## THE QUEST THAT FAILED: JACK LONDON'S LAST TALES OF THE SOUTH SEAS

by David A. Moreland

> As I see him the utterly infinitesimal individual weaves among the mysteries a floss-like and wholly meaningless course--if course it be. In short I catch no meaning from all I have seen, and pass quite as I came, confused and dismayed.
>
> --Theodore Dreiser

> We . . . float like fog-wisps through glooms and darknesses and light-flashings. It is all fog and mist, and we are all foggy and misty in the thick of the mystery.
>
> --Jack London

> A thankless task God has appointed for men to be busied about.
>
> --*Ecclesiastes*

The Jack London who stepped off the steamship *Matsonia* onto Hawaiian soil March 2, 1915, bore little resemblance to that healthy, handsome, confident author-celebrity who had sailed the *Snark* into Pearl Harbor some eight years before. Although only thirty-nine years old, he was overweight, insomnolent, rheumatic, alternately lethargic and irritable, and, most significantly, suffering from chronic uremia.

Physically, psychologically, and artistically he was in rapid decline and had turned with increasing frequency to drugs to relieve pain and to bring the relief of sleep. Today, the visitor to the Jack London Museum near Glen Ellen, California, may view London's medicine chest, the constant companion of his last years. Within it are strychnine, strontium sulfate, aconite, belladonna, heroin, morphine, and opium. According to a recent biographer, by 1915 he "was ordering six times the normal prescription of opium, hyoscyamine, and camphor capsules," while "also taking regular injections of atropine and belladonna mixed with opium and morphine to stimulate his heart and bladder muscles and to put him to sleep. In other words, he was taking the fatal 'uppers and downers' of modern pill-pushers in an age that regulated the sale of drugs extremely inefficiently."[1]

Even in this condition, London maintained his career-long writing regimen--a thousand words a day. He could not slack off for he continued to pour money into his Sonoma ranch faster than he could earn it and to entertain visitors on a lavish scale. However, his close friends noticed that his mercurial temperament was now verging on paranoia. He was "domineering, ungracious, and rude,"and "was unable to see, or perhaps unwilling to admit, that it was the unpleasant effect of his malady that was driving his friends away. He began to feel sorry for himself, to lament the perfidy of friends and relatives and, the same time, to become even more furiously angry and abusive with anyone who did not agree with him."[2] For example, when, in 1916, Spiro Ophens, a young Greek admirer, questioned the author's characterization of Mediterraneans in *The Mutiny of the Elsinore,* London accused him of treacherously turning upon the host who had opened his home to him: "At the end of it all, you have behaved toward me as any alleged modem Greek peddler has behaved toward the superior races."[3]

In such black moods of anger and disgust, he could write in the following fashion to his twelve-year-old daughter Joan, who had "failed" him by siding with her mother, London's first wife, against him:

> [A]ll my life I have been overcome by disgust, which has led me to turn pages down, and those pages have been turned down forever. It is my weakness as I have said before. Unless I should accidentally meet you on the street, I doubt if I should ever see you again. If you should be dying, and should ask for me at your bedside, I should surely come; on the other hand, if I were dying I should not care to have you at my bedside. A ruined colt is a ruined colt, and I do not like ruined colts.[4]

Throughout his life Jack London had sought to escape from difficult situations: his youthful adventures as an oyster pirate, his voyage on the sealer *Sophia Sutherland,* his tramp across America with Coxey's army, the Klondike gold rush, his divorce from Bessie Maddern, the *Snark* cruise through the South Seas, and his retreat to the land (to his "Beauty Ranch") were all of a pattern. When problems became too great, when unpleasant decisions were in the offing, literally or figuratively he would "light out for the territory." Now, in the last years of his life, his situation was once again intolerable. His body was failing him. Popular and financial success had brought no satisfaction, for, as he had recognized early in his career,"the ephemeral flourishes and the great stories remain unwritten."[5] He felt frustrated and isolated, and neither his socialism nor his

philosophical determinism offered him solace or direction But this time he found most of his escape routes closed. Alcohol and drugs offered temporary respites and writing was also a partial refuge: as he implied to his editor, his exhausting writing schedule was required both to meet his debts and to keep the ultimate escape of death, "the Noseless One," away. In sum, Jack London was at the end of his tether and "was striving to discover where he had gone wrong, why success had meant failure in that it had not brought him happiness and content, what, if anything, he could find to persuade himself to stop short of the brink to which he had now come so close."[6]

This then was London's physical and psychological condition when he returned to Hawaii hoping to recapture the health, pleasures, and inspiration that had been his during a four-and-a-half month visit there in 1907. In this context, the parallels between Jack London and Harry, the hero of Ernest Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," are striking. Both men, looking back over their lives and questioning their values and bearings, try to recapture the past by returning to the "good place" where they had once lived and written well. London, like Harry, hopes to "work the fat off his soul," but ultimately discovers that time has run out. London's Noseless One (Harry's hyena with the stinking breath) is the victor, and the answers remain as distant as Kilimanjaro's House of God or the high plateau of Guadalcanal where London's Red One resides.

Miraculously, however, he was able to reverse briefly that creative decline that had closely paralleled the physical degeneration of his last years. The climate and relaxed atmosphere of the islands were contributing factors, yet of more significance was his return to books in search of explanations. Darwin, Spencer, and Marx had been his guides when he had sought escape from poverty and the life of a work beast; now, as he realized that materialism offered the individual scant aid in comprehending the meaning of his own life and death, he turned not toward traditional religion but to the psychoanalytical works of Freud, Prince, and especially Jung.[7] Groping for something beyond a pessimistic materialism, he still felt it essential to find an empirical base for his beliefs. Or as James I. McClintock has characterized this stage of London's pilgrimage: "He was once again captivated by theoreticians who proffered him a scientifically defensible rationale for subscribing to humanly sustaining values as he flirted dangerously with nihilism."[8]

In the Jack London Collection of the Huntington Library is the author's copy of the 1916 English translation of C. G. Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious,*[9] well worn and with numerous passages marked. In her biography of her husband, Charmian London recalls the extraordinary ef-

fect that this new knowledge had upon him, for he saw in it an escape from the frustrations and bitter depressions that had marred his immediately preceding years. "Mate Woman," he exclaimed, "I tell you I am standing on the edge of a world so new, so terrible, so wonderful, that I am almost afraid to look over into it."[10]

