In the middle of June 1913, a person in New York City who wanted to see a moving picture “installation” or “exhibit,” as they were often called, would have had several choices: the eight-reel Italian spectacle *Quo Vadis* at the Astor Theatre, Thomas Ince’s five-reel *The Battle of Gettysburg* at the Grand Opera House, Captain Scott’s South Pole pictures at the Lyric, or *Jack London’s Adventures in the South Sea Islands* at the Criterion, a Broadway playhouse. A person who chose the Criterion for one of its twice daily screenings of the London film would have seen, as the title promises, exotic views of the South Sea Islands while listening to Martin Johnson, who accompanied London on his journey and was credited with making the film, provide a lecture describing the images. Press accounts of the day indicate that seeing the film would have been an exciting, worthwhile experience, despite the fact that London, whose name was a valuable commodity by 1913, appears to have played no significant part in the final product. One advertisement’s detailed synopsis of the film, for example, implies London’s on-screen presence only once; moreover, Johnson appears to have taken most of his footage after London and his wife, Charmian London, had returned home. Although the public’s desire to see London at work, both as author and American adventurer, had intensified over the course of the early 1900s, his absence from the film was surprisingly not an issue in the press coverage, which failed to mention it at all.

In fact, reporters seemed most impressed by the film’s realism and its uncanny verification of the unfamiliar rituals of the “noncivilized” world. On 16 June 1913, the *Morning Telegraph* reported that viewers...
would see “scenes from Polynesia, Melanesia, the Solomon Islands, New Guinea, New Zealand, Borneo, Sulu, Sumatra and Java,” many of them “handsomely colored.” Readers were also promised that they would be entertained by Mr. Johnson’s “highly amusing” and “instructive” lecture. Although London was not a central figure in the film, he was an essential, though invisible, attraction nonetheless. As Johnson writes in the preface to his Through the South Seas with Jack London (yet another instance of the famous author’s name recycled as a commodity), “The Snark alone was enough to compel attention, but the Snark sailed by Jack London, a writer of world-wide celebrity, was irresistible.”

London is cast here into multiple roles, including, however erroneously, movie star and filmmaker.

Despite Johnson’s prominent role at the screenings and London’s apparent absence—or at least his inconspicuous presence—the Evening World’s coverage on 16 June 1913 credits London entirely for the production: “Jack London did the verifying last night when his wonderful moving pictures of life in the South Sea Islands... were shown at the Criterion Theatre and explained by Martin Johnson.” Although London appears to have had nothing to do with making the film beyond the important fact that he was responsible for the existence of the Snark and its highly publicized voyage, his name was both easily identifiable and highly marketable. He is granted authorship by association here, a connection made because the London name and image possessed a cultural value that successfully (or so it seemed at the time) translated into the cinematic arena. Jack London had become a one-man cultural industry.

London’s first important film venture, in which he is neither star, director, nor author, provides a window onto the interrelated notions of authorship, stardom, commercial value, publicity, and representation that were being redefined during the early 1900s in response to the technology and industry of the moving image. Jack London’s transition from literary to cinematic production can be traced by examining his fascination with the cinema’s potential to distribute images, including his own. London was concerned with the value of his name and the status of his image, but his interactions with cinema suggest that current accounts of his relationship to film production, which emphasize financial motivations, overlook other important factors at play in this representational shift, especially the influence of cinema on his literary production. Moving images made London rethink the concept of
authorship, particularly once he began writing with the ultimate goal of cinematic production in mind. But it was not just London who was forced to redefine what it meant to be an author in these rapidly changing times; London’s career illuminates a moment of widespread cultural redefinition in which the notions of authorship and literary success were being challenged and reinvented in response to the motion picture industry.10

Image Economy

Movies offered London an alternative market for his personality and his works that he, at least initially, understood as more effective and potentially more valuable than literature. To a certain degree, cinema interrupted the status quo of representation, its moving images colliding with established modes of narration and illustration in an American culture progressively oriented to the visual. If as Jonathan Auerbach suggests in his study of London’s self-fashioning, “[s]uccess in the market means personal validation, the ‘stamp’ of approval conferred during the process of getting into print,” then cinema presented an entirely new territory of conquest, of which London was acutely aware and to which he particularly responded in the final years of his life (MC, 24). London recognized that the movies were a new language that could convert his product and himself (though the two are essentially indistinguishable) into something with greater value, both economic and cultural.

London regarded cinema as a superior mode of representation, outdoing the written word, perhaps even ultimately replacing it, as he noted in a 1914 interview: “In the portrayal of action, which often is [a] fight, the motion picture is supreme as a medium of expression and it carries the underlying motive, perhaps, better than the alphabet could.”11 London seemed aware that motion pictures might surpass literature in the transmission of ideas and certainly of images, particularly the action variety of which his writing was often the epitome. He further realized that motion pictures could serve as an ally in the modernization of mass entertainment, allowing him to stay a central player in the cutthroat literary marketplace. London envisioned his work’s transition onto the screen as a way to more efficiently transfer information from himself to an audience, literate or not. London’s goal was “to get the images living in my brains into the brains of others,”
a notion he had forecast several years earlier in his autobiographical novel *Martin Eden* (1909). Such conceptualizations indicate the degree to which London wanted to align himself with this innovation in communication and entertainment, so much so that he appears to credit cinema with a potential superiority to literature from the outset.

London further clarifies these ideas in a 1915 essay, “The Message of Motion Pictures,” in which he espouses an understanding of cinema as a new language with the potential to educate the masses and distribute “knowledge in a language that all may understand.”

