

**THE DRUNKEN BOAT :
JACK LONDON'S ROMANTIC IMAGINATION**

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要約

酔いどれ船：Jack London の ロマン主義的想像力

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基本的にはロマン主義的な想像力から生み出されている Jack London の作品は、19世紀に芸術的創造力のイメージとして典型的であった、嵐の海に翻弄される酔いどれ船のイメージから考察することが可能である。London の船の標移性は、彼を、その前後に出現したその他のポスト・ロマン主義的「航海」と関係づける。London は最も楽天的な瞬間においては恍惚としたヴィジョンを語る一方、最も悲観的な瞬間には、非人間的なそして悪魔的でさえある、脅威的な力を漲らす測り難い深海、即ち意志とイドと恐怖の世界を漂流することに絶望する。London が定まった航路に固執せず、こうしたポスト・ロマン主義的海上の航行を試みたことは、実際、彼の注目すべき業績といえるであろう。「酔いどれ船」の中で Rimbaud は、他者が体験したと語る体験を、自らがまさに体験したと述べているが、もし London の声に我々が十分に注意深く耳を傾けるならば、我々もまた彼の体験の多くを知ることができるのである。即ち、その他の酔いどれ船のポスト・ロマン主義的航海者と同様、London が典型的かつ独特に体験した目眩の内的体験をである。

Given the complexities of the heterogeneous ideas that have been called "Romantic," and given the contradictory stances that abound throughout the uneven body of Jack London's work, it is surely imaginative, if not foolhardy, or even "drunken," to attempt to fulfill the implications of my title with its slight echo of and side glance to Rimbaud's "*Le Bateau ivre*," ("The Drunken Boat.") My intent, however, is at once less and more, to outline in broadest terms an essential but not always recognized aspect of London's genius, and in so doing to show him in relation to the Romanticism that came after Romanticism. For, as Northrop Frye has observed, everything that followed Romanticism, including anti-Romanticism, had no resources to be anything other than a post-Romantic movement. In short, I propose to chart broadly the course of London's work as he alternatively passionately envisages the possibility of a total communion and harmony with the universe, or as he experiences more soberly his situation afloat, albeit uncertainly, on a darker, alien unfathomable world, natural or human. In either case, as his boat is tossed from ecstasy to despair, it is London's vital, creative "Romantic" impulse that keeps him afloat. In this thrust, the drunken boat and sea image is a characteristic aspect of London's fiction, just as it is important for many of his nineteenth century precursors, an image relevant to his revolutionary writings just as it is to his stories of man against the elements—in Alaska or on the high seas.

To refer to Frye again, Romantics think of "the structure of civilization, or the state of experience, as on the top of a subhuman and submoral 'world as will,' an ark or *bateau ivre* carrying the cargo of human values and tossing on a stormy and threatening sea. This figure becomes the prevailing one later in the nineteenth century, both for the revolutionary optimists, with Marx at their head, who see the traditional privileges of a ruling class threatened with destruction from below, and for more sombre thinkers—Schopenhauer himself, Freud, Kierkegaard—all of whom think of the values of intelligence and imagination as above, but very precariously above, a dark, menacing, and subhuman power—Schopenhauer's world as will, Freud's id, Kierkegaard's dread. For all of these, the boat and sea image is an appropriate one, and this structure in particular shows how the Romantic mythological schema, unlike its [pre-Romantic] predecessor, enables poets and philosophers to express a man-centered revolutionary, or counter-revolutionary, attitude toward society."¹ In London's case, one might add, the man-centered attitude of a single individual. For London, surely as much as Jay Gatsby, created himself, or thought he created himself. It has been said that one cannot cross an ocean in a tiny sailboat unless one is coldly rational; yet is one rational if he sets out to do such a thing? Like William James, who considered "rational" a pejorative term, the successful single-handed sailors have considered, if various, reactions to this apparent paradox. So also Jack London, whether we refer to him as a singlehanded sailor-writer, or a single-handed writer-sailor. For, from his adolescence, Jack London, whether rational or "drunken," was both literally and metaphorically such a sailor. The metaphor now of ecstasy, again of despair, but always, implicitly or explicitly the metaphor is

of London's essential voyage as the romantic artist embarked on a voyage to find what will suffice.

