

## A Merging of Nature and Culture: California's Ecological Pastoral in Jack London's *The Valley of the Moon*

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Most of Jack London's copious writings in his forty year life concentrate on how to look at the relationship between harsh surroundings and living things. His romantic impulse has been concretized in his literary searches for California's authentic pastoral in the turmoil of modern capitalism. He had a conviction that "domestic realism was not realistic enough, because it failed to embrace the reality of life as struggle."<sup>1)</sup> His exploration of the conditions of pragmatic adaptation to the wild or the human world had been presented in his early apprenticeship. In *The call of the Wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1906), he concludes that both Buck's rationality and *White Fang's* wild temperament not only increased the skills to survive in strange environment but also transplanted an appreciating eye to perceive nature's beauty. Conscious of their given

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1) T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace* (Chicago, IL: The U of Chicago P, 1994), 103.

circumstances with pragmatist adaptation, they commonly escape from blind savagery and over-domestication and revealed the integration of rationality and wild vivacity in the end.

Openness to heterogeneities makes a regional community boost up its ecological as well as aesthetic diversities. Two extreme responses in the pastoral discourse—eulogy of romantic ideal and critique of machine civilization, whose themes have been well demonstrated in Leo Marx's "the pastoral design"<sup>2)</sup> throughout *The Machine in the Garden*—are far from any meaningful middle ground by subsuming wild nature into the civilizing domain or transforming it merely into the subject-matter of romantic fantasy. Authentic pastoral can be reformulated by drawing the idea of ecological sustainability to embrace different forms of natural objects. The iniquities of modern capitalism pressed conscious intellectuals to transform the traditional pastoral argument into a more ecologically conscious format. Rather than a type of ideology reflecting human desire, the pastoral idea has been changed into a catalyst of the human as well as the non-human world by the conscious writers.

In this sense, London's naturalist experiments in his early stories get joined to ecological significance in *The Valley of the Moon*. His novelistic experiment extends from the animal blood mixture of his canine stories to the pastoral coziness in this novel. Away from toilsome working class condition in early twentieth century Oakland, London makes Billy and Saxon Roberts discover authentic beauty of nature in the Sonoma Valley and leads them to cultivate it as their own authentic pastoral through pragmatist perspicacity. They not only make use of the given circumstance to yield much profit but also try

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2) Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (New York: Oxford UP, 1964), 25.

to keep the natural beauty. Rather than endorsing untouched nature unconditionally for the purpose of criticizing exploitation of the virgin soil, London merges civilization and wild nature in his pastoral vision as far as keeping nature's beauty and sustainability. In *The Valley of the Moon*, "instrumental pragmatism," which means a practical use of natural resources to create modern conveniences, is merged in aesthetic whole vision. "Aesthetic pragmatism," which pays attention to practical skills to survive in modern capitalism as well as critical attitude to the negative aspects of modern capitalism, is accomplished by taking the ecological truth of pristine nature into account. The pastoral metaphor is a pivotal element to grasp a holistic viewpoint in dealing with aesthetic pragmatism. Not excluding foreign and unknown elements, his pastoral adopts a strategy of incorporation—embracing ethnic minorities and using up-to-date agricultural technologies in the ranch—which makes London's pastoral more tangible and ecologically meaningful.

## 1. Working Class Hardships and the Crush of Romantic Fantasy

London's disillusion to turn-of-the-century America is registered in the problematic happy ending of *White Fang*.<sup>3)</sup> Contrary to making

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3) Buck's apotheosis in the wilderness marks a sharp contrast to White Fang's languid body in civilization. An animal might become a winner in the wild through killing its game. This cutthroat animal kingdom is a subverted vision of the delicate refinement of the wild and brute modern society. Such a pessimistic prescription entraps London for a long time; Martin Eden, for example, well illustrates "the truth that a wholly naturalist human hero—operating in a wholly naturalist universe—is an

Buck an apotheosis as interweaving civilization's rationality with self-reliant wild prowess, London exposed his pessimism regarding the loss of masculine vivacity to the readers through the exhibition of White Fang's languid body.<sup>4)</sup> Muir's search for a compromise between blind savagery and over-domestication provides leitmotif for London's pastoral desire. But London did not go beyond White Fang's incomplete, 'bartered' happiness in a Santa Clara middle class home for several years.<sup>5)</sup> In *Martin Eden*, betrayed by the onrushing material culture and the sensational journalism at the turn of the century California, the protagonist falls into a deep pessimism as well as an economic predicament. While drifting around waywardly without writing his own authentic literary works, Martin Eden, a firm believer of individual sanctity, only recollects his nautical experience as a sailor: "The visions of Tahiti-clean, sweet Tahiti-were coming to him more frequently"<sup>6)</sup> According to Joan London-the author's daughter-he

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impossibility" (Jay Gurian, *Western American Writing* (DeLand, FL: Everett/Edwards, 1975), 54).

- 4) In *The Call of the Wild*, London's restoration of Buck's wild masculinity insinuates the reverse side of "the growing fear felt by many turn-of-the-century American men that the market, increasingly abstract and rationalized": this changing world "could no longer offer the grounds to define manhood, particularly in terms of those ideals of self-reliance, diligence, and mastery at the heart of nineteenth-century liberal individualism" (Jonathan Auerbach, *Male Call* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1996), 111).
- 5) In *The Iron Heel* (1908), he reveals a dystopian vision in the early twentieth century. The "Everhard Manuscript" recounts the imperialism-dominated world from 1912 to 1932. Alongside with Canada, Mexico, and Cuba, the United States is engulfed in a flurry of Oligarchies known as the "Iron Heel." And the skeptical vision of *Martin Eden* (1909) leads London to drown the protagonist Martin Eden. *The Scarlet Plague* (1912), too, has for its background the extremely hierarchical America in 2072, sixty years after the fearful scarlet plague which diminishes earth's population.

made an attempt "to prove that the strength of the strong individual was intrinsically worthless, that individualism itself was an anachronism and would disappear with other rubbish when capitalist society was replaced by a socialist one, but he was unconvincing, even to himself."<sup>7)</sup>

*The Valley of the Moon*, however, turns his mind to a bright prospect for California's near future.<sup>8)</sup> "If not an epic on the scale of Frank Norris' *The Octopus*, *The Valley of the Moon* was nevertheless London's bid to write The Great California Novel."<sup>9)</sup> The storyline is based on redeeming one working class couple's rundown status—"the evils of poverty",<sup>10)</sup> so to speak—by dint of finding, purchasing, and cultivating their own ideal pastoral ranch in the Sonoma Valley, a.k.a., the Valley of the Moon. Saxon Brown, a female ironer at an Oakland laundry, lives poorly with her socialist brother Tom and sister-in-law Sarah.<sup>11)</sup> Suffering from a series of manual labors from

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6) Jack London, *Martin Eden*, 323.