Positioning moving images as an ideal conduit for ideas previously written, he presents film as a medium for “universal education.” London also identifies a more self-serving motivation for his interest in the movies: “The motion picture spreads [literature] on the screen where all can read and understand — and enjoy.” Motion pictures, London believed, might provide a significant advantage in the cultural marketplace. Like Vachel Lindsay, who in 1915 prophesied that cinema was a “new weapon of men,” London no doubt had political intentions regarding cinema as a universal language. But he also had personal ambitions, and movies appeared able to transmit his kind of fiction onto the screen for a wide audience. London’s further observation that the motion picture “will teach by visualization” is noteworthy considering his ultimate insistence (however much others were party to it) that his own image be part of that education: his motion picture contract with Bosworth stipulated that footage of himself precede all their film productions.

The decision to include moving images of London as prefatory material to these films seems only appropriate given his iconic status in the culture at large. As the *Batania New York News* put it in 1913 in its response to London’s motion picture deal, “Jack London is himself a moving picture, on or off the screen. The personification of restlessness and perpetual energy, he is here, there, and everywhere, traveling to the ends of the earth for material and local color and getting it.” London was a frenetic character, largely of his own invention, and ideally suited, or so the *Batania News* argued, for participation in the industry of the moving image. This was so much the case (and London’s mythology was so regularly, and often incorrectly, circulated) that the *Fresno Republican* reframed London’s film work with Bosworth by entirely and erroneously collapsing autobiography, authorship, and the motion picture industry: “It is not often that a man
has an opportunity to direct the films that depict the doings of his own life. Many have written their autobiographies, but this is the first case on record of any man picking out actors and locations (the authentic ones of the original occurrences) who were to reproduce the history of his own life."\textsuperscript{18} However incorrect the article’s facts, the report lays out the seductive fantasy of self-representation that motion pictures seemed to offer.

London’s entrée into the motion picture industry occurred at a crucial moment: as films became longer in duration and were gradually accepted as more than just a passing fad, theaters were built specifically for the projection of moving images.\textsuperscript{19} The public’s interest in movies as a “new universal language” coincided with the industry’s adoption of increasingly sophisticated modes of narration and address, which escalated in the decade before 1920.\textsuperscript{20} It is no coincidence that London’s decision to enter the fray occurred during the time that movies were establishing effective narrative conventions and achieving mass popularity, if not respectability. Cinema’s potential strength derived largely from its ability to show, not tell (one of London’s own literary dictums), and to do so on a large scale. London realized the value of immediately comprehensible and recognizable representations virtually from the start of his career, much as he realized his own value as a commodity. The turn-of-the-century press had helped London foster and perpetuate his charismatic and virile image; now a new medium had the potential to convey his celebrity even more forcefully and widely.

Of course, mass media and fame existed well before the invention of cinema. One might argue, however, that the motion picture industry—particularly in Hollywood—increased the degree of potential celebrity exponentially, especially in the case of the contentious and limited nature of literary fame, even in its early-twentieth-century manifestation. As Raymond Williams has demonstrated, the development of a large, middle-class reading public in England during the eighteenth century transformed a system of literary patronage into modern commercial publishing, allowing the novel to become a commodity and its author to become an important, if controversial, figure in the marketplace.\textsuperscript{21} The technological and social changes that sparked the development of a middle class also facilitated a more tangible relationship between the producers of culture—such as authors and theatrical performers—and their audiences.\textsuperscript{22} In the process, celebrity and com-
modification became increasingly entwined with the communications
technologies of the day, which evolved dramatically over the course
of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The impulse to live in the public eye—to which London was no
stranger—was nurtured not only by technological advancements but
also by ideological shifts. By the late eighteenth century, authors
could aspire to literary fame in a culture that emphasized the grow-
ing importance of success in the marketplace.23 As renown emerged as
an objective, instead of a consequence, of authorship, the populariza-
tion and increased visualization of heroes and artists led to the confla-
tion of success with visibility.24 By 1850, as Richard Ohmann observes
in his meticulously researched Selling Culture, the modern sense of
celebrity was already in place; the public’s knowledge of celebrities
was, by the turn of the twentieth century, a kind of “cultural capi-
tal” resulting “in a storehouse of shared knowledge about individuals
who had attained standing as cynosures, or were on the way to it.”25
Modern mass publicity was already in nascent form by at least the
early nineteenth century, setting the stage for what would become an
unprecedented confluence of media and personality in the twentieth
century, and an increased tolerance for—even fascination with—those
like London who chose to exploit this convergence.

By the late nineteenth century, touring theatrical companies in the
United States had famous players who attracted audiences by virtue
of their reputations;26 the theater, however, had neither the means of
mass distribution nor the vast mechanisms of publicity of which its
cinematic counterparts could boast just a few decades later. In other
words, the theater lacked the kind of virtual omnipresence promised
by cinema’s means of distribution.27 However, cultural developments
like the rise of theater in the nineteenth century in many ways pre-
pared Americans for the mass cultural phenomenon of cinema in the
twentieth; as Ohmann notes, Americans of the nineteenth century
“learned to pay for amusement, learned to expect that it would be pro-
vided by professionals (and strangers), learned to accept publicity as
the forerunner and framer of a major event, learned that they must
have certain experiences—or at least know about them—to feel adroit
in the medium of the social.”28 This cultural conditioning paved the
way for the motion picture industry, which quickly began to exploit the
most commercially advantageous of these earlier techniques while
also inventing new modes of publicity and commerce.
As an authorial celebrity garnering tremendous publicity in the press, London was conscious of those features of his writing and his personality that made him a valuable commodity, particularly in this celebrity-mad culture increasingly oriented to the visual. In 1905, Macmillan produced a slender promotional volume entitled *Jack London: A Sketch of His Life and Work with Portrait*. The title of this volume points to the importance of London’s visual image in relation to his literary celebrity. Inside the front cover, a portrait shows London in his signature shirt-and-tie pose, looking off to his right with a cigarette in hand. This classic glimpse of London in the frontispiece is a photographic precursor to the cinematic prologue of a similarly posed London attached to Bosworth’s London adaptations. As with the moving version of this preface, the still photograph is a static argument about the author and his value as an image; in fact, these prefaces suggest that much of London’s success is founded on his image, multivalent as this term can be. In the films, however, these images also suggest, however incorrectly, not just conceptual but cinematic authorship. London, seated at his desk in a slightly romanticized, work-like pose, is read not only as bearer of the valuable image but as creator of the images to follow.

