Author under Sail

Jay Williams

Chapter 13: Jack London's Place in American Literature

UNREVISED

Clubbing the Imagination

To go on at great length about sources for a novel that London never wrote indicates, besides a certain mad obsession on the part of this author, two things: more details about London's composition process for a major novel—combining multiple sources; composing multiple kinds of notes; using books as an impetus for rough drafts; adhering to his own injunction to form a philosophy that will infuse one's fiction writing—and how this process for a vast, eventually invisible work (a kind of ghost manuscript) is kept hidden if we pay attention only to the history of his writing process for material for publication. We marvel at the volume of London's published work without realizing how much lies hidden behind it. It would be an exaggeration to say that for every work he published he wrote parts or nearly wholes of works that never made it into final form. But the central lesson of his Christ novel, as far as we are considering London as a working author, is that his published works tell only part of the story of his authorial practice and accomplishments. He left a lot on the cutting room floor.

He would not, of course, mention this to beginning writers. It was a part of his secret life as an author. Neither would he mention how little money writing essays about writing earned him nor how it was wise to ignore a signed contract with a major international publisher in order to indulge one's own creative urge. For his early 1903 essays on writing and publishing—"Getting into Print," "Stranger Than Fiction," and

"The Terrible and the Tragic"—he earned a grand total of $50.00. To write one uncontracted essay and receive $5.00 for it, as he did with "Getting into Print," would indicate a carefree attitude towards want. To write three in a row indicates a need greater than financial security. When he says in "Getting into Print" "I shall always be content to receive the minimum rate," we need to take him at his word, even if he learned how to drive the price of his stories up. Of course he would take more money, but money was not the point.[1]

These three essays form a kind of hinge between *The Call of the Wild* and *The Sea-Wolf.* The first of the essays looks back to the former novel in the way that it addresses the question of inspiration; the second and third look forward to the latter in the way they discuss reality versus romance, Poe, tragedy, and the horror story; in fact, since London came up with the plot and characters for *The Sea-Wolf* in January 1903, he was thinking about the novel as he wrote these essays.[2] They each have their own thematic concerns, but in general they act as a bridge between the novel that he was not contracted

---

[1] Most biographers assert that London wrote for money because he was broke all the time. The most recent biographer, Earle Labor, is no exception. In the winter of 1902-1903, Labor says, London was "desperate for cash. . . . The Macmillan contract eased some of the financial stress." (168) It's true that writing the seven essays in 1903 that we will be examining did not take much time—maybe two months total—but if his financial desperation was so great, then why not turn to writing something that would earn real money?

[2] See London, letter to Brett, 20 Jan. 1903, *Letters,* 1:337. I discuss other significances of this letter below.

to write and the one he was. The essays are either implicitly or explicitly concerned with commercialism and art, and so we look to London's writings about writing to try to understand why he wrote what he wrote. Reading between the lines of his fictional output to discover the answer to these questions is always a risky business, so we hope to find them answered straightforwardly in his writing essays. We will fail. Not only did he hide his true methodology and compositional process from his readers, his friends, and his publishers and editors, he also hid the true story of his beginnings as an author and how he maintained a living as a writer. His life was stranger than fiction. By the logic of his own argument in "Stranger Than Fiction," as we will see, he could not tell it straight. But it was the human document behind his writing, whether the genre was short story, novel, play, or nonfiction essay.

On 12 February 1903, after he had completed the review of Ghent's and Brooks's books and three stories for *Tales of the Fish Patrol,* but before he wrote three other socialist essays, he wrote "Getting into Print," originally titled "How I Placed My First Manuscript."[3] We recall a similar piece he wrote at the end of 1901 entitled "Again the Literary Aspirant," which was rejected by Hamilton Holt, who told London that he himself had written a similar piece in *The New York Times* in 1900. If they didn't share political views they did share an outrage toward magazines that favored celebrities over beginning writers.[4]

---

[3] See London, sales notebook no. 3, JL 935.

[4] See Kuehl, *Hamilton Holt,* 23-24. Holt told London in his rejection letter: "I was glad to get an article from you again and especially one on such an interesting subject. But we have printed six or eight articles on this subject, which appeared about a year ago, and we

Unlike "Again the Literary Aspirant," in which London railed against the paradox of magazines accepting only established writers (thus, how do beginners get established if they can't get published), "Getting into Print" lays out concrete steps "to compass the paradox." Now he had a contract with Macmillan and had completed a second, successful novel for which he had just received an acceptance for the serial rights from the *Saturday Evening Post.* One might think that he would write a celebratory, happy essay. Instead, the bitterness and frustration of "Again the Literary Aspirant" gives way to mythologizing and poor mouthing. He knew he had arrived, he knew he was in a position to tell beginners how to succeed, but he was a secretive, distrustful author. Not everything he says in this essay is untrue—just the story of his career, which he imagines runs only from the spring of 1897 to February 1899.[5] Like the 1899 letter to Houghton Mifflin written as public relations material for the publication of *A Son of the Wolf,* this 1903 essay, though briefer, is equally misleading. London writes, not only did he have no money when he first "went up against the magazines," as if in warfare, but also he knew nothing about publishing, he says. Again, here is the no-mentor-but-myself model of authorship that he tried to convince his audience was true. "I lived in California, far from

---

do not feel like taking it up again now. Our series rather started the subject in the other papers, and this of yours is the last echo of it that I have happened to see. You take precisely the same ground that I took in an anonymous article in the Saturday (N.Y.) Times Review some time ago, entitled `Editing a Magazine.'" (Holt, letter to JL 10 Jan. 1902, JL 7567). It was actually called "Confessions from the Chair of One of the Best Known Periodicals in the Country," a title that London may have been mimicking

[5] He of course does not provide these dates, but the events he describes are easily datable.

the great publishing centers," converting what was always a source of pride for him—and a nonnegotiable marker of authorial identity—into a liability.

Part of the strategy of poor mouthing in an advice essay, though, is to persuade the beginning writer that if someone as handicapped as London could succeed then any beginner could do the same. You just don't have to start out the same way because he is now telling his "secrets." Yet those secrets are untrustworthy, too. "Avoid the unhappy ending, the harsh, the brutal, the tragic, the horrible—if you care to see in print the things you write." These adjectives prompted the content of his next two essays on writing, especially "The Terrible and the Tragic." But they also lead him to unwittingly create a new paradox. He appends to that sentence a parenthetical: "(In this connection, don't do as I do, but do as I say)." In other words, you should keep your day job, write fiction, don't write poetry, write jokes if you are funny (like Mark Twain), practice writing in a notebook, read to learn how to write, eat well, and work hard.[6] But if London succeeded by writing about "the tragic" and "the horrible," then, a beginner might adduce, why should he or she follow any of the advice? The one kernel of advice London seems to be offering is don't follow the rules, mine or anyone else's.

---

[6] The connection between eating well and writing was not something he took lightly. "See that your pores are open and your digestion is good," he writes. "This is, I am confident, the most important rule of all." This emphasis on the right kind of foods may seem insignificant, but see the discussion of diet and reform movements of all kinds, including those promoted by Upton Sinclair, in chapter 23.

A further instance of London writing advice contrary to his own practice appears in a brief set of notes called "Ideas for Literary Essays, or Essays on Literature. Maybe on literary topics":

> The short story, high as an art form, poorly remunerative. Eight or ten a year, but no more if he keeps it up.
>
> Difficulty of writing, compared with novel-writing. No padding. Every word must count. And here's the rub, for he's paid by the word. He is paid for length, not strength. . . .
>
> Publishers shy at collections of short stories. They make practically nothing themselves, the short-story writer makes practically nothing, and there is as much chance of being struck twice by lightning, as there is of such a collection making a hit.[7]

---

[7] London, "Ideas for Literary Essays, or Essays on Literature: [notes]," JL 780, HEH. On the same page of notes, he refers himself to Norris's second "Salt and Sincerity" essay in the *Critic,* May 1902. I discuss the relationship between Norris's essays on authorship and London's pre-1902 essays, especially his 1901 defense of Kipling, "These Bones Shall Rise Again," in volume 1, 109. What I neglected to mention in that discussion is how ruthless London is toward the Anglo-Saxon. So when Ninetta Eames, in her 1900 interview with London for the *Overland Monthly,* says that Kipling and London share "an ingrained belief in Anglo-Saxon dominance," I should have posted a caveat: Kipling celebrates this dominance, London is agnostic. London praises Kipling in "These Bones Shall Rise Again" for accurately capturing an essence of his time, that is, the nineteenth century. "Kipling, as no one else, has sung the song of the dominant bourgeoisie, the war

How could anyone take such advice seriously, true as it may be, when it was written by someone who wrote nine short stories in the fall of 1898, twenty-seven stories in 1899, nineteen stories in 1900, fourteen stories in 1901, and thirteen stories in 1902. If his audience could not know these figures, they could see for themselves the number of short story collections he had published by 1903 (three). The most obvious contradiction, though, concerns novel writing. If writing novels is so much easier than short stories, and earns more, then one would think that London would have started out writing novels and would have no anxiety about doing so. Also, where is the concern he has for earning money on a regular basis so that he can have the time to write novels without worrying about income? Where is any mention of advances, of his strategy of publishing work in serials and in book form? No, London did not mean to reveal himself in these essays about writing and publishing.

Nevertheless, London did work hard and did mean that beginners should, too, yet here he even leaves himself open for multiple interpretations. On the one hand, he tells us, work hard. Get paid what you deserve. That seems to be the message of his story of encountering the publishing machine. On the other hand, that same story leads him to a different conclusion: "Let other men, thought I, receive the maximum rate, whatever

---

march of the white man around the world, the triumphant paean of militant commercialism and imperialistic nationalism. For that," and not his prose style, "he will be remembered." This conclusion to the essay is not an endorsement of Kipling's "philosophy of life"; it is, however, an endorsement of the necessity for a "philosophy of life" for any author who aims to be representative of his time, that is, canonical. Here we see an early articulation of what he hoped to accomplish with *The Sea-Wolf*.

marvelous sum it may be. As for myself, I shall always be content to receive the minimum rate. And, once I get started, I shall do no more than three thousand words a day, five days only in the week. This will give me plenty of recreation, while I shall be earning six hundred dollars a month without overstocking the market." Surprisingly, London espouses his bohemian economics, but he does not put it into rule form, which would go something like this: play as often as you work. Earn just enough to keep body and soul together. If the market will pay more, then take it. Once again, especially in regards to that final directive to not flood the market, he could have appended the injunction to do as I say, not as I do. At this point in his career, readers would have known just how much he was publishing. And in the next couple of months, they would see three new works appear almost simultaneously, flooding the market.

There is a rotundity to what he means by *work.* To work doesn't only mean, as his story of his career seems to indicate, to write constantly, to send material out constantly. "Oh, I was prolific," he says, but he doesn't mean that he wasn't goofing off, flying kites, admiring the poppies in his bohemian Piedmont property. To work also means to "work for a philosophy of life," to "find out about this earth, this universe; this force and matter, and the spirit that glimmers up through force and matter from the maggot to Godhead."[8]

---

[8] London, "Getting into Print," JL 674. He originally titled it "How I Placed My First Manuscript" as well as "How It Was Done." The reprint of this essay in *No Mentor but Myself* contains a significant error. Instead of "from maggot to Godhead" it reads "from magnet to Godhead." This manuscript is mistitled in the Huntington as "First Aid to Rising Authors." The latter, as far as I can determine, does not exist in manuscript form.

This is the facet of the complete meaning of *work* that he chose to emphasize for beginners. It wasn't enough to write all the time, to keep a notebook, to organize yourself in your home writing office. You had to work for a higher purpose.

Now we can see another dimension to studying the process by which he almost wrote his Christ novel: Jesus was an intellectual vehicle—something to think with—to lead to a better understanding of "the spirit" that existed in conjunction with "force and matter." To understand Jesus was fundamental to his philosophy of life, and his

---

This is as good a moment as any to correct I mistake I made in volume 1. On page 467, I quoted from the end of "Getting into Print" and attributed the quotation to "First Aid to Rising Authors," letting myself get confused by the catalog mistake at the Huntington. The importance of correcting the mistake is that the concept of sincerity, instead of dating back to 1900, actually becomes central to London's conscious theorizing in February 1903, right when he has completed *The Call of the Wild* and had outlined *The Sea-Wolf.*

One further topic is raised by the manuscript of "Getting into Print." London corrected page proof for this essay and cut out all original references to *The Editor,* the publication in which it appeared. These substantive changes, as well as changes he made in page proof for "What Communities Lose by the Competitive System" and "First Aid to Rising Authors" (all three of which are at hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p15878coll31#nav_top, the Jack London Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin), show London at work as an assiduous reviser, contrary to the myth that he never revised, a myth propogated by himself and perpetuated by many scholars since.

philosophy of life did not include the imperative to work so hard that you became a mere machine. The point was to never have to work like a machine again, or a work beast. To arrive at a better understanding of the nature of spirit was to help achieve a balance between work and play.

How does one get into print, then? London's imagined audience—probably working class like himself, with some amount of education, and a fondness for magazine writing—could easily track the advice that London lays out. After all, he spelled out his key words in capitals: "GOOD HEALTH; WORK; and a PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE. I may add, nay, must add, a fourth—SINCERITY [whatever that is, for he hasn't even used the word until this last minute, let alone define it]." But for those who were brought up short by the injunction "don't do as I do, but do as I say" and for those paying attention to his career (and this includes those of us in the twenty-first century), there were troubling contradictions that pointed to a different path to getting into print: don't work too hard, leave time to enjoy life, write tragedies with brutal characters and horrible events, don't worry about what you eat or drink or smoke, try to get published in the elite magazines, get to know people—editors, newspaper reporters, other writers—who are involved in the publishing business. That's how London did it. But he doesn't want you to know that. In an essay in which he gives advice, he finds himself giving advice that he did not follow, a contradiction that he glossed over. In other words, by playing cat and mouse with his readers he indicates how ambivalent, how puzzled, how disturbed, how haunted he was by his own imagination, his own glimmering spirit.

The traditional way to analyze this essay is to focus on London's description of the submission and rejection process as a kind of machine—"the process seemed like the

working of some soulless machine"—and then link it to a similar description in *Martin Eden.* London employs the machine metaphor, however, only to describe impersonal rejections, and he leaves out all the personal rejection letters he received, letters that offered encouragement and good advice and notice that the editor would like to read something else by him. When he gets accepted—another element in his career that he hides from his readers—the machine is magically replaced by human beings like Brett, McClure, Walker, and others. That is, he would never use the machine metaphor to describe his relations with the number of editors and publishers who took a genuine and personal interest in both his writing and his career. Thus he also minimizes the importance of his acceptance by the *Overland Monthly* and exaggerates the importance of the *Black Cat,* something he did in his introduction to H. D. Umbstaetter's *"The Red Hot Dollar" and Other Stories* and other places.[9] As I pointed out in volume 1, London fictionalizes his almost simultaneous acceptances from *The Black Cat* and *Overland Monthly* to create the illusion that writing for money was the only motivation he or any other author followed. This is, after all, what he imagined his audience wanted. To get into print meant to earn a living writing, and thus he valorizes *Black Cat* and denigrates *The Overland Monthly.*[10] Again, he was hiding something important, and this time it was the fact of his imagination and its never-ending imperative to write first and consider the marketplace second.

---

[9] See volume 1:138-39, 508-9n140.

[10] Interestingly, the only time that I have found that he was honest about which magazine accepted him first occurs in a newspaper interview in 1906 while he was touring the country. Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 7, page 82.

The most important trick he pulled in "Getting into Print" is to deny the importance of inspiration. On the one hand, he tells his reader to investigate the presence of "the spirit" in all things. On the other hand, in probably his most famous piece of advice to beginners, he says, "don't loaf and invite inspiration; light out after it with a club, and if you don't get it you will nonetheless get something that looks remarkably like it." On the one hand, the immaterial animating force of all things should be sought after and understood. On the other, the immaterial animating force of an author's being should be beaten into submission. What did he mean by this latter directive? Why shouldn't one come to terms with one's inner spirit instead of beating it with a club?

That vivid image of something being beaten with a club indicates a thematic connection between the *The Call of the Wild* and "Getting into Print." Consider this scene from the novel:

> And Buck was truly a red-eyed devil, as he drew himself together for the spring. . . . Straight at the man he launched his one hundred and forty pounds of fury, surcharged with the pent passion of two days and nights. In mid air, just as his jaws were about to close on the man, he received a shock that checked his body and brought his teeth together with an agonizing clip. He whirled over, fetching the ground on his back and side. He had never been struck by a club in his life. . . . After a particularly fierce blow he crawled to his feet, too dazed to rush. He staggered limply about, the blood flowing from nose and mouth and ears, his beautiful coat sprayed and flecked with bloody slaver. Then the man advanced and deliberately dealt him a frightful blow on the nose. . . . He was beaten (he knew that); but he was not broken. He saw, once for all, that he stood no chance

against a man with a club. . . . That club was a revelation.. . . . A man with a club was a law-giver, a master to be obeyed, though not necessarily conciliated.

Just as beating things with clubs bleeds over from *The Call of the Wild* and into "Getting into Print," so the concerns of "Getting into Print" are foreshadowed in *Call.* In other words he was using language from *The Call of the Wild* in his essay to describe the process of writing because *The Call of the Wild* is about the process of writing. This means that Buck is a figure for the creative imagination that must be beaten into domestication—it must be tamed—before it can produce a work of art, before it can be functional and do something useful like pull a sled. Remember, in London's Klondike fiction he often makes the analogy between the men and dogs breaking trail in the snow and the black lines of writing on a white page. Buck, as the figure of the imagination, leads the hobo-miner author across the page.

Buck starts out on a porch, doing nothing, producing nothing, just fat and happy and loveable. But once men start chasing him with a club he becomes "a red-eyed devil." Initially he doesn't do what they want him to do. Buck's transformation is often portrayed as a movement from domestication to primitiveness, and we can color code this transformation. He goes from red to white, from the red-eyed devil to the ghost dog. Beaten into obedience, controlled enough to give London story after story, novel after novel, his imagination nonetheless breaks free in the end like Buck, more powerful, multiplying on its own in the wild. It creates without the seeming intervention of the artist. The artist can only sit back and watch it take control. Or the artist has died in a Barthian sense, like John Thorton, while the imagination lives on. Thorton enacts the death of the author. The imagination is eternal, and the author disappears while writing.

In “Getting into Print,” London doesn’t use the word *imagination.* He uses the word *inspiration.* Are they synonyms? London’s writings on the subject aren’t very helpful, and we shouldn’t be surprised by that because he spent so much time denying its existence. So let’s turn to an author, a romantic poet, who did theorize about the imagination, who also valorized John Milton, and whose career is marked by the same interplay of reading and writing as London’s: Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In *The Road to Xanadu,* John Lowes’s study of the workings of Coleridge’s imagination—especially in how his reading directly informed his composition process—and how he produced the two poems “Kubla Khan” and “Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” Lowes refers to Coleridge’s “shaping spirit of the *imagination*” and “the informing *spirit* which broods over chaos to draw it . . . into `the precincts of light,’” that last phrase coming from Milton’s *Paradise Lost.* Here then is the very literary, very typical way of portraying the imagination. “Sing, O heavenly Muse,” writes Milton, in a work that London knew well and that he brought with him as a kind of lantern into the darkness that was the Klondike. In book three of *Paradise Lost,* Milton prays that the “Celestial Light” “shine inward, and the mind through all her powers /Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence / Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell / Of things invisible to mortal sight.” That is, an element of the unseen world will give the poet the tools (the eyes) to see what cannot be seen by humans and then, as well, the voice to tell of these things. The Muse is a heavenly light.

According to Coleridge, after we take into account the individuality of an artist “there [is] a precious residuum which is peculiar to no individual, but which inheres in the nature of the imaginative faculty itself.” (32) This is what he would call the primary

imagination. Everyone has an imagination. It's something we all have, even if we don't use it all the time. As parents, we tell our kids, "use your imagination." And that's a kind of work-a-day understanding of the imagination. But not all of us can write *Paradise Lost* or *Mutiny of the Elsinore.* According to Coleridge and Lowes, an image, something we read, goes into the deep well of memory or, as Henry James—another writer who like Coleridge was perfectly happy with his own creative talent—says in the preface to *The American,* "the deep well of unconscious cerebration.'" It undergoes "strange transformation there." "It has merged insensibly, in hues and outline, with others of the myriad denizens of that mysterious deep, and what we think we have remembered we have actually, in large degree, unconsciously created." (56-57). So, the imagination and the memory are inextricably tied together and is either in the unconscious or works side by side with the unconscious. Of course, what does it mean to say that memory is in the unconscious? Bits of reading go into the deep well of memory. There, they sit together fusing, "and when the flash of inspiration at last [comes]—that leap of association which, like the angel in the Gospel, stirred to momentary potency the waters of the pool—it was neither" the one image or the other or one plus one but something entirely new. This describes the memory and the unconscious working together and then animated by "the flash of inspiration."

Here inspiration is not synonymous with the imagination. The imagination works as a combination of memory and the unconscious. Everyone has imagination, and everyone has inspiration, at least from time to time. But there is something else. According to Coleridge, it takes "genius" to make the fusings noteworthy. "Genius" is an "enhanced and almost incredible facility with which . . . the fragments . . . fuse and

assimilate and coalesce." (59-60). So, first conscious intellectual activity drops stuff into the well (the poet takes notes in a notebook); then these bits of reading matter of observations of life sit there and the imagination works on them; and then "it is conscious energy [genius], now of another and loftier type, which later drags the deeps for their submerged measure and moulds the bewildering chaos into unity." This is the process of the secondary imagination. So for Coleridge inspiration and imagination are not synonyms necessarily. Sometimes he uses them interchangeably, but when he is being precise he separates them denotatively by their operation through time. That is, imagination is always present. Inspiration happens in a moment.

Now is this how London understood the process of creativity? In an important way, it doesn't matter. Both terms signify something internal, something of the mind or soul or unconscious or the barely conscious. Both work together to produce art. Like Coleridge, London drew inspiration from reading. He pinned newspaper articles to sheets of paper and then typed notes for possible short stories based on what the newspaper article said. So if inspiration and/or imagination are being chased by a club, what in the creative process is holding the club? Genius, would be Coleridge's answer, that "conscious energy . . . of [a] loftier type, which . . . moulds the bewildering chaos into unity." London would agree. In "Getting into Print," the man with the club is very much a rational, though hypersensitive being, with great eyes, with great vision. The artist molds chaos into unity. "`The imagination,' said Coleridge . . . `*sees all things in one.* "[11]

But in *The Call of Wild* we can't call the man in the red sweater a hypersensitive being, with great eyes, with great vision, can we? In a sense we can. The man in the red

[11] Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu,* 432.

sweater who beats Buck into submission is simply one of many of London's Anglo-Saxon zone-conquerers, men who take charge not just of their own lives but of all the world. They are brutal, but they have the vision necessary to try to conquer the world through violence. They turn the imagination into a Satanic red-eyed devil, but by god that devil pulls the sled.

