JACK LONDON'S PACIFIC VOYAGE OF TRANSFORMATION: AN ANTHROPOLOGIST LOOKS AT *THE CRUISE OF THE* SNARK (1911)[1]

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MOST PEOPLE TODAY ASSOCIATE THE AUTHOR JACK LONDON (1876–1916) with his adventure stories such as *Call of the Wild* (1903) or *White Fang* (1906), manly tales of derring-do set in the cold snowy wilds of the Yukon during its gold rush days. And yet, as literary critic John Eperjesi points out, "Even though Jack London is most well known for his Yukon fiction, the Pacific was his career" (2005, 107). For example, London's *The Sea Wolf* (1904)—another tale whose hero exhibits elements of the Nietzchian "*ubermensch*" or rugged individualist associated with London's prose—was set in the (cold) North Pacific.[2] Readers rarely, if ever, associate Jack London with images of palm trees, sandy beaches and surf boards, iconic symbols of the more salubrious South Pacific.[3]

However, in 1907, Jack London, his second wife Charmian Kittredge London, and a four-member crew that included the yet unknown, but soon-to-become-famous, adventurer Martin Johnson[4] left San Francisco on their own collective adventure. Sailing a forty-five-foot ketch named the *Snark* that London had paid for himself,[5] he and his crew set off on what was meant to be a multiyear cruise around the world that London was going to finance through dispatches he would write along the way.[6] London published some of these articles in a volume titled *The Cruise of the* Snark (1911). Basically a travelog, the books is the story of London's adventures at sea and London and his personal travails were its main focus of attention.

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Although he was more interested in reporting his own adventures at sea in *The Cruise of the* Snark than in conveying information about the peoples and cultures of the Pacific Islands, during the voyage he collected anecdotes, recorded observations, took photographs, and amassed artifacts throughout the Pacific. Objects in particular intrigued him. Canoes, calabashes, and carvings, even guns and surf boards all play a symbolic role in his writing about the South Pacific (London 1911). When London became dangerously ill in the Solomon Islands (he had pellagra as well as malaria), his around-the-world cruise was precipitously cut short. In the fall of 1908, he sailed down to Australia and sold the *Snark*, and in early 1909, he and Charmian returned by steamer to California.[7]

Critics of London's work have long wrestled with his contradictory stance as a socialist who nonetheless harbored distinct racial prejudices that reflected late-nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxon fears about the detrimental effects of the mixing of different races. Recent scholarship concerning London's views on race have begun to present a more complex picture of his attitudes (Riedl and Tietze 2006; Reesman 2009). Although these scholars have focused primarily on his short fiction and novels, I want to pick up on their interest in teasing out a more nuanced understanding of London's attitudes toward race by focusing on London's nonfiction in *The Cruise of the* Snark (1911).[8] Specifically, I suggest that London's experiences living and interacting with various Pacific Island people during his almost two-year voyage across the Pacific Ocean, some of which he recounted in *The Cruise of the* Snark, played a transformative role in changing—or at least challenging—his basic assumptions about race and racism.

Of immediate relevance to a discussion of representations of Pacific Islanders are London's prose images of the Pacific Islanders he encountered in Hawai'i, the Marquesas, the Society Islands, and the Solomon Islands. Many of these representations repeat or reaffirm tropes and images of the Pacific Islands and Islanders that were already well established in the western imaginary by the time London sailed the South Seas; others, such as that of the surfer, were images that London helped promote.

I suggest that experiences London had during his Pacific voyage, especially with individuals from the colonial settler cultures he encountered in the Pacific Islands, but also as a result of getting to know Pacific Islanders themselves, laid the groundwork for a transformation in London's outlook not only about Pacific Islanders but about race relations in general. While London remains the focus of essays in the collection, as the voyage progresses he portrays himself in an ironic, sometimes antiheroic light. London describes many of the white settlers he finds in the islands—missionaries, labor recruiters, and plantation owners in the Solomon Islands, an expatriate who fancies himself as a "natural man" transplanted from San Francisco to Tahiti—in less than flattering terms.