7) Joan London, *Jack London and His Times*, 253. London's abandonment of socialist ideals in the sentimental domestic overtone and "an embrace of the middle-class culture" (142) has been also argued in the following criticism: Christopher Hugh Gair, "The Way Our People Came": Citizenship, Capitalism, and Racial Difference in *The Valley of the Moon*", *Rereading Jack London*, eds. Leonard Cassuto and Jeanne Campbell Reesman (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1996): 141-57.

8) "The Sonoma novels mark a shift in London's thinking. In place of his earlier advocacy of socialism, he turned toward a vision of agrarianism as salvation, a vision that fused a nostalgic return to the land with a progressive faith in modern scientific farming" (David Fine, *San Francisco in Fiction* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1995), 56).

9) Howard Lachtman, "Revisiting Jack London's Valley of the Moon", *The Pacific Historian* 24,2 (1980): 147.

10) Peter M. Schmitt, *Back to Nature* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990), 136.

11) Hereafter, textual quotations are from the following: Jack London, *The*

"jute mills, the cannery, the paper-box factory, the laundry" (96), she becomes conscious of her sickening working condition: "the acrid smell of scorching cloth" (4), where "the many irons rose and fell, the pace of the room in no wise diminished; while the forewoman strode the aisles with a threatening eye for incipient breakdown and hysteria" (5). Her private space is restricted to "a small room, eight by twelve, and the earthquake had left its marks upon the plaster" (7). The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake had made a streak of crevices in her not-so-rich Oakland house wall. The sultry weather, the hot air in the laundry, and her brother's vehement participation in socialist and labor movements creates an environment which enervates Saxon day by day.<sup>12)</sup>

To shake off "the week of deadening toil" (11), Mary-Saxon's co-worker—and Saxon go to a dance floor in Weasel Park and they meet Bert Wanhope and Billy Roberts. From that moment, Saxon and Billy fall in love with each other. Billy has abandoned his prize-fighting and started a new life as a prospective teamster in Oakland. Still, his previous experience as a pugilist inspires Saxon to romanticize him as a lonely hero, in counterpoint to her stuffy situation. "They [prize-fighters] did not work for bosses, but spectacularly and magnificently, with their own might, grappled with the great world and wrung splendid living from its reluctant hands" (44). The cut-throat survival of prize-fighters like White Fang's desperate fights

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*Valley of the Moon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1913).

12) The historical fact also affirms the life of toughness in Oakland at the turn of the century. "Oakland was a tough place in the 1890s, a haven of oyster pirates and wharf gangs who seemed to be living out the promises of the town's origins as a community of hard-nosed, trespassing squatters," Mary Lawlor, *Recalling the Wild* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2000), 111.

is transformed into Saxon's romantic psychology without any mediation of real life.<sup>13)</sup> Historically, it is attested that "By the 1890s, among educated, urban Easterners who faced an increasingly onerous standard of respectability, longings for regeneration through violence became particularly acute."<sup>14)</sup>

"[H]e haunted with phantoms of pain and unrest" (48), Saxon's romantic search for her haven bears a kind of hereditary origin, as is shown in her late mother's Arcadian poem on California.<sup>15)</sup> The poem's message about the sweetness of "California's boundless plains" has diminished in the twenty-two inch Spanish girdle which cherishes her mother's soul. Saxon is now only enraptured by the fetishized patch to fall into a pastoral vision, "Closest of all, this survival of old California-Ventura days brought Saxon in touch. Hers was her mother's form. Physically, she was like her mother" (50). Billy also shares her dream, regarding that "I like to hear about the old people of the old days ... Things was more sensible and natural. I don't exactly say what I mean. But it's like this: I don't understand life to-day" (66).

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13) "Spectator sports became an important reflection of the issues of race, class, and gender that divided American society at the turn of the century, and the predominantly white, middle-and upper-class men who comprised the primary audience for such contest found in them a confirmation of their manliness and position in society," John Dudley, "Inside and Outside the Ring", *College Literature* 29,1 (2002): 54. Such a thriving spectatorship widens the chasm between fighters' brutality and audience's domesticated cowardice.

14) Lears, *ibid.*, 117.

15) "Sweet as a wind-lute's airy strains  
Your gentle muse has learned to sing,  
And California's boundless plains  
Prolong the soft notes echoing" (48).

The romantic touch of Billy and Saxon is actually linked to primeval brutishness. As he scares Charley Long away from Saxon, Billy says that,

It's one thing the fightin' game's taught me, he said. To take care of myself. A fellow can't work all day and dance all night and keep in condition. It's the same way with drinkin'-an' not that I'm a little tin angel. I know what it is. I've been soused to the guards an' all the rest of it. I like my beer-big schooners of it; but I don't drink all I want of it. I've tried, but it don't pay. Take that big stiff to-night that butted in on us. He ought to had my number. He's a dog anyway, but besides he had beer bloat. I sized that up the first rattle, an' that's the difference about who takes the other fellow's number. Condition, that's what it is. (64)

He does not dare to show off before his enemy, for ostentation might easily expose his weak points. To keep a balanced state, or to shot through "what's behind the fists" (64), he thinks that moderation is the key element, whether he fights physically or mentally. He takes a lesson from his experiences in the world of instrumental pragmatism. As for him, brutishness is not a sheer savage battering but a timely response to his counterparts. The root cause of sharpening his fighting technique is in tandem with his innermost romantic hankering for shunning away a series of conflicts in modern life.<sup>16)</sup> Like Muir's blind savage and over-domestication linkage, romantic wish is bound to rugged urban life. Billy's romanticism, similar to Saxon's escapist desire, is a reaction to many problems

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16) "There's the labor unions an' employers' associations, an' strikes, an' hard times, an' huntin' for jobs, an' all the rest. Things wasn't like that in the old days. Everybody farmed, an' shot their meat, an' got enough to eat an' took care of their old folks" (66).

caused by modern capitalism, but their aesthetic impulse does not belong to the realm of critical pragmatism which carefully takes note of what the real nature says. As the story goes on, "London shifted his focus from redemptive socialism to a return to the land", because "a retreat to the land can provide regeneration, health, and escape from the evils of capitalism."<sup>17)</sup> Both of them share the ideal of authentic pastoral, away from hideous working class living conditions and ethereal romanticism.

The crowds in the prize-fighting represent what Saxon and Billy want to avoid. The meaningless fights to make ends meet indicate that the authentic human relationship has been consumed beneath the pleasure-giving fighters and the masculine consumers.<sup>18)</sup> What really exasperates Billy is a bunch of coward losers in real life (76). The prize-fighting entertainment works as a launching pad for alleviating their frustration in the urban lower class life. "This is a fight for fight-fans that's paid their admission for blood" (79). John Muir's

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17) Carolyn Johnston, *Jack London* (Westport, CT: Greenwood P, 1984), 166.