The consequences of his discovery of depth psychology appear to have been threefold. First, it offered, in his opinion, the only scientific support for the concept of free will--a possibility which he had previously viewed as anathema to the rational mind. As evidence of this shift in the author's thinking, one must turn again to Charmian London's work, in which she quotes a lengthy passage from Beatrice Hinkle's introduction to *Psychology of the Unconscious* and then comments on London's response to it:

> "The value of self-consciousness lies in the fact that man is enabled to reflect upon himself and learn to understand the true origin and significance of his actions and opinions, that he may adequately value the real level of his development and avoid being self-deceived and therefore inhibited from finding his biological adaptation. He need no longer be unconscious of the motives underlying his actions or hide himself behind a changed exterior, in other words, be merely a series of reactions to stimuli, as the mechanists have it, *but he may to a certain extent become a self-creating and self-determining being.*"
>
> I shall never cease to remember the day when, all a tip-toe with discovery, Jack entered the dining room, slipped into his chair and repeated the foregoing italicized sentence. I, knowing his theretofore immovable position regarding free will, sat aghast at the implication upon his tongue. At length:
>
> "Do you *realize* what you are saying? What are you implying?"
>
> "I know how you feel --how surprised you are," he answered. "But it almost would seem that I can grasp, from this, some sort of inkling of free will."[11]

A few days later he was to shock her again with the comment: "For the first time in my life, . . . I see the real value to the human soul of the confessional."[12]

The second point of Jung's appeal for Jack London logically flowed from the questionings aroused by contemplation of free will, guilt, and responsibility. In the analysis that follows of key stories written in the Hawaiian summer of the writer's last year, there is a recurring issue: the pos-

sibility of a reality beyond materialistic determinism--a spiritual dimension hinted at through the pervasiveness of religious mythology, tradition, and folklore.

Finally, it was this significance of dreams and myth in the Jungian world view that opened for London a new field of exploration--his own dreams and those of whole cultures as expressed in their myths. "It may come as a surprise," writes Earle Labor, "that, several years before Eliot immortalized Miss Jessie L. Weston by poeticizing the cruelties of April, the Wonder Boy of the Naturalist Carnival had already discovered a similar key--perhaps the skeleton key--to the 'lostness' of modern man in the primitive folklore of Polynesia--and in the writings of Carl Jung.[13]

Jack London left Hawaii for the mainland in the late summer of 1915, but returned to Honolulu that December, remaining until July 26, 1916. He died November 22 of the same year. But during this last Hawaiian sojourn he played the role of writer-celebrity, "Papa London," whenever his health permitted. Dinner and card parties were frequent and he entertained by reading aloud "in the stately numbers of Ecclesiastes,"[14] an ominously meaningful selection when viewed in retrospect. At such times, his friends would ask his wife, "What ails Jack? He looks well enough, but there's something about him . . . his eyes. . . ."[15]

In the morning hours London wrote most of the short stories later to be collected in *On the Makaloa Mat* (1919) and *The Red One* (1918). These tales, which give artistic form to the conflicts and questionings inspired by the author's physical dissolution, his spiritual gropings, and the perceptions of Jung, are among Jack London's finest achievements. The remainder of this essay is devoted to an analysis of four key stories in these collections.

Jack London completed "The Water Baby"[16] on October 2, 1916, after returning to Glen Ellen, California. Like "The Bones of Kahekili" and "Shin Bones," other stories from *On the Makaloa Mat* to be discussed subsequently, it utilizes a frame story technique to convey a simple central narrative devoid of the explicit detailing of violence and suffering that is both a strength and a weakness of much of his earlier fiction.

The narrator of the frame story is John Lakana (Hawaiian for "London"), a cynical, modem *haole* (white man) who lends a weary ear to the chanting of his fishing partner, the aged Polynesian, Kohokumu. Lakana, although much younger than Kohokumu, is unable to match the energy and joie de vivre of the old man. He cites physical causes--an aching head and an upset stomach--but the reader recognizes another source of his obscure malaise: the enervating ennui of a purposeless existence.

In contrast, Kohokumu is a believer in the old pagan religion and a man who feels that he is part of a natural process in a meaningful universe. When the reader first meets him, he is "chanting of the deeds and adventures of Maui, the Promethean demigod of Polynesia who fished up dry land from ocean depths with hooks made fast to heaven, who lifted up the sky where under previously men had gone on all fours, not having space to stand erect, and who made the sun . . . stand still and agree . . . to traverse the sky more slowly" (p. 143).

After listening to Kohokumu with apparent irritation, Lakana demands: "And you believe all this?" (p. 144). In response, the old man appeals to tradition for "all our old men from all the way back tell us these things as I . . . tell them to my sons and grandsons" (p. 144). Then he startles the narrator with a perceptive comparison: "I have read the Hawaiian bible . . . and there have I read that your Big Man of the Beginning made the earth and sky . . . and all animals . . . in six days. Why Maui didn't do anything like that much. He didn't *make* anything. He just put things in order . . . and it took him a long, long time" (p. 144). Taken aback by this fair reply, the author's surrogate muses to himself that science and evolutionary theory support the Hawaiian myth of creation by asserting that man first moved on all fours, the earth's rotation on its axis is slowing down (thereby lengthening the day), and the Hawaiian Islands were raised from the sea.

Disturbed by this trend in "the profitless discussion," Lakana is relieved to find a diversion--the fish begin to bite. Ironically, however, this distraction only serves to reinforce the contrast between the two men. In amazement the narrator watches the Hawaiian, "past seventy . . . , lean as a spear, and shriveled like a mummy," do what few haole athletes "would do or could do" (p. 147). Kohokumu dives into the forty-foot depths of the coral reef, pries a nine-foot octopus from its lair, and kills it by biting "into the heart and life of the matter" (p. 148). Rising to the surface with his conquest, "the grisly clinging thing," the Polynesian bursts "into the *pule* of triumph which had been chanted by countless squid-catching generations before him" (p. 148). Looking on for the outrigger, the white man is simultaneously fascinated and repelled.