So in his essay "Getting into Print" he seems to be saying that if you want to write fiction your imagination or inspiration will end up as something tamed, domesticated, but nonetheless devilish, something that might turn on you at any moment. But who wants to be a writer with a red hellish animal living inside you? Wouldn't we rather have a white ghost dog of an imagination roaming freely, producing little puppies of stories out in the wild? Notice that the title of the essay is "Getting into Print," not, "Once You Have Gotten into Print." For London, unlike Coleridge and Milton, the process of becoming a writer involves not only a transformation of the writer as he or she becomes more learned about the world, but also a transformation of the faculty of the imagination. This is the ultimate meaning of "don't loaf and invite inspiration; light out after it with a club." To get into print, to start out, you must tame your imagination, train it, make it do what you want it to do, assert control. But at some point, and this is the unstated claim in the essay, you'll discover that great art evolves beyond that relationship between artists and imagination. At some point you have to put the club down and see where your imagination takes you. You have to let it run wild. I believe that London put the club down in the fall of 1902 when he began to write *The Call of the Wild.*

Thus, in January 1903, filled with doubt about his newly completed novel, about his relationship to his publisher, about his contractual status as an author, about his very

place in American literature, he picked up the club again and wrote "Getting into Print." As I said, on the surface, he advised the beginner to take a club to inspiration and write about the happy stuff of life. His own way was the harder path to take, and he advised against it. For himself and also for the few of his audience who wanted more than just a regular run of stories in the magazines, he knew that to let your imagination wander freely, to write about ghosts and the tragic and the horrible, was the way to greatness.

Jack London could not help writing about ghosts and the terrible and the tragic because that was how he understood and described his relationship to his creative powers. For Coleridge and Milton, the imagination was a holy thing, a gift from God. Not to use it would be an unholy act. For London, it was a devil and a ghost. It either ripped you to shreds or left you half-dead in the wilderness, pen in hand, as it howled its own song of the wild. For the professed man from Missouri, the man who insisted time and time again that if you couldn't see something, touch something, then it didn't exist, the imagination and/or inspiration are metaphysical in nature and therefore are open to question, to doubt. When you are perfectly at ease with your creative talent you mold chaos into unity. When you are upset or haunted by your imagination, you beat inspiration with a club.

"Getting into Print," while looking backward to *The Call of the Wild,* also looks forward to the next two essays, as well as to the Miltonic, Satanic figure of Wolf Larsen. As I mentioned, "Getting into Print" ends with a keyword—"sincerity"—that is perhaps London's most fundamental nonnegotiable identity marker, and yet he leaves it there, on the printed page, unexplained. He thus had to write an essay about *sincerity*, which became "Stranger Than Fiction." I dealt with this essay and the concept of sincerity in volume 1, reading it with Oscar Wilde's essay "The Decay of Lying" and London's *The*

Road in order to show how he created the figure of the hobo-author and how sincerity became such a crucial concept for London. Sincerity became the touchstone to solve the problem of how to be true to an imagination that requires the unbelievable facts of life in order to produce high art. Sincerity is the connection between artist and audience, the pledge of trust between the two.

In "Stranger Than Fiction," London emphasizes what the artist must do (or isn't able to do, in his case) in order to gain that trust. But there is a second element to the equation—what the audience must do—and that is the point of his story about the editor and the hobo, who was based on Frank Strawn-Hamilton. (And we might recall that sincerity is best explained in London's collection of hobo stories, especially in *The Road.*) The moral of the story is that an editor (and an audience) would be much better off if they simply made a leap of faith and believed the story as written.[12] The seemingly

---

[12] The editor is Ellery Sedgwick and the "young writer in Southern California" is Cloudesley Johns. The girl from the Sierras is not known, but he used her as a model for Frona Welse in *A Daughter of the Snows,* a characterization that reviewers found, as London says, monstrous. In fact, Julian Hawthorne's review in which he wrote of Frona, "I cannot recall a single act or word of hers that has a genuine ring to it. She is, indeed, as much a monster—a thing contrary to nature—as the phenomenon constructed by the philosopher Frankenstein" appeared in the February 1903 issue of *Wilshire's.* I discuss this novel at length in volume 1. Also, his "short adventure-stories for a famous juvenile publication" are his *Tales of the Fish Patrol;* as if prescient, a week before he receives a letter from *Youth's Companion* questioning the veracity of the stories, he bemoans the fact that the editor found some of them them unreal. See London, letter to corresponding

true is more vital than the actual true fact. One can be honest without being faithful to the facts.

Sincerity is an affect, not a methodology, so it is impossible to describe it scientifically or enact it in practice. It is beyond rule making. *Be sincere* is not an injunction that can be followed or should even be stated, and so London doesn't. He writes around it. Sincerity is a quality of transparency (ironic for an author who does so much to hide the actual material writing processes he engages in) and naturalness. Ease and fluidity are other qualities that overlap with sincerity. Being real in the sense of rejecting the fake, the fanciful, the mercenary is required. To write simply for money or to allow one's primary imagination to guide one is to be insincere. Sincerity guarantees interest—*McClure Magazine'*s key word for quality fiction—and that leads to absorption. To be interesting is to transfer one's enthusiasm to another. Once that happens, the author and the reader are joined in affect; they are reading the same words and garnering the same feelings. The reader, in order for this process to work, must forget him or herself, and once that egoless state is achieved he or she thus becomes absorbed in other lives.

Just as Coleridge posited two orders of the imagination, so too does London, though in a skeletal and underdeveloped fashion. One is associated with sincerity, and one is associated with its opposite. At one point in "Stranger Than Fiction" he says that "whenever I evolved out of my sheer inner consciousness some boyish adventure, it

---

editor, *Youth's Companion,* 9 Mar. 1903, *Letters,* 1:348-50. The "cliff-climbing story" is "Up the Slide." I have no idea what he is referring to with the phrase "pastoral experience."

received the most flattering approval of the editors."[13] One might think that the "inner consciousness" is the topos of the imagination, and it is, but it is also the topos of fancy, a degraded form of imagination. That's what the word "sheer" indicates. The true imagination works with facts and with what one reads. It turns reality into fiction. Fancy is airy nothingness, as London might say. It appeals to editors because it usually leads to what is imminently saleable, the happy ending, the optimistic, romantic view of life. The imagination begins from the tragedy of life. When London next says that "whenever my inner consciousness was not in working order, and I fell back on the facts of my life, wrote adventures I had actually gone through, things I had done with my own hands and head," he is deliberately masking the action of the imagination required to actually write those adventures just to make the point that editors could not believe a (relatively) faithful account of unbelievable moments and characters in life: a woman like Frona Welse, a tramp like Frank Strawn-Hamilton, a "pastoral experience" that involved his family. London pretends that reality can be transcribed. He knows it cannot. That is why he continued to write stories based on facts he had observed or on events that he read about in the newspapers.

The true imagination creates stories that are unbelievable based on facts. Because they are based on facts, London thinks the stories should be automatically believed—not necessarily accepted, but at the very least believed. He's shocked to learn that some readers (editors) don't believe him. The essay brings this shocking news to light: sometimes facts are not believable and thus the stories based on them seem untrue. But the artiface of this diatribe is obvious. A good story does not have to be grounded in

[13] London, "Stranger Than Fiction," JL 1271.

believable fact. And more often than not London wrote stories based on believable fact, so his injunction at the end of the essay—"the man who writes fiction had better leave fact alone"—rings false and validates his own continued use of documentary material to ground his fiction. We cannot overlook the humor of the essay, though, the tongue-in-cheek treatment he gives the topic. From start to finish, he treats his serious keywords "real," "true," "belief," "fact," even "inner consciousness" with a light hand and with an awareness of how meaning can reverse itself in different contexts. This lightness or affability connects so easily with the reader that we know from the start that he is being sincere. And since he is being sincere, when he says at the end that he prefaced the essay with "a solemn affirmation of its [the essay's] truthfulness" and is "confident that it will be believed by no one" because "it is too real," we immediately cry out, oh no, we believe you, even if the editors' actions seem preposterous.

Sincerity is the essence of what he called impassioned realism. Fiction needs imagination. Fiction needs absorption. We recall how anthropologist William Dall protested against London's depiction of Native Americans because he thought they "are not only absolutely unlike the Yukon Indians, but they are unlike any Indians whatsoever." (quoted in volume 1:411). London, we remember, countered by saying that Dall would have him load his stories with too many facts. What he had done in writing fiction was a matter of "artistic selection," something that a scientist like Dall would not understand. London at this point calls himself "an emotional materialist" who practices

"idealized realism."[14] The materialist in him wanted to write factual stories. If that were possible, then all his stories would be theatrical. But the emotional, idealizing realist knows this is not possible, and from that perspective, whenever he had problems with editors, audience, and reviewers, they thought the story was too unbelieveable because too true because the facts were too visible. The stories failed because he had not used enough fictive cloth to cover the facts. There was too much Dall-like realism and not enough Londonian idealization. He seems to make idealization into a dirty word because the imagination, "his inner consciousness" is so troubling. So he calls it unreliable and fake and untrue. But it's actually the thing that makes him a successful writer. And deep down he knows it. There is a thin line between fact that seems unbelieveable and thus did not happen and the lying that fiction does. That is, fiction creates situations that did not happen, which is similar to the fact that is so outrageous that it could not have happened. So the successful fiction writer will use fact to make it seem like fiction. "Fact, to be true, must imitate Fiction," says the emotional materialist.

Three days later, in "The Terrible and Tragic," an essay not about how to write but what to write, he again tells his audience to avoid the terrible and the tragic, the ghosts, the material that made Edgar Allan Poe famous. One might hear an echo even of "The Pit and the Pendulum" in London's title. In volume one I also note that in "The Terrible and the Tragic" London laments the absence of a publication that aimed solely to publish high art, not yellow magazinism, that is, not material published to fit the

---

[14] We'll see the same rejoinder in a set of notes for *The Sea-Wolf,* where he talks about how he injects "the feels" into his stories. See also Michael Milner's essay in *The Oxford Handbook of Jack London.*

expectations of editors and their readers. London points out that readers claim they do not want to read stories based on fear and with unhappy endings, but they cannot help themselves from reading them anyway. The best example of this seeming hypocrisy is the work of Poe, whose publication history is "a paradoxical tangle. Editors did not like to publish his stories nor people to read them, yet they were read universally (and discussed and remembered), and went the round of the foreign newspapers." The situation, says London, remains the same in 1903: "No self-respecting editor with an eye to the subscription-list can be bribed or bullied into admitting a terrible or traffic story into his magazine; while the reading public, when it does chance upon such stories in one way or another, and it manages to chance upon them somehow, says it does not care for them." The point is that the audience, ashamed of its fear and not admitting to liking horror, should admit to the fear and the liking of horror because the terrible and tragic, as evidenced by Poe, lasts longer than "sweet and wholesome, optimistic" stories, which, we learned from his previous essays on writing, are written from the fancy, not the true artistic imagination. Poe didn't make any money, says Jack, but he cleaved to greatness and sits among the giants, which is the final line of "Getting into Print." ("with [sincerity] you may cleave to greatness and sit among the giants.")

Not only is London addressing horror but he also is tackling, we now see, the larger question of what gets into the literary canon and what does not. London in a round-about fashion is facing up to Brett's injunction to write for a permanent place in the history of American literature. Poe, Ambrose Bierce, and the others serve as models for story writing, but they also stand in anxious relationship to their audiences and then to the

current reading public.[15] In short, London's anxieties about his own status—now and in the future—is transferred to that of those authors of horror who came before him and

---

[15] See Edgar Allan Poe, letter to F. W. Thomas, 25 May 1842, *Letters of Poe and His Friends,* vol. 17 of *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe,* ed. James Harrison (New York, 1902), HL 338984. This is the edition London used. See Hamilton, *"The Tools of My Trade,"* 226, for London's annotations, including the marginal note "are forgotten" next to a line that mentions Poe's "love-tales" (p. 111). Of the others, some are cited in the essay, including Morrow, *The Ape, the Idiot, and Other People,* who were important to him as a ghost writer and as a Californian writer. These stories originally appeared in *Overland Monthly,* the *Examiner,* the *Call,* and other places. In a different context in the essay, London cites Brooks Adams, *America's Economic Supremacy* (New York, Macco, 1902). In the essay "Natural Selection in Literature," Adams discusses the difference between Scott and Dickens. An important book to London, though not something with he agreed necessarily, it links economics to publishing and nineteenth-century literary history. Scott represents the highest flowering of not just courage in literature but of a society based on romantic warfare between peoples, "the martial and adventurous temperament." Dickens represents the Industrial Revolution, the replacement of armed conflict by class conflict, the pastoral with the urban, the military classes by the mercantile classes. For Adams, Dickens represents a debasement of society. The heroic and honor have disappeared. Romantic and religious enthusiasm is gone. All these qualities have been selected out by natural selection as society has "progressed." Now "a timid social stratum" has taken over. (111) On p. 113 he discusses courage in Scott and fear in Dickens.

serve as his mentors. He repeats the concern of "Stranger Than Fiction," that is, that the best writing is not accepted (for whatever reason), that it is misunderstood and judged, not on its own merits, but on the supposed blindness and prejudices of the reading public. We of course remember his characterization of that audience in "Again the Literary Aspirant": "the uncultured mass cannot become cultured in a twinkling of an eye. . . . They ["our villains and clouts and clowns"], with their dimes and quarters in their hands, and their free and equal thumbs turned up or down, determine what shall live for today and for this month." (51) How can they be trusted when they say they hate horror but buy it anyway? The point is that the audience, ashamed of its fear and not admitting to liking horror, should admit to the fear and the liking of horror because the terrible and tragic, as evidenced by Poe, lasts longer that the "sweet and wholesome, optimistic" stories. If only there were a magazine that published "stories that are bids for place and permanence rather than for the largest circulation." If only he could write independently of market concerns.[16]

London was now mentally and emotionally prepared to write a novel of horror and tragedy that would vie for a place next to Poe. Brett wasn't urging him to write a

---

[16] At some point in 1903, London envisioned a collection of essays entitled *Hints on Writing: Confessions of a Magazine Writer.* It was to include "On the Writer's Philosophy of Life," "Editorial Crimes," "The Question of a Name," "Phenomena of Literary Evolution," "First Aid to Rising Authors," and "Getting into Print." When he made this list, apparently "Stranger Than Fiction" had not yet been accepted. If he had included the latter, the volume would have totaled 14,500 words, large enough for book publication, though why he chose not to pursue the project is unknown.

horror story; he wanted a sea story, and he wanted it badly. London too wanted to finally write adult sea fiction,[17] and he saw, after writing "The Terrible and the Tragic," that he could combine the two genres and perhaps achieve the greatness that Brett was promising. That was his intention, and it is the first time that he approached a work of art with that in mind. In a sense, then, and recalling his statement to Brett in the winter of 1902 that he felt he was beginning a new period in his career, London was (again) starting out as an author.

The conjunction of beginning a career and embarking upon a new work of art are not all that dissimilar. Edward Said, in his early work of criticism titled *Beginnings: Intention and Method,* argues that the beginning of a text and the beginning of a career might be considered in the same way. That is, for both "the beginning is the first step in the intentional production of meaning."[18] We looked at the question of when London's own career began and came to the conclusion that 1893 was the best date to assign to that event, the first year he combined travel and writing and publication; otherwise, to say that his career began with the publication of his first short stories in 1899 (or even the fall of 1898 when he wrote some of those stories) would be to severely diminish the importance

---

[17] We saw in volume one, in the chapter "At Sea with the Family," that going to sea represented three things to London: escape from poverty, the gathering of factual material, and the desire to write long fiction. I also discussed a number of short sea stories, including *The Cruise of* The Dazzler and *Tales of the Fish Patrol.* See pp. 326-29.

[18] Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (Basic Books: New York, 1976), 5. It may seem superfluous, yet appropriate somehow, that Said started his own career as a critic and scholar with a study of Joseph Conrad.

of the previous five years of authorial activity, just as London did in order to create the myth of the mentorless author. We will also want to remember, without getting too far ahead of ourselves, that London told Joseph Conrad that he first read Conrad when "I had just begun to write."[19] To begin a career and to begin (with writing or reading) a text, seemingly so incongruous, now seems right. Just as London, for example, spent an extended period of time—sometimes days, sometimes years—preparing to write the first sentence of a novel, so too did he spend time in preparing for a career. In other words, training to become a writer means that one has already become a writer. To train is to begin. The writer has begun.

In "Getting into Print," London wants to convince us that he started from nowhere, knowing nothing, and that the author he has now become began from a starting point independent of anything connected to writing.[20] He made the same point in a 1903 interview with Fannie Hamilton, which was reprinted widely because of the success of *The Call of the Wild.* In her prologue to the interview, Hamilton re-creates the story London wanted promulgated:

> The heart quickens over this out-of-the-age boy who, when only nine, started in single-handed to conquer circumstance. Fifteen years of life in its sterner phases,

---

[19] Quoted in volume 1, 533 n. 52.

[20] Fannie K. Hamilton, "Jack London: An Interview," *The Reader* (Aug. 1903): 279-83. Hamilton and London maintained a correspondence at least through 1909, sharing an interest in the sea and contemporary fiction, including Conrad, which I discuss below. In 1906 she wrote concerning his politics and the influence of Herbert Spencer; see chapter 19.

> intrepidly met, conquered, and the lessons applied unflinchingly are basic elements of that force and poise which distinguish Mr. London. It was character building of the heroic type, the more remarkable that, being his own godfather, literary and otherwise, he might have shirked his destiny. . . . Untrained and inexperienced, far from the great publishing centers, with no one to give him advice, and knowing no one who had ever written anything or tried to publish anything, he sat down and wrote in order to gain an experience of his own. Authorship on its own account made little appeal to him. The attraction lay in the supposed rewards of literature. Mr. London says he developed whatever mental power he had, to meet an economic situation. (279)

Much of the interview quotes from "Getting into Print" and London himself regurgitates material from the same essay, though he adds a few new touches to his origin story. One, of biographical interest, is that he says "I was wage-earner as ranch hand long before I was nine, when my mother moved to Oakland, where I worked as a newsboy." (280) There is no mention whatsoever of his father or, more surprisingly, his stepfather. It's all about the mother: "One day the `San Francisco Call' offered three prizes for descriptive writing. My mother wanted me to try, and I did so, sending `A Japanese Typhoon.'" (280) Oddly, he then says the paper accepted a few more things. Hilariously, he projected the image of a boy, naively truthful, and of course Hamilton bought it: "Given his temperament and deep nature, fictitious values are impossible. He is primitive, free and unhackneyed." (281) Seemingly incapable of deception, he easily won over his audience by feigning innocence. But most of all he denied any artifice that might attach to the office of authorship. By attributing his success to a simple desire to earn a living ("This

was in ’96. I hated to give up the hope of a University education, so I tried more writing. This was the only time when I really worked because I loved it. I got up early in the morning and sat up late at night. Now it is only work—just like any other business” (280-81) he doesn’t have to address the question of imagination. Never mind that he is being deceitful or playfully deceptive. As Said says, “beginning is *making* or *producing difference;* but . . . difference which is the result of combining the already-familiar with the fertile novelty of human work in language.” In other words, “beginning is basically an activity which ultimately implies return and repetition rather than simple linear accomplishment.” (xiii).

So London, in writing these essays, is not simply creating a myth of how he began. He is enacting in the self-study of his own career the very process of how he wrote. He and his texts have the same intention, the same methodology. He writes horror stories and tragedy because as Arthur Conan Doyle put it in *A Study in Scarlet,* “where there is no imagination, there is no horror.” Or we might find the same thought in Goethe who describes genius as partly constituted by “the Daemonic.” (Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu,* 432). Or, as we shall see, we find that Hamilton Wright Mabie theorizes the daemonic as necessarily constitutive of the imagination. Buck is that demon of genius, the satanic avenging angel who restores order through procreation in the chaos that is the white, formless wilderness. Is it so surprising, then, that in his next novel he creates another demon genius who seems to share the same species as Buck? Embarking on a new beginning is, as Said says, a matter of circularity and repetition, not telic linear movement.

After telling his audience in *The Editor* that they should do as he says, not what he does, and after telling his audience in *The Critic* that there is good reason not to write tragedy or horror, he next writes a novel about a Poe scholar—that is, someone intimately familiar with Poe whose interior intellectual life then gets replicated in the exterior—who is tortured as badly as any character in Poe.[21] The novel certainly did earn London a permanent place in American literature, but it also became a novel that cemented his reputation as a violent naturalist and proponent of radical individualism. He spent years trying to undo the damage this book did to the connections he saw so plainly among his socialist essays, his writing essays, *The Call of the Wild,* and *The Sea-Wolf*. Still, he was only twenty-seven. If he had been a baseball player he would have been just entering his prime.

The Leopard Man and the Sea Wolf

---

[21] In the only review of *The Sea-Wolf* that mentioned Poe, Norma K. Bright wrote, "Mr. London's point is to picture the horror of the horrible. Here he overdoes himself and loses the effect. Blood flows freely and atrocities abound, but the blighting chill, the grip of the terrible, the curdling of the blood are not produced. . . . The thrill of terror and the crawl of the flesh which readers of Poe's tales so often experience,—Mr. London falls far short of approaching these. . . . `The Sea-Wolf' has not even the element of fascination that made `The Call of the Wild' so compelling." I take her use of the word "fascination" to be synonymous with *absorbtion.* (Norma K. Bright, "The Sea-Wolf," *Book News (Philadelphia),* Dec. 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3, HEH.

The last work he completed before beginning *The Sea-Wolf* was a short story entitled "The Leopard Man"; later collected in *Moon Face,* it was not intended for *Faith of Men,* the collection he was just one story away from completing. It's a skit more than a short story, a recollection of two anecdotes that Jack had probably heard while circulating among circus performers, sniffing out possible feature stores for the *Examiner.* He had turned his attention away from the Klondike, and he was in a feisty mood. He sent this tale to the *Black Cat* on 15 March, two days after finishing "The Class Struggle," and Umbstaeddter rejected it.[22] *Frank Leslie's Monthly* picked it up immediately, paid $25.00, and published it in August 1903, thus having a short story by the author of *The Call of the Wild* at the same time that the novel came out. Leslie's timing could not have been better.

Two things characterize the Leopard Man: first, his affect, which is melancholy bordering on no affect at all, a lassitude that renders him almost paralyzed when he isn't performing in the circus by appearing in a cage of man-killing leopards. Given that London had just completed several essays about labor and capital, he can't help ending the very first paragraph by stating that "his employers rewarded him on a scale commensurate with the thrills he produced." (896)[23] So his affect is not caused by oppressive working conditions.

---

[22] There were no hard feelings, of course. In 1909, Umbstaetter asked London if he had any stories available, and London replied, "in the months to come, when I get around to writing short stories again, if I turn out any BLACK CAT stuff I'll bear you in mind." (JL, letter to H. D. Umbstaetter, 23 Nov. 1909, JL 13810.

[23] The manuscript for this story appears lost.

The second characteristic is his reluctance to tell the narrator his life story. The narrator appears to be a reporter sent by his paper to interview this man of daring-do, but the Leopard Man wouldn't or couldn't tell his story because "he appeared to lack imagination." He had no devil-dog living inside him, apparently, until his memory woke it, in good Coleridgean fashion, and he told the story, not of himself, but of two lion tamers each of whom have their heads bitten off by lions. The first is a warm-up, an exhibition of "patience" by a man who "hated" the lion tamer. "Now, that's what I call patience," said the Leopard Man, "and it's my style.'" Of course it is. He barely likes to talk, let alone act, and there's something creepy about the way he admires the patience of a man waiting years to see a nemesis get eaten.