18) As is described in the introduction, Billy's prize-fighting experience can be comprehended as the historical transition of America's material culture from feminine sentimental culture of the mid-nineteenth century to the male-leading material culture of the late nineteenth century. Such a changed cultural geography was salient, especially in the American West. Although the brute prize-fighting had been prohibited in most of the eastern states, it was still in vogue around the Far West like Nevada's Carson City by the turn of the century. "The first American writer with any substantial claim to pioneer status as a boxing writer is clearly Jack London." In his pugilist stories, London "embraced both the Darwinian-Spencerian philosophy of 'the survival of the fittest', and something of the Nietzschean admiration for the *bermensch*" (Lawrence J. Mitchell, "Jack London and Boxing", *American Literary Realism* 36,3 (2004): 225, 227). For a more detailed discussion about Nevada's prizefighting and its related pictures, see John B. Reid and Ronald M. James, *Uncovering Nevada's Past* (Reno: U of Nevada P, 2004): 133-35.

thoughtless and over-domesticated sheep affected by the shepherd's direction is in line with concession-less fights in modern capitalism. At this point, there is no choice but to 'fight or disqualify': the latter means no-income. He and comrade fighters often contrive a gimmick to only perform a plausible spectacle before the raving audience. Such a trick drives him to say in desperation: "It's a dirty world—an unfair, lousy world, I can't make it out. They's no squareness in it" (83). Billy's sense of defeat worsens when he recognizes that modern day amusement, too, does not escape from the powerful huge capitalism.

When he looks around Oakland, Billy contrasts the scenic Contra Costa hills and "the green and sunny stillness of Redwood Canyon" to the unattractive cityscape—"the houses and streets and things in the city" (87). His pastoral impulse grounded on romanticism pushes him to vocalize his wish to escape from urban afflictions: "I almost wisht I'd ben born a farmer. Folks wasn't made to live in cities" (89). When they feel compassionate with each other for their ill-lucked, orphan-like childhood, the dismal atmosphere of the industrialized Bay Area intimates that the modern capitalistic society will not let them be happy.<sup>19)</sup>

In preparing for her marriage, Saxon is glad to leave the life of an automaton in the terrible factory. The female workers' racket for a trivial matter on her last working day shows how the downtrodden modern workers' mind has been domesticated under daily drudgery.

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19) A kind of darkness gets ahead of them: "Beneath them stretched the flatlands to the bay, checkerboarded into fields and broken by the towns of Elmhurst, San Leandro, and Hayward. The smoke of Oakland filled the western sky with haze and murk, while beyond, across the bay, they could see the first winking lights of San Francisco" (95).

When a bat is hanging around over the factory ceiling, "the wildest scream of terror" raises, and the workplace falls into an utter turmoil, despite the forewoman's cry—"It's only a bat! ... It won't eat you!" (115).

But they were ghetto people, and were not to be quieted. Some woman who could not see the cause of the uproar, out of her overwrought apprehension raised the cry of fire and precipitated the panic rush for the doors. All of them were screaming the stupid, soul-sickening high note of terror, drowning the forewoman's voice. Saxon had been merely startled at first, but the screaming panic broke her grip on herself and swept her away. Though she did not scream, she fled with the rest. When this horde of crazed women debouched on the next department, those who worked there joined in the stampede to escape from they knew not what danger. In ten minutes the laundry was deserted, save for a few men wandering about with hand grenades in futile search for the cause of the disturbance. (115)

The boisterous female workers are similar to John Muir's foolish sheep in *My First Summer in the Sierra*, when terrorized before the stream. At a different glance, it is also probable they might not really be surprised by the presence of a bat, on the condition that to take a rest (or a momentary diversion), they made use of stereotyped female timidity to free themselves from daily routines. Those two standpoints share the following premise: modern capitalism forces the workers to perform the role of feeble-minded lower class, whether it is nothing more than group psychology to involuntarily imitate their peers, or a purposeful mimicry of standardized gender (or class) roles.

Billy and Saxon Roberts settle down in a little cottage at Pine Street after their marriage, making a refuge from laborers' tribulation

within their sweet home. Despite poor in their newlywed life, it is distinguished from the monotonous toils of ironing and prizefighting, and so they are happy. Billy catches "a wind of coolness" from Saxon's sweet voice "like the first of the see-breeze settin' in in the afternoon after a scorchin' hot morning" (128), and calls her as a beautiful "thoroughbred", or "my Tonic Kid" (129). From her neighbor Mrs. Mercedes Higgins, she learns "a recipe for home-made soap" and "better ways" (135) to make pretty embroideries like laces and lingerie, while listening to the romanticized tales of the old days, which fortify the intriguing stereotypes of California's diverse ethnicities, including Chinese, Japanese, and Hindus. Traces of California's golden past in Mercedes' confabulation encourage Saxon's hope for a bright future, with overcoming contemporary tribulations. Something foreign and ancient in California is subsumed into a cardinal portion of California's authentic pastoral, which not only takes diversities of ethnic composition and physical nature into account but is also different from the pastoral discourse based on the dichotomous interplay between civilization and pristine nature.

Saxon's peaceful world of domestic fantasy symbolizes a bulwark from the vehemently up-rushing tension between gigantic capitals, California's chaotic ethnic crucible, and incendiary labor movements. The cultivation of the domestic sphere, based on her versatility and practical knowledge, overturns the conventional wisdom of boundaries between the fragile female domestic arena and the strong masculine world outside. Therefore, "the housewife's effort" does not be blamed for its "conspicuous wasteful expenditure of time and substance", for it is not an activity "for the purposes of reputability" of the upper class.<sup>20)</sup>

Nevertheless, California's diverse ethnicity is symbolically modified into a portion of Saxon's trick to attract Billy with showy decorations. Mercedes' theory of flamboyant diversity of embroidery merely focuses on arresting a husband's eye. The pretty and harmonious outward look of diversity in the household embellishment is the opposite side of the ugly and gregarious influx of minority cultures in the modern society. The hostile mood of nativism does not allow a foreign element to infiltrate into the Anglo-Saxon domestic area packed with Saxon's romance.<sup>21)</sup> Through the psychological barrier made from the various decorations, Saxon trivializes "the current influx of immigrants" that imperils her Anglo-Saxon heritage.<sup>22)</sup>

The rising tide of labor movement in the Bay Area, too, comes to menace the sanctity of domestic comfort in full-scale. As Billy joins the strikers' cause of rebelling against gurus in California, the household economy deteriorates day after day.<sup>23)</sup> Such a crisis incurred by external factors reflects the problem of domesticity devoid of spiritual repletion. In spite of helpful tips of advice concerning

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20) Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Penguin, 1979), 82, 85.