The Macmillan volume also contains the usual details of London’s legendary roots and literary ascension (a *New York Dramatic Mirror* article would declare in 1913: “There is little need of repeating London’s well-known story”—but there obviously was), and it ends on an autobiographical note that forecasts how London’s image will be incorporated into cinematic versions of his works. In reference to *The Sea-Wolf*, the anonymous author concludes: “The book contains more of Mr. London and his philosophy of life than anything else which he has written.” London’s autobiographical writing style was noted by many of his contemporaries and by virtually all of his critics. Henry Meade Bland’s 1904 essay in the *Overland Monthly* echoes Macmillan’s publicity for its star author, starting with the declaration that “Jack London has, perhaps as no other American author, put his own life into his books”; this would, within a decade, apply equally to his films.

In addition to reprinting two photographs of London, Bland describes the author at length: “In personal appearance London is not especially striking. He has light curly hair, blue eyes, square face, firm-set chin, and rather prominent cheek bones. He is of medium
height, and now weighs about one hundred and sixty pounds. He is agile and strong." If Bland purports to find London "not especially striking," his narration suggests otherwise; or it perhaps suggests that Bland, despite his own dismissal of London's appearance, was aware that readers anticipated and desired further interaction with London's image. Furthermore, London's success, here and elsewhere, appears implicitly linked to his appearance (both the way he looked and the fact of his being pictured). The author was not just an anonymous producer of great literary works; he was a celebrity, and the movies promised to substantially augment his renown. Through print media coverage, his own book and magazine publications, and eventually motion pictures, London became known as a relentless purveyor of his own image. Bland's decision to describe London in such detail after presenting two photographs of him reminds us of the degree to which literary production was becoming linked to personality and image (see fig. 1). At the same time, it demonstrates the degree to which the producers of language were attempting to approximate and do justice to the visual.

Selling Out?

In a recent article about Jack London and publicity, Loren Glass shows that "[s]ignatures of famous American authors became a hot commodity during the second half of the nineteenth century, big-name bylines became an essential marketing device for both newspapers and magazines, and an authorial star system emerged in the wake of the international copyright bill of 1891." One need only browse through the collection of Jack London ephemera at the Huntington Library to realize that London was inundated by autograph requests throughout his career from individuals wanting to complete their collections of signatures of famous authors, theatrical performers, politicians, and the like. As Glass points out, London was unusually aware of the degree to which his name functioned as a kind of cultural currency that could enhance the value of his work. His savvy self-publicity climaxed with his decision to allow the "currency of his name" and, perhaps more important, of his image, into the arena of the motion picture industry. London was speculating on the potential of this new medium to translate both literature and personality into something new and, it may be inferred, newly valuable.
Although not the first, London was among those writers on the cutting edge of this transitional phenomenon of selling stories to the industry. As producers struggled to create more complex stories in their films, they looked to literature for much-needed source material. In 1908, the Kalem Company was borrowing from Shakespeare and Essanay, the film manufacturing company, from Dickens. In the Huntington Library’s Jack London scrapbooks for 1913 and 1914 are numerous articles that address the translation of literary works into movies. An article in the Spokane Washington Review notes “two decided tendencies in the moving pictures today”: the use of established writers and of “legitimate” players. New pictures, it explains, are being released with “several angles”: “There is the feature by a popular playwright or novelist; the feature with the legitimate star in its stellar role or roles; and the feature by the popular novelist with the legitimate star in its cast. The latter seems to be the last word in feature productions.” London’s relationship to the film industry complicates this division between “legitimate stars” and established authors because London was both; this double identity was, after all, what made him such a valuable commodity to the many film producers who sought association with him. London’s cultural status—what he brought to the industry—offered a double dose of “symbolic capital” (to borrow the term Auerbach uses to suggest London’s cultural value) to his cinematic ventures (MC, 2).

This much is clear: something in the culture of authorship was changing, and the shift was at least in part a result of the demands and operating principles of the motion picture industry. As Christopher Wilson notes, writers quite obviously “shape their cultural style to fit the tastes of the day,” and the advent of motion picture technology was a palpable influence upon popular tastes. But London’s participation in this shift in authorial practices signals an important step in the evolution of print and visual culture, which were becoming increasingly interrelated, and not always successfully so. In fact, the question of how this transition in authorship would change the status of the profession was widely debated, with many voicing concerns, however longstanding, about the negative influence of commerce (associated with the movies) upon art (associated with literature).

The anxiety over divisions between high and low art, and between literature and commercial writing, were not, as Auerbach points out, London’s concerns: “London’s significance was to see from the start
Fig. 1. In this gently mocking cartoon of unknown origin, Jack London is “snapshooting” himself with a still camera, placing the cartoon’s probable publication date before his involvement with motion pictures. The circle around London’s image was drawn by either his clipping bureau; his wife, Charmian London; or London himself. Reproduced by permission of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California (Jack London Collection, JLE2356). See detail, opposite page.
of his career how these oppositions were beginning to lose their distinct definitions in the new century (MC, 30). The dichotomy between writing as art and writing as commerce was not born in response to cinema’s influence but had already been the subject of debate over the course of the late nineteenth century, during which “writers oscillated between being ‘makers’ of manuscripts and sellers of their wares” (LW, 16). William Dean Howells feared “Barnumizing his talent” (LW, 12), opining that “people feel there is something profane, something impious, in taking money for a picture, or a poem, or a statue.” London’s understanding of writing as ready-made for the marketplace defies the notion of literature as sacred, and the motion picture indus-
try is the most blatant example of how and where distinctions between high and low were becoming blurred.