But then the Leopard Man tells a slightly more complicated story of a hot-headed circus performer named De Ville (London of course had interviewed Peter De Ville for the *Examiner* in October 1901) who manages to get a lion to bite off the head of a man *he* hates. Again, the Leopard Man tells the story with such a coolness that now we begin to wonder about his sanity or even his humanity. In fact, we realize that his moniker indicates a monstrous conflation of feline and human, and his affect is a symptom of that monstrousness. In the face of such cruelty, violence, and treachery the Leopard Man acts as if it is all so, so ordinary. His inability to see the "romance in his gorgeous career," his striking inability to tell his own story, and his excitement at the thought of telling stories about headless men, whose decapitated trunks would be spouting quarts of arterial blood in the sawdust of the circus, should warn us that this reluctant author figure is a perversion, a freak of nature, half man, half cat. He foreshadows Humphrey Van Weyden's description of Wolf Larsen: "The jungle and the wilderness lurked in the uplift

and downput of his feet. He was cat-footed, and lithe, and strong, always strong. I likened him to some great tiger. . . . The piercing glitter that arose at times in his eyes was the same piercing glitter that arose at times in his eyes was the same piercing glitter I had observed in the eyes of caged leopards."[24] Or, more tellingly, in the scene in which Larsen attacks one of Death Larsen's crew, Hump says, "It was the leopard and the lion. . . . Wolf Larsen was the leopard." (231). "The Leopard Man" may be a light tale, but it served its purpose of warming up London for the main event, the writing of *The Sea-Wolf.* The Leopard Man's diffidence becomes, in exaggerated form, Wolf Larsen's unmoral nature.

Beginning *The Sea-Wolf*

With *The Sea-Wolf,* he dispensed with the light-hearted tone of "The Leopard Man" and the theatricality of the essays and returned to the serious and absorptive mode of *The Call of the Wild.* He did not start until 10 April, having to correct proof for both *The Kempton-Wace Letters* and *The People of the Abyss,* as well as for *The Call of the Wild.* When he had sent of the proofs of the latter, he began *The Sea-Wolf.*

---

[24] London, *The Sea-Wolf* (Macmillan: New York, 1904), 213. See L. Clark Mitchell, "`And Rescue Us from Ourselves': Becoming Someone in Jack London's *The Sea-Wolf,*" *American Literature* 78 (June 1998): 317-35, where Mitchell tracks the importance of legs and feet in the novel.

He did not know immediately what other ingredients—other, that is, than horror and data from sea travel—needed to be in the stew that was to make a canonical text.[25]

---

[25] David Mike Hamilton asserts that London's notes for "The Mercy of the Sea," a novel that London had proposed to Brett in his 21 November 1902 letter were "expanded and evolved into *The Sea-Wolf*" (20), as does Charles Watson. But, actually, nothing in those notes fits with *The Sea-Wolf.* Both stories were loosely based on his experiences on the *Sophie Sutherland,* but beyond that they are dissimilar. See Hamilton, 19-20, Watson, pp. 000, and London, notes for *The Mercy of the Sea,* JL 941-42. Watson, unfortunately, fell victim to a cataloging error in the Huntington Library's London collection. In the folder JL 941, we find handwritten sheets of notes. Two of the are entitled "The Mercy of the Sea." The others either have no title or are titled "The Sea, the Real Dirt." Watson took that latter title as some part of *The Mercy of the Sea,* but, in fact, London was compiling notes on a large project called *The Sea,* of which "The Real Dirt" would be a part—either a short story or a chapter or an essay; it's impossible to tell. But the cataloging error is obvious once one looks at JL 1102, a set of two typescript pages that duplicates pages 3-8 of JL 941. "The Real Dirt" was an anecdote told to him by someone named Neely on board the *Kamehemeha,* a yacht owned by the San Franciscoan industrialist Irving Scott (not incidentally a financier of *The Overland Monthly* in the early years of its second series) that London boarded in June 1907 and participated in its race around Oahu. See London, Jack, "The Real Dirt: [notes for short story]," JL 1102.

I discuss the notes for *The Mercy of the Sea* at length in volume 1, especially in relation to London's first publication, "The Story of a Typhoon," where I tie together the figure of a ghost with author figures in general. One point I want to reemphasize is the

He knew what made for a good sea story. He had read Richard Dana, Frank Norris's *Moran of the Lady Letty,* Robert Louis Stevenson's *Captain's Courageous,* and other stories.[26] He also may have read Joseph Conrad's *Tales of Unrest* in the late summer or

---

prefatory comment London wanted to begin the novel with: "A fairly truthful narrative of things that happened." Life as too strange for words could take place at sea as well as in the Klondike.

[26] Watson is very thorough on the literary models for London's characters and the possibility of the influence of Shakespeare, Stevenson, Dana, Norris, Conrad, and Browning, though an early review in *The Bookman* (as well as many others) linked *The Sea-Wolf* to *Moran* and *Captains Courageous* (see unsigned review, *Bookman,* Nov. 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3). What's most interesting in Watson's discussion is the lack of any direct evidence that any one or group of books actually influenced the writing of *The Sea-Wolf.* John Sutherland, in his notes for the novel, is less conservative, but less reliable. He baldly lists a number of books that readers may wish to consult "to follow up on some of London's sources." For the "general theme—the effete intellectual toughened into manhood by his experience at sea—derives from Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years before the Mast,"* though nothing in the London archive indicates this supposed fact. The other books Sutherland cites—*Moran, Captains Courageous, The Wreck of the Grosvenor, The Open Boat,* and *Foul Play*—are all by authors mentioned often in reviews of *The Sea-Wolf,* that is, books that reminded the reviewers of certain similar characters or plot elements in *The Sea-Wolf*. None have been found to actually have influenced London directly. See Sutherland, "Select Bibliography," *The Sea-Wolf,* ed. Sutherland (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1992),

xxxvi. Neither Watson nor Sutherland mention Albert Sonnichsen's *Deep Sea Vagabonds,* published in 1903 (McClure, Phillips: New York, April 1903, HL 332520) and annotated by London. One note in the back pages reads, "learning in the fo'k'sle. referring to Wolf Larsen," a reference to a passage about one of the ship mates reading Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Emerson, Carlyle, and Browning, and I will discuss the influence of this book a little later. Thanks to Hamilton for pointing this source out. But even this note feels as if it were written after London had completed a fair amount of work on the novel and had found this document of life aboard ship to confirm his characterization of Larsen. In fact, London may have been led to Sonnichsen through a review of *Deep Sea Vagabonds* that appeared in October 1903, which he pasted into his scrapbook because it reviews both that book and *The Call of the Wild,* declaring that besides London "the only other California writer of the sterner sex who has attracted much attention this summer is Albert Sonnichsen" ("Books and Writers: What the Makers of Literature Are Doing and Intend to Do," *Sunset* 11 (Oct. 1903): n.p.). London also told Julian Hawthorne in an interview in 1905 that "the local color of `The Sea Wolf' was gained by some years of personal experience in the forecastle. The character of the redoubtable pirate, while true enough to life as regarded his brutal and sinister aspect, was imaginative upon the intellectual and philosophical side," meaning that he invented a captain who read so widely. It is of course possible that he was hiding his reliance on *Deep Sea Vagabonds* from Hawthorne and the public, but that seems unlikely given the plausible late date of his reading of Sonnichsen. Julian Hawthorne, "Jack London in Literature," *Los Angeles Examiner,* 16 Jan. 1905, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5 reel 3, HEH.

fall of 1903, while he was still writing *The Sea-Wolf;* after interviewing him for *The Reader,* Fannie Hamilton sent him a copy of a Conrad collection of stories, and London replied, "Now is my Conrad complete. I have glanced at the first tale, & been compelled to choose between it & my day's work, and have nobly put it down until bed-time."[27] Presumably, he fell asleep with Conrad.

There appears to be no direct connection between another of Conrad's works—*Youth*—and *The Sea-Wolf,* but London read it while writing his own novel and read it out loud to Cloudesley Johns while he was visiting London in the spring of 1903: "he read to me Joseph Conrad's `Youth,' in boyish delight in sharing with kindred spirits his own joy of life."[28] (Do not fail to hear yet another meaning of the word *spirit* in this sentence; London's friends knew of London's investment in and characterization of the imagination as a spirit). What London found in that story that might have been transferred to *The Sea-Wolf* was an affective discourse, elusive to capture and vague in meaning, but nonetheless strong in sensibility. It would be centered on the disjunction

---

[27] London, letter to Fannie K. Hamilton, 14 Aug. 1903, *Letters,* 1:378. She inscribed the book (which was her own copy, purchased June 1898) as follows: "To Jack London, with grateful appreciation. F. K. H. August 3, 1903. East Dedham, Massachusetts"). I discussed the interview earlier and noted how Hamilton was so easily conned by London into believing his birth story as an artist, but it is also apparent that they talked seriously about Conrad and that Conrad's presence was steady throughout the composition of *The Sea-Wolf.*

[28] Cloudesley Johns, "Who the Hell *Is* Cloudesley Johns?" ed. James Williams, *JLJ* 2 (1995): 50.

between Marlow's recollection of his youthful emotions in having his first adult responsibility aboard a ship and his current emotional life that sees, not a ship of great opportunity, but a leaky and dangerous craft, not a land of romantic adventure, but the East as it really is: strange ships at anchor, a cursing white captain, and a wall of staring "brown, bronze, yellow faces."[29] He does retain a vision of the East that came to him on that first voyage, which includes the "first sigh of the East" of "a puff faint and tepid and laden with strange odours of blossoms, of aromatic wood."[30] But it is all mixed together now with the sense that after all the time spent on the sea and in far-off lands all that

---

[29] Joseph Conrad, *Youth: A Narrative and Two Other Stories* (William Blackwood and Sons: Edinburgh, 1902), 45, HL 12066. This is the edition that London read, but not the actual copy. That appears to be lost. London also told Johns that he should read *Lord Jim* "and other Conrad works" (50). Of course, this means that London was reading (or had read) Conrad while writing *The Call of the Wild* as well as his socialist and writing essays. It doesn't seem entirely out of the realm of possibility to think that the short novel form of *Youth,* as well as its partner in the same volume, *Heart of Darkness,* inspired London to write a short novel, too, called *The Call of the Wild.* London received a short review of *Youth* in March 1903 and pasted it into his scrapbook; it called Conrad, Kipling, and London the current masters of the short story form. It's possible that he picked up *Youth* after reading the review, but he had been reading Conrad all along. The number of reviews that linked *The Sea-Wolf* and *Youth* is quite startling; all were positive and used Conrad as the baseline of excellence in telling sea stories that London had more than ably met.

[30] Conrad, *Youth,* 41.

remains is "only a moment; a moment of strength, of romance, of glamour—of youth!" Conrad, in that process that remained so mysterious to London—the process of communicating emotion through black marks on white pages—communicated the longing and worldliness of Marlow and his companions as their "weary eyes looking still, looking always, looking anxiously for something out of life, that while it is expected is already gone—has passed unseen, in a sigh, in a flash—together with the youth, with the strength, with the romance of illusions."[31] How to communicate to his own readers that strength of naïve youth that he too must have felt on board the *Sophie Sutherland* as well as the subsequent loss of illusion he knew in 1903 (at the ripe old age of twenty-seven) was the task that enthused him to such a degree that he "exclaimed" to Johns before he began reading *Youth* out loud, "`Listen to *this!*"[32]

He did not have a plot in mind; later, he would describe the book this way: "This is a novel, not of plot, but of incident and development."[33] When he was well into the writing, he revealed specific incidents in an interview with a University of California

---

[31] Conrad, *Youth,* 50.

[32] Johns, *Who the Hell* Is *Cloudesley Johns?* This outburst of enthusiasm was typical of London, even in his later years. When he and Ford Madox Ford had been drinking together in Mexico in 1914 in a bar and someone started shooting, they both sat still and then once things had settled down, Ford says London exclaimed, "`Now, what do you think about *that?*" (Oliver Madox Heuffer, "Jack London: A Personal Sketch," *Living Age* 292 (Jan.-Mar. 1917): 124.

[33] London, "Amplification of Synopsis of Last Half of Sea Novel," undated, folder 9, box 24, Jack London Collection, USU.

student. "`I am working on a new book,' he said. `Oh, it's going to be a sea story. The Pacific's the place, and the thing starts out with the wreck of the San Francisco ferry, then there's a wreck of one of the China Mail steamers and a wreck….' London paused to light a cigarette, and the interviewer moved on to another topic, but not before London added, `It has to be completed by the first of December, and I have been working several months.'"[34] Five months to be exact, and he didn't finish it until January 1904. There is incident and locale, but no plot. So, for this kind of novel, he needed strong characters. So he started from what he knew: an author figure, oblivious to the danger of fog (an odd sort of echo of the Leopard Man), absorbed in his own life and the texts that are central to it. He is a critic and scholar of Poe, this Humphrey Van Weyden. The centrality of authorship and Poe in Van Weyden's life connects him to the next ingredient: a ship called *The Ghost.* London returns to the ship by the same name in *Cruise of* The Dazzler, both being modeled after the *Sophie Sutherland,* the sealing ship he sailed on in 1893.[35]

---

[34] T. M.,"Jack London on Football," *The Occident,* Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 3, reel 2, HEH.

[35] "Jack and I, for varying reasons wish we could find a fur seal. I, for curiosity, the sea LIONS off the Golden Gate being my entire experience of that family; and Jack, in reminiscence of his seven months sealing on the SOPHIE SUTHERLAND (model for the GHOST in The Sea Wolf) off the Coast of Japan" (Charmian London, Diary of *Dirigo* voyage around Cape Horn, 1912, JL 208). And: "`Jack London and Hawaii!' From the years of his youth the two names have been entwined in the minds of those who knew him best—since that day when, bound for the Japan sealing frounds and behring Sea on the *Sophie Sutherland* (the schooner `Ghost' of *The Sea Wolf*) he first glimpsed to

He also began with a different sort of half man, half animal. It's a wolf named Larsen, the antagonist to the Poe scholar, as if one of Poe's characters had come to life; we might even say he has come back from the dead. The final ingredient was the romantic interest, which by necessity should be absent in a story about the crew of a sailing vessel, and London knew that. In fact, Hump tells us what London knows about genre: "I had read sea-romances in my time, wherein figured, as a matter of course, the lone woman in the midst of a shipload of men." But those romance writers had not discovered "the deeper significance of such a situation. . . . [which] required no more than that the woman should be Maud Brewster," that is, someone exceptional. So, because London imagined that a novel in the permanent place in literature had to be read by the many, the many demanded a romance. So, he contradicted or undermined the traditional sea story and, on his own terms, he created an "exceptional" love interest. His own terms were that she be another author figure, someone who recalls the force and multiplicity of Frona Welse and

---

northward the smoke and fire of Kilauea" (Charmian London, *Jack London and Hawaii* (Mills and Boon: London, 1918), 9). A number of biographers and critics have pointed out that Van Weyden is on the ferry in January 1893, the same month and year London left on the *Sophie Sutherland;* Russ Kingman has the precise date as 20 January, and John Sutherland has it 23 January. See Russ Kingman, *Jack London: A Definitive Chronology* (David Rejl: Middletown, Calif, 1992), , and John Sutherland, explanatory notes to London, *The Sea-Wolf,* ed. Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 348.

Hester Stebbins.[36] It's as if he were saying to the clowns and the clouts that this is obviously a ploy to win your readership, but you won't even recognize it as such. And they didn't. Frona excited the crowd to such a degree that they called her a monster. But not one contemporary reviewer felt the same way about "a delicate, ethereal creature, swaying and willowy. . . . a bit of Dresden china" (212) who becomes a seal-clubbing, independently minded author named Maud Brewster.[37] The reviewers and most readers

---

[36] An early review in *Nation* thought, perhaps more facetiously than not, that "the whole book is to be regarded as a parody, in which case `Captain Outrageous' would be a more fitting title." (105) More of a setup for a delicious pun than a serious attempt at literary criticism, the reviewer's point about parody stems from the observation that the book is more theatrical than absorptive, more reliant on discourse than on plot. I will return to this point later.

[37] On the other hand, Charles Watson writes, "As a club-wielding mate-woman, Maud is even less convincing than Frona Welse." (Watson, *The Novels of Jack London,* 76). It isa legitimate claim, but we do have to be self-vigilant in order to make it. As Forrest Robinson has written, our own cultural predisposition to see women in traditional gender roles blinds us to the reality of independent women like Welse and Brewster; see Forrest Robinson, "The Eyes Have It: An Essay on Jack London's *The Sea-Wolf,*" *American Literary Realism* 18 (Spring-Autumn 1985): 192-94, and the essay's revision in Robinson, *Having It Both Ways: Self-Subversion in Western Popular Classics* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 77. Mitchell calls this an ingenious reading (334), but, even if it is finally unpersuasive it is so much more than merely ingenious; he has discovered a leakage of contrary meaning, which though

ignored the fact that the novel was about her transformation as much as it was about Hump's or Larsen's death. For the many, Maud Brewster was merely conventional, and an afterthought.

Before he began, London said in a letter to Brett, "my idea is to take a cultured, refined, super-civilized man and woman, (whom the subtleties of artificial, civilized life have blinded to the real facts of life), and throw them into a primitive sea-environment where all is stress & struggle and life expresses itself, simply, in terms of food & shelter."[38] The novel is about the contest of wills, a contest between those who live principally in alliance with the ethereal imagination and those who are grounded in Nature, in life. As we saw in "Stranger Than Fiction," Wilde says Nature imitates Art.[39] London reformulated that decree: "The creative imagination is more veracious than the voice of life."[40] This is why Hump and Maud, the advocates for the imagination and

---

unsustainable at the end, surely disrupts our understanding of Maud as simply a romantic ideal, though I disagree with Robinson's claim that "it is highly unlikely that Jack London set out in *The Sea-Wolf* to offer an analysis and critique of the dominant sexual assumptions of his day" (76). Of course he did, but his focus in this novel is on how those assumptions manifest themselves in romantic literature like *Marooned* and how it is possible to undermine and make more profound those representations. For London, it's all about literature.

[38] London, letter to Brett, 20 Jan. 1903, *Letters,* 1:337-38.

[39] See Sutherland's note that the title of Hump's projected essay is an homage of sorts to Wilde.

[40] London, "Stranger Than Fiction."

bonded by a love that London takes very seriously, must win over Larsen, "the voice of life." That is, Maud Brewster joins with Hump as true authors to fight against Wolf Larsen who has captured *The Ghost,* that is, the imagination. He is like the man in the red sweater, beating the imagination with a club, thinking he is taming it but only making it more wild and violent. Maud and Hump need to seize the imagination from him so that they may write again. The plot of the *Sea-Wolf* is how true authorship seizes control. That is, the stories of the imagination must be allowed to trump the stories of facts. If Larsen were to write, he would be an antiromanticist, the author who relies on facts alone. He would be like Herbert Wace or Dall, ignorant of the writer's need to select and infuse facts with "the feels."[41] Or, to put it another way, he is the voice of the white logic that is London's antagonist in *John Barleycorn*.[42] London may be undermining the form of romance, but he takes that form's epistemology seriously.

Therefore, we have a new addition to the creation of the model for an author. To the hobo, the miner, the newspaperman, the artisan, and the romantic genius we add the sailor. We saw hints of this conception developing in the discussion of sea stories in the first volume. Going to sea meant wanting to write novels. Martin Eden is the fully

---

[41] See volume 1, 411-12, where I discuss London's "idealized realism," as well as pp. 345-46 in which I discuss *Youth's Companion*'s objection to the supposed unveracity of London's *Tales of the Fish Patrol* and his response.

[42] There is a powerful link between these two works that I will discuss in volume 3. For now, consider Wolf Larsen's initial response to Brewster and Van Weyden's idealism: "`I am like a sober man looking upon drunken men, and, greatly weary, wishing he, too, were drunk" (London, *The Sea-Wolf,* 224).

realized figure of the sailor-author, but Hump and Maud are nearly as well developed. In the lazy hours of the dog watch—as Albert Sonnichsen says in *Deep Sea Vagabonds,* the one surviving book of London's library that contains notes pertaining to anything in *The Sea-Wolf*—the men would gather on deck to smoke and tell stories; they are, as Conrad's Marlow attests, natural storytellers, and of course it is exactly that setting that begins *Heart of Darkness,* a beginning that is really an elaboration of the beginning of *Youth.* London must have noticed this methodological similarity between Conrad and himself. He felt his own creative impulses vindicated and encouraged by it, energized by Conrad to shoot for the glory of writing an important work of art.

There's something else besides the imperative to tell stories that sailors have in common, Sonnichsen notes, and it is "the love of change, the spirit of unrest." (44) Life on land is too predictable for them, no matter how enticing the wife, the girlfriend, the occupation, the family. In a passage marked by London, Sonnichsen repeats the story of a fellow sailor who had tried to give up the life, and he became a lawyer, married "a good woman," and settled down. "`But I couldn't stick it out. I wasn't happy a moment during all that time. A longing, undefinable yet horrible, seemed to consume my very vitals. I can't describe it any better than as the horror of knowing what will happen to-morrow and the day after." (41). Again, there is no imagination without horror, and sailors tell stories because they mimic their need to live a life whose ending is a surprise and a delight.[43]

---

[43] This is a different take on the intersection of authorship and sailing that nonetheless agrees with Jonathan Auerbach's discussion of the novel. Also connecting "Story of a Typhoon" to *The Sea-Wolf,* he writes, "From this originary moment of publication, the

The uncertainty that London felt in how to write a canonical text finds expression in the very first line. That is, *The Sea-Wolf* begins with a confusion of how to begin: "I

---

scene of the sea reappears at key moments in his early writing, which suggests how by 1903 the vocations of `sailor' and `author' had become closely associated for London. . . . . The genre of the sea novel thus offered London a chance to tell stories about his own career as a writer." (Jonathan Auerbach, *Male Call: Becoming Jack London* (Duke University Press: Durham, N.C., 1996), 183). I don't think this novel is about his career so much as it is about how an author must to some extent imitate the life of the sailor in the way that he also borrows from the loves of miners and newspapermen. So, I read this novel not autobiographically (which leads, I believe, Auerbach to confuse an origin of a career with a beginning of a career) but rather historically. All the same, Auerbach, without referencing the November 1902 letter from Brett to London, ends up making the same claim as I: "London; ambitions for *The Sea-Wolf* extended beyond professional self-revision. . . . London aimed to move beyond magazine stories and even serialized fiction to make a more permanent mark in American letters." (183, 184)—though I disagree that it was ever London's intention to write without serialization or the more general support of the magazine publishing world, which is part of the point of matching *The Black Cat* to *The Ghost* and *The Overland Monthly* and *The Atlantic Monthly* to the *Martinez.* One more of Auerbach's statements relates to my own, but our intentions are very different: "*The Sea-Wolf* represents London's first (and last) bid for canonical status" (184). True, but Auerbach attributes this drive to London's desire to make a name for himself. He does not take into account how the idea of being a canonical author originated with Brett.

scarcely know where to begin, though I sometimes facetiously place the cause of it all to Charley Furuseth's credit." We can return to what he means by "cause" and "it," but first we need to look at what else he could mean by "to begin." Now that we see that he will be reporting on the substitution of one life's trajectory for another (in the traditional understanding of the novel, the sissy Humphrey becomes the man Hump), and knowing that he is an author figure, we see (again) that Said's observation about the beginning of a text and the beginning of a career are inextricable. We also see how much both are linguistic constructs. The beginning of Hump's career is what he says it is.[44] Hump

[44] It's important to note that London's own narratives of the beginning of his career—did it begin when he returned from the Klondike? did it begin with the publication in *Back Cat?* did it begin in 1897?—as well as his life—did it begin from old American stock? was his father John London?—as well as his political orientation—how I became a socialist—adhere to this principle as well. This indeterminancy could be considered a patrimonial gift, if one were inclined to theorize in that fashion. Nonetheless, I stick to my own empiricism as discussed in volume 1 and reaffirm my musings on how to date the beginning of London's career. The author is not the only defining agent involved in determining a career's beginning, and it is central to Said's project (deeply indebted to Foucault and Vico) that he ignore the marketplace and all its participants in order to define the production of literature by "the author." The question of language production is defined by two camps, "the partisans of analogy/regularity/universality and the partisans of anomaly/irregularity/locality" (55), and there is no compromise possible between the two. I have been arguing that a third camp exists, which escapes the pitfalls of man-and-his-work criticism by focusing on how acknowledging what Said calls "an

doesn't begin with or even consider the fog's role in the ferry crash; for an idealist like Humphrey, natural fact has nothing to do with the true nature of beginnings. If Hump were a critic in the twenty-first century he would have read and agreed with Said who

---

original (in the vague, somewhat passive sense of that word) if not a beginning connection between text and individual author" necessarily leads us to examine how the individual author's will is disrupted and reconfigured once it enters the marketplace. See volume 1:19-20.