21) Mercedes says, "Variety! There lies the magic. ... A wife must be many wives" (140). And the hideousness of machinized civilization outside domestic comfort is rendered into the serpent in the garden: "In the garden of love is a snake. It is the commonplace. Stamp on its head, or it will destroy the garden" (140-41).

22) Gina M. Rossetti, *Imagining the Primitive in Naturalist and Modernist Literature* (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2006), 36.

23) Tom, Bert, and Billy agree on the social injustice: Tom says, "Justice, eh? Another pipe-dream" (172); Bert, too, thinks that "there was two kinds of us, the lions and the plugs. The plugs only worked, the lions only gobbled. They gobbled the farms, the mines, the factories, an' now they've gobbled the government" (174); Billy echoes with him, saying that "Some one has to get knocked out, I suppose" (174).

household management, Mercedes hoards in her house countless extravagances for the purpose of fulfilling her vanity only. She justifies her hobby by the notion of *carpe diem*, like Miss Havisham in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectation*: "Why not? I shall die as I have lived. It is my pleasure. I go to the dust as a bride" (163). The distorted love of materials pushes Mercedes to say that "In the old days the great of earth were buried with their live slaves with them, I but take my flimsies, my dear" (163). Trapped in a narrow domestic realm, Mercedes lost her sound judgment regarding material possessions, negating the possibility of realizing a democratic vision in this world: "Democracy—the dream of the stupid peoples" (181). Saxon agilely picks up Mercedes's false class consciousness, thinking that "It is downright wicked" (163).

Bearing the interrelationship between domesticity and the outside world in mind, Mercedes' materialism reflects the reverse side of monopoly by a small number of capitalists. The flowery interiors, presented in opposition to the pell-mell minority workers, are not different from the glitzy merchandises on the showcase affected by the giant capitalism. Saxon's awakening of Mercedes's falsity is the first momentous step toward materializing ecologically meaningful pastoral. As the story goes on, she leaves the reckless inhumanity of modern capitalism to find out the right location of her romance, hires two Chinese workers to realize in her pastoral, and applies the logic of beautiful diversities of embroideries to the surrounding nature of her ranch.

As her economic condition gets worse, Saxon's pastoral dream becomes more and more intense. And her pregnancy makes her notice the preciousness of life, felt outside the noisy social atmosphere. The

touch-and-go situation between the strikers and the special police is set off by a thoughtless little Olsen boy who jeers at the police for protecting "the scabs." And the police's subsequent operation to squelch the strikers in a ruthless manner induces Saxon's unwanted miscarriage, losing a baby girl in the middle of the disorder. Most of the strikers are killed, caught, or executed by the government, but Billy hardly bends his stubbornness to stand by the strikers (199). Saxon is worried about her husband's safety in the ever-worsening Oakland industrial situation. Locked in a psychological panic, as though plunged into the middle of the shadow-boxing, she comes to recognize that the lower class laborers will not get out of the uncontrollable economic super-structure, dominated by a few magnates.

When she takes a walk in the Rock Wall, the man-made hopeless wall is strangely colored in natural beauty. "There was no men there, no laws nor conflicts of men. The tide flowed and ebbed; the sun rose and set; regularly each afternoon the brave west wind came romping in through the Golden Gate, darkening the water, cresting tiny wavelets, making the sailboats fly. Everything ran with frictionless order. Everything was free" (252). Taking in the power of nature that turns the artificial fabrication into a subject matter for aesthetic appreciation, she discovers a chance to restore her post-nuptial happiness in a world elsewhere, a place capable of redressing twisted contemporary consumerism. With the help of the natural world, Saxon wants to avoid "a world in which some men possessed so much food that they threw it away" (253). With "the smudge of Oakland at her back", she was "staring across the bay at the Smudge of San Francisco. Yet the sun was good; the wind was good, as was the keen

salt air in her nostrils; the blue sky, flecked with clouds, was good. All the natural world was right, and sensible, and beneficent. It was the man-world that was wrong, and mad, and horrible" (254). Only a deeper understanding of nature will guide Saxon to achieve aesthetic pragmatism, away from flimsy romanticism and oppressive modern capitalism.

What she comprehended was the triviality of human activities, including herself and the abundance of nature filled with various living things. "Her eyes showed her only the smudge of San Francisco, the smudge of Oakland, where men were breaking heads and killing one another, where babies were dying, born and unborn, and where women were weeping with bruised breasts" (256). Leaving behind the pessimistic vision of the then naturalists, she plunges herself into the tinkling beauty of nature. Thus, to her "Oakland was not a place to stop in. ... It was a place to start from" (268). She succeeds in persuading Billy to leave the city to become established in the countryside.

## 2. The Wandering Anglo-Saxons and Their Pragmatic Adaptation

Billy and Saxon do not know where to go, only that they wish to go. Saxon has a notion that they are not looking for the 'get-rich-quick' land, for the age-old gold fever disappeared in the era of "big business" leaving "thousands of little men without any business at all except to work for the big ones" (293, 294). Acquiring the necessary items, the couple finally starts on their pilgrimage to

their own "vast and flowering sun-land of California" (297).<sup>24)</sup> Through their wandering over mid to northern California for more than a year, they experience a life of sheer joy— appreciating natural beauty and making friends with an artist group at Carmel. While Billy draws a memory of his father's "brag about California's bein' a blanket climate" packed with "wild game everywhere", Saxon also looks back on her mother's eulogy on "such a land for climate" "after crossing the deserts and mountains", called as "the land of milk and honey" (319). They are about to materialize their own ancestral vision during their journey. On their first night camping, Saxon says that "I've a feeling as if we've just started to live", and Billy imagines a prospective appearance of their authentic pastoral as "Good pasture an' plenty of it, in this kind of a climate" on a hilltop looking down a creek (318).

Life in wild nature is not easy. Saxon cannot sleep on the hard ground (323). And as Billy scares away the howling animals, Saxon pledges herself to learn everything concerning pristine nature. "We're just as able as our folks ever were, and we're healthier on top of it. We've brought up different, that's all. We've lived I cities all our lives. We know the city sounds and things, but we don't know the country ones. Our training has been unnatural, that's the whole thing in a nutshell. Now we're going in for natural training. Give us a little time, and we'll sleep as sound out of doors as ever your father or mine did" (326). The direct contact to nature lets her see through

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24) A biographical fact confirms that London and his wife Charmian also took their journey to northern California "to retrace the one part of the Robertses' route" (Clarice Stasz, *American Dreamers* (New York: St. Martin's, 1988), 220). With the help of Charmian, London could successfully configure the detailed personality of Saxon.

the enervating force of modern capitalism by detaching her from knowing the truth of nature. To survive in the harsh circumstance, she tries to absorb newly-given information about agriculture, and to grasp the beauty of nature in a holistic perspective. In other words, she steps towards aesthetic pragmatism through the moderate use of instrumental pragmatism as well as her sensitive observation of pristine nature. Therefore she requests Billy of asking what he doesn't know from plowing to cropping.