Although there is no suggestion that London had ever read "Le Bateau ivre," or even heard of its author, Rimbaud's poem provides an illuminating backdrop for considering London's creative imagination; for both writers, whatever their manifest differences, are like other romantics, as Frye has noted, in finding the boat and sea imagery appropriate, especially as that imagery is related to intoxication of one sort or another.

Biographically, Rimbaud's title is explained by the claim that he, not yet 17, during the weeks he was composing "Le Bateau ivre" had spent the time in "dedicated drinking," trying to be as much of a derelict as possible. For the present purpose, the poem may be summarized as follows: The poet *is* the drunken boat, bathing in "le Poeme/De la Mer." He is "inebriated with alcohol, freedom, visions, and longings, as well as the *voyant's* new poetic language. The central metaphor of 'Le Bateau ivre' equates intoxication with liberation: the boat is the drunken body (or mind) which travels on various imaginary fluids."² Through his intoxication the poet discovers a release from the stable world of conventions and commerce. The voyage begins on a river in North America, possibly the Mississippi, where the crew of a canal barge is killed by Indians, leaving the boat to follow its own will, to feel the freedom of the river waters. The initial intoxication of wine is only the beginning. There is a deeper imaginative intoxication, indicated by the entrance to the sea where control and direction are lost, and reality is transformed into a series of pictures both horrible and wondrous beyond ordinary dreams, "communion on erotic, poetic, and spiritual levels."³ But the boat becomes conscious of itself, a pause for self-recognition and horror, a mood of subjectivism and self-examination. The intoxication of the mind and senses is succeeded by a final image of the intoxication of the heart, an image which suggests man's oneness with every aspect of his experience as well as a keen sense of his limitations. The experience is vividly and colorfully esthetic as the boat-narrator bathes in the "Poem of the Sea infused with stars and lactescent, devouring the green azure, where, like a pallid, ecstatic bit of flotsam, a pensive drowned man sometimes sinks down—where dyeing suddenly the blueness, with delirium and slow rhythms . . . there ferments the bitter reddening of love, stronger than alcohol and vaster than your lyres."⁴ At the same time, the experience is "so overwhelming as to be compared with death"—a sense of love, a kind of "voluptuous self-immolation," of "total communion and harmony with the universe . . . at once metaphysical and sensuous."⁵ The final movement signals a return to sobriety as the poet comes back to his inland origins, exhausted and ashamed. "The title, 'Le Bateau ivre,' therefore, is both a glorification and a condemnation of his intoxication: an exaltation of his momentary exhilaration and an ironic commentary on his delirious drunkenness, which has its origins in wine, madness and yearnings for love. His aesthetic, moral, and spiritual inebriation has finally led him to powerlessness, guilt, ridicule, and despair."⁶ By means of the symbolic boat, he has thus passed through the cosmic experience of drunkenness in order to will at the end the sinking into the sea of all his visions.

A powerfully moving intellectual and spiritual autobiography written at the age of

16, "Le Bateau ivre" has been read as Rimbaud's rite of passage from youth to manhood. More profoundly, it is about the transformation from the ordinary to the extraordinary. The will to be a creative artist is the real experience narrated in the poem, the desire of the poet to bring back a kind of knowledge synonymous with particularly brilliant vision, is the real experience narrated in "Le Bateau ivre."

Jack London's self-designation as a philosophic materialist and his concern with what he called "the irrefragible fact" would seem to place his imagination at a considerable remove from Rimbaud's extravagant quest for extraordinary vision. Without having seen the ocean, Rimbaud claimed to have had the experience that others say they have had. London, of course, had sailed his literal boats, sometimes drunkenly, not only in San Francisco Bay but to the South Seas; and he wrote of these experiences. The obvious realistic and naturalistic elements of his writing, however, should not obscure the essential romantic cast. I would like to focus here on several works manifesting the striking similarity of London's vision to that of Rimbaud, and other Romantics, as it is expressed in the boat/sea metaphor. A number of other works might be examined, but I will limit myself here to brief explications of relevant aspects of *John Barleycorn*, *Martin Eden*, *The Sea Wolf*, *The Cruise of the Snark*, and the short story, "The Kanaka Surf."