It is difficult to miss the symbolic import of this scene. In his totality of beliefs and physical abilities, old Kohokumu is a part of the natural world in which he functions. He is not--like John Lakana--a skeptical spectator, but rather a participant in his world, one who, bites "into the heart and life of the matter," experiences it to the full, and finds it good. Significantly, what for the haole is a monster, snake-like and horrifying, is for the Hawaiian "a very fine squid," a God-given delicacy.

When the narrator questions Kohokumu's remarkable stamina and longevity, the old man responds in a passage whose mythic content is indicative of London's reading of Jung:

> "The Sea is my mother. I was born in a double canoe, during a Kona gale. . . . From her, the Sea, my mother, I received my strength. Whenever I return to her arms . . . , as I have returned this day, I grow strong again and immediately. She, to me, is the milk giver, the life source. . . ."
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> "Some day," old Kohokumu rambled on, "when I am really old, I shall be reported of men as drowned in the sea. This will be an idle thought of men. In truth, I shall have returned into the arms of my mother, there to rest under the heart of her breast until the second birth of me, when I shall emerge into the sun a flashing youth of splendor like Maui himself when he was golden young" (p. 150).

To Lakana's deprecating comment that this is a "queer" religion, the Polynesian replies that with age he has learned one thing: truth is to be found within oneself. It arises from the "deeps," and man, "if he be not blind," acknowledges it. Such an epistemology obviously runs contrary to the empiricism that London, the avowed materialist, always publically espoused. His dramatization of this concept, through the sympathetic figure of Kohokumu, suggests that in his last year Jack London was seriously questioning his philosophical positions.

Even when John Lakana challenges the old Hawaiian's beliefs with the nihilism of Mark Twain's mysterious stranger, suggesting that all might be a dream, Kohokumu is unperturbed: "There is much more in dreams than we know. . . . Dreams go deep, all the way down, maybe to before the beginning" (p. 152). Jung's theory that dreams are keys to the understanding of personality, and that myths--the dreams of peoples arising from their "collective unconscious"[17]--are the keys to the comprehension of racial and cultural values, is reflected in this quotation.[18]

"The Water Baby" concludes with the inside narrative related by Kohokumu at John Lakana's request. The tale of Keikiwai, the water baby, is a reaffirmation of the theme conveyed in the old man's confrontation with the octopus. To supply lobsters for the king, the young boy must dive to the bottom of a shark-infested lagoon. However, the water baby has one distinct advantage: as a part of the natural world, he understands and speaks the language of fishes. Like a modern con artist, he misleads the sharks, causing them to destroy each other while he safely

gathers the king's supper. Again the point is made: the unstudied, spantaneous, natural Polynesian triumphs in his environment.

At the conclusion of his story, Kohokumu silences Lakana with "I know what next you would say. You would say with my own eyes I did not see this. . . . But I do know, and I can prove it. My father's father knew the grandson of the Water Baby's father's uncle" (p. 159). The contrast between an ingenuous but life-sustaining faith and a stultifying, debilitating skepticism is clear. Jack London is poised between them, sympathetic to the former, intellectually committed to the latter.

Any discussion of Jungian influence in Jack London's fiction must acknowledge James I. McClintock's essay "Jack London's Use of Carl Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious,* " reprinted in revised form in his book *White Logic: Jack London's Short Stories.*[19] Although McClintock is generally critical of London's short stories written after 1905, he has high praise for the *On the Makaloa Mat* collection, considering it superior to the author's earlier South Sea fiction. He believes, with justification, that this last creative outburst testifies "to the restorative influence the psychologist's [Jung's] thought had upon the quality of London's fiction."[20] The critic has special praise for the unity and simplicity of these tales and for London's return to his "most productive themes and subjects: death, the conflict between primitive and modern cultures, and the struggle between optimism and pessimism."[21]As a cursory reading indicates, these motifs all function in "The Water Baby."

Regarding London's debt to specific aspects of Jungian psychology, McClintock emphasizes the concepts of logical "directed thinking" and its obverse "dream or phantasy thinking,"[22]which are discussed in chapter 1 of *Psychology of the Unconscious* and dramatized by London in the Lakana-Kohokumu contrast. Also the critic notes the fictionist's utilization of Jung's libido theory, whose definition (by Dr. Hinkle) London underlined in his copy of *Psychology of the Unconscious:*

> He [Jung] saw in the term libido a concept of unknown nature, comparable with Bergson's élan vital, a hypothetical energy of life, which occupies itself not only in sexuality but in various physiological and psychological manifestations . . . and all the human activities and interests. This cosmic energy or urge manifested in the human being he calls libido and compares it with the energy of physics.[23]

According to McClintock, London interprets this "energy of life" as the nuclear force motivating his questing heroes of earlier tales and the source

of old Kohokumu's vitality. It is a well-spring of optimism in opposition to the grim deterministic truths of science that debilitate such later figures as John Lakana.

"The Water Baby," when interpreted from this perspective, reads as an artistically effective presentation of the previously cited "tension between civilized skepticism" and that "natural affirmation" based on "the most common . . . archetype . . . that of the sun (the hero and libido energy) setting (dying) in the sea (the womb) and rising in the morning (being reborn)."[24]

While McClintock's analysis suggests the extent to which Jack London gave fictive shape to Jung's theories, the important fact his research substantiates is that at the end of his career the author turned, as he had so often before, to the new sciences (in this case, psychoanalysis) in hopes of discovering truths that would explain the human predicament. However, "The Bones of Kahekili" and "Shin Bones" portray more unequivocally than does "The Water Baby" the inability of London's modern man to transcend the limitations of pessimistic materialism, strongly suggesting that their creator's final quest ended in failure.

In "The Bones of Kahekili,"[25] completed at Waikiki, Honolulu, June 28, 1916, the author's persona is Hardman Pool, "a source of life, a source of food, a fount of wisdom, a giver of law, a smiling beneficience, a blackness of thunder and punishment" (p. 43) to those who live and work on his vast Hawaiian ranch.

The seventy-one-year-old Pool is a haole who has gained much from Hawaii. Through marriage with Polynesian royalty, he gained land, wealth, and a deep understanding of native traditions: "He knew his Hawaiians from the outside and the in, knew them better than themselves--their Polynesian circumlocutions, faiths, cutsoms, and mysteries" (pp. 44-45). Ironically, however, this "fount of wisdom" is, like London his creator, a skeptic, a questioner of the meaning and purpose in life who must turn to alcohol to escape thought. Gaining much that is Hawaiian, he has, nonetheless, failed to achieve that inner peace, that affirmative vision that is the Polynesian's most envied possession.