After the publication of *The Cruise of the* Snark, the Londons continued to return to Hawai'i, a place that had captured their imagination as well as their desire for a salubrious environment, until Jack's death in 1916. These subsequent visits also contributed to London's formulation of a new image of Pacific Islanders, one based neither on his earlier "romantic" or negatively "realistic" images but rather an amalgam of the two, a hybrid image of a "new man" of the future. Fundamental to this transformation, however, was London's cruise through the Pacific Islands on the *Snark*.

The Cruise of the Snark, or "Romancing the Yacht"

Jack London's endeavor to sail around the world in a yacht embodies the very title of this volume in that the voyage itself was borne of London's romantic idea of conquering the elements and describing the variety of cultures and peoples around the world with his pen and camera. Moreover, his mode of travel, a yacht that he built himself to sail the world's oceans and waterways, was adventure writ large.

The idea of the voyage had occurred to Jack in 1905 after having read Joshua Slocum's *Sailing Alone around the World* (Slocum 1999 [1900]).[9] Unlike Slocum, however, "[b]y the time he began to consider the *Snark* voyage, Jack was neither simply writer nor adventurer but—like Hemingway a generation later—both: a public adventurer who was expected to put himself in harm's way and to report the result to the panting public"(Madison 2004).

The reality of what such an adventure would entail was brought home to London almost from the very start with the problems he encountered in building the yacht. His trip was first thwarted by nature when the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 interrupted construction of the yacht. Then there was the problem of learning to navigate the craft on the high seas. Although London had been to sea, he was not a skilled navigator. Necessity forced him to learn how to navigate his yacht while at sea when the captain he had hired (Charmian's uncle) turned out to be inept at navigation and an alcoholic to boot.

Chapter VI: "A Royal Sport"—or, The Kanaka as "Brown Mercury"

After twenty-seven harrowing days at sea, London and his crew finally managed to reach the island of Oahu. More than simply relieved at making landfall, London and Charmian were captivated. London wrote: "It was all so beautiful and strange that we could not accept it as real. On the chart this place was called Pearl Harbor, but we called it Dream Harbor" (London 1911; but see also C. London 1915, 1917).

He then quickly added, "They don't know what they've got!"—a reference to Americans on the mainland, most of whom knew little about their nation's recently acquired territory of Hawai'i. The Londons were in no hurry to leave (they remained in the islands for almost five months while their yacht was made seaworthy and a new captain was hired). Perhaps Hawai'i appealed to London's sense of "Manifest Destiny"—America's newest frontier; perhaps, too, the Hawaiian Islands' relative proximity to Asia and, as we will see, London's eventual admiration for the mixture of races that coexisted together in the Hawaiian Islands, inspired in him a model of a new type of Pan-Pacific society.[10]

London wrote about two quite different aspects of Hawaiian culture and society in *The Cruise of the* Snark—the "royal sport" of surfing and the lepers of Molokai. Here, I only discuss what London had to say about surfing, largely because what he published in *The Cruise of the* Snark about his visit to Molokai—a very favorable description of the life of the lepers quarantined there—had been written specifically at the request of one of London's Honolulu friends, Lucius E. Pinkham, the president of the Board of Health and later governor of the territory. Although I have no reason to doubt the claim made by one of London's biographers that "London's humane descriptions of lepers went a long way toward changing world opinion" about the conditions on Molokai, I am more interested in his writing that may have been less directly mediated by favors to friends.[11]

London's description of surfing, on the other hand, deserves discussion because he was present in Hawai'i at the time that the ancient Polynesian sport, previously condemned by American missionaries in Hawai'i in the early nineteenth century, was beginning to make a comeback (Finney and Houston 1996). London's enthusiasm for surfing—and his writing about the royal sport—played an important role in the twentieth-century development of surfing as a worldwide sport.[12]

An awe-struck London lavished adulation upon the bronzed Hawaiian surfer he observed at Waikiki Beach:

> He is a Mercury—a brown Mercury. His heels are winged, and in them is the swiftness of the sea. In truth, from out of the sea he has leaped upon the back of the sea, and he is riding the sea that roars and bellows and cannot shake him from its back. But not frantic outreaching and balancing is his. He is impassive, motionless as a statue carved suddenly by some miracle out of the sea's depth from which he rose. And straight on toward shore he flies on his winged

> heels and the white crest of the breaker. There is a wild burst of foam, a long tumultuous rushing sound as the breaker falls futile and spent on the beach at your feet; and there, at your feet steps calmly ashore a Kanaka, burnt golden and brown by the tropic sun (*Snark*, 52).

