

Jubal Sackett Short Guide

Jubal Sackett by Louis L'Amour

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Characters

Jubal Sackett is a character much like Hondo, an independent survivalist and fighter (Jubal uses a longbow, pistols and sword with equal skill) who is lonely underneath. He lacks the hardness of Hondo, though: He values friendship and human companionship and doubts that Princess Itchakomi could love him. As a younger son he had previously been content to follow, to accept the judgments of his father and older brothers, and to leave them the responsibility. He was known as "the Quiet One" and "he who walked in shadows among laurel sticks and stood alone on balds when sun is rising." He tells himself that he undertakes his westward journey to satisfy his curiosity to see new land but on the journey finds he has really "escaped to himself," in other words, realized who he is as an individual separate from his family.

His bride Itchakomi is the regal Indian princess figure, perhaps based on the grown-up Pocahontas. She is an interesting character type for a masculine writer such as L'Amour to have attempted. At two crucial junctures in the novel, Jubal realizes that she, rather than he, has saved their lives although he has been in the forefront.

When he and she are out hunting alone, a number of Indians attack.

While he confronts them, she walks around to disguise how many they actually have in their party to keep the Indians confused and reluctant to fight.

When the Ute Indians come to inspect who has built a fort on their land, Jubal impresses them by killing a Spaniard in hand-to-hand combat and by riding his pet buffalo. Itchakomi, however, overwhelms them with ceremony: two Indians enter before her bearing torches, and then she majestically enters, sits on a bench covered with buffalo, and announces, "I am Itchakomi Ishaia, Daughter of the Sun, Priestess of the Eternal Fire." She, better than Jubal, understands how to outwit Indian warriors and how to impress other Indians to avoid battle. She definitely fits into the woman as goddess tradition of female figures in literature.



Social Concerns

L'Amour's emphasis on the family in *The Shadow Riders* (1982) recurs in *Jubal Sackett*. Jubal's recollections of the family friend Sakim, the flashes he sees of the future and the presence he feels of other times and other lives reflect L'Amour's expanding interest in Middle Eastern philosophy (as previously displayed in *Walking Drum*, 1984) and psychic powers, a growing preoccupation of the American public since the 1970s. A more concrete social concern in *Jubal Sackett* is the problem of interfaith and interracial marriages — the main character marries an Indian princess/ priestess. L'Amour, however, dismisses the problem too simply when he has Jubal say "although our beliefs were not the same their roots were similar" and when Jubal assures Itchakomi that his family would approve of her.



Techniques

L'Amour employs many of the same techniques in *Jubal Sackett* that he used in *Hondo* (1953) at the beginning of his career. *Jubal Sackett* begins exactly like *Hondo* with a single man being tracked by a group of Indians. Again L'Amour portrays an independent man falling in love with a resourceful woman who is already desired by a fierce, hotheaded Indian (Kapata in *Jubal Sackett*, Silva in *Hondo*). In both novels, too, the Indian chief is portrayed as a wise, understanding man who struggles to keep the hothead under control and to protect the woman (Ni'kwana in *Jubal Sackett*, Vittorio in *Hondo*). Both novels are also filled with violent action with a least one confrontation between men or man and nature per chapter.

In the case of *Jubal Sackett*, however, L'Amour decides that what worked well once in a novel will work even better if used twice. Itchakomi is desired not only by an Indian brave but also by an ambitious and dishonest Spaniard, Gomez. Diego, who becomes Jubal's friend even though Spaniards and English colonists are enemies, stands in the place of the wise chieftain: He is the captain of a force under which Gomez fights but, unlike the chieftains, cannot control Gomez and loses his command to him.

Jubal Sackett is also an odd combination of a loner novel and a family novel. Jubal talks much about his family, but none of them appear in the novel.

In place of a brother, he has the Kickapoo Indian Keokotah who accompanies him on his journeys because he, too, does not quite fit into his society.

Keokotah as a young Indian befriended a captured Englishman, grew to like him and his ways, and became dissatisfied with tribal life. He and Jubal make strange companions: although friends, they seldom share innermost thoughts and feelings — "for the thinking of an Indian is not like that of a white man" — and always fight separately rather than side-by-side. Still another brother figure in the novel is Unstwita, the Natchee who fights with Jubal in the Rocky Mountains, leads his people back to Tennessee, and then returns to join Jubal's new settlement in the mountains.