Saxon's yearning for a life close to the earth makes her feel inquisitive about the beautiful flowers on the borderland. She asks Mrs. Mortimer, the owner of the beautiful wayside flowers, a bunch of questions about those beautiful flowers. Now that beauty is not just an aesthetic object of sheer contemplation, she wants to know about agricultural methods related to building up gorgeous beauty. Mrs. Mortimer is ready to provide usable tips of advice to Saxon. When talking about the common response of each person to her beautiful flowers, Mrs. Mortimer relates their aesthetic worth to the self-same market value.

It is known that the stomach sees through the eyes. The thought of vegetables growing among flowers pleased their fancy. They wanted my vegetables. They must have them. And they did, at double the market price, which they were only too glad to pay. You see, I became the fashion, or a fad, in a small way. Nobody lost.  
(334)

To Mrs. Mortimer, Billy retorts that "It's just a trick" (334). But she answers back to him that "a paying trick" (335). In her mind, insofar as everyone has an aesthetic impulse, she has a reason to sell her products for double prices. Similar to the modern management

system of Magnus's ranch in Frank Norris's *The Octopus*, she divides her farm into small departments, like "the cattery, the piggery, the milkery, and the kennelry" (336) in her livestock raising. "All were money makers, she assured them [Saxon and Billy], and rattled off her profits glibly" (336). To undergird their lucrative status, she recommends that as she has experienced, they should read everything they can about farm management. If there are misguided patterns in the old American farming, she thinks that those wrongdoings must be fixed right away. As a diligent pragmatist, she continued to study, recording "all the experiment station" (340).<sup>25</sup> Their encounter with Mrs. Mortimer helped them understand how important economic considerations are as for cultivating every corner of their own pastoral. Billy raises a practical question of his inborn temperament (or capability) about not readily following up Mrs. Mortimer's farming style. "You were educated, an' ... an'-I don't know, I guess you knew society ways an' business ways we couldn't know" (342). After approving what he said, she emphasizes that it is a conquerable barrier only if love and compassion exist between each other. The expanding circle of love originates toward their pastoral-building. An authentic pastoral can be accomplished by synthesizing their genuine love of nature with the substantial reclamation of the field on the basis of a sensitive reading of the physical nature.<sup>26</sup>

When they were going to the southern region of San Jose, an

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25) Jack London himself also used to experiment with some plants at his Glen Ellen cottage.

26) Furthermore, their personal view has been influenced by the modern picture industry. With Saxon's pastoral vision that was partly shaped by "the moving pictures in Oakland" (402), Billy sums up the condition of their authentic pastoral: "an all-around farm they would have if they hiked forty years to find it" (402).

intensive agriculture to tease out the maximum profits and the related cannery industry were prominent in the hands of foreign farmers like the Japanese. The destroyed land, after white Americans deserted it, has been filled up by ethnic minorities, and they have endeavored to accomplish their thriving living conditions with their own hands. As Billy laments the disappearance of his pioneer folks, a local resident named Benson ironically talks back to Billy about irresponsible white residents who spoiled the land (367). Benson's criticism implies that the genuine masters of the land are not the first-comers or the conquerors who piked their stakes on the soil, but those who earnestly learn the specific qualities of their land and cultivate it to become an authentic pastoral.

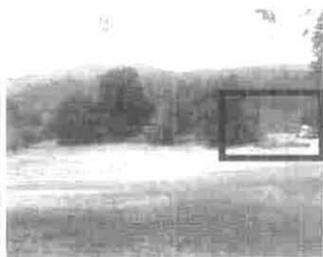


Figure 1. London's Cottage  
in Glen Ellen

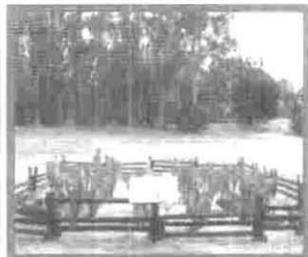


Figure 2. His Ecological  
Experiment

Just as the Robertses endeavored to be successful farmers, London himself made experiments in plant ecology on what he called "Beauty Ranch." And there is also a vineyard near his cottage that he had cultivated (the left side of Figure 1).

Needless to say, their prosperity upon the demolished soil is not equal to an authentic pastoral. The land cannot be changed into an authentic pastoral by human willpower only. It will be possible through the interplay between an appreciation of pristine nature's

beauty and an ecologically conscious care of the land. When moving southward to come to Carmel, they glimpse the breath-taking seaboard landscape. So they run "barefooted on the perilous fringe of cream-wet sand where land and ocean met" (371) and played like children. They capture "the many kinds of colorful sea life—starfish, crabs, mussels, sea anemones, and, once, in a rock-pool, a small devilfish that chilled their blood when it cast the hooded net of its body around the small crabs they tossed to it." In this region, Saxon feels that "It was as if all old dreams were coming true. Such beauty of the world she had never guessed in her fondest imagining" (376). It is not made by the infiltration of machines into wild nature but by the creation of something super-human. Appreciating Carmel's magnificent nature, the Robertses happily get along with the artists living there.

However, the fact that they have discovered nature's superb beauty is not also equal to an authentic pastoral, for they should keep abreast of the modern marketplace through cultivating lucrative crops on their own farmland. When taking a trip to the south part of Carmel, Billy configures his pastoral vision with "the grassy slopes pastured with his horses and cattle" (404). What they want is not John Muir's untouchable sacredness in *My First Summer* but a place combining mercantile occupation with aesthetic appreciation. When the poet named Mark Hall spoke to an audience about the nihilism of human life, Billy retorts that "Good things all the way up from juicy porterhouse and the kind of coffee Mrs. Hall makes to ..." (410). Mark Hall jeers at Saxon and Billy's pastoral search (414).<sup>27)</sup> In Carmel, the

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27) Mark Hall's life is "another cult of the melancholy beautiful, which can end only in despair" (Andrew Sinclair, *Jack: A Biography of Jack London*

hard-working class with their own solidarity does not get in touch with the dilettante artist bourgeois. Billy gets along with both parties, delivering mails while pleasantly driving the Seventeen Mile Drive to Monterey, and joining abstract chats with artists. The capitalist-laborer conflict which Saxon and Billy are sick of in Oakland is certified in the Carmel society: here, the fierce capitalism in Oakland is painted as the aesthetic turn of mind in the Carmel artists.