The Lakana-Kohokumu contrast of "The Water Baby" is echoed here for Hardman Pool also has his antithesis in Kumuhana, a seventy-nine-year-old Hawaiian survivor of the days when pagan rituals of human sacrifice were practiced in the islands. Kumuhana relates this tale's inside narrative in response to Pool's demand to be told where lie the bones of Kahekili, an ancestral *alii* (high chief) from whose line Pool's wife has descended. After considerable hesitation, the old Hawaiian tells how, fifty-

one years before (1829), he had been taken as a *moepuu*, a human sacrifice, "to go the way of Kahekili and his bones and to care for him afterward and forever, in the shadowy other world" (p. 64). He relates how after a night of drunken revelry he awoke to find the high priest Eoppo and numerous chiefs standing above him. The other kanakas had heard of Kahekili's death and fled, leaving Kumuhana as the only candidate for sacrifice, although tradition required two escorts for an alii into the netherworld. Kahekili, in a haole coffin, and Kumuhana, with a fearful hangover, were taken to the middle of the Molokai channel while the high priest intoned a Maori death chant:

> But death is nothing new.
> Death is and has been ever since old Maui died.
> Then Pata-tai laughed loud
> And woke the goblin god,
> Who severed him in two, and shut him in,
> So dusk of eve came on. (p. 72)

At the appointed site, the chiefs slipped Kahekili, in his coffin, into the sea; however, the high priest opposed the sacrificing of Kumuhana, arguing that half the required tribute was insulting to the dead alii. At that point, a cry of horror ended the debate:

> "The coffin, head end up, had not sunk. . . . And the glass of it was to us, so that we could see the face and head of Kahekili through the glass; and he grinned at us . . . and seemed alive already in the other world and angry with us, and, with otherworld power, about to wreak his anger upon us. Up and down he bobbed, and the canoe drifted closer upon him.
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> " 'Kill him'! [Kumuhana] 'Bleed him'! 'Thrust to the heart of him'! These things the chiefs were crying out to Eoppo in their fear" (p. 74-75).

As the knife was raised to strike, a chief, fending off the coffin, broke the face plate and sent Kahekili's bones to their resting place among the coral reefs of the Molokai Channel. Consequently, Kumuhana was spared. "And I, who was a moepuu," he concludes, "became a man once more. And I lived, though I died a thousand deaths from thirst before we gained back to the beach at Waikiki" (p. 75-76).

As Kuuhana ends his narrative, the white man remains in silent meditation, fascinated by the last line of the Maori death chant, " 'So dusk of

eve came on', finding in it an intense satisfaction of beauty" (p. 76) but no promise of salvation. In this instance, the Polynesian mythology offers no assurance. "We are wise," says Hardman Pool, "but the wisdom is bitter" (p. 70).

According to critic Howard Lachtman, the core meaning of this short story is found in

> the implied comparison between old Kumuhana's two masters [which] suggests that this ancient Hawaiian will survive both the great lord who required his life and the lesser one who demanded his secret. Whatever knowledge Harman Pool has gained about the facts of Kahekili's bones is less important than the intimation of Kumuhana's own vitality of spirit. But it is this last knowledge which Pool, the materialistic patriarch of modern Hawaiian civilization, cannot comprehend.[26]

Such an optimistic interpretation of this story is not, in my opinion, justified. Kumuhana's survival is a matter of luck, and his tale is littered with images of frustrated passion, pain, and death. It contains no affirmation. James McClintock is closer to the truth when he comments that in "The Bones of Kahekili" the "riddle of death and rebirth" is solved by a recognition of "the finality of death. . . . Maui the sun god of rebirth is dead. . . . The destructive 'goblin god rules."[27] Mankind can only face mortality with stoic acceptance. Too intellectually honest to write himself into a saving belief, the author was dramatizing the failure of Jungian insights to bring the expected answers.

Only one more story from *On the Makaloa Mat* need be cited in support of this thesis. In "Shin Bones,"[28] completed at Waikiki, July 16, 1916, Jack London, once more, effectively fictionalized his fruitless struggle to escape the trap of pessimistic materialism.

As in "The Water Baby" and "The Bones of Kahekili," London has constructed a frame story in which the skepticism of the modern world confronts the ancient traditions and religious beliefs of Polynesia. Yet "Shin Bones" differs from these tales in that herein the confrontation is not between cynical white man and an aged Hawaiian; instead, the modem skeptic is Prince Akuli, an Oxford-educated sophisticate, descended from "the oldest and highest aliis of Hawaii."

The setting of the outside narrative is a mountain bower on the mythical island of Lakanaii (London), "conceded by all to be the wildest, the most wildly beautiful, and . . . the richest of all the islands" (p. 108). Prince Akuli and an unnamed narrator are awaiting repair of the Prince's limousine.

In the opening pages of exposition the narrator relates the Prince's heritage, which is chanted in "interminable genealogies," all the way back to "Wakea, who is their Adam, and Papa, their Eve" (pp. 109-110). Then he abstracts his introductory material in a passage that sets up the inside narrative and introduces the thematic conflict between modern skepticism and traditional beliefs:

> And so, out of all incests and lusts of the primitive cultures and beast man's gropings toward the stature of manhood, out of all red murders and brute battlings and matings with the younger brothers of the demigods, world-polished, Oxford-accented, twentieth century to the tick of the second, comes Prince Akuli . . . , pure-veined Polynesian, a living bridge across the centuries, comrade, friend and fellow traveler, out of his wrecked seven-thousand-dollar limousine, marooned with me in a begonia paradise fourteen hundred feet above the sea . . . , to tell me of his mother who reverted in her old age to ancientness of religious concept and ancestor worship and collected and surrounded herself with the charnel bones of those who had been her fore-runners back in the darkness of time. (p. 112)

The tale that the Prince relates is an initiation story rooted in the veneration of these ancestral remains. What Akuli characterizes as a "collecting fad" was assiduously practiced by both his parents--but for opposite reasons. Hiwilani, his mother, reverenced the bones of her progenitors as an integral part of the old faith of pre-Christian Hawaii. ("It gave me the creeps, when I was a boy," says the Prince, "to go into that big, forever-twilight room of hers, and know that . . . in all the jars were the preserved bone remnants of the shadowy dust of the ancestors whose seed had come down and been incorporated in the living, breathing me" [p. 106].) Diametrically opposed to Hiwilani's belief was the attitude of Prince Kanau, Akuli's father, "modern to his finger tips." He was a businessman, cynic, and materialist who "believed neither in the gods of the *kahunas* (priests) nor of the missionaries" (p. 113). His commitment was to the world of sugar stocks and horse breeding and to music, "which is stronger than drink and quicker than opium" (p. 117). Nonetheless, he too collected bones, but only as a philatelist collects stamps.