Given the flurry of excitement and debate over the relationship between authorship and celebrity, particularly in film production and distribution, it is not surprising that London’s status as author was central to virtually all of Bosworth’s advertising for their first London film production, *The Sea Wolf*, which used the author’s name and image to publicize and authenticate the film.44 Emphasizing that the film was “universally copyrighted” and “fully protected,” Bosworth claimed that any remaining ambiguity over the status of *The Sea Wolf* as a legitimate Jack London product was also addressed by footage of London that served to introduce the picture. In an advertisement in the *Moving Picture World*, Bosworth calls attention to the London visual trademark attached to each Bosworth film: “As a further identification of each London subject a twenty-foot view of Mr. London will be prefixed, typifying as nearly as possible the local color of the story.”45

London’s presence brought much more than local color. In Bosworth’s film *Martin Eden* (1914), the prefatory moving images of Jack London are punctuated with a portrait of the author wearing his customary white shirt and tie, with his signature underneath, replicating the familiar autographed inscription on celluloid. The image and signature convey the author’s stamp of legitimacy, while appealing to the authenticating logic behind the autograph craze of the late nineteenth century.46 London’s image functions as a visual signature, attempting to restore his valuable aura and affirm his status as author. These images also reveal their maker’s twin assumptions: that Jack London would be a visually recognizable figure and that audiences would value his appearance as part of the film. London’s willingness to act “on screen” in this fashion makes clear the degree to which the author was prepared to sell Bosworth’s films by selling himself. It so happens that while London was playing this marketing game, his own writing also began to reflect the influences of this medium that promised to circulate his thoughts and ideas as well as his image.

**Writing for the Screen**

At least in the latter part of his life, I contend, London was writing novels with motion pictures and their attendant publicity in mind. Although his involvement with the industry resulted in cumbersome
illegal troubles and only moderate success, London never gave up hope for his future with the medium. In fact, he actively participated in one well-documented, if critically neglected, foray into authorship that revolved entirely around the motion picture industry: *Hearts of Three*. My consideration of the cultural circumstances from which this text evolved along with an analysis of the text itself will illustrate the degree to which London had revised his ideas of authorship to anticipate and accommodate cinematic production.

*Hearts of Three* was first printed as a book in England in 1918; the *New York Evening Journal* and *Oakland Tribune* then serialized it in 1919; Macmillan published the U.S. edition in 1920. London completed the manuscript before his death in 1916, through a deal facilitated by Edward Grant Sisson, editor of *Cosmopolitan*, the magazine that had contractual rights to all of London's fiction. As Alex Kershaw notes, this book-writing deal was a financial boon for London. He would be paid $25,000, “ten times the advance he had received from *Century* two years earlier for *John Barleycorn*.”48 Charles Goddard, a Hearst employee and photoplay writer, was to provide London with installments of motion picture scenarios as he completed them for a weekly moving picture serial; London would then follow Goddard’s plots to produce a novel of the screenplay, which would then be made into a weekly serialized film to be accompanied by the publication of London’s novel, serialized first and then published in book form.

This collaboration may seem like an unusual way to approach the business of novel writing, but serializations were very much a part of this decade’s filmmaking practices. It was, perhaps, only slightly unusual that an author of London’s reputation would undertake a project that might be considered so overtly derivative, but London, as I’ve already noted, did not shy away from an aggressive approach to the literary marketplace. This simultaneously creative and commercial relationship between Sisson, Goddard, and London provides yet another provocative instance of the merging of print and visual culture. As London knew all too well and was conscious of in his introduction to *Hearts of Three*, the motion picture producers were hungry for source materials.

London’s *Hearts of Three* can be understood as an embellishment of Goddard’s photoplay, appearing at first glance to rely more on elaboration than invention.49 Particularly notable for its frantic pace and unbelievable plot twists, *Hearts of Three* tells the story of Francis
Morgan, a wealthy young college man living on Riverside Drive who decides, in good Rooseveltian fashion, to take two weeks in the woods because he feels he’s “growing soft.” But first he encounters Alvarez Torres, who claims he can lead the young man to find a treasure buried by his father, Sir Henry Morgan. Many sensational events transpire over the course of the novel’s 373 pages: Francis goes to the Mosquito Coast and runs into unknown descendants of his father, most notably his half-brother Henry who looks almost identical to him (spare the difference in moustache); Francis meets and falls in love with a mysterious wild woman, Leoncia, whom he marries at novel’s end after an incestuous marriage almost takes place between Henry and Leoncia, who are siblings, and after Francis’s brief pagan marriage to the Lady Who Dreams, queen of a world of ancients and sun gods where explorers find Mayan treasure worth hundreds of millions of dollars, which is eventually brought back to New York to save Francis from losing everything in the stock market. (His financial plight is caused by the evil machinations of someone he took to be his father’s dearest friend, Regan.) London describes his plot in the book’s introduction: “And action! I have written some novels of adventure in my time, but never, in all of the many of them, have I perpetrated a totality of action equal to what is contained in ‘Hearts of Three’” (HT, viii). In order to keep up with such content, the formal structure of the novel adopts the conventions of the movie serials, which kept audiences hanging on the proverbial edge of their seats in anticipation of the next episode. The Kalem and Biograph companies were making movie serials by 1909, which were themselves largely based on nineteenth-century Victorian novels; by the teens, serials had become genres unto themselves, with characteristic tropes, such as the suspenseful weekly endings, already in place. The side-by-side crescendos and climaxes in Hearts of Three, as a novel, seem preposterous; but to the movie spectator of the teens, who would have had a full week between each cliff-hanger (to use a term whose origins reside in the moving picture serials), these events would have appeared less contrived and, as the genre established itself, more in line with the conventions associated with this kind of unfolding drama.