When they move northward, the tenacious minorities who successfully farm various crops, in contrast to ignorant, impatient, and dwindling white folks, draw their attention. Hearing from Gunston about many non-white farmers' well-organized cultivation, Billy does not want to live a life without assimilation to nature (425). Neither the Bohemian life of a loafer in Carmel nor of the workaholic farmer who brutally extracts maximum profits from land can be Saxon and Billy's role model. Consenting to Billy's remark on the importance of pleasure, Saxon cries to Billy:

It's just what I've been trying to get straightened out in my head, ... All the time I didn't envy the San Leandro Portuguese, I didn't want to be one, nor a Pajaro Valley Dalmatian, nor even a Mrs. Mortimer. And you didn't either. What we want is a valley of the moon, with not too much work, and all the fun we want. And we'll keep on looking until we find it. And if we don't find it, we'll go on having the fun just as we have ever since we left Oakland. (426)

Here, the couple is not pejorative to the non-whites on purpose. Their focus veers into those who recklessly follow the negative

aspects of modern capitalism within servile manner. Although yielding a certain amount of products in the field, the life of foreigners reminds them of their hard-worn routines in Oakland. Saxon's remark quoted below can be interpreted as her working class trauma rather than her xenophobic ideology: "And how quiet it is here, so short a distance away from those strange foreigners. And to think!— in the cities, right now, men are beating and killing each other for jobs" (427).<sup>28)</sup> Ethnicity constitutes only part of a troublesome matter in modern capitalism. California's multi-cultural atmosphere is ensnared by the dominance of capitalism, like Norris's corporatized world. Such a divergence between work and pleasure is what the Robertses hope to escape. And their wish to incorporate work with pleasure pierces through the heart of Deweyan experience as an aesthetic pragmatism: "The traditional separation between some things as mere means and others as mere ends is a reflection of the insulated existence of working and leisure class, of production that is not also consummatory, and consummation that is not productive. This division is not a *merely* social phenomenon. It embodies a perpetuation upon the human plane of a division between need and satisfaction belonging to brute life."<sup>29)</sup>

Jack Hastings gives them advice on how to establish their agricultural plinth: "Become a tenant farmer. Lease some place, where

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28) With the historical context of spreading Anglo-Saxon standards in mind (Emily E. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982) 42), the infiltration of foreigners in California soil might have provoked the Roberts couple's neurosis, so to speak, their retrogressive inclination to the spirit of the feisty West.

29) John Dewey, "Experience, Nature and Art", *Pragmatism: A Reader* (New York: Vintage, 1997): 244.

the old folks have died and the country isn't good enough for the sons and daughters. Then gut it. Wring the last dollar out of the soil, repair nothing, and in three years you'll have your own place paid for. Then turn over a new leaf, and love your soil. Nourish it. Every dollar you feed it will return you two." When Saxon cries that "It's wicked advice", Hastings retorts that "We live in a wicked age" (434). To the poor tenants, the love of "my land" accompanies inevitable provisional sacrifice of the soil's fertility in the grip of exclusive possession. Within vicinity of the Sacramento, thousands of foreign workers were contributing to turning plain fields into one of the most fertilized breadbaskets in California by eroding the soil's fertility.<sup>30)</sup> Spoiling the original soil, the bonanza white farmers, too, had gone to the cities.

London's idea of ecological sustainability has actually been adumbrated in *The Iron Heel*. The protagonist Ernest Everhard—the socialist ringleader—criticizes an unconsumed surplus in capitalism which should be disposed of abroad to keep the circulation and accumulation of capital possible. The earth cannot sustain this accelerating mode of surpluses eternally. "What will happen when every country in the world, down to the smallest and last, with a surplus in its hands, stands confronting every other country with surpluses in their hands?"<sup>31)</sup> Just as the inertial force of ever-accumulating capitals cannot

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30) June Howard thinks that the Robertses' pastoral impulse reflects the whiteman's phobia of "an landscape that constantly demonstrates the ways in which immigrants have triumphed economically over the native-born" (Lachtman, *ibid.*, 86). In this novel, the hiring of two Chinese hands in the Robertses' pastoral stands for the imaginary solution to alleviate the rampant rush of foreigners into California.

31) Jack London, *The Iron Heel*, 109.

be controlled in the system of human society, so the limited capacity of nature cannot meet the demand of capitalism to produce natural resources forever.

In *The Valley of the Moon*, ecological sustainability is crystallized through the quest of California's authentic pastoral by shunning away the capitalist ethos of abusing nature and instantaneously preserving its untouched beauty. Their rambling pilgrimage around almost all the corners of northern California intends to interweave the controlled instrumental pragmatism with the untouched natural beauty. As soon as going to idyllic Lake County (456), what they want to do is to criticize modern day tribulations, as well as to actualize their authentic pastoral by espousing the factual elements of ecology in the Sonoma Valley. Namely, they endeavor to execute aesthetic pragmatism by encompassing critical and instrumental pragmatism. The dissociation between the ecological facts and technological farm-management is about to be converged into their aesthetic vision. When talking with Billy, Saxon describes a pastoral that does not entirely resort to the irrigation system,

'It's lovely to think about—all about water, and all the happy people that will come here to live—'

'But it ain't the valley of the moon!' Billy laughed.

'No' she responded, 'They don't have to irrigate in the valley of the moon, unless for alfalfa and such crops. What we want is the water bubbling naturally from the ground, and crossing the farm in little brooks, and on the boundary a fine big creek—'

'With trout in it!' Billy took her up, 'An' willows and trees of all kinds growing along the edges, and here a riffle where you can flip out trout, and there a deep pool where you can swim and high-dive. An' kingfishers, an' rabbits comin' down to drink, an', maybe, a deer,'

'And meadowlarks in the pasture', Saxon added, 'And mourning

doves in the trees, We must have mourning doves—and the big, gray tree-squirrels,' (461)

While confiding the conditions of their authentic pastoral to each other, their ideal conditions for an authentic pastoral are enumerated. All kinds of living things live harmoniously together in their future pastoral, where an inevitable manual labor is rewarded with boundless joyful moments. They wander around "the towns of Willows, Red Bluff and Redding, crossing the counties of Colusa, Glenn, Tehama, and Shasta" (463), failing to find their promised land. Yet, their confidence that "There *is* a valley of the moon" (466) still persists.

### 3. A Merged Vision of Pastoral Beauty and Ecological Sustainability

One day the couple unexpectedly meets Mr. and Mrs. Hastings, and they suggest that there will be a valley of the moon in Sonoma Valley where the Hastings' ranch is. After hearing the news, Saxon and Billy head for Glen Ellen in the Sonoma Valley.