The inside narrative related by Prince Akuli is the story of his journey with Ahuna, an aged family retainer and adherent of the old religion, to the secret Cave of the Dead to obtain certain ancestral bones demanded by Hiwilani for her collection. This expedition, taken when Akuli was a

teenager, was the result of Hiwilani's incessant cajoling, badgering, and threatening of Ahuna to reveal the ancient burial site, for he alone knew the location of the cave. When Ahuna acquiesced to Hiwilani's demand by agreeing to make the difficult journey and to return with her mother's and her grandmother's bones, he stipulated that only akuli, sworn to secrecy, should accompany him. However, the prince was his father's son: "I refused to go on the bone-snatching expedition. I said I didn't care a whoop for the bones of all the aliis of my family and race.--You see, I had just discovered Jules Verne" (p. 119). The future, not the past, held the youth's attention."I stood with my father," declared the prince, "when it came to modern skepticism, and I told her [Hiwilani] the whole thing was rubbish" (p. 120). Only when his mother bribed him with a promise of an Oxford education did Akuli consent to accompany Ahuna. Ironically, the prince's journey into his past is his talisman into the future. The knowledge of science, the arts, and philosophy derived from his Western education would serve to sustain his youthful unbelief.

The journey began with the prince, Ahuna, and eight aged paddlers setting out for the treacherous Iron-bound Coast, an area whose wild beauty was matched only by its danger. Its shores, edging forbidding mountains,, were without bays or anchorages, making a landing a test of courage; the trip inland was even more trying. The "great forbidding cliff walls . . . , their summits wreathed in cloud and rain squall," and the valleys, resembling fissures in a "lofty and madly vertical back country," (p. 125) help create the atmosphere of disorientation, danger, and mystery required for the fifteen-year-old cynic's perilous journey back into the history of his race and his consequent spiritual detumescence.

Prince Akuli and his mentor, Ahuna, set out alone on the final stage of their quest. This literal night journey, on a path that resembled "a Jacob's ladder to the sky," ended at a tarn in a wasteland, "a God-forsaken place of naked, eroded lava, to which only rarely could the scant vegetation find foothold" (p. 130). The two dove into the pool, swam through an underwater passage, and surfaced in a cave which they followed into the mountain's core. When the prince swore never to reveal what he was about to see, Ahuna allowed him to enter the burial chamber. In this "centuries old family attic" the youth confronted a thousand years of Hawaiian history. Among the treasures were the bones: "they were all there, the Hawaiian race from the beginning of Hawaiian time" (pp. 134-35).

As the prince moved among the remains of his ancestors, his attitude initially reflected the irreverence of youth and his father's cynicism; but his perceptions quickly changed. This experience, "in the culminating pe-

riod of [his] adolescence," (p. 142) became an epiphany when he viewed the pathetic physical remnants of the most famous love triangle of royal Polynesia and heard Ahuna relate their story.

Three hundred years earlier, the beautiful Laulani, the wife of Chief Akaiko, took Keola, a famed athlete, as her lover. When she fled with him, Akaiko pursued and,"in a forgotten battle on the sands of Kalini" (p. 137), slew Keola. Of all that passion and grief, there remained two bundles of bones (Laulani's and Akaiko's) and a spearhead made from Keola's shin bone.

As Ahuna ended his tale, the prince "could but gaze, with imagination at the one time sobered and fired." For

> here were the three, I thought--Arthur and Launcelot and Guinevere. This . . . was the end of it all, of life and strife and striving and love, the weary spirits of these long-gone ones to be evoked by fat old women and mangy sorcerers, the bones of them to be esteemed of collectors and betted on horse races and ace-fulls or to be sold for cash and invested in sugar stocks.
>
> For me it was illumination. I learned there in the burial cave the great lesson. (p. 138)

Recognizing for the first time what Hopkins termed "the blight man was born for," Akuli kept two of the bones as *memento mori*, and they served well, for as he tells the outside narrator, they changed his life and gave him "a modesty and a humility" (p. 142) that his inherited wealth could not destroy.

Like Hardman Pool, Prince Akuli is wise, but the wisdom is bitter. In an epithet foreshadowing T. S. Eliot, London's protagonist tells his friend that there are no mysteries in life, for "this is the twentieth century and we stink of gasoline" (p. 141). However, that revelation in the Cave of the Dead had given him his "religion or practice of living" (p. 142). Moderation, resignation, and stoicism in the face of time and dissolution are his meagre substitutes for the customs, folklore, and beliefs that gave meaning to old Ahuna's life. The predicament of the prince, which Jack London saw as representative of modern man's, is summarized in the African proverb: "If a man does away with his traditional way of living and throws away his good customs, he had better first make certain that he has something of value to replace them." The prince's replacement is the author's own. And as "Shin Bones" suggests, both author and his fictive surrogate perceived stoicism's inadequacy in any confrontation with the Medusa of atheism.

As this analysis and summary indicate, "Shin Bones" utilizes numerous archetypes identified by Jung--the perilous journey, the descent into water, the cave--all aspects of the story's initiation theme, itself a universal motif. Ironically, however, at the thematic heart of "Shin Bones" is modem man's alienation from that mythopoeic vision which, according to Jung, gives meaning and value to the individual life.[29] Like his father, Prince Akuli cannot accept the Polynesian mythic tradition.