More than any other piece of London’s writing that survives, the novel’s introduction contends with the issues of literary production central to my essay. As London explains the process of reinventing his authorial self in relation to cinematic production, he muses on this
London and the Motion Picture Industry

With the rise of moving pictures into the overwhelmingly most popular form of amusement in the entire world, the stock of plots and stories in the world’s fiction fund began rapidly to be exhausted. In a year a single producing company, with a score of directors, is capable of filming the entire literary output of the entire lives of Shakespeare, Balzac, Dickens, Scott, Zola, Tolstoy, and of dozens of less voluminous writers. And since there are hundreds of moving picture producing companies, it can be readily grasped how quickly they found themselves face to face with a shortage of the raw material of which moving pictures are fashioned. (HT, v)53

This statement is a striking acknowledgment of the competing anxieties of the decade cast in terms of production and consumption, supply and demand. By describing this relationship in economic terms, pointing to the limited “fiction fund” that existed to serve these markets, London implies a kind of rabid capitalistic cannibalism, as the motion picture producers madly ingest the world’s great literary works. Further, the description is reminiscent of the tenets of the star system, which Miriam Hansen has compared to the worlds of industry and commerce, possessing “a similar voracity, opportunism, and volatility.”54 As star author, London was particularly, however willingly, subject to such patterns of consumption and commercial fetishization. His acknowledgment of such an industrial conceptualization of the relationship between the moving picture producers and the literary market reminds us of the degree to which he understood his own image as requisite for his survival in the new cinematic economy.

Part of London’s behind-the-scenes explication in the introduction to Hearts of Three involves the formal arrangements of the text and its analogous life on celluloid: “[W]e worked simultaneously at our respective tasks. I could not build for what was going to happen next or a dozen chapters away, because I did not know. Neither did Mr. Goddard know. The inevitable result was that ‘Hearts of Three’ may not be very vertebrate, although it is certainly consecutive” (HT, vii). While not using this mode of literary production as an excuse for the novel’s unusual structure or pacing, London was trying to convey a material sense of this rather unusual relationship between the written word and the moving image. This was a new economy for London, whose
authorial autonomy had been largely based upon a rigorous concept of isolated daily labor and production, however much he may have “borrowed” materials that were circulating in the culture at large. London frequently acquiesced to others’ editorial suggestions, which, I would argue, prepared him to “release” his manuscripts for alteration in the movies, a step many authors were unwilling to take, fearing accusations of literary compromise. Based upon the mechanics of this new relationship to his own production, London appears to have been willing to rethink the very notion of authorship: not knowing where the story was taking him, he accommodated narrative whims over which he apparently had no control.

Similarities between Goddard’s screenplay and London’s novelization, however, reveal that London did, in fact, provide substantial elaboration and invention for his “half” of the deal. Rather than simply adding a few details to Goddard’s screenplay, London made great descriptive departures, sometimes recounting for an entire page what Goddard attended to in a sentence; word and image, as London already realized, had relative economies. In part, this seems to have been London’s attempt to make novelistic a narrative that was essentially cinematic. This was an important lesson for London, however late it came in his career, about the vast mechanical differences between a photoplay and a novel. Goddard’s text attends to its characters as if describing the movement of pawns in a game of chess, transporting them about the Panamanian landscape with little or no elaboration. London’s novel takes Goddard’s skeletal descriptions and runs with them, filling in the picture for his readers based upon the suggestions offered by Goddard in an attempt to restore a descriptive, novelistic quality to the minimal details of the photoplay.

A Fresh Vision: New Form, New Function

Perhaps not surprisingly, *Hearts of Three* takes many of its formal and contextual cues from already established conventions of the motion picture. When Francis ends up in a gun-and-knife fight with a stranger, he says: “Too bad there isn’t a moving picture camera to film this” (*HT*, 26). This comment’s appearance in the novel, in addition to a later reference to a character’s “ideal ‘film’ face” (*HT*, 355), demonstrates on the most superficial level that the motion picture industry had become a part of London’s literary consciousness, all the more so
because of the filmic origins of the novel. More to the point, however, is the formal structure of *Hearts of Three*, which, consciously or not, reflects the language of the cinema.

Such influence is particularly evident in London’s use of the flashback, a cinematic convention that London adapted to the novelistic form in *Hearts of Three*. Whereas film historian Charles Musser notes that the Selig Company used the flashback device in *When We Were Boys* (1907), Bowser locates the term’s first application in *The Art of Photo-Play Writing* (1916), a manual by Harold Weston for moving-picture-scenario writers; she also notes that the device itself was referred to more commonly as “memory flashes.”57 Regardless of the terminology, the concept of the flashback was articulated around the cinematic medium in the early twentieth century. The *OED* defines its 1916 usage as “a scene which is a return to a previous action in the film, a cut-back; hence, a revival of the memory of past events, as in a pictorial or written presentation.”

This is precisely how London deploys the concept—a kind of psychological editing, as Gunning explains it—in his novel.58 Used as an interiorizing device, the flashback allows viewers a glimpse into the minds of characters. In London’s iterations, the flashback retains its principal function by similar formal manipulations that appear on the page instead of on the screen. An extended passage, which occurs after Francis’s newly found half brother, Henry, puts on their father’s old pirate clothes, illustrates London’s use of the device:

As the young man, picking the strings of a guitar, began to sing the old buccaneer rouse, it seemed to him that the picture of his forebear faded into another picture and that he saw:

The old forebear himself, back to a mainmast, cutlass out and flashing, facing a semi-circle of fantastically clad sailor cutthroats, while behind him, on the opposite side of the mast, another similarly garbed and accoutered man, with cutlass flashing, faced the other semi-circle of cutthroats that completed the ring about the mast.

The vivid vision of his fancy was broken by the breaking of a guitar-string which he had thrummed too passionately. And in the sharp pause of silence, it seemed that a fresh vision of old Sir Henry came to him, down out of the frame and beside him, real in all seeming, plucking at his sleeve to lead him out of the hut and whispering the ghostly repetition of:
American Literature

“Back to back against the mainmast, 
Held at bay the entire crew.”