Ahead and toward the right, across sheer ridges of the mountains, separated by deep green canyons and broadening lower down into rolling orchards and vineyards, they caught their first sight of Sonoma Valley and the wild mountains that rimmed its eastern side. To the left they gazed across a golden land of small hills and valleys. Beyond, to the north, they glimpsed another portion of the valley, and, still beyond, the opposing wall of the valley—a range of mountains, the highest of which reared its red and battered ancient crater against a rosy and mellowing sky. From north to southeast, the mountain rim curved in the brightness of the sun, while Saxon

and Billy were already in the shadow of evening. He looked at Saxon, noted the ravished ecstasy of her face, and stopped the horses. All the eastern sky was blushing to rose, which descended upon the mountains, touching them with wine and ruby. Sonoma Valley began to fill with a purple flood, laving the mountain bases, rising, inundating, drowning them in its purple. Saxon pointed in silence, indicating that the purple flood was the sunset shadow of Sonoma Mountain. Billy nodded, then chirruped to the mares, and the descent began through a warm and colorful twilight. (480)

The colorful harmony of every component in the untouched nature makes for an awe-inspiring beauty in the Sonoma Valley. Turning their eyes on the ground in detail, such a delightful mood still persists.<sup>32)</sup> When Billy gets "a hunch", Saxon also shouts that "We've found our valley" (481) within a mile-and-a-half of Glen Ellen. The next morning, after exploring the place, they estimate that by drawing their water from seven nearby springs, they will be able to boost up the soil and "grow crops the year round" (486).

When they stop at Trillium Coverts, the ranch of Mr. and Mrs. Hale, they introduce the Roberts couple to Naismith, the landowner of Madroño Ranch, so they can purchase their valley of the moon. Coincidentally, following Mrs. Hale's theory, "This *is* the Valley of the Moon. This is Sonoma Valley. Sonoma is an Indian word, and means the Valley of the Moon. That was what the Indians called it for untold ages before the first white men came" (491). In addition, it is

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32) "The air was aromatic with laurel. Wild grape vines bridged the stream from tree to tree. Oaks of many sorts were veiled in lacy Spanish moss. Ferns and brakes grew lush beside the stream. From somewhere came the plaint of a mourning dove. Fifty feet above the ground, almost over their heads, a Douglas squirrel crossed the road—a flash of gray between two trees; and they marked the continuance of its aerial passage by the bending of the boughs" (481).

said that the winter at their newly-acquired ranch is not so cold, and the summer, fairly cooler than adjacent areas. As a consequence, Saxon and Billy's strife to counteract white civilization results in an inexpressible bliss.

Mrs. Mortimer visits the ranch to give helpful tips of advice, and their new neighbor Edmund Hale also willingly gives the Roberts the books about California's agriculture. Mrs. Mortimer recommends the Roberts should shorten the circulation procedure to the market to keep products fresh, hire a few superintendents for efficient farm management on the basis of division of labor, and be conscious of what the customers really want. Following Mrs. Mortimer's counsel, they "parole two good-conduct prisoners from San Quentin" (500), two Chinese men named Chan Chi and Gow Yum, to make them their gardeners for fair wages. And Billy cheaply buys the horses of the clearance sale in the West Oakland stable after the popularization of automobiles in the urban area. "Despite the coming of the automobile, the price of heavy draught animals continued to rise" (499).

Through their various kinds of efforts, the valley of the moon pastoral starts to flourish. Although "Billy and Saxon's home is an idea before it is a physical home",<sup>33)</sup> they come to flexibly revise their original romantic dream fit into the given natural condition. Even Chinese gardeners teach Saxon "all the ten thousand tricks and quirks of artful gardening", helping her soon recognize "how helpless she would have been had she depended on local labor" (504). Exotic ingredients are subsumed into the process of building up the authentic pastoral. She wants to pull in non-white laborers as an

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33) Charles L. Crow, "Homecoming in the California Visionary Romantic", *Western American Literature* 24,1 (1989): 6.

important part of her authentic pastoral, not as a wasting item in their ranch management. Such a pragmatic attitude results from her experiential knowledge that rather than the lazy and irresponsible whites, the diligent non-whites are apt to cultivate the ranch as an ecologically harmonious pastoral. This pragmatist mind paves the way for her unbiased decision making, leading her to get over the anti-Chinese sentiment begun "as an attack on other foreign element" since late-nineteenth-century California.<sup>34)</sup> Regardless of the male-female or white-non-white relationship, the collected heterogeneities create a pastoral spectacle on the basis of the harmonious pristine beauty. Saxon and Billy contemplate their Madroño Ranch from a higher ground.

Together they looked down through an opening among the trees to the meadow which was a meadow no longer. With mathematical accuracy it was divided into squares, oblongs, and narrow strips, which displayed sharply the thousand hues of green of a truck garden. Gow Yum and Chan Chi, under enormous Chinese grass hats, were planting green onions. Old Hughie, hoe in hand, plodded along the main artery of running water, opening certain laterals, closing others. From the work-shed beyond the barn the strokes of a hammer told Saxon that Carlsen was wire-binding vegetable boxes. Mrs. Paul's cheery soprano, lifted in a hymn, floated through the trees, accompanied by the whirr of an egg-beater. (517)

The different kinds of labor have been casted in the form of harmonious beauty in the pacifying scene aforesaid. It seems that from a twenty-first century perspective, the Robertses became "rural

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34) Stuart Creighton Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1969), 7.

capitalists", i.e. members of "philanthropic leisure class", supervising their employees benevolently. Even the paternalistic attitude does not erase the fact that the couple has incorporated themselves into a school of capitalists. Furthermore, Billy would like to invest his returns by purchasing more good land, taking note of the ever-increasing importance of water as a natural resources: "An' water's goin' to be money in this valley not a thousan' years from now" (525). That granted, is it possible to confirm the well compartmented field as an authentic pastoral by reason of merely matching well with the surrounding nature?

Focusing on the Robertses' self-realization, Christopher Hugh Gair contends that by becoming employers, "Saxon and Billy gain freedom from determinism not because they 'become' themselves or Anglo-Saxons; rather, they assume the privileges of the middle classes."<sup>35</sup> According to Gair's remark, in order to achieve middle class values based on material sufficiency, they adopted racial demarcation from foreign-born minorities. Charles N. Watson also insists that London "offers an attractive if somewhat simplistic answer to the discontents that have plagued her [Saxon] life in the city", only prolonging a futile hope that still "the frontier survives."<sup>36</sup> While praising the beautiful wild nature, Billy calculates the price of newly found clay. And he also hopes to "borrow four hundred dollars back again from Gow Yum" (528) to purchase more horses. The strange co-existence of aesthetic as well as resourceful nature at the end of the novel baffles the right location of the narrator's authentic pastoral. It might be said that the

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35) Gair, *ibid.*, 156.

36) Charles N. Watson, *The Novels of Jack London* (Madison: The U of Wisconsin P, 1983), 210.

development from anthropomorphism to pragmatist ecology has not accomplished in the novel, only remaining a modicum of the couple's adaptation to modern capitalism in rural regions or their escape to "an earlier time of self-sufficiency"<sup>37)</sup> before the close of the frontier.

