the cause, for some, require bloodletting and sacrifice, but some felt that it also would have won a bigger victory than acquittal against President Theodore Roosevelt, who supported the prosecution; there was always something akin to religious fanaticism in the early years of American socialism.[133]

---

[132] "Fiery Lecture by Jack London: Denounces Capital; Scents Conspiracy; Predicts Revolt," *San Francisco Call,* 19 Mar. 1906, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 7. See also "London Talks on Socialism: Says Whole Power of Union Will Be Needed to Execute Miners of Boise," *San Francisco Call,* 19 Mar. 1906. The line about taking the whole US army to carry out the death penalty was picked up by one of the four speakers at the 8 April protest meeting: Franklin Jordan, George Holmes, P. H. McCarthy, and George Speed. See "Bloody Riot in Frisco." Mark Zamen speculates that he gave this same speech on 24 March at Woodman's Hall in Oakland, but it is clear from Charmian's diary (and from the complete silence of Bay Area newspapers) that this event did not take place. See Zamen, *Standing Room Only,* 178.

[133] See J. Anthony Lukas, *Big Trouble: A Murder in a Small Western Town Sets Off a Struggle for the Soul of America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 748, 727-28.

Before he gave his speech at Dietz Opera House, London was asked by Gaylord Wilshire twice to contribute to a special issue he was doing on the affair, and though he hadn't anything to contribute—he had just written his review of *The Jungle* and was now in absorptive mode, writing short stories—his speech may have been prompted by Wilshire.[134] Built from this speech at Dietz Opera House, the essay itself begins with a similar rhetorical device as *The Call of the Wild.* He leads the reader in a false direction, intentionally. Moyer, Haywood, and Pettibone "are guilty, and they should be swiftly and immediately executed. It is to be regretted that no severe and more painful punishment than hanging awaits them." It's a rewrite of a straightforward proposition he made in his speech at the opera house: "I say, and I know that I voice the sentiment of every socialist and labor unionist [but not anarchist] in the United States, if these men are guilty of these murders they deserve nothing better than hanging, for in that case they have played into the hands of the enemy; in that case they committed rash acts that no leaders of the working class should commit."[135] Of course he can confidently voice the harsh justice of the socialist because he knows without a doubt that the three are not guilty, that their arrest and transportation from Colorado to Idaho was a federal offense, and that they will be acquitted. Writing the essay for the mainstream press, London wanted principally to repeat the facts of their arrest and incarceration so that the general public could see behind the façade created by the mine associations in conjunction with the capitalist

---

[134] See H. Gaylord Wilshire, letters to London, 9 Mar. and 14 Mar. 1906, JL 20528 and JL 20529.

[135] "The Rising Tide of Revolution: Jack London on the Moyer-Haywood Outrage," *Socialist Voice* (Oakland), 24 Mar. 1906, 1.

press. Speaking truth to power, London kept his emotions in check until the very end, when he loaded Shakespeare into his pen and added an absorptive dimension to an otherwise thoroughly theatrical essay, complete with direct address to his audience.

The phrase “there’s something rotten in X” was easily employed as a synonym for corruption, especially state corruption. But given London’s familiarity with Shakespeare and especially with *Hamlet—The Mutiny of the* Elsinore betrays such a familiarity, almost infatuation, and certainly admiration—he would have known the context for this saying that had entered colloquial speech separated from its actual signification in the play. That is, before Marcellus utters the statement, we have been given a sort of historical background in the psychology of its characters. We are in a world and time where ghosts not only exist but influence human events. There was the rising of the dead before the death of Julius Caesar. And there is the cessation of ghostly appearances during the Christmas season. So, with ghosts being a part of the natural world, it is not surprising to Horatio and the others to see a ghost; its appearance doesn’t require belief, but rather knowledge of what the appearance signifies. Marcellus’s general observation—that a ghost doesn’t appear unless there is trouble in the land—lacks specificity because they await word from Hamlet. And Hamlet guesses correctly what that is even before he speaks with his dead father: “foul deeds will rise, / Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes.” Ghosts are embodiments of the dead, but they are also embodiments of “foul deeds,” and that is what the Danes see on the battlements as they prepare for war against Norway. And that is what London sees as he and his fellow socialists prepare for class warfare. In his absorptive writings, ghosts figure the imagination and its acts. In his theatrical writings, they figure the acts of corrupt men. These acts, exposed to the light of

day in newspaper and magazine writings, will melt away and haunt only those who perpetuated them. That is the hope. London can only believe, with inconsistent confidence, that Moyer, Haywood, and Pettibone will be found innocent. If hung, that "foul deed" will surely haunt the capitalists, and their martyrdom will perpetuate class warfare. That is part of London's rhetorical strategy. He hopes they get off, but he sees benefit in their deaths.[136]

The trial for Hayward began a year later, running from 9 May to 29 July, and in a decision that surprised both the prosecution and the defense he was found not guilty. Pettibone was acquitted in January 1908, and charges against Moyer were dropped in the same month. So they were found innocent in the end—the people have spoken!—but, in a final irony, it is more likely than not that, according to the latest exhaustive research, they were in fact guilty.[137]

---

[136] London continued his support for the Boise Three months after publishing his essay, notably in *The Iron Heel.*

[137] According to Lukas, the question of their guilt "defies easy answers," for there is no documentation of the talks among the Boise Three, Harry Orchard, and Steve Adams. But Lukas's research turned up letters to and from prominent socialists, especially Fred Warren, after the trial. He concludes, "If, four years after the Boise trial, these prominent Socialists wrote freely to one another about the guilt of Haywood, Moyer, and Pettibone, what does this tell us about who struck down the governor on that snowy night in Caldwell?" (754).