Just as an aside, one might read *The Sea-Wolf* as a narrative in tune with "How I Became a Socialist," especially given that both seem written as London was grappling with the Nietzschean concept of the blond beast. In the latter, London says that as a blond beastly hobo he was a man, doing a man's work. When he discards his identification with the blond beast his Nietzschean concept of manhood disintegrates as well to be replaced by something new, the New Manhood, say, that risks effeminacy in order to be politically correct (in the Marxist sense). Hump as London was thrown from his comfortable bed into prison (or prison ship) and confronted with the extremity of the individualist philosophy. The double irony here is that Nietzsche, the advocate for anticonventionality, adheres to a very conventional idea of manhood, while, London, so often mistaken as a conventional man's man, overthrows—in superman fashion—the conventional concept of manhood. So yes it is a tale of coming to manhood, but it is a manhood that London doesn't endorse, that is, Larsen's brand of manhood. It is more a story of becoming a man in the sense that a man is able to think on his own, and to become a socialist. But Hump fails in this regard. See the discussion below of reviews that isolate the novel's socialist components.

said a beginning is "a necessary fiction."[45] Hump's facetiousness is part of his linguistic construction of the true nature of the beginning of his new career and his text (called *The Sea-Wolf*). Though Humphrey says he is being facetious when he offers that his new career began with Furuseth insisting he come visit, he doesn't offer a reasonable alternative, and he continues to be facetious for the rest of the paragraph, as if it were true—and it probably is, at least for Furuseth—that someone would read Nietzsche and Schopenhauer to relax. That is, after making a stab at explanation, he leaves it open-ended, inviting us to fill in this rather large blank.

Do we dare try? After it (whatever it is) is all over, when we reach the end of the text, we the reader might locate the beginning of it somewhere other than with Charley Furuseth.[46] Logically, Furuseth had nothing to do with Hump falling into the water, and

---

[45] *Beginnings,* 50.

[46] Given London's penchant for borrowing names of real people for his fictional characters, it is entirely likely that Charley Furuseth's name is an homage to Andrew Furuseth, who is nicknamed by one biographer as the Abraham Lincoln of the sea; see Arnold Berwick, *The Abraham Lincoln of the Sea: The Life of Andrew Furuseth* (Odin Press; Santa Cruz, Calif., 1993). According to another biographer, by 1893, the time of London's first sailing job, Andrew Furuseth had "begun to establish himself as an intellectual leader in San Francisco and to make his mark in the national labor movement, where he was influential in starting a national seamen's organization and launching a legislative program for seamen" (Hyman Weintraub, *Andrew Furuseth: Emancipator of the Seamen* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1959), 27). Furuseth was instrumental in unionizing, but he was no socialist. He simply wanted to ensure the safety

and rights of common sailors in a time when brutality on board was commonplace. For example, in a footnote to the conclusion of a story about the brutality of a captain named Bully Hansen, Sonnichsen says, "Bully Hansen, whose true name there is no need of disclosing, since he is now safely lodged in a California penitentiary, and may, besides, have relatives living leading honourable lives, is the central figure of innumerable tales of brutality aboard American ships." He also says "perhaps the most notorious of these deep-sea tyrants was Bully Waterman, whose crimes are uncountable." (78). Nicknaming violent captains "Bully" rings harmoniously with the nicknames "Wolf" and "Death," though whether London was inspired to use these nicknames while reading Sonnichsen is unknown, though possible. The comparison between slaves and seamen was repeatedly used around the turn of the century, hence, the link between Lincoln and Furuseth. London's use of the name, therefore, is highly ironic; Charley Furuseth effectively sells Hump into slavery.

There is one other facet to this backstory (and readers of these present volumes would expect no less). As London read Sonnichsen's *Deep Sea Vagabonds,* and just after he marked a passage about a near mutiny over bad group aboard a ship bound for the US (in the back pages, he wrote "[page] 320—to get the best of a captain without mutiny"), he came across this testimony to the effectiveness of Furuseth's union organization:

> No class of wage-earners could more successfully work together than seamen, especially those of sailing ships. The demand for competent seamen in always greater than the supply. . . . To be sure, there are seamen's unions the world over, but most of them are shams; the leaders are dishonest and the members largely made up of incompetents. . . . A notable example of what can be done was seen in

so the usual interpretation is that the vagaries and chance happenings in Nature began Hump's new life and career, and this would be the way that someone like Wolf Larsen would construct the beginning.[47] But if we want to be faithful to Hump, the beginning is

---

> the work of the Seamen's Union on the Pacific Coast. That organisation doubled wages, forced beneficent laws in the interest of seamen to be passed, and raised the standard of competency. But as with most labour unions, especially at that time, the leaders lacked judgment, became arrogant, although in this case honest enough, and drove the ship-owners to importing men from other ports. . . . The demands made by the union went beyond reason. Then violence was resorted to, and that turned away public sympathy; from that time on the strength of the union declined. But even to this day wages are higher on the Pacific Coast than in any other port of the world, excepting, at times, in Australia, where also the union men are active. (Sonnichsen, *Deep Sea Vagabonds,* 324-25).

Shades of, among other texts, *The Valley of the Moon.* London would have known that Furuseth was responsible for these laudatory labor conditions. Sonnichsen, like Furuseth, was not a socialist, and London found proof in this pro-union discourse for his own anti–trade unionist, revolutionary socialist principles. John Sutherland, in his notes for the Oxford edition of *The Sea-Wolf,* comments that "`Furuseth' is a somewhat perverse choice of name for Van Weyden's decadent friend. For first readers of *The Sea-Wolf* it would inevitably recall the Norwegian-born labour leader Andrew Furuseth (1854-1938) a well known San Franciscan figure." (Sutherland, explanatory notes, 347).

[47] I don't want to say this is so far off the mark. Said, inadvertently making his work even more relevant to the study of Jack London, points out how many central thinkers during

not to be located with fog or Furuseth; it must be something antecedent to the fall and to his visit to Mill Valley. How far back do we have to go in Humphrey's personal history? What is to stop us from going so deep in history that we end up with Milton, asserting that the beginning of human history starts with Satan in the garden? But perhaps that is exactly where London does mean to take us, facetiously, yet with deep seriousness. The text of *The Sea-Wolf,* then is like an ouroboros. It begins with Adam in the Garden, who meets Satan; Eve comes out of nowhere, and the first parents leave the Garden to wander the earth together on a ship called *The (Un)holy Spirit-Ghost.* London's conception of a contemporary American canonical author was Poe, but the author to whom he ultimately compared himself was Milton. No wonder his self-criticism generated so much anxiety.

London's period—Darwin, Nietzsche, Marx, Freud—were concerned with beginnings, including works such as *The Origin of Species* and *Birth of Tragedy,* works of course that London was fluent in, though London had read, at least, *A Genealogy of Morals,* and probably not *Birth of Tragedy*. "What is interesting here," concludes Said, "is a transformation that takes place in the conception of beginnings, and this transformation is congruent with the change taking place throughout the creative disciplines. Satifying the appetite for beginnings now requires, not beginning as event, but beginning as either *type* or *force*—for example, the unconscious, Dionysus, class and capital, or natural selection." (51). The vagaries of Nature fall into the category of a force that creates a beginning, though its impersonal nature puts into question the nature of intention and separates it out from the beginnings initiated by human agency. Mother Nature had no idea that Hump would write a book after she dumped him in the water.

There is another dimension to a beginning that involves Milton. Playing off of Said's discussion of *Paradise Lost* and beginnings, we start with the obvious: *Paradise Lost* is about a beginning for humanity (one of many possible). It is about the beginning of man's fallen nature. Wolf Larsen, as a Miltonic Satan, then acts as a supervisor (if it had been written after 1909, we might call him Hump's warden, given the number of London's works in that time period concerned with prisons) of Hump's newly fallen nature. He is Satan-like, not so much because he is evil, but because in a Miltonic sense he governs fallen life. This beginning erases completely what came before. Baptized in the waters of the bay, Humphrey begins a new life without the freedom he once had. Van Weyden lived life as he had wanted, which, from Larsen's point of view, was a death in life. Once he falls overboard, all that changes. He is no longer free in the way he was. On board *The Ghost,* he is and he isn't a prisoner. He has liberties given to him by the captain. But they are severely circumscribed. It is a new world in which Hump finds himself. As Said says about both *Paradise Lost* and William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (another British poet who appears in London's work, both by name and influence, and whom London was reading in 1900-1901),[48] "each poet uses his poem to begin to *put* man in the world, to situate him. Thus in each case man at the outset faces . . . a highly conditioned set of circumstances in which his existence . . . is properly inaugurated." (44) Hump even has to transmit his new knowledge of beginnings to Maud. On one of her first days on board, he tells her, "all your experience of men and things is worthless here. You must begin over again." (209). When we understand both the beginning of the novel and the beginning of Hump's life in this way, we then understand why we want Hump to

[48] See *Letters,* 1:211, 251, and Hamilton, 16.

have fallen off the ferry and into the dangerous life of Wolf Larsen, contrary to what at first seems right. (It seems unfair at first that he suffers so much at the whim of Nature.) We understand why we get caught up in contradictory feelings about what is best for Hump. He should and should not have to suffer.

We also begin to understand why Wolf Larsen is such an attractive figure. As Maud says at the end, "`Good-bye, Lucifer, proud spirit.'" (SW, p. 000). We root for him to teach Hump via "the voice of life" what the terrible and tragic nature of Poe really is—not seen as an intellectual, but as a sailor-author figure. Hump, in his prelapsidarian state, is not a real author; he is merely a critic. In the end, despite becoming a sailor, we are unsure that he has become a real author, though we are sure he has become a better critic. But critics and authors operate within a different order of the imagination according to London. When Wolf Larsen becomes the ghost that is his ship's namesake, Van Weyden and Brewster have a telling conversation. "His life flickered out," says Van Weyden, realizing that Larsen had died overnight. But Maud says, contradicting him, "but he still lives." That is, the author, not the critic sees the ghost. She identifies and accommodates the ghostly imagination. That is why she calls him "proud spirit." She accepts Hump's pronouncement that "he had too great strength," but, she adds, "but now it no longer shackles him. He is a free spirit." Hump agrees: "He is a free spirit surely," but it is unclear whether he understands that word *spirit* in the same way that Brewster does. And it is unclear whether he is simply agreeing with her in order to put the whole matter to rest.

The Return of the Bricklayer

We do know where London stands on the matter, and now we have to take a small detour to look at the figure of the bricklayer, who first appears in "Story of a Typhoon off the Coast of Japan." Starting out as a seemingly inconsequential character, the bricklayer becomes absolutely essential to understanding the workings of London's imagination, and we will see how he is tied into not only several of London's accounts of the sea but also, and climactically, to *The Call of the Wild*. Few other characters in London's oeuvre appear as many times as he does; it is also striking that London uses him in fictional and nonfictional genres. From "Story of a Typhoon," to *The Mercy of the Sea,* to *The Sea-Wolf,* to "That Dead Men Rise up Never," the bricklayer appears again and again like the ghost that he becomes.[49]

We may remember that the bricklayer lies dying in his bunk in the background of the story of the typhoon while the rest of the crew keep the ship running during the terrific storm. His death at the end of the storm serves as a convenient moment with which to conclude the tale. Beyond that he has very little importance. In his next incarnation, though, the bricklayer becomes the central character of *The Mercy of the Sea,* yet another fictional reconstruction of his sealing voyage in 1893; early in his notes he

---

[49] One might also count the Bricklayers' Picnic in *Martin Eden* and the trio of bricklayers in *The Mutiny of the* Elsinore as instances of the ghostly repetition, not of the figure per se, but at least of his occupational incarnation. A more distant echo comes in *John Barleycorn* when London says that he caroused with two others on shore, and they were known as "the `Three Sports.'" "Victor and Axel, a Swede and a Norwegian, and I planned to keep together. (And so well did we, that for the rest of the cruise we were known as the "Three Sports.")

instructs himself, "Work up the wonder-sail before the north-east trade, (look up High School Aegis sketch),"[50] a reference to the end of "A Run Across," which was written at the same time as "Story of a Typhoon."[51] London wrote notes for *Mercy* sometime in late 1902 and abandoned the idea (for a number of years) in January 1903.[52] London's first lines of these notes sums up the theme and plot: "(Very first line of very first chapter: `The sea has no mercy—and enlarge concisely.) [the sea] Taking the Bricklayer, in all its heartlessness and end." That is, the narrative arc would follow a clumsy, ill-suited novice sailor for the duration of a sealing voyage in the north Pacific. After outlining the early events—a strong gale, the routines of the crew—that mark the Bricklayer as a man apart from the rest of the crew ("his utter inability to understand the men or the life."), London has him slowly die from some unspecified cause: "Last hours, these people all busy with life, and he busy with death. . . . Last hours, growing weakness, storms, snow, etc." He becomes "a ghost in the midst of it all." His burial, link to ghostliness, his separateness from the crew, his participation in a sealing voyage: all these story elements overlap with Larsen. Thus the bricklayer, like the Leopard Man, serves as a trial run for the creation of Wolf Larsen. But there is one more similarity. The bricklayer's death and burial at sea sound very much like a first attempt at what later would become Larsen's own burial: "Canvas wrapping holds air, parsimonious captain, coal in bag—not heavy enough. Schooner hove to, man slid over off hatch-combing to leeward." In *The Sea-Wolf* Van

---

[50] London, "The Mercy of the Sea: [notes for novel]," JL 942.

[51] See volume 1, 36 for a discussion of their composition and submission history.

[52] See volume 1, 326-27 for a discussion of London's desire and motivations for writing a sea novel.

Weyden "lifted the end of the hatch cover, and the canvas-shrouded body slipped feet first into the sea. The weight of iron dragged it down." Perhaps every burial at sea is the same, but London wrote three versions of the same scene, and each of these three end with the end of a storm.

And then he wrote a fourth. In August 1909, two months after he had begun *Burning Daylight,* London turned to writing his final account of this 1893 voyage, "That Dead Men Rise up Never." He had returned from the *Snark* trip the previous month, and it is likely that the extended sea voyage prompted him to revisit his first one. If the notes for *Mercy* overlap here and there with *The Sea-Wolf,* they seem more like a rough draft for "Dead Men." The essay is strictly autobiographical, a snapshot of a moment in the life of famous author Jack London or perhaps, more simply, as a snapshot in the life of a common sailor. For it begins and maintains the feeling of a story told in the forecastle among fellow sailors, smoking and taking in the night, as if they were all characters in a Conrad novel. Marlowe, I mean London, begins with a nineteenth-century circumlocutious construction: "The month in which my seventeenth birthday arrived, I signed on before the mast on the *Sophie Sutherland,* a three-top-mast schooner bound on a seven-months' seal-hunting cruise to the coast of Japan."[53] The autobiography, though, takes on a different aspect, functioning as a baseline for how a new saltwater sailor should act: work hard, complain little, fight against personal abuse. For London doesn't want to tell his own story all the way through. He wants to present the picture of a novice who did not behave properly. This, again, is the bricklayer. In the notes to *Mercy,* we read, "When Sailing master sends him aloft and he flattens out, trembling, under the

[53] London, "That Dead Men Rise up Never," JL 1301.

cross-trees. Could not frighten him higher." (JL 942). In "Dead Men," "Bullied by captain and mate, he was one day forced aloft. He managed to get underneath the cross-tree, and there he froze to the ratlines. Two sailors had to go after him to help him down." (JL 1301). To the bricklayer, "the compass must have been a profound and awful whirligig. . . . He never did come to know whether ropes should be coiled from left to right or from right to left. It was mentally impossible for him to learn the easy muscular trick of throwing his weight on a rope in pulling an hauling." The *Mercy* bricklayer had similar problems stemming from ignorance and sloth: "he couldn't learn to skin seals. . . . He couldn't steer ; he couldn't row, and couldn't learn." Like the bricklayer in "Story," and in *Mercy,* and like Larsen in *The Se-Wolf,* this incarnation also mysteriously became "a dying man" and dies in a storm. "Make strong," London reminds himself in notes to *Mercy,* "the smallness of the space in which twelve men, eat, sleep, fight, gamble, etc, etc" and in "Dead Men" London tells us the bricklayer "died, in a small space crowded by twelve men." When he dies "he died hating us and hated by us." In *Mercy,* it is the same: "Captain hates him, hunters hate him, crew hate him, cook hates him, and so caabinboy." (JL 942)

Up to this point we as readers find "That Dead Men Rise up Never" rather absorbing, though seemingly without a point. A little short of the halfway mark, however, we read this surprising claim: "And now I come to the most startling moment of my life." For a man who has adventured on five continents (North America, South America, Australia, Asia, and Europe), this statement immediately grabs our interest. We expect to read of a moment in his life of a colossal challenge met with grace and perhaps even success. But it turns out that when London writes "my life" he means his authorial career.

For "the startling moment" is his first encounter with the embodiment of his imagination, the ghost of the dead bricklayer. This bricklayer is not canvas wrapped, but, like the *Mercy* incarnation the crew "laid him on a hatch-cover for'ard of the main-hatch on the port side. A gunnysack half-full [thanks to the cheap captain] of galley coal, was fastened to his feet." Like the service for Wolf Larsen, one of the crew reads the lines "`And the body shall be cast into the sea.' We elevated one end of the hatch-cover, and the Bricklayer plunged outboard and was gone." Contrary to custom and still hating the man, the crew threw his clothes and belongings overboard. As the *Mercy* notes read, "Casting clothes overboard instead of holding auction." Now we are on new ground. No other telling of the *Sophie Sutherland* voyage contains this scene. The lead-up to "the most startling moment" continues as London tells us that he decides to take the vacated bunk to show the superstitious crew that he is braver than they. They insist no sailor has ever taken a dead man's bunk and lived to the end of the voyage. They "told stories of awful deaths and grewsome ghosts that secretely shivered the hearts of all of us." We are back on the good ship *Black Cat,* captained by Edgar Allan Poe. At midnight, London is called for watch, and though he insists he is unafraid and remembers Swinburne who said "that dead men rise up never," still, "my mind pondered on the tales of the ghosts of dead men I had heard, and I speculated on the spirit world." The sailor-authors had transferred their ghostly imaginations to London, auditor/reader.[54] He now allows for doubt: "My conclusion was that if the spirits of the dead still roamed the world they carried the

[54] These subject-positions reverse later on when London, having seen the ghost, fears that the crew will not believe the story that he would tell of its sighting. "Stranger Than Fiction," "The Terrible and the Tragic," and *The Sea-Wolf* again meld.

goodness or the malignancy of the earth-life with them." Of course, at that moment, he sees a ghost: "There, in the dim light, where we had flung the dead man overboard, I had seen a faint and wavering form. . . . Never before nor since, have I had such a shock." Of course not. One can only have one beginning as an author. This fact is ultimately what ties together all four recountings of the bricklayer. London tells this story in any number of ways because it is the story of his beginning as an author, "the most startling moment of his life." Further, it is startling because it is transformative in the extreme. After he sees the ghost he is "panic-stricken." Out of the panic comes a crisis of identity. He loses his old self. In language that he employed in *Before Adam* (written in 1906, the year previous) and repeated almost verbatim in *The Star Rover* (written in 1913-14), he says, "I, as I, had ceased to exist. Through me were vibrating the fiber-instincts of ten thousand generations of superstitious forebears who had been afraid of the dark and the things of the dark. I was not I. I was, in truth, those ten thousand forebears. I was the race, the whole human race, in its superstitious infancy." Later in the tortured hour of the dog-watch (we will hear of a different ghostly dog at the end), when he sees the ghost for a third time, he advances toward it with a knife. "Step by step, nearer and nearer, the effort to control myself grew more severe. The struggle was between my will, my identity, my very self, on the one hand, and on the other, the ten thousand ancestors who were twisted into the fibers of me and whose ghostly voices were whispering of the dark and the fear of the dark that had been theirs in the time when the world was dark and full of terror."[55]

[55] Interestingly, in the manuscript for this essay instead of "when the world was dark and full of terror" he had first written and then the next day crossed out in pencil "when the

This startling moment is about returning to the beginning of being human and then coming back to consciousness as a new man, a man who has now seen a ghost. "This thing, whatever it was, I must face alone. I must work it out myself," says the author who claimed to have no mentor but himself.

"That Dead Men Rise up Never" never resolves the question of the reality of ghosts. Just when London becomes convinced that ghosts are not real, he says he might after all learn that "dead men did rise up." We remember one of his earliest tales, "Who Believes in Ghosts!" a declarative title followed by the name of the person who does, Jack London.[56] Even after he offers a scientific explanation for the apparition, he tells us, "This was my first ghost." You would think that he was no longer susceptible to seeing ghosts. But, no, he still is, later in life, in the Klondike, of course, the land of the ghostly white silence. Almost casually, in an offhand manner, he ends the essay by telling us that he has seen one other ghost in his life. The bricklayer "was my first ghost. Once again have I seen a ghost. It proved to be a Newfoundland dog." Is anyone in doubt that its name was Buck?

From 1893 to 1903, the bricklayer became so inflated with meaning that he could no longer be sustained, and his story had to be set aside. Someone more occupationally important had to match the ambition and accomplishment, both physically and mentally, of the main character of London's first sea novel. Thus, the common laborer becomes a captain, though they signify many of the same things. In one iteration certain

---

world was young." Eight months later, he would write a short story entitled "When the World Was Young."