The London biographer Andrew Sinclair has seriously misread these last stories when he states that in them Jack London identifies himself "with aged Hawaiian natives telling the tales and myths of their past to skeptical foreigners."[30] While in all probability he wished to so identify himself, he could not. Kohokumu and John Lakana, Kumuhana and Hardman Pool, Ahuna and Prince Akuli personify the divergent visions struggling within the writer's psyche: the "comforting mythic . . . tradition and the corruptive materialism of modern civilization," one offering "to preserve man's spiritual vitality . . . the other diminish[ing] those who reap its benefits."[31] Yet in each story Jack London implicitly associates himself with the voices of skepticism and materialism. Lakana, Pool, and Akuli echo the author's own questionings. The Jungian insights that Jack London had discovered in *Psychology of the Unconscious,* "like the systems he had found before, had failed on the eve of his own death to give him a sure faith."[32]

"The Red One,"[33] completed at Waikiki, May 22, 1916, is an appropriate short story with which to conclude this essay. Not only is it a quality narrative, ranking with his finest achievements, but it is also a compendium of the major themes and motifs that inform the entire corpus of South Pacific narratives. Nonetheless, other than a few articles of the "notes and queries" variety,[34] this story has been virtually ignored by London scholars. The two standard works of London criticism, Earle Labor's *Jack London* and James I. McClintock's *White Logic,* do not discuss it.

"The Red One" differs from the other stories discussed in several significant aspects. First, the setting is no longer Hawaii, the Pacific paradise, but rather its opposite: the black hell of Melanesia--specifically, Guadalcanal, the Solomon Islands. And, as in all Jack London's South Sea narratives, this brutal world elicits the worst in human nature. Graphic descriptions of violence, suffering, and death (which were muted in *On the Makaloa Mat*) once again convey the naturalist's law of life.

Also, London puts aside the frame story technique employed in the other three stories; instead, he shifts to a Jamesian third-person point of view. The narrative voice limits itself to the thought processes of the protagonist, and the action of the narrative is presented from his perspective.

As shall be shown, the author's abandonment of his favored frame story technique and the utilization instead of this more sophisticated presentation are essential to the story's successful thematic development.

The aspects of "The Red One" cited above demonstrate its divergence from the other short stories treated. However, in its archetypal quest motif, obsession with death, and thematic contrast between primitive and modern cultures, "The Red One" manifests its kinship with the Polynesian tales of Jack London's last year.

"The Red One" is the tale of Bassett, a scientist, and his search for the source of an unearthly sound emanating from the unexplored interior of Guadalcanal. While butterfly collecting on the beach at Ringmanu, he first heard the call, which he subsequently described as

> that enormous peal that dominated the land far into the strongholds of the surrounding tribes. The mountain gorge which was its source rang to the rising of it until it brimmed over and flooded earth and sky and air. With the wantonness of a sick man's fancy, he likened it to the mighty cry of some Titan of the Elder World vexed with misery or wrath. Higher and higher it arose, challenging and demanding in such profounds of volume that it seemed intended for ears beyond the narrow confines of the solar system. There was in it, too, the clamor of protest in that there were no ears to hear and comprehend its utterance. (p. 1)

Like the sirens' call heard by Odysseus, the sound could not be ignored. Bassett's scientific curiosity had to be satisfied, for he associated the sound with mystery and knowledge: "Was this, then, *his* dark tower?--Bassett pondered" (p. 3). Believing the origin to be near, he abandoned his only link with civilization, the blackbirder *Nari* (a sailing vessel used to recruit black labor), and set out into the jungle. Almost immediately headhunters attacked, slew his servant, and mutilated the scientist himself (two fingers lost, his skull slashed and deeply indented) before he repelled the savages.

Now began a nightmarish period (of indeterminate duration) during which the ever-lurking cannibals and tropical fevers drove Bassett to the verge of insanity; yet, whenever possible, he continued to move toward that sound "like a benediction to his long-suffering, pain-wracked spirit" (p. 12). To the sick man the call became a symbol of life and promise in contrast to the luxuriant jungle, ironically, a symbol of evil, death, and decay. Seldom has the naturalist's nightmare been more effectively conveyed:

> But seared deepest of all in Bassett's brain, was the dank and noisome jungle. It actually stank with evil, and it was always twilight. Rarely did a shaft of sunlight penetrate its matted roof a hundred feet overhead. And beneath that roof was an aërial ooze of vegetation, a monstrous, parasitic dripping of decadent life-forms that rooted in death and lived on death. And through all this he drifted, ever pursued by the flitting shadows of the anthropophagi, themselves ghosts of evil that dared not face him in battle but that knew, soon or late, that they would feed on him. (p. 10)

Miraculously Bassett escaped the jungle ringing the island and crossed the vast Guadalcanal savannah, arriving more dead than alive at the forest-covered foot of the inland mountains. There, in an unconscious state. he was found by Balatta; dirt-caked and with a bloody pig's tail thrust through her left earlap, she resembled something more simian than human. But he owed her his life. She brought him to the village of her mountain tribe, and he resided there in decaying health, closely watched by Balatta, who wanted him as a love object, and by Ngurn, the devil-devil or medicine man, who wanted his head. However, Bassett refused to let go of life, "for, like the genuine scientist he was, he would not be content to die until he had solved the secret of the sound" (p. 18).

Quickly mastering the native language, Bassett became a crony of Ngurn, the priest, and in the smokey darkness of the devil-devil house, with its shrunken heads hanging from the rafters, the twentieth-century man of science and the representative of man's primordial beginning discussed the ultimate questions of good and evil, life and death. Often the conversation turned to the source of the sound, identified by Ngurn as the "Red One." He was their god, "more bestial powerful than the neighbor tribal gods, ever a-thirst for the red blood of living human sacrifices." Even those gods, asserted Ngurn, "were sacrificed and tormented before him" (p. 19). For generations the Red One had ruled, but the true nature of this deity remained a mystery to Bassett. No outsider could look upon the Red One--and live. Therefore, the scientist could only question and be tantalized. Why, for example, did Ngurn refer to the Red One as the "Sun Singer" and the "Star-Born"?