Like the French explorer Bougainville before him, who in the eighteenth century wrote of Tahiti as "*la Nouvelle Cythere*" and described Tahitian women as Greek goddesses, London applies the image of the swift, fleet-footed, Roman messenger god Mercury to describe the Hawaiian surfer he watched glide effortlessly over the waves.

As Bernard Smith (1985: 41–42) reminds us, although Bougainville's comparisons between the Tahitians and ancient Greeks were playful, "it is to be remembered that the eighteenth century viewed the ancient Greeks as gifted children who had lived at the dawn of civilization, themselves noble savages." Moreover, by extension, Bougainville attributed his sense that the semitropical natural abundance and beauty of Tahiti itself was like the Garden of Eden, thus a new Arcadia.

Echoing similar sentiments about the Hawaiian environment and the role of the surfer in it, London concludes by saying: "He is a Kanaka—and more, he is a man, a member of the kingly species that has mastered matter and the brutes and lorded it over creation" (*Snark*, 52).

London being London, he quickly adds, "And still further one thinks . . . you are a man, one of the kingly species, and what that Kanaka can do, you can do yourself" (*Snark*, 52). And he sets off to try the sport himself. After first describing the physics of surfing—how waves are formed and travel, how surf is formed, etc.—he then narrates the trials and tribulations of learning to surf. Poking fun at himself, as he ends up in bed with a terrible sunburn, he writes ironically: "When describing the wonderful water of Hawaii I forgot to describe the wonderful sun of Hawaii. . . . For the first time in my life I was sunburned unawares" (*Snark*, 59). He was sunburned to such a degree that he could not even walk. However, not one to be defeated, London ends the chapter saying, "Upon one thing I am resolved: the *Snark* shall not sail from Honolulu until I, too, wing my heels with swiftness of the sea and become a sunburned, skin-peeling Mercury" (*Snark*, 60).

There are several things to note here about London's representations of Hawaiians. First is the use of the term "Kanaka," which white people used widely in Hawai'i and elsewhere in the Pacific Islands to describe indigenous islanders (see Lepowsky, this volume).[13] Second is that aside from the glowing, but totally impersonal, description of the Hawaiian surfer—the brown Mercury—London has nothing else to say in the chapter about native

Hawaiian surfers. He received his surfing lessons from a *haole*, an American from the mainland named Alexander Ford who had recently taken up the sport and vowed to make it the basis of a burgeoning tourist industry in Hawai'i.[14] George Freeth, a young island-born swimmer whose father was Irish and mother half-Hawaiian also helped London learn to surf. Freeth, who is sometimes credited with being "the Father of Surfing," left Oahu in July 1907 with a letter of introduction in his pocket from London. He settled in Southern California where, among other things, he coached swim teams in Los Angeles and San Diego while entertaining crowds on the beaches with his skill at surfing, until he died prematurely in 1919, a victim of the flu pandemic.[15]

However, we do have some clues as to who London's brown Mercury might have been: a local Honolulu youth named Duke Kahanamoku.[16] Freeth, who was seven years older than Kahanamoku, was his swim coach at the time. Not only is there a photograph of Kahanamoku in London's Hawai'i album,[17] but Charmian later mentions him by name in *The Log of the* Snark (1915, xx) and *Our Hawaii* (1917, xxx).

A few years after the Londons' first trip to Hawai'i Kahanamoku would make headlines as an Olympic swimmer, winning gold medals in freestyle for the United States in 1912 and 1920. After Freeth's death, Duke Kahanamoku went on to popularize surfing in Southern California and Australia. Today he is immortalized by a statue on Waikiki Beach and a chain of eponymous restaurants in California and Hawai'i.