[56] See volume 1, 79-80.

characteristics get more emphasis than others. In *The Sea-Wolf* and "Dead Men," the horror of beastliness gets emphasized, and we lose sight of the differences between the common sailor and the captain. In the latter, we learn that "the Bricklayer was one of those horrible and monstrous things that one must see in order to be convinced that they exist. I will only say that he was a beast, and that we treated him like a beast." It's as if the bricklayer isn't simply a ghost of himself but is the ghost of Wolf Larsen. Again we hear the essays about writing that London composed in preparation for *the Sea-Wolf.* And we hear it too in both *Mercy* and "Dead Men." Both texts share a similar epigraph, a tie-in to "Stranger Than Fiction" appearing yet again. *Mercy* will be "a fairly truthful narrative of things that happened." "That Dead Men Rise up Never" concludes with a warning sign, an echo of the sign that begins *Huckleberry Finn:* "To the Editor: This is not a fiction. It is a true page out of my life."

Once London has repeated the tale one last time, he had been exposed so often to the ghostly imagination that he could to some extent forgive its tortuous presence. London's attitude toward the bricklayer in "That Dead Men Rise up Never" is calm and philosophical, neither praising him as a "proud spirit" nor hating him as a disruptive, violent force. After he calls him a beast and a monster (he might have simply called him a wolfman), London writes, "It is only by looking back through the years that I realize how heartless we were to him. He was without sin. He could not, by the very nature of things, have been anything else than he was." This is the expression of an author coming to terms with that wild wolf of an imagination that lives within him. We will return to this time in London's life where he is more at ease with his interior life as an author, but for now we can see that the writing of the bricklayer's life, including how London

incorporated him into Wolf Larsen, was a process of coming to terms with his ghostly imagination.

Afraid to Begin

Hump (and London) don't know where to begin *The Sea-Wolf* because they have seen a ghost (or maybe it was just *The Ghost*) and still are not sure if it was real and if anyone will believe them. It may be a life-and-death matter, but it is a mark of London's artistry that some of the same wry humor with which London infuses "That Dead Men Rise up Never" appears at the beginning of *The Sea-Wolf,* and it works as a kind of defense mechanism. As he says in the essay, either the apparition was a ghost or a joke. Of course the "real" explanation explodes that binary; science explains the ghostly presence. But London never stops calling reality ghostly, and the scientific explanation always seems slightly inadequate, and the whole situation needs humor to take away the fright.

The joke in *The Sea-Wolf* is that if Hump had been more persuaded by Furuseth of the value of the bohemian life, then he would never had to have been born again.[57] Once again, in London's work we see him create the illusion of a necessary binary by withholding or suppressing a third way; in this case, the bohemian transcends the binary

[57] Sausalito, which was a fishing village, was also known for its bohemian tendencies. It's where William Randolph Hearst kept his mistress, Tessie "Dirty Drawers" Powers; see Ben Proctor, *William Randolph Hearst: The Early Years, 1863-1910* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1998), 61. It's a fascinating though probably pointless exercise to imagine Hump as Hearst going to see his girlfriend Furuseth (Powers).

of fact and romance. To blame a San Francisco bohemian for Van Weyden's fate is to deflect attention away from the anxiety of not knowing, in the final analysis, how anything, let alone a novel or a career, actually begins. We need to find the right words to do so, and that means an author is indebted to his imagination. And that means, to paraphrase Turkish (Jason Statham) in Guy Ritchie's *Snatch* (2000) you are in its pocket. And like Brick Top (Alan Ford) the imagination may feed you to the pigs (dogs) before you can beat it into submission.[58]

In the beginning paragraph, not only does Humphrey identify himself as an author, but he also sees a man reading his newly published essay on Poe in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Just as *The Call of the Wild* began with a figure (a human who turned out to be a dog) who does not read newspapers but who might read other media (perhaps literary criticism), so *The Sea-Wolf* begins with a figure reading (again London begins with something familiar only to then elaborate on a theme), who foreshadows the great reader and critic himself, Wolf Larsen. This anonymous reader prompts two thoughts about reading novels. First, because he is reading criticism, we realize that the novel we hold in our hands will be open to criticism, too. That is, the question of what is a good novel hovers above the text and gets incorporated into the text with the presence of author figures, readers, and the figure of the imagination.

But the stakes are even higher than that, as we have seen. London doesn't want to write just a good novel. He wants to write a canonical one, trying to live up to the

---

[58] I now know why I have watched this movie countless times with my daughter, Patsy; only then could it come up out of the Coleridgian well for the imagination to work it as an appropriate metaphor.

standard that Brett had set for him. Ambrose Bierce, in his famous comments about the novel, recognizes London's ambition: "But the great thing—and it is among the greatest of things—is that tremendous creation, Wolf Larsen. If that is not a permanent addition to literature, it is at least a permanent figure in the memory of the reader."[59] This desire manifests itself in the beginning paragraphs of the novel. We recall that "the stout gentleman" who is reading the *Atlantic Monthly* is reading Humphrey's "analysis of Poe's place in American literature." Hamilton Wright Mabie, editor of *Outlook* and close friend of Brett, wrote an essay for the *Atlantic Monthly* (published in 1899) entitled "Poe's Place in American Literature."[60] As I discussed in volume 1, Mabie helped Brett

---

[59] Ambrose Bierce, letter to George Sterling, 18 Feb. 1905, in *The Critical Reception of Jack London,* ed. Susan Nuernberg (Greenwood Press: Westport Conn., 1995), 108.

[60] In one of the more bizarre reviews of *The Sea-Wolf,* the reviewer writes, "One of the cleverest pieces of realistic fictional claptrap perpetrated in recent years is the device of Jack London's, by which he commences his story now running in the Century, `The Sea-Wolf.' According to the story the hero is crossing on the ferry from Oakland to Frisco, and notes with delight that an elderly passenger is reading an essay of his in the `Atlantic.' The ferry collides with another boat, the hero is swept overboard and is picked up by an outgoing sealer, the Sea Wolf. The realistic fictional part comes in when on picking up the Atlantic you find that it really contains the identical essay mentioned in his other story, and you are thereby prepared to believe that he was a passenger on that same ferry boat, and that the story is a true one. Of course their simultaneous appearance may have been purely accidental, but it is reasonable to suppose that the matter was prearranged." *Herald (Durango, Colo.),* 4 Apr. 1904, vol. 4, reel 2, HEH. London's "The

verify London's identity and to locate London's whereabouts so that Brett could persuade him to become a Macmillan author. Brett's essay on the rise of the American canon, published in the *Outlook* in December 1903, fit nicely with Mabie's 1899 essay, and one can imagine the two friends discussing how their publishing ventures would elevate their relatively new country's status in world literature. Mabie also wrote very favorable reviews of *The Son of the Wolf* and *The God of His Fathers,* so the two publishers were in agreement about London's achievements and potential. Clearly, London is referencing a man he once told Anna Strunsky "occupies a foremost place in American letters."[61]

In his essay on Poe, Mabie strums a chord about the artist's relation to his imagination that would have pleased London to a great degree. Discussing American canonical authors from William Bradford and Jonathan Edwards to Benjamin Franklin, Charles Brockden Brown, and Poe, he writes, "There is none of the joyousness of youth in Brown's romances; but there is the sense of power, the play of the imagination, the

---

Scab" appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in January 1904, so perhaps the reviewer is thinking of that essay, though of course it is not "identical" with an essay on Poe. However, in the January 1903 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* (an issue London must have had close at hand as he began *The Sea-Wolf*) a review appeared not only of two new editions of Poe's works but of London's *Children of the Frost.* See "Books New and Old: Two Sorts of Fiction," *Atlantic Monthly* 91 (Jan. 1903): 130, 133-34. Also, Alice Meynell, to whom Maud Brewster is likened, has an essay on Dickens in the same issue; see Alice Meynell, "Charles Dickens as a Man of Letters," *Atlantic Monthly* 91 (Jan. 1903): 52-59.

[61] Quoted in volume 1, 456.

passion for expression for its own sake, which are the certain signs of literature. There is, above all, the daemonic element, that elusive, incalculable, mysterious element in the soul of the artist, which is present in all art; and which, when it dominates the artist, forms those fascinating, mysterious personalities, from Aristophanes to Poe, who make us feel the futility of all easy endeavors to formulate the laws of art, or to explain with assurance the relations of genius to inheritance, environment, education, and temperament."[62] Not only does Mabie's hidden presence in London's novel send a coded message to Brett that his new wild western author is adhering to his directive to write at the highest standards—standards that Brett would agree with, coming as they do from his good friend Mabie—but Mabie has confirmed for London what he has feared all along: the demon within is absolutely necessary for the creation of high art. The next step is to confront that demon, dominate it without beating it with a club, and win it over, knowing all along that the war will never end. The battle ends with the end of a book or story, but then the war begins again with the next book or story. The demon is a ghost, and a ghost never dies.

The next step—meeting Wolf Larsen—points to indeterminancy as well. In fact, like the fog that seems to permeate the entire novel, indeterminancy holds sway not just over the structure of the novel but also over some of the characters and their actions. As numerous critics have pointed out, Van Weyden and Brewster are seemingly androgenous; Van Weyden fluidly moves between gender identities. In the triangle of desire, we often lose sight of gender, especially of socially constructed ideas of gender.

---

[62] Hamilton Wright Mabie, "Poe's Place in American Literature," *Atlantic Monthly* 84 (Dec. 1899): 735.

Also, Van Weyden, who is both a man named Humphrey and a man named Hump, vacilates between the two incarnations of himself. The castration of his name by Larsen—an act that London thinks typical of book reviewers—signals both the creation of a new man and the retention of much of the old self. He remains a literary figure, and one senses he could easily write about Poe again, this time with more of engagement—absorption—in the horror that Poe can instigate.

But when we look at the monstrousness of Wolf Larsen we enter a new realm of ideas. As I have said, he is like the Leopard Man or like Buck: are they men, or are they beasts? "`You are a sort of monster,'" says Hump during their first discussion of ethics, when he compares him to a snake, tiger, and shark. "`Now you know me,'" Larsen says. "'Other men call me `Wolf.'" One reviewer affirms Larsen's affinity to circus freaks: "`The Sea Wolf'" rests upon the character of Wolf Larsen, a character so extraordinarily compounded as to attract attention as inevitably as the two-headed man of the side-show."[63] Larsen, though, is a monster gifted with great self-awareness; he knows he is a

[63] The reviewer, however, makes the connection only to highlight the implausibility of such a character, which is interesting because no latter-day critic finds his monstrous nature unbelievable: "Does the character hold? Does it convince the judgment, touch the imagination? It is precisely here that the artistic limitations of the novelist betray themselves. `If a painter should wish to unite a horse's neck to a human head, and spread a verity of plumage over mismated limbs'—the teaching of Horace fits most aptly such violently and artificially-constructed characters as this" ("unsigned review, "Strenuous Life in Fiction," *Springfield Republic,* 11 Dec. 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3).

monster. Hump has insight (or in-sight, or inner sight, or, in other words, imagination), but it is limited (he is, after all, not a fiction writer but an academic). In fact, over two hundred pages of his first-person narration pass by before we are startled to learn, along with himself, that he understands himself to be a monster as well. While he fights with Larsen, he is so preoccupied with the life-and-death struggle that he doesn't stop to consider why Larsen is so attracted to him. That is, Larsen may say that he takes Humphrey on board to make a sailor and a man out of him, but what he doesn't say, but knows on the cellular level, is that he recognizes his younger self in Hump—a monster in the making. Like recognizes like, except Hump has no idea. To this he is blind. His complete self-realization is only possible when Maud Brewster comes aboard, and he remembers reading her work. "My *memory* flashed back to that first thin little volume on my desk, and and I *saw* before me, as though in the concrete, the row of thin little volumes on my library shelf. How I had welcomed each of them! . . . They had voiced a kindred intellect and spirit, and as such I had received them into a camaraderie of the mind; but now their place was in my heart" (*SW,* 215). This is a highly significant moment. Memory, vision, imagination, artistry, and reading are all bound together. What follows is self-realization and love: "My heart? A revulsion of feeling came over me. I seemed to stand outside myself and to look at myself incredulously." He is repulsed by what he now realizes he is: a monster. What's even more amazing, in a way, is that he had been told by Charley Furuseth, bohemian artist and representative of the suppressed third way of authorship, throughout their relationship that he is "`the cold-blooded fish,' the `emotionless monster,' the `analytical demon.'" (*SW,* 215). He was a monster, half man, half book. Where Larsen was violent and terrible, Hump was pacific and pitiable.

Where Larsen was sensual and attractive to men and women both, poor Hump as nearly asexual. "Furuseth was right; I was abnormal, an `emotionless monster,' a strange bookish creature, capable of pleasuring in sensations only of the mind. And though I had been surrounded by women all my days, my appreciation of them had been aesthetic and nothing more. I had actually, at times, considered myself outside the pale, a monkish fellow denied the eternal or the passing passions." (*SW,* 216).[64] As Hump says before Brewster comes aboard, the crew "are a company of celibates. . . . It would appear that they are a half-brute, half-human species, a race apart, wherein there is no such thing as sex." (*SW,* 129). They have "no balance in their lives. Their masculinity, which in itself is of the brute has been overdeveloped. The other spiritual side of their natures has been dwarfed—atrophied, in fact." (*SW,* 129). He is of course right but completely unaware of the irony of this. He sees in them what he refuses to see in himself. Once he does, he becomes a true man, not the macho male Larsen is and wants him to be, but a wholly realized, complete human.

---

[64] Jonathan Auerbach pictures Furuseth slightly differently, though once again we are working the same vein: "Vividly invoked at one point as `lounging in a dressing-gown' and delivering `pessimistic epigrams' about Van Weyden's presumed drowning, the narrator's intimate friend is especially important in the first half of the novel as a model for civilized, literate masculinity in the absence of any women to come between Van Weyden and his captor." (*Male Call,* 192). If we don't note the bohemian markers that characterize Furuseth—his dress, his fondness for a "be-pillowed window couch," his penchant for German philosophers, and his need for summers off in the country, then we might mistake him for another author figure in the same mold as Van Weyden.

His inability to recognize his own monstrousness is not the only thing to which he is blind. Maud Brewster enters as a highly accomplished author, but, as it turns out, Van Weyden's review of her poetry was as monstrous as Larsen's take on Van Weyden's work and, more telling, as critics of Jack London's. When Brewster identifies Van Weyden, she remembers his review and objects that he had called her "`the American Mrs. Meynell!'" (*SW,* 198). She doesn't disagree with the truth of the statement, but she adds, "`I was hurt.'" London has transferred his own unease at being called the American Kipling to his fictional counterpart. For indeed she is another feminine embodiment of London's ideal author, a replay of Hester from *The Kempton-Wace Letters* as well as Frona Welse from *A Daughter of the Snows.*[65] She too has been robbed of her name by the critics. Van Weyden defends himself: "`We can measure the unknown only by the known,' I replied, in my finest academic manner. `As a critic I was compelled to place you. You have now become a yardstick yourself.'" Both London and Brewster know

---

[65] Regardless of Brewster's reaction, London must have admired Meynell to use her name as a classificatory tool for his fictional creation. Meynell once wrote an essay called "The Spirit of Place," a phrase that comes up in London's work from time to time, especially in "All-Gold Canon." Her essay singles out Milton as the greatest of poets. See Alice Meynell, "The Spirit of Place," *"The Spirit of Place" and Other Essays* (John Lane: London, 1899), 7. It is highly likely that London read this volume, as well as her poetry published before 1903. John Ruskin was one of her great admirers, and an ad for her *Poems,* which appeared in the back of *"The Spirit of Place" and Other Essays* contained his blurb that lauded some of her lines as "the finest things I have yet seen or felt in modern verse."

what little consolation this is. For example, when London's friend Jimmy Hopper published stories that took place in the Phillipines, he became the Jack London of the Philippines. In an unsigned article in the San Francisco-based *Town Talk,* which London clipped and saved, he read, "Jimmy Hopper will be sorry that his publisher advertised him as `doing for the Philippines' what our own Jack London `has done for the Klondike,' just as Jack is sorry that his publisher once said that he was `doing for the Klondike what Rudyard Kipling has done for India.'" Van Weyden simply has no idea how facile and pompous he really is. But Brewster knows, and she turns the discussion to him, appealing to his vanity.[66]

---

[66] Unsigned paragraphs, "Borrowed Laurels," *Town Talk,* n.d., Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3, HEH. The author of this perspicacious item concludes with wording all-too-familiar to London: "Of course these second-rate Bret Hartes and these inferior Jack Londons will eventually perish from the pages of periodical literature as the second-rate Poes and the inferior Dickenses faded from the ephemeral literature of the nineteenth century. There is no *permanent place in letters* for anything except originality and a strongly marked individuality" (ibid.; my emphasis).

I have to acknowledge again my indebtedness to Robinson's reading of Maud Brewster. He points out a number of occasions in which she manipulates Van Weyden's egoism, mostly as a survival technique, seeing as she is trapped in a world of violent men. His reading of the ending, though flawed, effectively demolishes any sense of conventional romance; instead, he sees her as biding her time until she can escape the ineffectual clutches of Van Weyden. I concur, though, I do think this reading does not invalidate London's belief in the transcendent power of love. It just reveals how difficult

The yolking of two diverse elements doesn't necessarily generate horror, but as Arnold I. Davidson has written, when we examine horror and monsters together (as London encourages us to do), two things happen. We are forced to reexamine the relationship between "between the orders of morality and of nature," and we begin to look at the indeterminate boundary between the animal and the human, forcing us to be more exact in our definitions of both categories.[67] In *The Sea-Wolf,* London, by bringing together monsters and horror—or, as he called it earlier, "the terrible and the tragic"—is encouraging us to rethink what he means by *human.* In the end, horror reaches its terminal point of usefulness. London wants us to think through horror, not embrace it, and leave it behind. To be human is to retain the hope of achieving a unified self and transcendence. But to get there one must go through hell and meet the devil.

Therefore, it is not incidental to London's narrative that the question of Larsen's monstrosity arises while they are discussing ethics and morals. In chapter 8, Larsen plays cards with Thomas Mugridge, who had earlier stolen $185 of Van Weyden's. The captain wins that exact amount, and Van Weyden claims it is his and should be given back to him. In Van Weyden's mind, it is unnatural—monstrous—that one should steal money

---

it is for strong, intelligent, accomplished, and independent women to find a suitable mate, and clearly Van Weyden, transformed for the better that he is, is still not good enough for Brewster, in the same way that Dane Kempton was not good enough for Hester Stubbins and Vance Corliss was not for Frona Welse. London was often criticized for not creating believeable women characters. But the fact is that he could not or would not create a believeable male character suitable for his intensely modern women.

[67] Arnold I. Davison, "The Horror of Monsters," in *The Boundaries of Humanity.*

and feel no guilt. Worse, since what happens on the level of individual interaction characterizes the larger social sphere, Van Weyden finds that Larsen's monstrosity determines the unnaturalness of the entirety of the ship's social relations. Lucifer rules in hell. Might is right and there are no morals.

This is monstrousness and animality at its worse. The hyphen in the word *sea-wolf* ties two disparate characteristics together. It signifies an improbability that is supposedly nonetheless true. There walks on earth a thing, a living thing, that is both of the land and of the sea. Without the hyphen, it could be a ship's name. *Sea* would become a modifier, removing the landedness from *wolf,* rendering it metaphorical. But with the hyphen he becomes a monster, a combination of two things that do not belong together.[68]

But there's another facet of the indeterminancy of his monstrosity besides his bestial nature. Hump says in the same scene, "Sometimes I think Wolf Larsen mad, or half-mad at least, what of his strange moods and vagaries. At other times I take him for a great man, a genius who has never arrived." This clichéd notion of a genius being a madman, or a madman being a genius points us to the humanness of the monster. Just as we relish the idea of a tough man teaching Van Weyden how to live in the world, so too do we become captured by the logic of the mad genius individualist.

It is this unlikely combination of the land creature who lives on the ocean that inspires the prerequite attraction and repulsion necessary for the horrible state of monstrosity. One cannot take one's eyes off the thing that combines in unlikely fashion two disparate elements. Suddenly we sense the importance of eyes and vision in the

---

[68] When and how the hyphen appeared in the title is unknown. London obviously preferred the title without it at the beginning of composition.

novel. Forrest Robinson counts fifty-six references to eyes in the text, and though he is right to say that "eyes are frequently avenues of expression for powerful emotions," eyes and vision are absolutely central to London's conception of the imagination and its processes. Brewster communicates largely through her eyes, indicating a direct control of the imagination, and Wolf Larsen's blindness signifies his loss of control over the imagination and foretells the couple's departure from his zone of influence. Borrowing again from *Paradise Lost,* London owed a great deal to Milton's brief formulation of the power of the imagination as "the Cell / of Fancie my internal sight." (*PL,* 8.460-61). And now more than ever we need to turn to the first epigraph of *Author under Sail,* the passage from *Martin Eden* that describes Eden's gift (curse) of imagination: "He, by some wonder of vision, saw beyond the farthest outpost of empiricism, where was no language for narration." The links among Eden (the place), the imagination, and the Satanic critic (who promises fame but delivers debasement) is quite evident in *The Sea-Wolf.* Hump needs Larsen. He could not have seen himself properly without looking into the mirror that was Larsen. It taught him what it means to be more fully human, and he salutes him for that. But Larsen the critic can accomplish only that, and like Satan he can return to hell triumphant yet ultimately defeated by his limitations. Maud and Hump "hand in hand with wandring steps and slow, / Through Eden took thir solitarie way." They move beyond the teachings of their critic and deepest reader, and now in charge of the imagination they can create even greater art. By choosing this conventional form of an ending, London asserts that the imagination needs the artist as much as the artist needs the imagination. Without the artist, the imagination is free but wild in the chaos of nature.

With the control of the artist, in whatever form he wishes, the imagination through the medium of art can bring salvation to humanity.

The reader-critic deals with facts, and Larsen is irrefutable. But the artist sees the place where there are no words, only feels the emotions, the romance of the matter, and thus deals with truths more grand. We recall the improbability of the giant mosquitoes that opens London's essay "Stranger Than Fiction," and another link between his writing essays and *The Sea-Wolf* is established.[69] More than just a simple chronological chain of events, though, these essays and this novel illustrate how London is working out the connections among the monstrous, belief, horror, and aesthetics. That is, this emphasis on the monstrous, on the confusion of animality and humanity, has, in addition to the questions of humanity and morals, an aesthetic dimension: what makes for good art? Sticking with sea stories, we remember London's opinion of *Moby-Dick* as art run riot, an orgy of creation. It is admirable work, but ultimately a failure. Conrad's stories, however, exhibit the kind of control and temper that shows the artist dominant over the daemonic force of the imagination. Hump and Maud, like Melville, are attracted to the daemonic, and salute it. They acknowledge its facticity and necessary function, but to allow the monstrous to have control over the imagination is a fatal aesthetic mistake.[70]

---

[69] And we shall see a little later on how London himself tied the two works together in his unpublished rebuttal to critics called "The Chattering Daws."