Knowing that death was imminent, the scientist became so desperate for a glimpse of the "God-Voiced" that he proposed a trade with the savage:

> "When I die I'll let you have my head to cure, if first, you take me to look upon the Red One."
>
> "I will have your head anyway when you are dead," Ngurn rejected the proposition. . . . "Besides, you have not long to live. You are almost a dead man now. You will grow less strong. In not many months I shall have you here turning and turning in the smoke. It is pleasant, through the long afternoons, to turn the head of one you have known as well as I know you. And I shall talk to you and tell you the many secrets you want to know. Which will not matter, for you will be dead." (p. 24)

Seeing that this stratagem was obviously fruitless, Bassett turned to the disgusting bushwoman, feigned love for her, and demanded in return that she lead him to the Red One. "A scientist first, a humanist afterward" (p. 29), he cared little that should the tribe discover Balatta's transgression her dying would be long and excruciating.

To show her love for Bassett, Balatta acquiesced, and on a mountain mesa the scientist finally confronted the Red One. There in a deep pit he saw a red orb, "a perfect sphere, fully two hundred feet in diameter, the top of it . . . a hundred feet below the level of the rim" (pp. 31-32). Over the anguished objections of the woman, Bassett descended to the object and found

> the pit bottom carpeted with human bones, among which, battered and defaced, lay village gods of wood and stone. Some, covered with obscene totemic figures and designs, were carved from solid tree trunks forty or fifty feet in length. He noted the absence of the shark and turtle gods, so common among the shore villages, and was amazed at the constant recurrence of the helmet motive. What did these jungle savages of the dark heart of Guadalcanal know of helmets? Had Mendana's men-at-arms worn helmets and penetrated here centuries before? And if not, then whence had the bush-folk caught the motive? (p. 32-33)

In this long overlooked story, Jack London apparently anticipated Erich Von Daniken's theory that space travelers visited earth in prehistoric times.

Bassett's examination showed the Red One to be of a metal scarred by intense heat and to be hollow at the core. As he touched its surface, the sphere quivered "under the fingertip caress in rhythmic vibrations that became whisperings and rustlings . . . of sound . . . like a peal from some

bell of the gods reaching earthward from across space" (p. 34). For hundreds of years this celestial traveler had called out when struck during myriad human sacrifices, and the irony of the situation was almost too much for Bassett to accept. He

> laughed aloud, almost with madness, at the thought of this wonderful messenger, winged with intelligence across space, to fall into a bushman stronghold and be worshiped by ape-like, man-eating and head-hunting savages. It was as if God's Word had fallen into the muck mire of the abyss underlying the bottom of hell; as if Jehovah's Commandments had been presented on carved stone to the monkeys . . . at the Zoo; as if the Sermon on the Mount had been preached in a roaring bedlam of lunatics. (p. 37-38)

Of major thematic importance, however, is the second level of irony in Bassett's situation, which the protagonist is unable or unwilling to perceive. It lies in the conviction of this prototypical twentieth-century man that he is morally superior to the Melanesians. In reality his capacity for evil equals or exceeds that of the bushmen--but he never confronts his heart of darkness.

Bassett's moral blindness is clearly defined when, after his return from the secret visit to the Red One, he determines to let nothing stop him from discovering whatever truth is contained within the sphere. In his musings on the intelligences that sent the Red One, he wonders: "Had they won Brotherhood? Or had they learned that the law of love imposed the penalty of weakness and decay? Was strife, life? Was the rule of all the universe the pitiless rule of natural selection?" (p. 41). Regardless of the answer, to crack this code of the higher priesthood London's dubious hero is willing to wade through blood. As noted, he chose to risk a horrible death for Balatta just to view the object. Now he plots to escape and to "lead an expedition back, and, *although the entire population of Guadalcanal be destroyed,* extract from the heart of the Red One the message of the world from other worlds" (p. 42; emphasis mine). Directed by modern man's only moral guide--the end justifies the means--Bassett, a scientist, prefigures the fathers of the mushroom cloud. Howard Lachtman recognized the symbolic import of Bassett when he pointed out that in "The Red One" Jack London contrasted the South Sea primitives and civilized man "to mirror the essential savagery of even the highest representatives (scientists) of modern civilization and the western world."[35] Could there be a more appropriate time for the expression of this theme than 1916, the year of Verdun and the Somme?

The relationship between this theme and the author's narrative method is part of the success of "The Red One." By replacing his usual frame story technique with the limited third-person point of view, London made a propitious decision. For by viewing the action through Bassett's eyes, he created verisimiltude and, more significantly, conveyed the Jekyll and Hyde discrepancy between the protagonist's motive and method, his vision of himself and the reality, without a first-person or omniscient narrator preaching to the reader.

"The Red One" draws to a conclusion with Bassett's realization that he is never to leave Guadalcanal. He grows weaker by the day and knows that soon he will be added to Ngurn's collection. Therefore, to gain a last glimpse of the "Star-Born," he offers himself as a sacrifice before it. Borne on a litter by a dozen blacks, the scientist once more journeys to the high mesa and down to the killing ground before the sphere. He is allowed to listen to its peal once more. Then the story concludes with a passage that ranks among the most powerful ever penned by Jack London:

> He knew, without seeing, when the razor-edged hatchet rose in the air behind him. And for that instant, ere the end, there fell upon Bassett the shadow of the unknown, a sense of impending marvel of the rending of walls before the imaginable. Almost, when he knew the blow had started and just ere the edge of steel bit the flesh and nerves, it seemed that he gazed upon the serene face of the Medusa, Truth--And, simultaneous with the bite of the steel on the onrush of the dark, in a flashing instant of fancy, he saw the vision of his head turning slowly, always turning, in the devil-devil house beside the breadfruit tree. (p. 49-50)

Here London's archetypal quest motif blends with the images of death (Bassett's shrunken head) and life (the breadfruit tree) in a symbolic trinity of the writer's major themes.

A few years after her husband's death, Charmian London wrote: "Sometimes I wonder if it can be possible, in the ponderings of the dying scientist, Bassett, that Jack London revealed more of himself than he would have been willing to admit--or else, who knows? more of himself than he himself realized."[36] Her speculations are probabilities, not possibilities. Bassett's quest was the lifelong obsession of Jack London, and "The Red One" contains the major themes and motifs of the author's better fiction: graphic violence, racial conflict, irony,[37] the search for a scientific justification for a belief in a reality beyond pessimistic naturalism

(i.e., the message of the Red One), an obsession with death, and finally, the inability of modern man to commit himself to anything beyond materialism and the physical facts of life as he experiences them. Although Bassett seems "to gaze upon . . . Medusa, Truth," the last image in his mind, before his spinal cord is severed, is of "his head turning slowly, always turning."Death, the Noseless One, has the stage alone.