However, the Robertses' authentic pastoral, at least in Saxon's mind, does not exclusively signify their private property only. As they told about the conditions of their authentic pastoral before coming to the Sonoma Valley, the natural ambience of their ranch is a pivotal constituent of their pastoral. It does not entirely lean on possessive individualism and human interests. London also regarded that "The ranch was an environment in which to grow, an experiment to engage his powers and focus his capacities."<sup>38)</sup> That is why they have desperately taken a long trip to every nook of California. They regard that the ranch's peripheral nature ultimately pierce through artificial cultivation, intermingling nature's beauty with the gardened ranch. In their authentic pastoral, the transforming effort of human beings depends on the specific region's natural circumstance.<sup>39)</sup>

The harmony among diverse living and non-living things in wild nature, comprising exotic components, has been proposed as the heart of California's authentic pastoral. Through their ecologically conscious

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37) Abraham Rothberg, "Old Stock: Jack London and His Valley of the Moon", *Southwest Review* 62.4 (1977): 367.

38) Lachtman, *ibid.*, 155.

39) Therefore, London's literary pastoral is ecologically different from what Raymond Williams has called "the idealised pastoral economy" in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* (1769). Williams regarded Goldsmith's poetic representation as merely "an imaginative rather than a social process" in tandem with "a Romantic structure of feeling—the assertion of nature against industry and of poetry against trade" (Williams, *The Country*, 78, 79).

land management, the Robertses put an end to the unfinished journey of their pioneer ancestors who "were not good stewards of the land."<sup>40</sup> It is true that the landscape is full of a regenerative power to heal their working class pits in Oakland, but its therapeutic effect is not originated from their spiritual allegory or metaphysical speculation. The practical engagement of transforming their abode dissolves their congealed urban weariness through aesthetic contentment. London's aesthetic pragmatism creates an ecologically heedful pastoral by merging instrumental and critical pragmatism with the bioregional locale of the Sonoma Valley. Criticism of modern capitalism by way of concentrating on nature's hard facts is connected to the harmony of natural and cultural elements.

Thus it cannot be "unreal, potent, and didactically compelling as the destructive power of the frozen North."<sup>41</sup> "In unifying the garden and the machine in the final pages of his novel, London was creating a new kind of frontier. Gradually abandoning the wilderness frontier of man-versus-nature in his Northland writings like *The Call of the Wild* and moving away from a closing frontier that spawned alienated workers and tramps, London maneuvered toward a civilized frontier that echoed the ideas of Progressives like Theodore Roosevelt, Charles Beard, and participants in the Country Life Movement. Like London, these Progressives wanted to combine the old (land) and the new (science) to produce a pragmatic, productive, and less exploitive society."<sup>42</sup> An authentic pastoral is both "discovered" in wild nature

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40) David Fine, "Jack London's Sonoma Valley: Finding the Way Home", *San Francisco in Fiction* (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1995), 67.

41) Donna Campbell, "Jack London's Allegorical Landscape: 'The God of His Fathers', 'The Priestly Prerogative', and *The Valley of the Moon*", *Literature and Belief* 21 1/2 (2001): 74.

and "cultivated" with care, to the contrary of a "machine-created" pastoral landscape. It marks the originality of London's ecological awareness in depicting an authentic pastoral in California.

#### 4. Conclusion

It seems that London exposed a merged vision of the ecologically authentic pastoral in line with experimenting blood mixture and its eugenic superiority over a purity of genealogy, as is shown in his animal stories. A spate of heterogeneities merged in his pastoral frame, demonstrate that London had a certain confidence in the embracing power of pastoral to sustain different elements in modern industrial society, as though a tiny speck is easily dissipated in the process of natural purification. The fact that London is conscious of the peculiar aesthetics of harmony among heterogeneities implicates a streak of his ecological awareness in relation to nature's sustainability. The scientific investigations of the land not only contribute to achieving economic gains but also provide for aesthetic whole vision with the untouched surrounding environment, thus nature and culture are merged together. In this sense, London's ecological mind approximates to what Dewey has merged immediately experienced nature ("nature-as-culture") with culturally constructed nature ("nature-as-culture"). As Larry A. Hickman alludes, Dewey's aforesaid view of nature also supports Aldo Leopold's land ethic, "the view that humans ought to act to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty

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42) Richard W. Etulain, *Re-imagining the Modern American West* (Tucson: The U of Arizona P, 1986), 20.

of natural system", which can be demonstrated either in the immediate experience of wild nature or in the economic, scientific, and religious realm.<sup>43)</sup>

Without doubt, like the principle of natural purification which is related to the critical mass of nature, London's authentic pastoral composed of heterogeneous incorporation is regulated in physical nature to sustain its ideal beauty. In his real life, too, the sensitive management of Sonoma Valley ranch hints that he is conscious of the pastoral's ecological variables. Therefore, the presence of London's authentic pastoral suggests that the infiltrating mode of modern capitalism to Mother Nature should be controlled in a moderate level. It is a momentous achievement in his ecological thinking.

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43) Larry A. Hickman, "Nature as Culture: John Dewey's Pragmatic Naturalism", *Environmental Pragmatism* (London: Routledge, 1996), 57, 65, 66.

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Abstract

A Merging of Nature and Culture:  
California's Ecological Pastoral in Jack London's  
*The Valley of the Moon*

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His early animal stories suggest that Jack London was interested in his contemporary eugenics illustrating the birth of superior creatures through blood-mixture. After going through depressive prescriptions of corporatized America at the turn of the 1910s, the fictive experiment of heterogeneous encounters has been crystallized again in the form of a merged pastoral vision of nature and culture in *The Valley of the Moon*. This novel transforms the traditional pastoral—which focuses on belated eulogies of the lost Golden Age and criticisms on modern civilization—into a more ecologically sustainable version in terms of its openness to diversities in the specific natural context. Billy and Saxon Roberts leave their wearisome life of the Oakland working class to search for their own Arcadia outside modern day urban tribulations. Through their peregrination around mid-to-northern part of California, they recognized that neither thoughtless sheer joy in the wilds nor beautiful despite exploited field could not satisfy what they really want to configure in the form of pastoral impulse. By incorporating heterogeneities within their discovered wild beauty in the Sonoma Valley, they have merged civilizing touches with the wild beauty to materialize their authentic pastoral by hiring Chinese workers and importing new agricultural technologies. The presence of natural beauty even after their pragmatic land use signifies that ecological sustainability is still intact. Thus London's quest for a heterogeneous but harmonious beauty is also linked to imagining ecologically meaningful pastoral. It is the very salient point of his

ecological awareness.

**Key Words**

Ecology, Pastoral Ideal, California, Jack London, *The Valley of the Moon*, Nature and Culture, Pragmatism