The young man obeyed his shadowy guide, or some prompting of his own profound intuition, and went out the door and down to the beach, where, gazing across the narrow channel, on the beach of the Bull, he saw his late antagonist, [Francis] backed up against the great bowlder [sic] of coral rock, standing off an attack of sack-clouted, machete-wielding Indians with wide sweeping strokes of a driftwood timber. (HT, 28–29)

A combination of vision and flashback, this narration relies upon a familial memory invoked by the donned attire rather than solely by Henry’s personal memory of his father. The way London chooses to narrate this scene is, I would argue, entirely cinematic. London’s methods here, where skipped lines are equated with fades and cuts, reflect the ways that moving-picture makers had pioneered such formal notions of representing memory, with the first space in the text functioning as a kind of literary dissolve, taking the reader from the present into a scene from the past without having to explain the transition with words. In fact, the representational mechanisms established by cinema and its modes of representation save the author the necessity of relying upon language to convey this effect.

Such devices certainly worked for contemporary filmmakers, who also frequently relied upon intertitles or hyperbolic physicality to explain characters’ thoughts. As Gunning points out, the use of psychological editing devices such as the flashback gave directors like Griffith a way to focus on character, allowing “changes to come from characters’ thoughts rather than from their physical actions.” Silent films avoided overly complicated verbal explications in favor of comprehensible visual signs, precisely the kind that London describes in his narration of *Hearts of Three*. The cinematic flashback also relies on the use of the dissolve, and the literal space London employs to initiate his flashback in *Hearts of Three* is the equivalent. Although the use of spatial separations to connote a shift in scenario was not of cinema born, it is a device that London uses rampanty in *Hearts of Three*, as he does nowhere else. His earlier novel *The Sea-Wolf* does have this kind of division between narrative action, but only on rare occasions to separate one scene from the next within a chapter. The technique
was, however, an established part of the cinematic vocabulary by the
time London employed it so heavily in *Hearts of Three*.\textsuperscript{61} As a condition
of having to approximate the visual narratives fed to him by Goddard,
London appears to have been compelled to use the literary approxi-
mation of the dissolve in order to get from one moment of the story to
the next.

One of the consequences of London's use of the literary dissolve
(itself a result of Goddard's serialized photoplays) is the unusual
prevalence of parallel action in *Hearts of Three*. Parallel editing in
the cinema allowed for the development of two simultaneous trajec-
tories of action, which were then intercut.\textsuperscript{62} There are at least as
many examples of this device in *Hearts of Three* as there are chap-
ters: Francis and Leoncia struggle in a cave to get the treasure while
elsewhere Henry is jailed and waiting for release; Francis takes care
of his business in New York while Henry carries on in Panama; and
Torres tries to get at the hidden treasure while several different events
preoccupy the Solano family. As with the cinematic serial, the pace
of London's story gets progressively faster, with shorter segments
between the spaces that signify these dissolves.

London's literary deployment of these visual and cinematic prop-
erties was not only a mimetic response to what Goddard was hand-
ing him. One particular scene rendered by both Goddard and London
illustrates the degree to which London was responding to more than
just the necessity of following Goddard's photoplay. After Francis mar-
ries the queen and brings her to New York, Goddard's photoplay sug-
gests her entrance into this unfamiliar and civilized world: "Francis
kissed her as in the dream and she asks what the stock ticker is.
Francis starts to explain, picks up the tape sees something that scares
him and jumps to telephone."\textsuperscript{63} London elaborates upon Goddard's
scenario by having the queen ask Francis about the mysterious stock
market ticket:

He opened his mouth to reply to her last question, halted, and said
nothing, realizing the impossibility of conveying comprehension to
her, the while, under his eyelids, or at the foreground of his brain,
burned pictures of great railroad and steamship lines, of teeming
terminals and noisy docks; of miners toiling in Alaska, in Montana,
in Death Valley; of bridled rivers, and harnessed waterfalls, and of
power-lines stilting across lowlands and swamps and marshes on
two-hundred-foot towers; and of all the mechanics and economics and finances of the twentieth century machine-civilization. (HT, 302)

With or without Goddard’s cues, London’s literary techniques here are highly visual, undeniably cinematic. Instead of speaking, Francis projects. The “burned pictures” in “the foreground of [Francis’s] brain” reflect the cinema’s techniques for explicating character consciousness, which at least partially drove London’s desire to “to get the images living in my brains into the brains of others.” This is narration recast as cinema, or perhaps it is cinema reinscribed as narration. Motion pictures embodied the “twentieth century machine-civilization” London invokes; they also facilitated a reinvention of literary convention and a rethinking of the relationship between the written word and the moving image. Due to the collaborative circumstances in which London wrote Hearts of Three, his deliberate prose cinematizing is rendered especially visible.

Although Hearts of Three appears to have failed, as both a novel and a motion picture, London’s letters just months before his death remain optimistic—notwithstanding his irrepresible cynicism—regarding a future with the motion picture industry despite his merely minor successes and substantial failures. London was hoping to get Hearst to simultaneously produce a film version alongside the publication of what would be the final novel released during his lifetime, The Little Lady of the Big House (1916). By 1916, he thought it almost obligatory that his works have their day on screen at some point. He had even reflected upon their inadequacies with regard to motion picture production, writing to Sisson on 23 September 1914:

I have written to Mr. Garbutt sending him the text of The Little Lady of The Big House so far as I have it written. I am doubtful myself that the ending is happy enough to make it a successful moving picture affair; however I have written to Mr. Garbutt and you may also understand the same thing from me—namely, that I give to the scenario writer free fist to change my plot ending and anything and everything necessary to turn the story into a successful moving picture.64

London seems to admit here, without any hint of regret, his own resignation, of sorts. He had become a highly visible laborer, one of many,
producing novels to be fleshed out by more cinematically inclined personnel for his products’ secondary (or tertiary) lives. London’s acknowledgment that his novel’s ending was perhaps not ideally cinematic also implies that he did not think of himself as writing a movie scenario; rather, he was creating a product-in-progress whose ultimate destination was the silver screen. Although this may have increased his cultural cachet, it simultaneously eroded certain romantic notions of autonomous and heroic authorship, increasingly creaky concepts that had begun to diminish over the course of the Gilded Age in favor of a model more akin to the production line, a rather appropriate conceptualization at which to arrive on the cusp of the mass cultural revolution of the 1920s.