[70] So much of contemporary criticism focuses on gender and sexuality in this novel and seeks to explain the triangle of Wolf, Hump, and Maud as an exposition about gender roles and the construction of identity. I do not wish to deny the importance of this work,

Further, after flirting with "abnormal" sexual relations—Hump with Larsen (the man), Larsen (the animal) with Maud—the novel restores traditional heterosexual coupling as the desired sexual relation because London all along believes that the highest art is conceived in "normal" social relationships. At the same time that he believes it is perfectly natural to be attracted to those of the same sex and to be aroused by animality, he in fact believes it is a mistake to give in to those desires, in the same way that it is an artistic mistake to give in to the impulse to create an "orgiastic" work like *Moby-Dick.*

In the confrontation between Hump and Larsen we see the confrontation between an author and his audience. The "stout gentleman" on the ferry—named the *Martinez* after London's friend Xavier Martinez, the bohemian artist?[71]—becomes Wolf Larsen, the reader-critic who has seized control of the imagination and feels entitled to tell the artist how to write a great novel. Though Wolf doesn't write himself, he does possess the eyes of "the true artist," which are "wide apart," a description London uses for Martin Eden (*Sea-Wolf,* chapter 3; Martin Eden chapter one), thus cementing the likeness between Hump and Larsen triangulated by London with Eden. All of them possess an

---

and clearly many of the scenes on board *The Ghost* are sexually charged, as is the infamous scene of remasting the ship.

[71] As Dennis Hensley pointed out, the ferry crash was based on the 1901 crash between two ferries, the *San Rafael* and the *Sausalito,* that occurred in a heavy fog on the bay. "I used the incident in my yarn," said London in a 1905 interview (quoted in Dennis E. Hensley, "Jack London's Use of Maritime History in *The Sea-Wolf,*" *Pacific Historian* 23 (Summer 1979): 3, 5. We will see the reprise of Martinez as a name in his 1906 short story "Created He Them."

extraordinary visual acuity: Larsen and only Larsen sees Hump in the water after the ferry crash, and with Eden "nothing in [his] field of vision escaped." Larsen then is very much a part of the artistic community. This confrontation between author and audience gives the novel its theatricality. It isn't so much a novel of ideas as it dramatizes through dialogue the ideas he has been writing about in his previous essays. In a sense, Hump's transfer between ships is a movement of an author between two publishing worlds with two different audiences. Like London, he moves from *The Atlantic Monthly* or its supposed counterpart in the West, the *Overland Monthly,* to *The Black Cat.* In another way this beginning of the novel represents the beginning of London's career.

In fact, in yet another way London was returning to his first writings when he began *The Sea-Wolf.* "A Thousand Deaths," for which he received the first payment that matched his expectations of his worth as a writer and that appeared in *The Black Cat,* can be considered a first draft of the beginning of *The Sea-Wolf.* As I pointed out in volume 1, the narrator in this story also falls into the San Francisco Bay to be rescued by an authority figure (his father) who tortures him unmercifully, but in the name of science, until the narrator figures out how to kill him. In "Who Believes in Ghosts!" and "The Rejuvenation of Major Rathbone" one also sees the theme of rebirth. Although we may never know for sure, apart from Sonnichsen's book, there are no sources for *The Sea-Wolf* because he already had tried out his ideas in early work.

Wolf is a reader and a monster. How do these two concepts come together? I have argued that the transference of emotion between author and reader mediated by the printed text forms a bond between the two, and, further, that just as the author is haunted by his imagination so the reader becomes haunted by whatever of that imagination gets

mediated by the text. Different readers retain different amounts or qualities of that imagination. With Wolf, his reading causes his imagination in turn to be fired to a maniacal degree, fevered and out of control. He is like the false author who is dominated by the feverish imagination, which ultimately blinds him and forces him to lose control. And it is this imagination-out-of-step-with-reality that characterizes him as a monster.

That is also how London saw critics. They were readers who imagined themselves the supreme reader, God, who knew what the imagination was and what it was supposed to do. Before 1904 and the publication of *The Sea-Wolf,* he had very little to say about critical reviews. In a rare instance, at the top of one negative, misinformed review of *The Call of the Wild* that he pasted into his scrapbook, he wrote, as if for the benefit of twenty-first-century scholars, "A reactionary publication which has it in for me because of my socialism and because I once saw fit to teach its editor a little etiquette and literary ethics."[72] But now, given his new investment in writing an important novel that would he hoped grant him a status apart from the public perception of him as another Kipling—that is, a novel that would grant him a name of his own—he was infuriated by bad reviews. This anger is not your typical authorial self-pity at being misunderstood. It is rooted in Brett's expectation that London will be considered a first-rank American author, an expectation as I have said that London wanted to meet. To become famous without the attending glory—or without unanimous approbation—will have great ramifications for the rest of his career. The crisis of being famous began here and culminates in the writing of *Martin Eden,* whose first title, as we all know, was *Success.*

---

[72] The name of the publication is unfortunately obscured by London's handwriting. See Jack London, scrapbooks, vol. 3, reel 2.

We've seen already how Brewster embodies his anger at critics. In two separate sets of notes for essays he ultimately did not write, he excoriated those who had found fault with *The Sea-Wolf*. He was fair to reviewers who were fair to his work (even if critical), but for those whose prejudices stood in the way of their literary judgments, he could be brutal. In a paragraph of undated notes, London makes a list of things that reviewers have dismissed in his writing as improbable, unbelievable, and therefore inferior:

> the climb up the cliff; [again, as in "Stranger Than Fiction, "Up the Slide" becomes an exemplum]; the seamanship of The Sea-Wolf; and finally, Love. I've got the reputation of a primordial beast, and they won't have it otherwise. I put in love-notes, touches, feels, out of my own experience. (Into Sea-Wolf). I was in love at the time, and lo, the critics had expected me to have my hero make love with a club, and drag my heroine off by the hair of her head and up into a tree. Because I didn't, they branded my love as sentimental bosh and nonsense. And yet I flatter myself that I can make love as well as the next fellow, and not quite so ridiculously as the average critic.[73]

---

[73] London, "Experiences with Reviewers and Editors: [notes for lecture]," JL 651, HEH. These are typed notes of handwritten notes on note paper, which read slightly differently: "Experiences With reviewers and editors—the climb up the cliff the prize-fight—the seamanship of Sea Wolf—and finally, love. I've got the ~~credit~~ reputation of a primordial beast, and they won't have it otherwise. I put in love notes out of own experience—touches, feels, etc. I was in love at the time. And lo! The critics had expected to have my hero make love with a club and drag my heroine out by the hair of her head and up into a

It's hard not to focus solely on that juicy bit of biographical material—"I was in love at the time" with Charmian Kittredge—and so see London as Hump, protective of Charmian (Maud) in the face of the threat by critics (Larsen). But this isn't the whole or even most interesting part of the story. The idea that critics have turned him into one of his "primordial" characters strikes us as unfair, unflattering, and ultimately demeaning—until we read a second set of notes, whose title—"The Little Chattering Daws of Men"—makes the monstrousness of critics explicit. He also makes explicit his own wildness and why critics might get a "mistaken" impression of him:

---

tree. Beause I didn't they branded my love as sentimental bosh and nonsense—and yet I flatter myself I can make love as well as the next fellow as not quite as ridiculously as the average critic." London, "Experience with Reviewers and Editors: [Notes for Lecture]," JL 650. These handwritten notes may have been intended for a lectue, or he may have typed them up later when it occurred to him to use them for lecture material. On the typewritten version he has other paragraphs pertaining to other "experiences": The Sourdoughs and the Chechaquos Explain. Also explain how men in my cabin are sour-beans and soda afterward. How I Begged My First Meal [blank] Japanese Anecdotes "Scrap imminent." Jap thought commercial telegram, and meant pig-iron. [rest in pencil] How I learned that city folks were not wise—Irvings Alhambra. [can't read the next word but took pic and looks like Follwedly] [rest in pen] Bluff—and how I learned to hit first." These notes get repeated in other sets of notes for the "Experience" lecture, but it's impossible to say when these various versions were given. See chapter 16 for a discussion of London's lecture trip in 1905-6.

"THE LITTLE CHATTERING DAWS OF MEN."

A la reviews of "Sea Wolf"-----make it four or five thousand words long. Be serious, honest; tell what is true of it; that it is truth. Hell-ships coming into port every day. Also, instance Niedenheimer, the Chicago prototype of the Wolf Larsen character.

And give the psychology of the little chattering daws.-----what kind of mind they have, -----the rule of the dead-----bourgeois, etc.

Some, (a few), whom I know personally, who rant in print against my stuff, talk about "healthy; manly, wholesome books" in contrast-----and who privily clasp sin to them in the perfumed gloom.

A wolf-dog down here, a long street, meeting poodles and pugs-----their ludicrous non-understanding -----describe Brown. He comes of the wild and the vastness, etc., and so I, telling my tale. Men who have never seen rougher life than tennis flannels and seaside resorts, telling me what is possible or not possible upon the great sea----also Youth's Companion story, "Up the Slide."

Also, the review of "The Sea Wolf" by man who knew the sea and its sorrows. Look up in clipping-book.

What they have to say about my "Sea-Wolf" love-making. Their love-making, far sillier. Let each of them go into his own experience, the fond foolishness, immortal asinity, then rise like God to laugh at the particular silliness of the kind of love in "The Sea Wolf." (Enlarge)[74]

---

[74] London, "Little Chattering Daws of Men" [notes for article on reviews of Sea-Wolf], JL 895.

We can easily follow London's divisions according to topics. First, there is the question of believability, especially of Wolf Larsen. Any number of reviews refused to believe that such a character could exist. He was monstrous, not because he was pictured as half man, half beast, but because he combined violence and learning in such extreme degrees. No man, the critics argued, could be so violent who had read so much. It seemed impossible to those who believed in the humanizing power of literature and philosophy that they could serve the purposes of the demonic individualist.

Within this topic, we find a subtopic of interest to latter-day critics, that is, the question of who was the model for Larsen. In 1905, London wrote to the *San Francisco Examiner* on the occasion of Captain Alex McLean's arrest for seal poaching, "I never personally met Alexander McLean, but I heard of his wild exploits from the men with whom I went seal hunting in 1893. McLean had an exciting record of adventure and upon his deeds I based my Sea Wolf character. Of course, much of the Sea Wolf is imaginative development, but the basis is Alexander McLean. Alexander had a brother, Dan McLean, who also was a sealing captain and a petty adventurer of some note."[75] Later, in an interview when McLean was presumed drowned, London said he was "known as the worst man, so far as physical violence was concerned."[76] Who then is "Niedenheimer, the Chicago prototype of the Wolf Larsen character"? Was he too a captain of a "hell-ship"? Perhaps it doesn't matter. What matters is that, again, London cannot be completely truthful about his methods for writing fiction. Perhaps Niedenheimer was known for his intellectuality and brutality, but McLean had the adventures in sealing that London

---

[75] London, letter to the editor, *San Francisco Examiner,* 15 July [1905], *Letters,* 1:492.

[76] Quoted in *Letters,* 1:492 n. 2.

needed for plot. It is clear nonetheless that Larsen is a conglomeration of men London knew or had heard of and that London was intent on not revealing this combination of primary source material. When he mentions Niedenheimer, he doesn't mention McLean, and vice versa.

The second topic, which is closely connected to the first, is the surprising self-identification with his dog Brown Wolf or Brown, and here we return to the question of London's own primordial nature. And yet the surprise quickly dissipates as we remember, not so much that he signed his letters to his friends "Wolf" or that he created a bookplate with the drawing of a wolf's head or that he called his dream house Wolf House, but that he created a chain of signification from wolf dog Buck to the imagination to the ghost ship *The Ghost* back to a character named Wolf. Wolves and the imagination and the author were all intimately connected, and this is what he meant when he wrote, "He comes of the wild and the vastness, etc., and so I, telling my tale." The wolf-dog-imagination has given sight to the tale teller that ordinary men—the clouts, the clowns, the poodles, and pugs—do not have.

And of course these ordinary men, the bourgeois, the flannel-shirted tennis players, the inhabitants of Clubland, men like Humphrey Van Weyden, assume to be God and to tell the imaginative artist "what is possible or not possible upon the great sea," or even in the Klondike, as in his story "Up the Slide." He had been kind to these critics in "Stranger Than Fiction," but now he saw them as monsters who were worse than Larsen because they didn't dare adventure. More than that, they were insincere; they criticized love-making without admitting how invested in romance they really were. They criticized supposed immoral violent behavior without fessing up to their own peccadillos. One

reviewer, someone who had known the sea, wrote an honest review of *The Sea-Wolf;* London had saved it in his "clipping-book." That was someone he could respect.

Attached to these notes was a paragraph from the San Francisco publication *The Argonaut.* In a section called "Epigrammatist," London marked "The nineteenth-century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban at seeing his own face in the glass." He then wrote "Oscar Wilde" next to it and "Chattering Daws." Harkening back yet again to what he had written in "Stranger Than Fiction," London was trying to turn the tables on the unbelieving public. They, not the realist author who writes with sincerity about things seemingly impossible, are the true savages. They are the antimoderns, and the artist, as Wilde has insisted, will lead them out of their darkness. There is a hint of Wilde's essay "The Soul of Man under Socialism" in *The Sea-Wolf.* As John Sutherland has noted, when we read the title of Van Weyden's projected essay, "The Necessity for Freedom: A Plea for the Artist," we are led to believe that he is under the influence of Wilde.[77] As I discussed in volume 1, Wilde and London (and apparently Van Weyden as well) believed that only the artist could reveal the structural deficiencies of capitalism that lead to poverty. And further, when Wilde, venturing away from politics and toward the general role of the artist in society, wrote, "A work of art is the unique result of a unique temperament. Its beauty comes from the fact that the author is what he is. It has nothing to do with the fact that other people want what they want," London highlighted the passage and then, I believe, wrote his note about the rage of Caliban. (17) "Indeed," wrote Wilde, "the moment that an artist takes notice of what other people want, and tries to supply the demand, he ceases to be an artist, and becomes a dull or an amusing

[77] See Sutherland, explanatory notes, *The Sea-Wolf,* 348-49.

craftsman, an honest or a dishonest craftsman." (17) And, of course, London highlighted this passage as well. Wilde had two takes on individualism: one was political and one was aesthetic. He joined them together. When he wrote that "Art is the most intense mode of Individualism that the world has known" (17) because the artist can only create real art from his sense of being a unique individual, London agreed; see, said London to the chattering daws, you have no idea what it is to be me, to be the wolf howling with the muse's song. But when Wilde argued that "socialism itself will be of value simply because it will lead to Individualism," London disagreed. His marginal note reads, "socialism, scientific & up to date, does not endorse this." (13)

In fact, the marginal note is appended specifically to Wilde's discussion of socialism, marriage, love, and Jesus, and for a moment we can return to Jesus in the theater of socialism. Wilde claims that "socialism annihilates family life. . . . With the abolition of private property, marriage in its present form must disappear." (13) No, says London, adjustments to the marriage contract will need to be made, but its disappearance is not necessitated by the advent of socialism. This is a flaw in Wilde's philosophy of individualism, and we can see in Van Weyden's condemnation of the nonmarital state of the crew and its captain London's prejudice for heterosexual marriage. Wilde saw marriage as "legal restraint," whereas London believed right-thinking couples would not use marriage as a form of either bondage or prostitution. Wilde argues that "Jesus knew" that "individualism . . . converts the abolition of legal restraint into a form of freedom that will help the full development of personality, and make the love of man and woman more wonderful, more beautiful, and more ennobling." (13) "And so," concludes Wilde, "he who would lead a Christ-like life is he who is perfectly and absolutely himself." (13).

Perhaps, thought London, but, as we saw in the previous chapter, he had not yet worked out all the complications involved in twining the philosophy of Jesus with the socialist program. Wilde's conflation of Jesus' thought, individualism, and socialism seemed too easy.

For *The Sea-Wolf,* on another level of thought, London used Wilde, not so much as a basis for Van Weyden's thought as he did for Larsen's. Larsen is the individualist that Wilde celebrates, and Van Weyden is the altruist whom Wilde—and London—deplores. Van Weyden would advocate altruistic behavior toward the poor—that is, charity—not the revolutionary principles so necessary to restructure society according to socialist doctrine. Wilde wrote, and London underlined this sentence, "Disobedience, in the eyes of any one who has read history, is man's original virtue," and this eprigrammatic statement seems Nietzschean in its rebelliousness against convention, but there are other literary echoes.[78] What a great twist upon the Miltonic pronouncement that *Paradise Lost* would be about "Man's first disobedience and the fruit of that forbidden tree." Of course, Larsen is not a socialist—he and Lucifer are anarchists, says Brewster, and we know how little London sided with them, despite his admiration and

[78] There is no proof that London had read Nietzsche before writing *The Sea-Wolf,* but I assume that he did. The evidence is all circumstantial, but compelling. I believe he read *A Genealogy of Morals* in the spring or summer of 1902 and continued in the fall of 1904 and through to 1906. My supposition is based on his use of the phrase *blond beast* in *The People of the Abyss,* a use that betrays an understanding of its appearance in *A Genealogy of Morals.* See chapter 19 for a discussion of Nietzsche, Wolf Larsen, and *The Iron Heel.*

affiliation[79]—and when Wilde advocates individualism as a form of rebellion, Larsen can agree without giving up control of his capitalistic enterprise, *The Ghost.* And, at the same time, he can argue against altruistic behavior and confound the liberal Van Weyden. Larsen would understand the strength of the strong that defines London's revolutionary principles, and they both estimate Van Weyden's liberality as weakness. Let the strong on both sides of the political economy fence fight it out, hammer and tongs, say Larsen and London. May the best economic philosophy win.[80]

Given London's distaste for the "chattering daws" and the multiple ways he attacked them, we might think that the reviews of *The Sea-Wolf* were devastating. Quite the opposite is true. To begin with, he must have been gratified by at least four reviews that picked up on the indirect telling of a socialist parable, even if they exhibited the ignorance of the reviewer who condemned *The Call of the Wild:* "The book reveals very clearly Mr. London's well-known Socialist principles, though the propaganda is not direct. Wolf Larsen, the terrible Captain of the schooner "Ghost," is presented as a sort of type of the tyrannical power of capital and property holding that, according to Mr. London's theories of political economy, grinds the masses. . . . . Jack London is still young. Probably some day he will outgrow his socialist ideas and forget the rough scenes of his early environment."[81] But the other three that read the novel as socialist

---

[79] London, *The Sea-Wolf,* 249.

[80] All quotations from Wilde's pamphlet come from London's copy: Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, etc. See vol. 1 for complete citation.

[81] Unsigned review, *Nashville Tenn. Banner,* 26 Nov. 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3, HEH.

propaganda were laudatory or at least neutral and fair. "Open the pages of Jack London's latest novel, The Sea-Wolf, where you may and you shall find brutalities, bloodshed and horrors only equaled by the tortures of the inquisition. The book is a story of the sea with the majority of the scenes placed aboard the sealing vessel, The Ghost, captained by Wolf Larsen, a human monster without conscience, feeling or belief in God or man. . . . Knowing Mr. London's socialistic views it is easy to fancy that he has used Wolf Larsen to typify the ruling forces of the world as he believes them to exist."[82] Another displayed the reviewer's well-informed knowledge of London the author:

> Mr. Jack London is familiar to us in various aspects. One is that of the writer of socialistic articles for *the Atlantic,* another is that of the widely intelligent and keenly sympathetic sociological student, putting his first-hand observations into form in his masterly *People of the Abyss;* the third, and perhaps best-known phase of his work appears in *the Call of the Wild,* an understanding interpretation of the dog nature, together with a wonderful picture of life as it is in the far North. But through all these runs the one key-note of dissatisfaction with the present social order.

As with a number of others, this perspicacious reader noted the lack of plot in the novel, but finds fault neither with that lack nor with the seeming implausibility of "the story." Instead, he or she singles out the political message of the book: "Mr. London's socialistic sympathies are apparent in his whole attitude toward the minor characters. His very description of the life of oppression led by the common sailors on the Pacific sealing

---

[82] Unsigned review, *Toledo Daily Globe,* 23 Nov. 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3, HEH.

vessel suggests his passionate love for the people, the downtrodden. We know well Mr. London's belief that it is only in revolution that relief can come." In addition, London's "power as a writer of wonderful prose is no less evident here than in *The Call of the Wild.* There Alaska was plain to our vision; here, the great western ocean, and by no means a `pacific' ocean tosses its great waves and storms and howls around us. We can see now what a sea storm must be." But reviewer comes back to the portrait of Larsen, which he or she renders quite accurately: "the cruelty that distinguishes Wolf Larsen is only the cruelty of the upper class toward the lower, as Mr. London observes it, crystallized into the person of one man, and changed from economic to physical injustice. His materialism represents the trend of modern thought along religious lines. . . . His outbreak of passion is the revolt of the brute nature of man against the convention, always threatening in the submerged portion of modern life." As good as the reading of Larsen is, the analysis of the interaction between Larsen and Hump is even more acutely insightful:

> Humphrey Van Weyden, on the other hand, represents the leisure class—the educated and moneyed class. . . . The people, aroused and in power, impersonated in the cruel Wolf, is too strong for the aristocracy of wealth and taste. But through a contact with the real necessitous hand-to-hand fight for life, this aristocracy can find its lost worthiness. . . . Then the combination of culture and strength, coming when culture is made practical and of working value, will be too strong for the mere brute force and passion of the primitive people. It is this consummation of the unavertable social revolution, by which is to come the touch between people and aristocracy, that is in Mr. London's mind, we surmise, when Wolf Larsen's vigor yields to the inevitable. Here is his socialism apparent again.

The reviewer nicely captures both the political elements of the book as well as how Van Weyden's transformation isn't simply about gender politics, but is about the class struggle as well.[83] That reading is affirmed in the only review in a socialist publication that I found: "Wolf Larsen is made the incarnation of our present competitive system. With gigantic constructive or destructive power, bestial materialism, utilizing all the scientific and literary knowledge of modern society, but only for the purpose of individual personal gain, he stands as the apotheosis of the individualistic capitalism of today."[84] These lines restate not only the political valence of Larsen's ideas but how Wilde's concept of individualism is simply neither complex nor comprehensive enough.

Of course all the reviews, even the politically minded, spoke of the brutality and violence in the book. But just as with the violence, as many reviewers praised the love interest as those who deplored it. The number of reviews is overwhelming, so a sample of the positive and negative is called for. One review, at the top of which London wrote "Return" (meaning that he had sent this to someone and was asking him or her to return it so he or Charmian could paste it into his scrapbook), first summed up the criticism that the serial publication of the novel generated: "The most various criticisms have been passed upon it: some seem to have thought the story great; some perniciously immoral; some have simply choked on `the brutality,' and refused to read further." Then, the reviewer excoriated the last half of the novel: "As usual, Mr. London's work is weak

---

[83] Unsigned review, [name of publication illegible], Philadelphia, 17 Dec. 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3, HEH.