John Barleycorn, London's self-proclaimed alcoholic memoir, was written three years before the author's death at the age of 40. Concerned with alcohol the book certainly is; but actually it is London's spiritual and intellectual autobiography, the literal facts of which are not always reliable. When he was 14, he claimed he had crossed San Francisco Bay in an open skiff in a roaring southwester "when even the schooner sailors doubted my exploit." At that age, having "drunk two men, drink for drink, into unconsciousness," I set sail, cast off, took my place at the tiller, the sheet in my hand, and headed across the channel. The skiff heeled over and plunged into it madly. The spray began to fly. I was at the pinnacle of exaltation. I sang... as I sailed. I was no boy of fourteen, living the mediocre ways of the sleepy town called Oakland. I was a man, a god, and the very elements rendered me allegiance as I bitted them to my will." Returning to the wharf with the tide out, now sober, he runs aground and flounders in the mud. "I paid for it. I was sick for a couple of days, meanly sick" (Rimbaud describes the stains on his boat from his vomit of cheap, blue wine). Yet London's account of what he admits in retrospect was "squalid and ridiculous and bestial," vibrates with a sense of liberation. Later, at 15 he abandons his 10-hour-day job in a cannery for "the winds of adventure" to be found sailing San Francisco Bay: "the smack and slap of the spirit of revolt, of adventure, of romance, of the things forbidden and done defiantly and grandly." "Such was my escape from the killing machine-toil... the introduction had begun with drink, and that life promised to continue with drink... Romance and adventure seemed always to go down the street locked arm in arm with John Barleycorn... Try to think of what it meant to me... not yet sixteen burning with the spirit of adventure, imagination maddened by the stuff I had drunk."

In such passages, of course, London is writing what purports to be direct autobiography, and thus he is not as intensely concerned with the will to be a poet as was the

adolescent Rimbaud. But it is to be remembered that London is writing of his adolescence from the perspective two decades later of the world-famous writer, a perspective that is informed by his increasing realization of his failure to achieve all that he had hoped his inspired imagination would lead him to, the ending of "this glorious passage in my life . . . made possible for me by John Barleycorn." Even at 15, one night, after a "prodigious drunk," he was possessed by a "maundering fancy of [swimming] out with the tide." I decided that this was all, that I had seen all, lived all, been all, that was worthwhile, and that now was the time to cease. The water was delicious . . . [to] my drink-maddened brain. Away with tears and regret. It was a hero's death, and by the hero's own hand and will." Whatever the boy had thought, London, as will become apparent, for over two decades (he was 37 when he wrote *John Barleycorn*) had, in his own terms, like Rimbaud—and Whitman in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," and others as well—been engrossed in his writing with what Harold Bloom has called the supreme act of the Romantic Imagination in relation to Keat's "Ode to a Nightingale": "the fluid dissolve or fade-out in which the limitations of time and space flee away, and the border between being and non-being, life and death, seem to crumble." The romantic ecstasy, of course, is always shadowed by despair. In London's experience, "the dramatic, romantic side of my imagination, drink-maddened to lunacy" fades to sobriety. On one level, then, an adolescent and doubtlessly exaggerated drunken exploit. On another level, however, it is the Romantic state of mind so vividly experienced that the question seems inevitable: When does he wake or dream?

In *Martin Eden*, a less direct autobiography—and an important American novel—less direct, although London said, *I was Martin Eden*," the experience of the writer, *as writer*, in relation to sea imagery is made more explicit. On a "treasure-hunting" voyage to the South Seas, Martin had first conceived the idea of becoming one of the "world's giants" as writer. He is ecstatic as "his splendid dream arose." "He was tortured by the exquisite beauty of the world and wished that Ruth [whom he worships] was there to share it with him. He decided that he would describe to her many of the bits of South Sea beauty. The creative spirit in him flamed up at the thought and urged that he recreate this beauty for a wider audience than Ruth. And then, in splendor and glory came the great idea. He would write. He would be one of the eyes through which the world saw, one of the ears through which it heard, one of the hearts through which it felt." "Once the idea had germinated, it mastered him, and the return voyage was like a dream. He was *drunken* (italics added) with unguessed power and felt that he could do anything."

Here as well, however, the ecstasy subsides into despair—and suicide. Disillusioned with his experience of success, even with writing (he "puts by the lute"), unaccompanied he takes a voyage to the South Seas. But the beauty no longer exhilarates him. Murmuring Swinburne's expression of relief "That even the weariest river/Winds somewhere safe to sea," he lowers himself out of the porthole of an ocean liner and swims downward as a bonita bites into his flesh. He must struggle against the will to live, even as he falls into darkness. "And at the instant he knew, he ceased to know." The union with nature, the self-immolation sought by 15-year-old Jack is achieved by his fictional

alter ego.