The fact that London mentioned his white friends Ford and Freeth by name but not Kahanamoku fits the common pattern of westerners' representations of native "Others," denying them their identity as specific individuals. Of course, when London published *The Cruise of the* Snark in 1911, Kahanamoku had not yet won his Olympic medals. Perhaps if he had, Jack, like Charmian in her 1917 memoir, probably would have mentioned Kahanamoku by name.

Chapter X: *Typee*: London's Marquesas—Romance vs. Reality

After an almost five-month stay in the Hawaiian Islands, London and his crew sailed from Hilo for the Marquesas. London was excited about visiting the Marquesas since much of his motivation for traveling to the South Seas was his love of Melville's novel *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (1846):

> When I was a little boy, I read . . . Herman Melville's *Typee*; and many long hours I dreamed over its pages. Nor was it all dreaming. I resolved then and there, mightily, come what would, that when I

> had gained strength and years, I, too, would voyage to Typee. . . . The years passed, but *Typee* was not forgotten (*Snark*, 98).

Thus it was with great anticipation of the fulfillment of a boyhood promise to himself that London arrived in the exact harbor in Nukuhiva where Melville describes the *Dolly* being anchored before his protagonist Tom [aka Tommo] and his accomplice Toby jump ship. There is even a photograph of the harbor in London's photo album of the Marquesas.[17] Beside the photo Charmian has written: "Places that small boys run away from home to sea."[18] Appropriately, London's chapter about the Marquesas is simply titled "*Typee*."

Like Melville's protagonist's experience in Nukuhiva, where Tommo was rescued by the Typees, who tend to his wounds, feed, and house him, London's visit to the Marquesas begins benignly enough when he and his crew are invited to a local feast. London writes:

> . . . we attended a feast, where one Taiara Tamarii, the son of an Hawaiian sailor who deserted from a whaleship, commemorated the death of his Marquesan mother by roasting fourteen whole hogs . . . (*Snark*, 100).

London's description of the feast develops into a discourse on the subject of cannibalism, a topic that his magazine audience most likely would have relished—indeed, anticipated—since cannibalism is a trope long associated in the western mind with Pacific Islanders.

London sets the stage for his reader by recounting:

> From the distance came . . . men's voices, which blended into a wild, barbaric chant that sounded incredibly savage, smacking of blood and war. Then, through the vistas of tropical foliage appeared a procession of savages, naked save for gaudy loin-cloths. They advanced slowly, uttering deep gutteral cries of triumph and exaltation. Slung from young saplings carried on their shoulders were mysterious objects of considerable weight, hidden from view by wrappings of green leaves (*Snark*: 100–1).

Having raised our expectations, London then lets us down: "Nothing but pigs, innocently fat and roasted to a turn, were inside those wrappings." Reality, we learn, is far more prosaic than what we had imagined. But London deftly turns the prosaic into an opportunity to remind us of the Marquesans' savage past:

> The men were carrying them into camp in imitation of old times when they carried in "long pig." Now long-pig is not pig. Long-pig is the Polynesian euphemism for human flesh; and these descendants of man-eaters, a king's son at their head, brought in the pigs to table as of old their grandfathers had brought in their slain enemies (*Snark*, 101).

Like Melville, London plays to his audience's desire for the grotesque.

After cleverly evoking a transposition in the reader's mind between pigs and people, London then quotes from the scene in *Typee* where Tommo witnesses the remains of a cannibal feast, "the bones still fresh with moisture, and with particles of flesh clinging to them here and there," giving his reader the chance to savor the gruesome spectacle Melville had cooked up in his vivid imagination.

London, bemoaning the fact that he will not have the chance "in these degenerate days to see any long-pig, eaten," focuses instead on his acquisition of a "duly certified Marquesan calabash, oblong in shape, curiously carved, over a century old, from which has been drunk the blood of two shipmasters" (*Snark*: 101–2). Material objects come to signify an exotic past not so long gone.