[84] Unsigned review, *International Socialist Review,* n.d., [but among clippings from Feb.-Mar. 1905, 508, vol. 5, reel 3, HEH.

where women are concerned. We suppose it could not have been avoided, but a young man and a young woman—lovers—in a boat together—many days—alone—is a crassly indelicate situation. Much of the `love talk' is infantile. As some French critic has said of Victor Hugo's Marius and Cosette, one sees the lovers, but not the man and woman. The washing out of all human characteristics in Maud and Humphrey while they are alone together is, we suppose, a concession *virginibus puerisque*; but they are too virtuous." Does this reviewer recommend the book to his or her readers? Absolutely! "As a whole, `The Sea-Wolf' is a remarkable achievement. It is the strongest book London has yet given us."[85] A similar review stated, "No one would have missed the love episode, and we would have had a shorter, but finer, achievement. As it is, we must take the ill with the good and be thankful. There is so much that is good in "The Sea Wolf" that we could forgive the author almost anything."[86] Others were not so generous, and they "choked

---

[85] Unsigned review, "Literary Notes: Jack London's Remarkable Book," *The Argonaut (SF),* 14 Nov. 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3, HEH.

[86] Unsigned review, *New York Tribune,* 12 Nov. 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3. Other reviews that deplored the romance but forgave the "error" include unsigned review, *New York Post,* 19 Nov. 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3; "The Woman Spoils It," *St. Louis Mirror,* 17 Nov. 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3; unsigned review, *Philadelphia Press,* 20 Nov. 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3; unsigned review, *Richmond (Va.) Dispatch,* 26 Nov. 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3; and unsigned review, *Boston Transcript,* 30 Nov. 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3.

on" the brutality and the romance.[87] But a number found the romance singularly appealing, whether believeable or not. For example, the *Christian Register (Boston)* found that "with varying fortunes involving many other men on this and on other vessels, the fight goes on until, quite after the manner of Clark Russell, a woman is brought on board. Her presence makes the strife still more eager and momentous. Of course in the end the right man wins, and `They live happily ever afterward.' But how it all comes about makes a story which for those who like Jack London at all will be interesting and exciting as few stories are."[88] London knew Russell's work and its unreality. In Sonnenschein's *Deep Sea Vagabonds,* one of the sailors sums Russell up in way that London would have agreed with: "Clark Russell is not a favourite among the people of whom he writes. . . . [As one of Sonnenschein's shipmates said,], `He might be able to write a good text-book on ship-work, but when he writes novels he paints sea life about as true as dime novels illustrate life in the West—it's all cutlasses and boarding –pikes with him."[89] Whether London was able to avoid or exploit the romantic claptrap of authors like Russell is another matter; I believe he was.

---

[87] See *San Francisco Chronicle,* 13 Nov. 1904? Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3

[88] Unsigned review, *Christian Register (Boston),* 24 Nov. 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3. See also unsigned review, *Lewiston (Maine) Journal* 3 Dec. 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3; unsigned review, *Globe (town obscured),* 3 Dec. 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3; and unsigned review, *Quebec Budget,* 26 Nov. 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3.

[89] Sonnenschein, *Deep Sea Vagabonds,* 46-47.

It's as if the reviewers couldn't help but place the book within the pantheon of American literature despite their divided attitudes—both among themselves and within each other. They could locate what was wrong with the book—an unbelievable main character, a conventional love story, a lack of plot, a mismatch of realism and romance, a too-violent kind of realism—but they could not define what made it great, though they were absolutely convinced it was. One reviewer tried to list its positive qualities and called it "wonderful in conception, in suspension of interest, in characterization, in presentation of unique situations and extraordinary men," and yet lacking in a "vital spark of genius, or humanity." Why? Because the violence was unbelievable, and this reviewer further refines this idea, in a way that is central for our own understanding of the connections between the novel and London's writing essays: "A critic once found fault with the theme of a story which a writer had presented to him. `Your plot is absurdly improbably,' he said. `But,' contended the author, `it is a true story. I know that it really happened.' `That is of no importance,' decided the critic, `it is not a fictional probability. It is reporting then, not literature.' It might be safe to assume that a story is probable as long as the author can succeed in convincing the readers. There are some scenes in `The Sea Wolf' where Mr. London fails to do this, although it cannot be denied that he has made Wolf Larsen startlingly real." In fact, the reviewer concludes, "`The Sea Wolf,' with its great vistas of the sea and the wildness of the storms of elements and passions, has a wonderful power, haunting the memory even after it has been finished. And a book which can accomplish this in these busy times of ours is assuredly out of the common."[90]

---

[90] Mary Katherine Lynn, review, *Chicago Journal,* 3 Dec. 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3. Given that this reviewer is a woman, it is important to note a

So quick to call the story and characters unbelievable, the reviewer nonetheless finds herself "haunted" by *The Sea-Wolf,* and thus London's ultimate goal of a writer is achieved: to transfer his own sense of hauntedness as an author to his reader. The ghost within seems so improbable, and yet so real.

London had ended up with a Poe-like horror tale with a happy ending. Or was it? We return to the indeterminacy of the beginning. Maud's final words can be read in two ways. First, the obvious way, is that the revenue cutter that will take them off the island will prevent them from having illicit sex, an act we are led to believe would happen if this

---

tangential commentary by Burton Beach: "There is, also, a special factor in out social life that enhances the vogue of fiction; and this is the supremacy of women in the country as exponents and conservators of culture. . . . American fiction, having come to its own, has the inside track—the favor of American women beyond all other. Take `The Sea-Wolf'—much less artistic than `The Call of the Wild,' but captivating to the mind of our women for reasons best known to themselves." But of course they don't know why because the ghost is so hard to pin down (Burton T. Beach, "Publishers Depart from Policy; Ignore the Campaign Tradition. Despite the Political Activities Many Important Books Are Issued in the Fall—Reception Proof of Country's Prosperity. Novels Must Win the Approval of Women. Autumn Output Shows Feminine reader Has Deciding Vote in Determining the Sale of a Story—War Literature Sells Very Well," *Chicago Post,* 26 Nov. 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5, reel 3).

For more reviews in their entirety, see the excellent selection made by Susan Nuernberg in *The Critical Response to Jack London,* ed. Susan M. Nuernberg (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995), 99-108.

ship had not arrived (a novel doesn't have to stage such sex to qualify as a modern undermining of conventional romance). After all, their kiss is not a chaste kiss, and she kisses him as much as he kisses her. The second way, though profitable as a reading of Hump's and Maud's characters and their relationship, is ultimately unsustainable. As Forrest Robinson suggests, when they kiss and Hump's "imagination" flashes back to the moment when he saves Maud from Larsen's sexual advances, she is actually ambivalent about those advances; she is both attracted and repelled by him. She kisses Hump to continue the pantomime of loving him so that she can ultimately escape from him. Of course she is ambivalent about Larsen's attractions, but she tells Hump "`Hush'" not to forestall Hump's own sexual desire in order to work out the attraction to Wolf but to uphold the moral order on the ship that, contrary to Wolf, says thou shalt not kill. She is attracted to Larsen in the same way that London was attracted to Emma Goldman. As appealing as it is to imagine Maud, in their first moment of physical love, laughing at Van Weyden, wanting to escape both the island and the man so blindly attached to her that he cannot see she does not love him, this reading ultimately fails to take into account her very real love for Hump. She is a true artist, and in love with her best, most faithful, most attentive reader.

The critics may have objected to the monstrousness of conjoining two disparate fictional genres, but London would argue that such monsters, like the monster that is Wolf Larsen, is too real to be ignored. In any case, while he was reading the hundreds of reviews and pasting them in his scrapbook, he submitted to an interview with Julian Hawthorne, a brave and forgiving act because Hawthorne had skewered him two years

previous for creating the monstrous female Frona Welse.[91] When Hawthorne asked him about the sources for Wolf Larsen, he said that, in Hawthorne's paraphrase, "the local color of "The Sea Wolf" was gained by some years of personal experience in the forecastle. The character of the redoubtable pirate, while true enough to life as regarded his brutal and sinister aspect, was imaginative upon the intellectual and philosophical side." Brewster, London continued, "was in the story for the purpose of giving artistic balance; but Mr. London remarked that critics had censured him for bringing her in at all." No kidding. But this censure had now taken its toll, and London "spoke of the story with no enthusiasm, and seemed to feel more satisfaction in his `People of the Abyss,' which was a plain record of actual investigation." *The People of the Abyss* had, of course, received its share of criticism, but now he was not only worn down by the critics but he was also feeling disenchanted by the creative process.

> When I [that is, Julian Hawthorne] wanted to know whether he derived no pleasure from the act of creative imagination, he said no; but afterward explained that, while the mere conception might be agreeable, the drudgery of writing the thing down took the good taste out of the mouth. Besides, looking at the product subsequently, in the cold day light—in the reaction from the creative glow—it was apt to look like poor stuff, which one was sorry to have fathered. It was best to let it alone, if one could afford to do so, and get out of this fleeting existence something real, personal, positive. But if one could not afford to take this attitude,

[91] See volume 1, 533-34 n. 58.

then let him write his stuff as well as he could, sell it in the most favorable market, and forget it.[92]

Not only had London been deeply engaged in absorptive fiction for several months in 1902 and all of 1903, a kind of writing that forced him to confront the ghost of the imagination, a battle he could never win; not only had he had to suffer through the reviews of *The Sea-Wolf* for almost all of 1904; he had found *The Sea-Wolf,* unlike *The Call of the Wild,* to be a difficult and demanding project to complete. No wonder he was downplaying the attractions and fulfillments of writing.

As I said before, London began the novel on 10 April 1903, almost a month after he completed "The Leopard Man," two weeks after reading proof of *The People of the Abyss* and *The Kempton-Wace Letters,* and the same day he finished reading proof of *The Call of the Wild.* As he told Brett on that day, "With these proofsheets [of *The Call of the Wild*], my desk is at last clean. I have already worked out plot, characters, details, etc., of it [the sea novel], and shall start in now on the actual writing of the Book."[93] In January

---

[92] Julian Hawthorne, "Jack London in Literature," *Los Angeles Examiner,* 16 Jan. 1905, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 5 reel 3, HEH.

[93] London, letter to Brett, 10 Apr. 1903, *Letters,* 1:360. Charles Watson, not unreasonably, bases his date of 5 May 1903 as the beginning date on a letter London wrote to Cloudesley Johns, in which he says, "Have started the sea novel, and expect to swing along 5000 word per week till it is completed." (London, letter to Cloudesley Johns, 5 May 1903, *Letters,* 1:362). Here again is another instance of London telling someone that he was writing much less than his supposed standard fare of 1000 words a

he had had the rudiments of the story; this was the moment he formally gave up on *The Mercy of the Sea,* which means that while he was writing *The Call of the Wild* he was formulating *The Sea-Wolf* (tellingly, *The Call of the Wild* was at one point going to be called *The Wolf*).[94] In January, he had told Brett, "The superficial reader [the clowns and clouts] will get the love story and adventure; while the deeper reader will get all this, plus the bigger thing lying underneath," a thing he called *"mastery."* As he pitched it to Brett, it was a case of civilization losing itself yet somehow mastering "a primitive sea-environment where . . . life expresses itself." What I have called the fight over control of the imagination, he calls "mastery" of "life," that is, "the voice of life" expressed by Larsen. He assured Brett that "I am not rushing it, and I intend to take plenty of time over it."[95] Brett replied, "I am glad to hear about the sea story and shall look forward to it with

---

day; we recall he was telling Robinson, Brett, and Strunsky for the last several months that he was writing 4000 words a week, that he was working slowly.

[94] See London, letter to Brett, 10 Mar. 1903, *Letters,* 1:351. There is another, enticing carry-over from *The Call of the Wild* to *The Sea-Wolf.* When London provided his "amplification" of the synopsis for the last half of the novel, he wrote, "The thing I wish to emphasize, is that the second half will be written in a different key (style of course, remaining unchanged) [from the first half], the key will be that of the song a man sings of himself and his love, and the man, in turn, clever of phrase, deep of insight" (London, "Amplification of Synopsis of Last Half of Sea Novel"). Hump, then, is like Buck who "could sing only the *song* of the wild, not the *call* of the wild."

[95] London, letter to Brett, 20 Jan. 1903, *Letters,* 1: 338.

great pleasure,"[96] but because he was so anxious to finally get a sea story from London, he couldn't restrain himself three weeks later after London had told him that he was going to take the money from *Call* and "engage cabin passage in a sailing vessel for the South Seas, take a typewriter, plenty of paper and ink, and the plot for my sea story along, and thus get the sea atmosphere on which I have during the last several years gone stale."[97] Brett replied enthusiastically, "I have felt very great hopes for the sea story and your plan of working it seems to me to be a desirable one. So few sea stories are appearing—and none of these, I may say, good for anything—that a really good sea story at the present time would, without question, achieve a very remarkable success."[98] No matter that London decided instead to buy *The Spray* and stay close to home, reading his old sea stories, Conrad, Sonnischen, and others. Brett was thrilled.

And the thrill of anticipation continued after London signed the new contract for *The Call of the Wild.* That made Brett happy, but he was happier contemplating the future sea book, whose success he thought would be practically guaranteed both by the "subject" and by the imagined success of *The Call of the Wild*: "As I told you before I am going to try and do my best to sell this book and to push it in a way that will affect favourably the sale of all your forthcoming books, and I am most anxious that you shall follow it up with the sea story about which we have so often spoken. You have done this, `The Call of the Wild', in so original and clever a fashion that I am certain of your achieving an equal if not greater success in dealing with a subject which is so much more

---

[96] Brett, letter to London, 27 Jan. 1903, JL 2977.

[97] London, letter to Brett, 12 Feb. 1903, *Letters,* 1:343.

[98] Brett, letter to London, 19 Feb. 1903, JL 2981.

commercially possible, as the sea story is. I hope by the time this sea story is done that you will have a considerable audience and that we may be able to revise our publishing agreement to our mutual advantage by its success."[99] It is worth repeating: from a commercial standpoint, Brett was not entirely confident that *The Call of the Wild* would sell well, but he had absolute confidence in the salability of *The Sea-Wolf.*

By 29 May London had 30,000 words done, which means he was writing closer to 4000 words a week since the beginning of April.[100] He was writing on board *The Spray;* he told Anna Strunsky "have just come in from a trip, during which I blew my sails into ribbons."[101] His joy is palpable, joy from writing a sea novel while sailing on his own first real boat. His marriage to Bess Maddern, however, was falling rapidly apart now, and after she and their daughters went to Glen Ellen for the summer, London plotted an affair only to fall head over heels with Charmian Kittredge. As Russ Kingman says, by 18 June "Jack and Charmian are madly in love" (though they were in love before then)

---

[99] Brett, letter to London, 1 Apr. 1903, JL 2991. Three months later, he repeated the point: "I am delighted to hear that you are making such progress on the sea novel. This much is certain at any rate in regard to `The Call of the Wild'; that the book has attracted great notice and that all your future work will be much more eagerly awaited in consequence, and whether this book really succeeds, from the standpoint of great numbers, or not, there is no doubt that your next novel, if it interests the public, will have a much larger sale than it other wise could have done, which is, after all, what we are trying to effect" (Brett, letter to London, 30 July 1903, JL 2999).

[100] See London, letter to Johns, 29 May 1903, *Letters,* 1:364.

[101] London, letter to Anna Strunsky, 29 May 1903, *Letters,* 1:364.

and on 14 July "Jack tells Bessie that he is leaving her." Two weeks later he moved out of the bohemian bungalow and rented a room with his good friend Frank Atherton and his family.[102]

He still was able to write on a consistent basis. From 16 June to 24 July he lived on the property of Charmian's aunt, Ninetta Eames, called Wake Robin Lodge in Sonoma County outside the village of Glen Ellen, though the author under sail visited friends and saw Charmian whenever he could. On 2 July he told Johns that he was writing 1500 words a day, seven days a week, which is both an exaggeration and a fact. By 24 July he told Brett he was half way done, which means that he had written only 17,000 words in seven weeks, so he wasn't working at that frenetic pace for very much of the time. Or, to be even more exacting, he told Brett on 10 August that he had mailed the first half of the novel and that it would be between 90,000 and 100,000 words long. If we take the larger number, that means he completed only 20,000 words in ten weeks.[103]

In any case, a newspaper reporter set the idyllic Sonoma County scene in which London wrote his sea novel in the summer: "California poets and authors realize that the native muse has geographical preferences that cannot be lightly overlooked. There is no doubt that the muse is kindliest when her lovers court her in the little nooks nestling in the elbow of Sonoma Creek just below Glen Ellen. For it was here, in the old Osbourn home sitting snugly on a wooded hill, that Robert Louis Stevenson wrote some of his best tales. Here, too, Jack London wrote the book *[The Sea-Wolf]* that clinched his fame; and

---

[102] Russ Kingman, *Jack London: A Definitive Chronology* (David Rejl: Middletown, Calif., 1992), 45.

[103] See London, letter to Brett, 10 Aug. 1903, *Letters,* 1:377.

Sterling, latest of California poets, found the inspiration here for his `Testimony of the Suns.'" The reporter doesn't use the word *bohemian,* but she might as well, and it's clear that London was trying to maintain continuity between the bohemian house in Piedmont and the bohemian property in Sonoma County:

> 'Twas here [years back] that a sister experiment of the Brooke farm was tried. Like Emerson's dream of a demesne for mental aristocrats, the colony soon scattered, but their influence is still keenly felt.[104] Mrs. Ninetta Eames, the well known magazine writer [who interviewed London for *The Overland Monthly* in 1900 and was Charmian's aunt], has kept their memory green on her beautiful place known as `Wake Robin Lodge,' and here every year a little coterie of writers and artists come to shake off the grime of the city and get close to nature in one of her prettiest moods.

How like Hump's bohemian friend Charley Furuseth.

The reporter stands amazed at London's workstation:

---

[104] There is no historical confirmation of a utopian colony located at or near Wake Robin Lodge. Edward Biron Payne, Ninetta's husband, did form an Altrurian colony in 1894 a few miles north of Santa Rosa (Glen Ellen is south of Santa Rosa), and perhaps the reporter is simply mixed up. Or it is also possible that Payne and Eames formed a kind of informal version of their earlier experiment at communal living. The earlier community did build "at least seven cottages" and attempted to build a hotel, so there is an architectural similarity between the two (Robert V. Hine, *California's Utopian Colonies* (Huntington Library: San Marino, Calif., 1953), 107.

> The spot that is reserved for Jack London's sanctuary is a rustic bit down by the brim of Sonoma Creek. Under a leafy roof of overhanging boughs stands the table where he writes. A wire clothes line stretched between the trees over the table is used for Mr. London's literary washing. Jack London's methods are as original as the man himself. When he gets ready to write a story or book that has been shaping in his mind, he sifts out all the notes pertinent to the take, and with wire clothes pins fastens them on the line. To see these rag tags and bob-ends of paper flittering on the breeze, the passer-by would not fancy that they contained the data of months of hard work. When London hurried to Japan, he had to part a story he was writing in the middle, and he left out a line full of this literary wash which someone else fortunately took in before the rain had a chance to blur the invaluable notes.[105]

Since London was completing only *The Sea-Wolf* at the time he left for Japan, and he was living in Oakland at the time, it's unlikely that the reporter got this right; perhaps, when he left Glen Ellen in July he had left his notes on the clothes lines. Although he enjoyed writing outside, in Glen Ellen he had to; his quarters were a one-room shack, barely big enough to hold a single bed. In any case, the contrast between his bohemian lifestyle and the horror of *The Sea-Wolf* could not be greater. It's as if the beauty of his surroundings kept him from sinking too deep into the blood and gore of his tale. However, by far the greatest amount of the novel was composed on board *The Spray* or at Atherton's house.

---

[105] Lady Algy, "The Authors' Haven," *San Francisco Newsletter,* 11 June 1904, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 4, reel 2.

London, in a significant departure from his usual practice, did not handle the serial rights for *The Sea-Wolf.*[106] Brett had been promoting London's work to Richard Watson Gilder, editor of *The Century Magazine,* "for sometime past and finally got him to consider this book" without London's knowledge.[107] In August, Brett wrote to London, telling him that Gilder has expressed interest and that he wants to know what London is charging. "I am getting a minimum rate of three cents a word form the best magazines, where my best work goes. This is what I received from the *Call of the Wild.* In case the novel should prove available for the *Century,* I do not know whether Mr. Gilder would buy it for a lump sum, or pay a rate per word for the quantity he published."[108] So, swamped by his new, demanding novel and his personal affairs, London allowed Brett to

---

[106] Yet he couldn't resist mentioning the novel and its possible serialization to John Cosgrave, a conservative friend and editor of *Everybody's,* who apparently had heard about the sea novel and wanted it. Brett wrote to London in the middle of his negotiations with Gilder that "I met Cosgrave yesterday, the Editor of Everybody's Magazine, and he told me that you had written him to say that the thing [the sea novel] could not be serialized, and when I told him in effect what the story was he seemed to shy at it very much and doubted whether he could use it at all." (Brett, letter to London, 27 Aug. 1903, JL 3001). London wrote back, telling him that "I thought I'd make him shy at it. Work of mine he has refused for *Everybody's* I have sold promptly, and right on top of it, to the *Atlantic.*" (London, letter to Brett, 2 Sept. 1903, *Letters,* 1:384) Cosgrave's letter apparently does not survive.

[107] Brett, letter to London, 31 Aug. 1903, JL 3002.

[108] London, letter to Brett, 10 Aug. 1903, *Letters,* 1:377.

take over. He also did so probably because he was departing from his usual method of composition as well. Rather than keep the book to himself until he had completed it, he revealed its half-finished state to Brett, who then seized the opportunity, as a means to promote the novel, to talk it up among his friends in New York, including Gilder. London would need another four months to complete it, but Brett was so confident in the novel's excellence that he negotiated with Gilder for a month to accept it for serial publication; on 5 September, Gilder called Brett to say he would take it, and Brett immediately wrote to London with the good news.[109] It was most likely a choice that London would not have made, especially given his recent interaction with the Gilder clan.

Richard Gilder's wife, Jeannette Leonard Gilder, was editor of *The Critic.* In December 1902, she had rejected "The Golden Poppy," saying that it was "delightful, but `The Critic' is not a story paper. . . . Once in a green moon I have dropped into fiction, though you say that yours is a `true narrative,' but not often."[110] She probably would have

---

[109] See Brett, letter to London, 5 Sept. 1903, JL 3004.

[110] Jeannette Leonard Gilder, letter to London, 9 Dec. 1902, JL 6682. In an advertisement that first appeared in *The Critic* in their December 1903 issue and was repeated at least once more in early 1904, it was announced that "Jack London, author of `The Call of the Wild,' etc., will contribute a series of stimulating papers touching on a variety of topics in hiw own clever and incisive manner. This will be Mr. London's first appearance as the writer of a magazine department, and he has taken up the idea with an enthusiasm that will be shared by his readers" (advertisement, *The Critic* 43 [Dec. 1903]). Perhaps he meant to do a series like "Hints to Beginners," but no correspondence on this matter exists as far as I know, and it seems he never wrote for *The Critic* in this capacity.

ignored the sign London posted at the end of the manuscript of "That Dead Men Rise up Never," too, yet, in what may be the most ironic acceptance London ever received, she paid him twenty dollars for "Stranger Than Fiction." In September 1902, the associate editor of *The Century Magazine*, Robert U. Johnson, rejected "The One Thousand Dozen," saying, "This is a capital piece of work this Klondike story of yours, but it falls outside our range by the unrelieved tragedy of it. We hope you'll try us sometime with a cheerful tale."[111] In June he too had rejected "The Golden Poppy," and up to the publication of *The Sea-Wolf, The Century* had not published a single essay or story by London; they would later publish four stories, including "All Gold Canon" and the second version of "To Build a Fire." To him, the outlet just wasn't high on his list of places to submit, and he rarely sent them anything; it was never his first choice. It's entirely likely that both Jeannette Gilder's and Johnson's letters, among letters like it, reinforced London's motivation to write "The Terrible and the Tragic" and "Stranger Than Fiction."