Superficially, Martin's disillusionment might seem merely his disappointment in love as Ruth is unable to understand or accept his writing and his disgust that his admiring readers do not really appreciate him for the right reasons. His despair, however, is more fundamental, less sophomoric. Martin, like his creator, like other Romantics as described by Frye, sees himself as floating "on top of a subhuman and submoral 'world as will.'" He is no "revolutionary optimist"—in fact, he attacks socialism as a "slave" philosophy. London, to the surprise of many readers, so strongly does the author seem to approve of his character, claimed to have written the novel in refutation of Martin on this point. Moreover, in *John Barleycorn* he asserts that his belief in "the people" saved him from suicide during his own "long sickness" of "pessimism." Whatever the validity of London's claims—Upton Sinclair said of London that he could never decide whether he was a revolutionary or a landed gentleman—for years he signed himself, "Yours for the Revolution"; and certainly his socialist writings are an important aspect of his work. For Martin, however, his "cargo of values" of intelligence and imagination are threatened by, in Frye's terms, "a dark menacing and subhuman power—Schopenhauer's world as will" As long as he is convinced that "he could do anything"—a conviction inseparable from his ecstatic worship of Ruth—he remains afloat, theoretically cognizant of such a vision, even relishing it, to Ruth's distress and eventual rejection of him, at least until he becomes a success. When Martin reads a story which he thinks highly of to Ruth, who finds it "dreadful" and "utterly horrible," he notes with "secret satisfaction" her fascination and responds, "It is life . . . and life is not always beautiful"; and, of course, he refuses to accept her admonition to avoid the "nasty things in the world," believing that he would be a lesser artist to do so. Eventually, when the "nastiness"—including Ruth's virtual offer to prostitute herself to him after he has become famous—imperils his equanimity, he is unable to stay afloat on the world he has come to experience more immediately.

Elsewhere, in such works as "The Terrible Solomons" and other fictions growing out of his experiences sailing in Melanesia, London writes, even "nastily" of the iniquity and corruption of man, black or white. Specifically in *The Sea Wolf*, London's protagonist is concerned to refute Schopenhauer's vision of life; and he must cope with the Sea Wolf himself as its embodiment, Wolf Larsen, one of London's most memorable creations. Even more extremely in "Batard" is the power of blackness evident; Black Leclere, the central figure, is ecstatic in his evil, especially as expressed in his music. The narrator remarks of the musician and the fiendish dog whom he torments with his playing, "There is a saying that when two devils come together hell is to pay"—especially if one devil is buried in the artist and the other in his audience. Thus, in some of his fiction, London explores a fearful symmetry, backing his unwilling yet responsive reader into an unpleasant corner of his mind. As Ruth Morse exclaimed, "It is not nice! It is nasty." In Frye's terms, it is an expression of one aspect of the romantic imagination. The drunken boat does not necessarily remain afloat.

But for many years and for millions of words, London attempted to keep it so.