London’s cinematic dealings, then, would suggest that his relationship to the motion picture industry signaled his rejection of the sacred status of the singular author. This is not to say that the loss was not compensated for in alternate, almost postmodern, ways, since London’s image became all the more prevalent and valuable despite his virtual alienation from “his” cinematic products. When Christopher Wilson declares that “nearly a century after writers began their quest for the recognition of their intellectual property, they have become, in the jargon of the agent, ‘properties’ themselves,” he could be describing the deliberate outcome of Jack London’s own image making, his willingness to sell himself (*LW*, 201).

Although London’s writing came to reflect the language and form of motion pictures, he seemed content with, and perhaps even intent upon, following a literary path with only limited involvement in motion picture production. This path, however, led to a seemingly inevitable cinematic afterlife for his works. The author’s aims for his literary production had therefore undergone a significant conceptual shift with the addition of motion picture distribution to his chain of literary economics. London may not have had “a successful moving picture affair,” but he was willing to relinquish and, in so doing, debunk the sanctity of authorship in the name of his future successes in the more loosely defined field of popular culture, foreshadowing the fates of dozens of established American authors who later sought to make their reputations, and their money, by transporting their works to Hollywood.
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Notes

A Mellon fellowship from the Huntington Library permitted me to work with their Jack London collection, and Sue Hodson’s expertise made it possible to efficiently navigate this impressive collection. I am grateful to the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, and to I. Milo Shepard for permission to quote from the Jack London holdings. I am also indebted to the thoughtful advice of Jonathan Auerbach, Charles Caramello, Bob Kolker, Devin Orgeron, and David Wyatt.

1 The London film apparently has not survived, nor is it listed in the section “Jack London Filmography” of Tony Williams’s Jack London: The Movies (Los Angeles: David Rejl, 1992), although Williams mentions it elsewhere in the book. The New York press, however, thoroughly covered the film’s arrival and run. In scrapbooks assembled by Jack London and, later, by Charmian London, are extensive clippings of this coverage. The scrapbooks are available on microfilm in the Jack London Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino, California. References to the microfilm versions of these scrapbooks will be cited parenthetically as JLS. All items are cited with the permission of I. Milo Shephard and the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

2 In the advertisement’s synopsis, London is described as appearing only in the first sequence. Although the film begins with images of the famous author, his absence during the remainder of the film is surprising, especially given its marketing and reception (n. d., n.p.; see JLS, Box 517, reel 9, vol. 15).

3 JLS, Box 517, reel 8, vol. 12.

4 I am deliberately, though somewhat improperly, invoking Tom Gunning’s notion of the “cinema of attractions,” which suggests that early moviegoers came to theaters to see novelties and spectacles that would excite their curiosity like attractions at a fairground. Gunning’s phrase signifies early cinema’s “foregrounding of the act of display,” which initiated a relationship between audiences and the presentation of objects, people, or events in a way that prefigures the dynamics of movie stardom (see “Now You See It, Now You Don’t: The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions,” in Silent Film, ed. Richard Abel [New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1996], 73). London’s star status functions precisely as an attraction within this evolving mass cultural matrix. For more on the relationship between Gunning’s concept of the cinema of attractions and its relationship to stardom, see Miriam Hansen, Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1991).

5 Martin Johnson, Through the South Seas with Jack London (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1913), ix. The cruise was recycled in many popular culture forms: it was heavily covered in the newspapers; London published The Cruise of the Snark in 1911 (New York: Macmillan); and Charmian Lon-
London followed with *The Log of the Snark* in 1915 (New York: Macmillan). It is worth noting that Johnson’s book, which was advertised as possessing “numerous illustrations” (thirty-three to be exact), contains only one photograph of the Londons.

London’s first film contract was actually with the Balboa Amusement Company. London broke his initial 29 April 1913 agreement for exclusive motion picture rights with Balboa when they failed to produce the number of films they had promised, initiating years of legal battles between the two that also involved Bosworth Inc., which eventually produced a number of London’s films. For a detailed account of the litigation and its ramifications, financial and otherwise, see Williams, *Jack London: The Movies*.

On the need for a study of London’s progressive relationship to film form and culture, see Jonathan Auerbach, epilogue to *Male Call: Becoming Jack London* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1996), n. 7, 282–83; further references will be cited parenthetically as MC.

For example, Loren Glass claims that during the last decade of his life, London was trying “to write himself out of debt,” making it seem that any deals enacted during this period were made only to remedy this dilemma (“Nobody’s Renown: Plagiarism and Publicity in the Career of Jack London,” *American Literature* 71 [September 1999]: 531). Robert Birchard further explains that London “looked to the movies to provide a much-needed source of steady income” as a means of combating his debt (“Jack London and the Movies,” *Film History* 1.1 [1987]: 16).

This was not, of course, a unidirectional influence. Literature was a vital source for early narrative cinema. As Tom Gunning points out, D. W. Griffith was fascinated with literary naturalism, and particularly with the writing of Frank Norris (see *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film* [Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1991]). Miriam Hansen claims that Griffith’s best-known film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), possesses a “novelistic self-consciousness” (*Babel and Babylon*, 142). For more on the relationship between Griffith and narrative cinema, see Gunning, *D. W. Griffith*.


Throughout *Martin Eden*, Martin is subject to vivid visions of his past and future. The use of such intense visual ruptures prefigures London’s heavy reliance on this device in the novel I will explore presently, *Hearts of Three* (1920, first American edition).