Themes

One main theme of *Jubal Sackett*, a theme held in common with many L'Amour novels, is destiny. L'Amour does not feel sympathy for the Indians who were pushed off their lands and exterminated. Instead, he conjectures that other peoples — Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans — had come to the New World and that the Indians at best have been only temporary residents. L'Amour feels that the inexorable march of progress and civilization naturally leaves Indians behind because they can not adapt to change and have little initiative. Jubal praises the curiosity and energy of early European settlers while deprecating the abilities of the Indians: "Many acres were needed to feed even one Indian, living as they did, but men would come who would grow grain where only grass grew . . . There were too many landless ones back in Europe, too many willing to risk all to better themselves. . . ."

The Indians in Jubal's seventeenth-century America are troubled by the warriors of fire (soldiers with guns) and sense change in the air but, apart from stealing guns and horses, do little to combat the change.

Other important topics in *Jubal Sackett* are the operations of the mind and the importance of the transmittal of knowledge. Almost all of L'Amour's heroes are readers, and Jubal the wanderer often longs for books although he did not think to carry any with him.

Jubal, after a mystical experience with mummified bodies in a cave, questions the authority of his physical senses: "What is it we see? Is it not often what we expect to see? . . . The eyes see, the mind explains . . . The mind only has what experience and education have given it, and perhaps that is not enough." Yet it is Jubal's curiosity — the desire to enrich his mind with knowledge — that led him to the cave in the first place. Men have a duty, according to L'Amour, to confront the unknown, for knowledge is "that most sacred thing": "In a world of many mysteries there are a few doors left slightly ajar for us to see. He who passes one of those doors may deny man knowledge precious to us." Jubal marvels at the powers of his own memory when Itchakomi asks him about his parents' tales of England — tales long since pushed back from his conscious memory — but at the same time is irked at what little opportunity he had taken to find out about his own people from his parents. Although L'Amour seems to appreciate the importance of intelligence and knowledge in these episodes, he fails to make these concerns integral parts of his novel: Jubal seldom depends on more than physical prowess and instinct to survive, he never does read or teach Itchakomi to read, he never shares his knowledge of the cave with anyone, and his stories of England are little more than wondrous campfire tales.

Adaptations

None of the novels of the first generation of American Sacketts has been adapted to other media. The Daybreakers and Sackett, however, L'Amour's first two Sackett novels which cover later Sackett generations, were combined into a television miniseries in 1979 entitled The Sacketts.

Literary Precedents

L'Amour's family sagas with their reappearing characters and depiction of a historical era in a particular region have many predecessors, including the sagas of James Fenimore Cooper, Honore de Balzac, Emile Zola, Anthony Trollope, John Galsworthy, William Dean Howells, and Francis Marion Crawford. Of this group L'Amour most resembles Balzac and Zola. Like Balzac, L'Amour uses reappearing characters and "indeterminacy" (he leaves gaps in the stories of the various generations of the family which the reader must imaginatively fill in). Also like Balzac, L'Amour shifts narrative point of view between novels and sometimes within the novel (one chapter in Jubal Sackett is told from Itchakomi's point of view, the rest from Jubal's) to show various reactions to the same events and ideas.

L'Amour resembles Zola in Zola's dramatization of families through generations and, specifically, Zola's use of inherited characteristics. Jubal, like his father and Lila, has second sight.

Through the use of this second sight, he sees and senses that the Sacketts have a dynastic pioneering destiny. As he crosses Tennessee, for example, he finds a valley which he senses will be a settling place for some of the clan, and in the Rocky Mountains he again senses that it is his destiny to settle there. As far as genetic similarity goes, all the Sacketts are tall, strong, fighting men capable of understanding and adapting to their place of settlement.



Related Titles

Jubal Sackett is one of the last Sackett novels, which include *The Daybreakers* (1960); *Sackett* (1961); *Lando* (1962); *Mojave Crossing* (1964); *The Sackett Brand* (1965); *Mustang Man* (1966); *The Sky-Liners* (1967); *The Lonely Men* (1969); *Galloway* (1970); *Ride the Dark Trail* (1972); *Treasure Mountain* (1972); *Sackett's Land* (1974); *The Man from the Broken Hills* (1975); *To the Far Blue Mountains* (1976); *The Warrior's Path* (1980); *Ride the River* (1983); *Lonely on the Mountain* (1986). Of these titles, the books dealing with the same time period and somewhat similar setting to *Jubal Sackett* are *Sackett's Land*, *To the Far Blue Mountains*, and *The Warrior's Path*. These novels chronicle the adventures of Jubal's parents, Barnabas and Abigail; his brothers Kin-Ring, Yance, and Brian; and his sister Noelle.

L'Amour also clearly intends a sequel to *Jubal Sackett* because, by the end, he still has not found out what the cave voices meant when they said, "Find them!" nor has L'Amour completely explained the connection between the Carthaginians, the mummies, and the Sun people of the Natchee Indian tribe.



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