Consider *The Cruise of the Snark*, the voyage of his 43-foot yacht, which London recounts in a book of that title published in 1911, two years after *Martin Eden*. In some parts, this work may be relegated to the realm of journalistic reporting—London's teaching himself navigation, or his experiences as an "amateur MD" responsible for the health of his crew, for example. London's casual attitude is suggested by his offer to name the vessel *Cosmopolitan Magazine* if the editor would only agree to buy all the copy mailed back from the proposed trip around the world. And London's explanation of the actual naming is in the same vein. "We named her the *Snark* because we could not think of any other name—this information is given for the benefit of those who otherwise might think there is something occult in the name." And yet the connotations of Lewis Carroll's imaginary voyage, however we may think of it—the pursuit of happiness, the search for the absolute are among the interpretations that have been offered—inevitably color London's account. In any event, the imagery of the narrator-writer-boat, at one with the sea, literally as well as metaphorically—naturalistically and romantically—was never expressed more vividly by London, a presentation that places his images with those of Rimbaud and other Romantic precursors, as we recall the *Bateau ivre* being penetrated by the pure natural element of the water, limitless and powerful. London is speaking of surfing: "The face of a wave may be only six feet, yet you can slide down it a quarter of a mile, or half a mile, and not reach the bottom. For, see, since a wave is only a communicated agitation or impetus, and since the water that composes a wave is changing every instant, new water is rising into the wave as fast as the wave travels If you still cherish the notion, while sliding, that the water is moving with you, thrust your arms into it and attempt to paddle; you will find that you have to be remarkably quick to get a stroke, for that water is dropping astern just as fast as you are rushing ahead." Charles Walcutt refers to this as London's involving the reader in "an intellectual adventure."⁷ It is also London's artistic adventure. To translate it to esthetic terms, the wave is the material with which the artist deals; here we might think of Wallace Stevens' dynamic romantic theory—London's act of finding what will suffice through his creative literary as well as physical expression. Like Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*, London is the boat—but not borne back ceaselessly into the past. It is closer to the pair caught up in Frost's "West-running Brook," but without the relatively controlled, somewhat facile, less "drunken" resolution. As Walcutt has perceived, "For London the living and writing became almost one, but it may be said that the writing really came first in the sense that it defined and directed the living He exists in his books as he writes, as he expresses, as he discovers the meanings and intensities for which he could not even yearn without language. He grows in the books and lives his evolving role between them, as the man in the flesh enacts the man in the books . . . he had to write the experience before he really knew it."⁸

London's romantic struggle with life thus continues throughout his works as throughout his life. In "The Kanaka Surf" written some two years before his death—whether through suicide or gross neglect of his health has never been finally ascertained—the metaphor is again presented powerfully in imagery that not only recalls the vision

of Rimbaud's *Bateau ivre*, but also incorporates London's characteristic and ambivalent acceptance of naturalistic fact. In "The White Silence" he had written of a "sole speck of life journeying across the ghostly wastes of a dead world. Man trembles at his audacity, realizes that his is a maggot's life, nothing more." The sea/boat imagery of "The Kanaka Surf," however, provides London with a more powerful vehicle for the reaches of his romantic-drunken, yet limited imagination. He describes a wave in these terms, the colors reminiscent of the vision of Rimbaud quoted above: "Beardless itself, it was the father of all bearded ones, a mile long, rising up far out beyond where the others rose, towering its solid bulk higher and higher till it blotted out the horizon . . . ever mounting and thinning to the transparency of the colors of the setting sun shooting athwart all the green and blue of it . . . a blue gem brilliant with innumerable sparkle points of rose and gold flashed through it by the sun. Against the face of the wave showed the heads of the man and the woman like two sheer specks. Specks they were, of the quick, adventuring among the blind elemental forces, daring the Titanic buffets of the sea."

I have mentioned London's ambivalences and ambiguities—and they are manifest. What I have wished to stress here is that they are typical as well as idiosyncratic. They are the ambiguities of his post-Romantic age, and the idiosyncrasy we remark in him is the scope of a vision that would not allow him to reject either of the principal post-Romantic courses summarized by Frye, that of the optimists, who believe with Marx that the structure of civilization can be made to suffice, that of the pessimists, who think of the values of intelligence and imagination continuously in danger of being submerged. It is London's considerable achievement that, consciously or no—and he was more conscious of what he took to be the inner pulse of things than he is often given credit for—he attempted to navigate his craft over such fathomless post-Romantic seas without holding to a single, safe course. A foolish consistency was never his metier. Of "Le Bateau ivre" Rimbaud stated that he has had the experience that others say they have had. If we listen carefully to London's voice, we can learn much of the experience he most certainly had, the vertiginous inner, as well as surface, experience that he typically and idiosyncratically shared with other drunken post-Romantic voyagers.

FOOTNOTES

1. *A Study of English Romanticism* (New York, 1968), pp. 32–3.
2. Enid Rhodes Peschel, "Arthur Rimbaud: The Aesthetics of Intoxication," in *Modern Critical Views: Arthur Rimbaud*, edited by Harold Bloom (New York, 1986), p. 83.
3. Peschel, p. 83.
4. Translated by John Porter Huston, *The Design of Rimbaud's Poetry* (Westport, Conn., 1963), p. 70.
5. Huston, pp. 70–71.
6. Peschel, p. 85.
7. *Jack London* (Minneapolis, 1966), p. 32.
8. Walcutt, pp. 33–34.

(Received October 18, 1988)