Jack London wrote a great deal on a variety of subjects during the last summer and fall of his life. Nevertheless, his own mortality, Carl Jung's theories, and visions of the South Seas dominated his thoughts and imagination. When these subjects coalesced, "The Water Baby," "The Bones of Kahekili," "Shin Bones," and "The Red One" was produced. Of a pattern, these tales are similar in setting (only "The Red One" is situated outside Hawaii); use of Jungian archetypes; and contrasts between primitive islanders--whose religious beliefs give meaning and direction to their lives--and modem skeptics, who are looking for the missing ingredient that gives purpose and meaning to life and death. However, their basic affinity lies in this last point: civilized man's questioning of his ultimate destiny. Jack London thought he had found a key to this mystery in the writings of Jung but the perplexities of John Lakana, Hardman Pool, Prince Akuli, and Bassett demonstrate that Truth still hid her face.

Eighteen years earlier, when London was just beginning his literary career, he received word that Fred Jacobs, a close friend, had died unexpectedly. Jack's terse comment was, "He solved the mystery a little sooner."[38]In 1916 the mystery remained. For as these last short stories indicate, Jack London needed the impossible--a scientific, rationalistic basis for belief transcending naturalistic determinism. Some years after London died, the last mentor to fail him, C. G. Jung, succinctly summarized the source of the naturalist's frustrations:

> faith cannot be made: it is in the truest sense a gift of grace. We moderns are faced with the necessity of rediscovering the life of the spirit; we must experience it anew for ourselves. It is the only way in which we can break the spell that binds us to the cycle of biological events.[39]

Jack London's last tales of the South Seas are an affecting literary record of his unsuccessful search for the means to break this spell.

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## NOTES

1. Andrew Sinclair, *Jack* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 218.

2. Joan London, *Jack London and His Times* (New York: Doubleday, 1939; reprinted by University of Washington Press, 1968; Washington Paperback edition, 1974), p. 371.

3. Quoted by Sinclair, p. 220.

4. "To Joan London," 24 February 1914, *Letters from Jack London,* King Hendricks and Irving Shepard, eds. (New York: Odyssey Press, 1965), p. 416.

5. Jack London, "The Terrible and Tragic in Fiction," *Critic* 42 (June 1903): 543.

6. Joan London, pp. 372-73.

7. Charmian London, *The Book of Jack London,* vol. 2 (New York: Century, 1921), p. 253.

8. James I. McClintock, *White Logic: Jack London's Short Stories* (Cedar Springs, Michigan: Wolf House Books, 1975), p. 152.

9. C. G. Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious,* trans. by Beatrice M. Hinkle (New York: Moffat, Yard and Co., 1916).

10. Charmian London, *The Book of Jock London,* vol. 2, p. 323.

11. Ibid., pp. 357-58

12. Ibid., p. 359.

13. Earle Labor, *Jack London* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974), p. 127.

14. Charmian London, *The Book of Jack London,* vol. 2, p. 367.

15. Charmian London, *Jack London and Hawaii* (London: Mills and Boon, 1918); published as *Our Hawaii* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), p. 342.

16. Jack London, "The Water Baby," *Cosmopolitan* 65 (September 1918): 80-85, 133. Collected in *On the Makaloa Mat* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), pp. 143-59. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses within the text.

17. Anthony Storr, *C. G. Jung* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), pp. 105-6.

18. While writing these last Hawaiian stories, London was planning a historical novel about the discovery of America by the Norsemen. The following comment in his notes indicates his preoccupation with this new "science": "Get in interpretation of the genesis of their myths, etc., from their unconscious." Quoted by Charmian London, *The Book of Jack London,* vol. 2, p. 381.

19. James I. McClintock, "Jack London's Use of Carl Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious,* " *American Literature* 42 (November 1970): 336-47.

20. Ibid., p. 159.

21. Ibid.

22. McClintock, "Jack London's Use of Carl Jung's, Psychology *of the Unconscious,*" p. 154.

23. Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious,* p. xxvi. Quoted by Charmian London, *The Book of Jack London,* vol. 2, p. 358.

24. McClintock, *White Logic,* pp. 162-63.

25. Jack London, "The Bones of Kahekili," *Cosmopolitan* 67 (July 1919): 95-100, 102, 104. Collected in *On the Makaloa Mat,* pp. 41-77. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses within the text.

26. Howard Lachtman, "The Wide World of Jack London" (Diss., University of the Pacific, 1974), pp. 121-22.

27. McClintock, *White Logic,* p. 166.

28. Jack London, "In the Cave of the Dead," *Cosmopolitan* 65 (November 1918): 74-81, 119-21. Collected as "Shin Bones" in *On the Makaloa Mat,* pp. 106-42. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses within the text.

29. Storr, p. 36.

30. Sinclair, p. 229.

31. Lachtman, p. 119.

32. McClintock, *White Logic,* p. 167.

33. Jack London, "The Red One," *Cosmopolitan* 65 (October 1918): 34-41, 132, 135-38. Collected in The *Red One* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1918), pp. 1-50. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses within the text.

34. Of these, the best is Thomas D. Clareson's commentary in *A Spectrum of Worlds* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1972), pp. 87-90.

35. Lachtman, p. 118. See also Clareson, p. 89.

36. Charmian London, *The Book of Jack London,* vol. 2, p. 334.

37. The ultimate irony of this story is historical. When Jack London wrote "The Red One," few people in the Western world had heard of Guadalcanal. But twenty-six years later it was the site of the first great land and sea battle of the Pacific war, which London predicted in "The Yellow Peril" (1904). Between August 1942, and February 1943, eighteen hundred Americans and twenty-four thousand Japanese died in a bloodletting that dwarfed to insignificance the sacrifices to the Red One.

38. Quoted by Russ Kingman in *A Pictorial Life of Jack London* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1979), p. 274.

39. C. G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul,* trans. by W. S. Dell and Cary F. Baynes (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1933), p. 122.