Ibid., 106–7.
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16 Bosworth released its first London film in 1913, a seven-reel adaptation of The Sea-Wolf. Although Bosworth made several London films, many of which were acclaimed, London never achieved the degree of economic profit or cultural clout he had hoped for from this collaboration.


18 “Jack London’s Many Adventures Reviewed at the Kinema Today,” Fresno Republican, 9 March 1914; see Hobart Bosworth Scrapbook 4, Hobart Bosworth Collection, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles, California. All materials from Bosworth’s scrapbooks are cited courtesy of the Margaret Herrick Library. Further references will be abbreviated HBS.

19 In the transitional period, playhouses often doubled as motion picture venues. An undated clipping from an unidentified source entitled “B’Way Houses with Pictures” notes that “Jack London’s ‘Trip to the South Sea Islands’” will be arriving at Cohan’s “in a few weeks,” adding a telling aside that “[i]nside 30 days half a dozen Broadway playhouses will be utilized for feature moving pictures”; see the Jack London Collection, Huntington Library, JLE1979. Further references to items in the Huntington’s Jack London Collection that are not on microfilm will be cited by the call number JL or JLE.

20 See Hansen, Babel and Babylon, 79.


22 For more on these changes, see Leo Lowenthal, Literature, Popular Culture, and Society (Palo Alto, Calif.: Pacific Books, 1961).


24 Ibid., 425.


28 Ohmann, Selling Culture, 19.

29 According to Hensley Woodbridge, John London, and George Twaney, “London is known to have personally written the majority of the text in this sketch of his life” (Jack London: A Bibliography [Georgetown, Calif.: Talisman Press, 1966], 263).
For an interesting and related discussion of Griffith’s attempts to establish film authorship, a concept that differs from textual authorship by virtue of the medium’s necessarily collaborative nature, see Gunning, D. W. Griffith. According to Gunning, Griffith’s groundbreaking move was to claim authorship of the films he directed for Biograph, thereby redefining “film as an authored discourse” (51). This was an era of narrative revolution, and Griffith and London were both experimenting with similar notions of product recognition.


Ibid., 374.


See JL Box 522, which contains autograph requests.

Loren Glass uses this phrase in “Nobody’s Renown,” 531.

For further discussion of this era, see Eileen Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema: 1907–1915* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1990), especially 42–44.

See JL Box 517, reel 8. Writers like Rex Beach, Ida Tarbell, and Booth Tarkington were also dabbling in this no-man’s-land of cinematic production.


Christopher Wilson, preface to *The Labor of Words: Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1985), xii; further references will be cited parenthetically as *LW*.

See, for example, “Jack London Here on Business; Hints ‘Movies’ Want Him,” *Los Angeles Express*, 25 April 1913; and “Another Great Author Succumbs to the Movies,” *Herald Times*, 6 August 1913, both in HBS, Scrapbook 4.


Given the legal struggles with the Balboa Amusement Company, this issue of authentication was particularly important. London and Bosworth sought to identify their “authorized” film to devalue what they claimed was Balboa’s illegitimate production.

Advertisement by Bosworth Inc., *Moving Picture World*, 23 August 1913, 848.

Of the three reels of Bosworth’s 1914 version of *Martin Eden* that survive at the Library of Congress (reels one, two, and five), the first reel preserves the crucial images of London that I’ve described.


49 While I am referring to the novel as London's and while London was the sole person credited with authorship when it was published, it is worth remembering that it originated with Goddard's scenarios, which themselves are labeled “Hearts of Three” by Jack London & Charles W. Goddard; see JL752. Only scenarios 6–11 and 13–15 (the last) are extant in the Huntington Library’s collection.

50 Jack London, *Hearts of Three* (New York: Macmillan, 1920), 2; further references to this source will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically as HT.


52 Almost all sources indicate that the film version of *Hearts of Three* was never made, except for London’s inexplicable reference in a letter to Sisson dated 5 August 1916: “What has happened to the screening of *Hearts of Three*? I noticed that the Vitagraph had started to screen it, then I read clippings about a law-suit against me for violation of contract, and then I have heard no further in the matter” (see JL13551). This was apparently much to London’s dismay, since he inquired about the film’s status several times; as he put it in the first staunch telegram to Sisson on 6 November 1916: “WHY HAS HEARTS OF THREE DIED DEAD” (see JL13562).

53 London’s first sentence echoes the sentiment of an undated article by P. Harvey Middleton, “Moving Picture Man,” that London had clipped for short story inspiration (see JL954). “Moving Picture Man” begins: “If figures mean anything, the moving picture show is the most popular of all our national amusements, not excepting baseball, which undoubtedly thoroughly deserves its title as the national sport of America” (source unknown, 543).

54 Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, 247.

55 The obvious exception would be London’s collaboration with Anna Strunsky on *The Kempton-Wace Letters* (New York: Macmillan, 1903).

56 For more on London’s willingness to be edited and directed, see Wilson, *LW*, especially 98–100.


58 See Gunning, *D. W. Griffith*, 123.

59 Ibid. Gunning also demonstrates that “films based on memory images became more frequent” around 1908, with Edwin S. Porter’s *Fireside Reminiscences* (Edison, 1908) superimposing memories over the “background of a fireplace, before which the protagonist sits musing,” a device strikingly similar to London’s in *Hearts of Three* (*D. W. Griffith*, 117).

60 For an example of this kind of division, see Jack London, *The Sea-Wolf* (1904; New York: Macmillan, 1919), 250.
61 Musser notes that Méliès used dissolves in 1899, and that they were commonly practiced in the Edison Manufacturing Company’s films (Emergence of Cinema, 177, 316).
62 For more on parallel editing, see Gunning, D. W. Griffith, 103.
63 JL752, Episode 13, Scene 10.
64 See JL13513.