But Brett looked to *The Century* as a place to help establish London's permanent reputation; after all, Gilder had serialized, among other significant works of American literature, *The Bostonians* and *The Rise of Silas Lapham* and edited selections of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn.* He was inordinately proud of the latter—he even reminded Brett of it in a letter about serializing *The Sea-Wolf*—even though Twain had been reluctant to give it to him and then only a small amount already set in type of the book

---

[111] Robert U. Johnson, letter to London, 6 Sept. 1902, JL 8494. See London, "Magazine Sales. No. 2: From May 1900 to Feb. 1903," JL 934.

version.[112] No matter. Brett could forgive Gilder his egotism if he were willing to help promote London. Gilder admired *The Call of the Wild* and told Brett in late August that he wanted to publish the new sea novel, but he had two objections: one was "the dead level of almost sickening brutality in the first draft of the first half of the story."[113] London would not have been surprised by this judgment, though he may have been surprised by how *The Century* first advertised their new author's novel: "The story is told by a young man who is picked up after the wreck of a ferry-boat in San Francisco nay, and is taken forcibly on a sealing voyage under a captain who is a strange mixture of brutality and self-culture, and who is thought to be one of the most striking and original

---

[112] See Victor Fischer and Lin Salamo, "introduction," Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckeberry Finn,* ed. Fischer, Salamo, and Walter Blair (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2003), 744-57. The editors sum up the relationship between Clemens and Gilder: "Clemens apparently did give his `full consent' to the editing of *Huckleberry Finn* for a magazine audience. . . . The editing of the *Century* episodes of *Huckleberry Finn* in almost every instance originated with the editors and was a requirement of the magazine's format and its implicit contract with its audience." (756-57). A better description of London's relationship with Gilder and other magazine editors could not be made, except to add that London, as well as Twain, feared not magazine editorial intervention because they considered the book text final.

[113] Richard Watson Gilder, letter to George Brett, 26 Aug. 1903, JL 6683. Brett sent this copy of the letter to London.

characters in modern fiction."[114] The magazine had figured out how to make the most of the violence.

Gilder's second objection seemed harder to meet but was actually easier, and because Gilder phrases it in such a charming way, it is worth quoting in full. Remember, at this point Gilder has only seen the completed first half and a synopsis of the second, all of which Brett has passed on to him having received it from London:

> More troublesome is the question of the last half. There is nothing out of the way in the synopsis sent: In fact, the book as a whole [is] elementally interesting and ideally attractive---evidently it is the outcome of much living and thinking. Yet—. . . a woman—a lonely and presumably lovely woman. How is this to be managed, in a way to [not] shock magazine readers—i.e. the American prudes. Here I will tell a story—dramatically.
>
> Scene, London—Latter part of the XIX Century
>
> Enter Thomas Hardy and Rev. G.
>
> Thomas Hardy: I would like to write about things more freely—about servant girls in families for instance – but the public won't stand it. As for you Americans, you're awful prudes: My book is being <u>cut</u>, in several publications in America now.
>
> ---- Rev. G: Yes, Mr. Hardy, I don't know but that prudishness is an American vice. But considering the rotten condition of the French theatre and modern literature, in great part – and the scandalous, disgusting goings on in a

[114] Advertisement in *Century Magazine* 66 (Oct. 1903): 46, Jack London Scrapbooks, vol. 3, reel 2.

> group of writers and others in London lately, I for one am willing to pay the price of prudishness for belonging to the decentest people on the face of God's Earth.
>
> This probably has no application to the subject – but only to my own phrase of "prude." Yet – I want to be reassured as to the last half.-What "ideals" are to triumph?-Those of Kempton or those of Wace. I truly think that my precaution is needless – yet it is a rule we have to adhere to.

Gilder was nothing if not consistent; in an 1887 essay he expressed his prudery in almost exactly the same terms: "There are many who believe that America has the purest society in the world. Is not this purity worth paying for with a little prudery?"[115] As the editors of *Huckleberry Finn* point out, "The *Century* was most concerned with offending the sensibilities of its readers by allowing profanity, libel, irreverence towards religion, sexual suggestiveness, immorality, or vulgarity."[116] According to one study of the magazine, "the strongest of taboos barred the frank treatment of sex. Gilder's . . . staff was even more vigilantly prudish. . . . Johnson was famous for his sensitivity to offensive passages."[117] One can draw a direct connection between the kind of realism Gilder preferred—the teacup realism of Howells—and his editorial practices. He upheld nineteenth-century genteel values. But, to go further, he had no sympathy for

---

[115] Quoted in Arthur John, *The Best Years of the "Century": Richard Watson Gilder, "Scribner's Monthly," and "Century Magazine," 1870-1909* (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 1981), 157.

[116] Introduction, 748 n. 250.

[117] John, *The Best Years of the "Century,"*153.

photographic realism, something London practiced in conjunction with his impassioned realism, a form of realism that Gilder and Johnson could tolerate to some extent.

That London could take sex offstage only meant that he felt it should not be photographed; he told his friend Cloudesley Johns, "I wonder how you will like the *Sea Wolf*. I'll bet you'll wonder how the *Century* dares to publish it."[118] He felt readers could see that scene for themselves if he gave them enough to go on, and so, without compromise, he could adhere to Gilder's injunction to profess the ideals of Dane Kempton, not Herbert Wace. Gilder seems to have prompted London to look at the romance in terms of his previous novel. In his "amplification" of the synopsis, London, in words that recall *The Call of the Wild,* says, "Up to this point Humphrey Van Weyden has been singing another man's song, the keen and chilly song of materialism; from this point and to the end he will sing his own song, the warm and glowing song of love triumphant. The love that triumphs will be the passionate, romantic love of Dane Kempton (and I flatter myself that I shall be able to write it, and yet keep it in accord with the harsh physical environment of sea and storm and hardship [)]."[119] Kempton and the new Hump are "idealists."

As I mentioned in volume 1, Wace can be seen as precursor to Wolf Larsen in that both celebrate scientific rationalism and unsentimental poetry, a philosophy too modern for Gilder's taste and too affiliated with Zola, Hardy (whom London is reading

---

[118] London, letter to Johns, 21 Sept. 1903, *Letters,* 1:388.

[119] London, "Amplification of Synopsis of Last Half of Sea Novel."

and crying over in 1900),[120] and "the rotten condition of the French theatre and modern literature." Wace is the antibohemian critic, the advocate for a Machine Age, proletariat literature. He is thus attractive to a poet like Hester, just as Larsen is attractive to Brewster, but ultimately the lack of romanticism tilts the poets to Van Weyden and Kempton. And because London himself advocated the blending of passion and realism, the human document, he had no quarrel with Gilder and Johnson's editorial practice. London told Brett that he could assure Gilder that "the characters themselves will not permit of anything offensive. . . . I exploit brutality with my eyes open, preferring to do it through the first half and to save the second half for some thing better. . . . I am absolutely confident myself, that the American prudes will not be shocked by the last half of the book."[121] They could, after all, find common ground.[122]

---

[120] See London, letter to Strunsky, 27 Nov. [1900], *Letters,* 1:221. Russ Kingman dates this letter a 1902; see Kingman, *Jack London,* 40. Neither source gives a rationale for the date used. It seems, though that the earlier date is more sensible because he had read *Tess* in March 1900, and in the later letter he compares the two. Hardy was on his mind that year. See London, letter to Ninetta Eames, 26 Mar. 1900, *Letters,* 1:178.

[121] London, letter to Brett, 2 Sept. 1903, *Letters,* 1:383-84.

[122] The ad, quoted above, finished off in a fashion less agreeable to the author, to whom Brett had sent the proof of the ad (see Brett, letter to London, 11 Sept. 1903, JL 2005): "A strong love interest develops in the latter part of the story, and the plot brings out most picturesquely the triumph of the ideal over the actual phases of force and matter. In fact, the triumph of materialism is the dominant note of the first half of the book, while that of the second half is love and the triumph of idealism." That is, *Century* wanted to market it

After Gilder assured himself about his "needless" "precaution," he asked Brett for "a full synopsis" or, better, the rest of the completed novel. If he received the final draft of the first installment in a month or two, that is, by the end of September of October, he could begin running the novel in January 1904. He offered $4000 for the whole shebang,

---

as a novel of ideas. If the arc of the narrative goes from materialism to idealism (note, there is no mention of Hump), then readers will be anticipating a rather intellectual experience. *Century* wanted to stress this point, but against London's wishes. When Gilder wanted to entitle it *The Triumph of the Spirit,* London told Brett that he himself preferred *The Sea Wolf* (no hyphen): "I do not like Mr. Gilder's title at all. The very thing he feared about the last half of the sea novel (the making of a tract of it), I fear about his title. It seems to breathe a purpose, an advertisement of a preachment; in fact, it might do for the title of a tract. . . . *The Sea Wolf* is a strong and brief title" (London, letter to Brett, 10 Sept. 1903, *Letters,* 1:386). He reinforced the point to Robert U. Johnson; see London, letter to Robert U. Johnson, 22 Sept. 1903, *Letters,* 1:389. Johnson, explained the reasoning to London behind choosing *The Triumph of the Spirit*: "it suggests to the reader, who may be repelled by the first half of the story, that something more ideal is coming, and thus makes him patient with the piling up of detail which you yourself would, no doubt, say is in one key. Some one has suggested `The Taming of the Sea Wolf.' This also would meet the emergency if it were only exact, but the Sea Wolf is not to be tamed" (R. U. Johnson, letter to JL, 15 Sept. 1903, JL 8495). You can be assured that Johnson and others in the office were the ones "repelled." In the end, because Brett, Johnson, and London all agreed that the same title should be used for both serial and book publication, they would use *The Sea-Wolf.*

and Brett conveyed the terms to his author, but with a very sensible warning: "Personally I should like to see the thing in *The Century* but if to put it there means the spoiling of it; or if to put it there means to hurry the book unduly so that it will not be up to the magnificent conception of it I shall be very sorry indeed."[123] Here is yet another example of Brett looking out not just for London's best interests but for his elevation to American literature's highest valuation. Within a week London mailed "an amplification of the synopsis of the sea novel," assured Brett that he had no problem with Gilder's editorial policy, and once again reiterated his own desire to take his time. But he also clarified what was the status of the draft that he had already mailed: "Mr. Gilder speaks of rough drafts. I do not make any. I compose very slowly, in long hand, and each day type what I have written. My main revision is done each day in the course of typewriting the manuscript. This manuscript is the final one, and as much time is spent on it as is spent by many a man in making two or three rough drafts." That is, what you have is what I want, though Gilder "has my full permission to blue pencil all he wishes."[124] He could even call it *The Triumph of the Spirit.* But the final authorized version would be the text as published by Macmillan.

London hadn't written a word on the novel for the entire month of August, writing instead two short stories—"The Banks of the Sacramento" and "Love of Life"—and attending to his personal affairs. He started again on 1 September and promised to have the final first installment by 4 October and the novel finished in three months.[125] Yet

---

[123] Brett, letter to London, 27 Aug. 1903, JL 3001.

[124] London, letter to Brett, 2 Sept. 1903, *Letters,* 1:383.

[125] See London, letters to Brett, 2 Sept. and 16 Sept. 1903.

again he departed from his usual practice. In September, he asked Brett for the first half of the manuscript back so that "a couple of friends [could] look over, suggest, and criticize."[126] The friends were Charmian and Sterling. It seems, because he had started and then stopped, that he had either lost the thread of the novel as a whole and needed to go back over it, or he had had a crisis of confidence and needed some outside advice and encouragement, or both. He also asked Cloudesley Johns to look over the first half; it was too late for advice on the serial version, but he wanted it for "all the book and the remainder of the serial publication."[127] Johns did so by 7 October, and London told him he would send more. In fact, Johns decided to come north, and by the beginning of November they were sailing, writing, and playng together on *The Spray.*[128] On 9

---

[126] London, letter to Brett, 16 Sept. 1903, *Letters,* 1:387.

[127] London, letter to Johns, 21 Sept. 1903, *Letters,* 1:388. Macmillan even released the information that London had revised the serial text to its marketing department, who then released it to the press. In an over-the-top review, which called the book "the novel of the year in America," "it is announced that the novel has been considerably revised and rewritten since its appearance in The Century." Matthew Brocoli, in his edition of *the Sea-Wolf,* points out the change from past to present tense. London had used the present tense throughout his first tale of the sea, "A Story of a Typhoon off the Coast of Japan."

[128] See Johns, "Who the Hell *Is* Cloudesley Johns?" ed. James Williams, *Jack London Journal* 3 (1996): 172-85, for a wonderful account of these days. Johns mentions at least three times that London was writing the concluding chapters of *The Sea-Wolf,* meaning that the damned novel just would not come to a close. Johns also says that London was "turning out an average of nearly a thousand words a day," but that has to be an

November, London wrote to Brett, telling him that it would be done the second week of December.[129] That was another optimistic estimation; this novel had its own timeline, and London could not rush it even as he tried to. This novel had to be written slowly. Johns left, and London returned to Oakland on 20 December. In the next eighteen days he wrote the final chapter—approximately 3000 words—and on 7 January 1904 he mailed the completed sea novel to Brett.[130]

---

exaggeration or else he would have finished far sooner. Finally, Johns confirms Charmian London's observation about the relation between London's time on the *Sophie Sutherland* and the writing of *The Sea-Wolf:* London had gone "aboard the sealer *Sophie Sutherland,* obtaining experience which now, ten years later on his own sloop and with a successful literary career assured, he was writing into "The Sea Wolf" as we sailed the tributaries of San Francisco Bay" (176).

[129] See London, letter to Brett, 9 Nov. 1903, Macco records, NYPL.

[130] He also gave the final chapters to Charmian to look over and asked her to send them to George Sterling and Johns. As Johns says in his autobiography, "I received from Charmian Kittredge a carbon copy of the last chapters of `The Sea Wolf' for criticism, and information that Jack had directed that any changes upon which she, George Sterling and I should agree should be made before sending the manuscript on to the Century Magazine, in which serial publication already had begun. Where one or two of us suggested changes, and any one of the three disapproved, the manuscript was to be left as Jack had written it. This, of course, only for serial publication, as Jack, retunring form the wars, would revise final copy for book publication." Johns found a discrepancy about the presence of a Bible on board the *Ghost,* and London was delighted with his friend's

But the writing project that had begun in a sense with "Stranger Than Fiction" could not be completed, it seems, until its author had treated the same old subject one last time. An "`old sea dog'" had read chapter 38 the *The Sea-Wolf* in manuscript and complained about the implausibility of two people restepping a mast of a sealing schooner. London wrote back to Johnson with an explanation; "I consulted, in rigging my schooner at the very start, the shipyard men. They gave me the figures, length, weights, powers of windlasses, etc."[131] The "old sea dog" was L. Frank Tooker, who was on the

---

proofreading powers. (Johns, "Who the Hell *Is* Cloudesley Johns?" *Jack London Journal* 5 (1998): 113; see p. 114. See also London, letter to Johns, [? March 1904], *Letters,* 1:421: "By God! Cloudesley! I wrote it, and two others went over it; but it took you to discover the Bible contradiction. I'll fix it by having him quote from it." It seems to me the editors of *Letters* have misdated this letter. In his autobiography, Johns says he received this letter 9 July 1904. On 11 July he tells Brett that he has sent *Century* the proofs; see London, letter to Brett, 11 July 1904, *Letters,* 1:434. London did not have the proofs with him overseas, nor was he interested in going over them, waiting to do so when he got back. He tells Charmian on 1 April "Still no mail," so it seems highly unlikely that Johns, Charmian, or Sterling wrote to London, telling him of Johns's catch. (London, letter to Charmian Kittredge, 1 Apr. 1904, *Letters,* 1:421).

[131] London, letter to Johnson, 20 Dec. 1903, *Letters,* 1:400-401. Two years later, London would recite yet another injustice done him by a reviewer of *The Sea-Wolf* who had found fault with his nautical knowledge. He told the editor of the *New York Times* that "an Atlantic Coast critic . . . laughed hugely at me because I sent one of my characters

staff of *The Century.* When he looked back on his career at the magazine, he bemoaned the fact that "its attempts to rise on the wings of a popular author's previous success . . . [had] been singularly unfortunate," and his long list of examples concludes with *The Sea-Wolf.* In a chapter entitled "The Business of Catching Larks," which he thought described Gilder and Johnson's editorial policy, Tooker takes London to task for violating those "sacred things," "truth and plausibility." Did he object to Larsen being a violent man schooled in philosophy? No. Did he object to the sudden appearance and subsequent centrality of a female character who just so happened to be familiar to and familiar with Humphrey Van Weyden? Not at all. He, who had written sea stories and poetry, felt compelled to tell Johnson and Gilder that it was impossible for two people to raise and set the masts of *The Ghost.* Despite London's retort, Tooker edited the text so that "certain modifications were made [in the dimensions of *The Ghost* and its spars and sails] that at least glossed the most obvious faults. They were not enough to obliterate them completely, but they made them less conspicuous, and London voiced no objection."[132] Of course not. London would make sure the original dimensions would remain in the Macmillan text.[133]

---

aloft to shift over a gaff-topsail" (London, letter to the *New York Time,* 18 Aug. 1905, JL 12899). These reviews of *The Sea-Wolf* plagued him to no end.

[132] L. Frank Tooker, *The Joys and Tribulations of an Editor* (Century: New York, 1924), 282.

[133] Brett, when he had read the manuscript in its entirety in January 1904, objected to the description of the raising of the mast, not because he felt it was inaccurate, but because it seemed "to me to be slightly forbidding from the standpoint of most women readers. Of

But the issue of the ship's masts was but a small detail in the larger picture of the novel's violation of Tooker's laws of truth and plausibility. How could Van Weyden, wrote Tooker in an exasperated tone, "be so wholly ignorant of practical things that on his first day aboard he threw ashes over the rail to windward and could not even peel potatoes, yet in a few short weeks of desultory and haphazard toil attain so extraordinary a degree of mechanical genius that, after sailing an open boat for many days through dangerous gales and high seas with perfect safety, he restepped the ridiculaously tall masts of the schooner from which he had escaped—which had fortuitously come his way to the same desolate coast . . . rerigged the schooner, bent her sails, and alone with the heroine proudly set sail for Japan." It was "farcical. . . . It took the reader's lack of intelligence for granted." But Gilder and Johnson, so blinded by the success of *the Call of the Wild,* ignored these factual lunacies. "And there you were," moaned Tooker. "Facts were immaterial in fiction; the illusion was everything, and the editors were willing to submit the case to a hundred thousand readers or more to prove their contention. . . . My contention that the illusion should be felt by those who had a practical knowledge of the facts upon which it was based, otherwise it was indefensible, had no standing."[134] Poor

---

course, you will decide in regard to its possible curtailment when you go over it, and I am accordingly bring the matter to your attention in the hope that you may decide possibly to cut the story a little in this particular place." (Brett, letter to London, 23 Jan. 1904, JL 3008). London, regardless of his lady readers, decided against cutting it.

[134] Ibid., 281. Gilder and Johnson felt they were in a battle royale with *McClure's,* so snagging a famous author was paramount. Cutting objectionable material provided a way to keep modern and please their audience, but Gilder knew the cost. "If we, for instance,

Tooker. The scourge of the editorial office of *The Century* had lost another battle in editorial taste and philosophy.

Tooker spoke for those whom London fought against all his career, the unbelievers, the discounters, those who refused to be absorbed into the reading of the work. Luckily he never had to read Tooker's memoir, but he did read the reviewers and made the mistake of thinking that they were the arbiters of the American literary canon. Up until *The Sea-Wolf,* he had seen the justice of the criticisms. But now, with Brett's injunction to aim for a "permanent place," he began to take such criticisms more seriously and more personally. He found that they frustrated his and Brett's new ambition, and they played on his insecurities about being a novel writer. Brett, for his part, admired the novel greatly. Back in August, upon receiving the first draft of the first half, he wrote to London, "I have read the half of the story which you sent me and it is certainly magnificent. Of course, one cannot tell how well it will fit in with the last half, but if the last half is as good in its way as this first half the book is a masterpiece and will enhance your reputation greatly."[135] When, in January 1904, he had read the whole

---

should go to boasting about the Sea Wolf—some one would say, yes but they're cutting it. We know our own principles and reasons, however" (Gilder, letter to R. U. Johnson, 2 Aug. 1904, *Century Magazine* correspondence, CM 508, HEH). Any number of letters between the Gilder and staff members testify to the competition between the magazines; see for example Gilder, letter to *Century Magazine,* 4 Oct. 1904, CM 544, box 6, *Century Magazine* correspondence, HEH, and Gilder, letter to Johnson, 12 Sept. 1904, CM 553, box 6, *Century Magazine* correspondence, HEH.

[135] Brett, letter to London, 31 Aug. 1903, JL 3002.

manuscript, he effused: "I have had the pleasure of reading `The Sea Wolf' and I may at once say that it has been a real pleasure to me and that I have thought it a very remarkable piece of work indeed, an advance over any work of yours that have seen and, indeed, I might add, of any American work of the same general sort that I have ever come across."[136] London's publisher had thus placed London in the canon of American literature. He neither expressed repulsion nor doubted the novel's veracity or sincerity. He would have told London to ignore the "chattering daws." Certainly London's abrupt departure to Japan and Korea to cover the Russo-Japanese war conveniently allowed him to ignore the vein of indeterminancy he had opened and to suppress his doubts and anxieties about what the novel may accomplish for him; he received Brett's affirmation, his certificate of inclusion in American letters, only when he was ready to come back, in June 1904 (mail between New York and Seoul took awhile). With what he hoped was a successful, status-affirming novel completed, he took off across the Pacific, strangely

---

[136] Brett, letter to London, 23 Jan. 1904, JL 3008. Brett decided on a first edition of 40,000 and hoped to sell 30,000 before the actual date of publication. See Brett, letter to London, 26 Oct. 1904, JL 3016. He actually presold the entire first printing and part of the second of 15,000; see Brett, letter to London, 9 Nov. 1903, JL 3018. By February 1905, it had sold around 52,000 copies, a creditable amount, though below what one would expect given the buzz surrounding it, in Brett's estimation; see Brett, letter to London, 27 Feb. 1905, JL 3029. However, the sales of *The Sea-Wolf* boosted London's income considerably, and in fiscal year 1904-1905 Brett estimated his book sales totaled $17,000, or close to half a million dollars in 2014 dollars. See Brett, letter to London, 12 June 1905, JL 3038.

duplicating the voyage he had taken in 1893 and that he had in some sense re-created in *The Sea-Wolf.* This time, however, he was accompanied, not by sealers or critics, but by newspapermen, author figures who were in a way just as monstrous as those critics. In fact, they called themselves the Vultures.