He then recounts a tale—perhaps apocryphal—about one of the two deceased captains, an unscrupulous individual who:

> . . . sold a decrepit whale-boat, as good as new what of the fresh white paint, to a Marquesan chief. But no sooner had the captain sailed away than the whale-boat dropped to pieces. It was his fortune, some time afterward, to be wrecked, of all places, on that particular island. The Marquesan chief was ignorant of rebates and discounts; but he had a primitive sense of equity and an equally primitive conception of the economy of nature, and he balanced the account by eating the man who had cheated him (*Snark*, 102).

London obviously delighted in the reciprocal retribution of this act in which the chief, acting according to his own set of cultural rules, recognized that one bad turn deserves another.

The calabash was not the only object London acquired from the Marquesans. In the same chapter, he recounts how one day while exploring the island he and his companions:

> . . . crawled through thick jungle to make the acquaintance of a venerable moss-grown idol, where had foregathered a German

> trader and a Norwegian captain to estimate the weight of said idol, and to speculate upon the depreciation in value caused by sawing him in half. They treated the old fellow sacrilegiously, digging their knives into him to see how hard he was and how deep his mossy mantle, and commanding him to rise up and save them trouble by walking down to the ship himself. In lieu of which, nineteen Kanakas slung him on a frame of timbers and toted him to the ship, where, battened down under hatches, even now he is cleaving the South Pacific Hornward and toward Europe—the ultimate abiding place for all good heathen idols . . . (*Snark*, 100).

Here London's ironic view of Europe—and so-called civilization in general—comes through, for he is well aware of the long history of Christian missionaries and their role in undermining the "heathen" religions of the Pacific Islanders. It has not been lost on him that the same Europeans who bemoaned the pagan practices of the so-called savages of the South Seas nonetheless valued the "good heathen idols" as items worthy of their museums and private collections, curiosities of another, less-civilized world.

London, perhaps not wanting to be seen as a hypocrite, then continues his description of the fate of such "good heathen idols" by noting:

> . . . save for a few in America and one in particular who grins beside me as I write, and who, barring shipwreck, will grin somewhere in my neighborhood until I die. And he will win out. He will be grinning when I am dust (*Snark*, 100).

And, indeed, London was absolutely right, for although he died just seven years after he had obtained the figure, the "idol" still exists. It can still be seen on display, along with numerous other artifacts that Jack and Charmian acquired on their Pacific voyage, in the House of Happy Walls, a museum that Charmian built in Jack's memory at their ranch in Glen Ellen, California.[19]

While Marquesan objects might endure over time, the Marquesan people, according to London, had not. Underlying many of London's reactions to the Pacific Islands and Islanders he encountered is a profound sense of disappointment in what he found there. His disappointment is the result of the contrast between the romantic images he had created in his imagination, images based on novels such as *Typee* and the travel literature he had read and the reality he was experiencing.

His most explicit statement of this disappointment comes in his chapter about the Marquesas. Referring to the incident of the removal of the stone figure, London wrote:

> The Marquesans of the present generation lack the energy to hoist and place such huge stones. Also, they lack the incentive. . . . For the Marquesans are perishing, and, to judge from conditions at Taiohae, the one thing that retards their destruction is the infusion of fresh blood. A pure Marquesan is a rarity. They seem to be all half-breeds and strange conglomerations of dozens of different races. Nineteen able laborers are all the trader at Taiohae can muster for loading of copra on shipboard, and, in their veins runs the blood of English, American, Dane, German, French, Corsican, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Hawaiian, Paumotan, Tahitian, and Easter Islander. There are more races than there are persons, but it is a wreckage of races at best. Life faints and stumbles and gasps itself away (*Snark*: 102–3).

As with this paragraph, the overwhelming tone of this chapter is regret tinged with sadness and remorse: regret that he got to the Marquesas too late to experience them as Melville had and remorse for the inexorable changes that had occurred to the Marquesans. London's sentiments represent two common western themes about the Pacific. The first is the contrast between the former "idyllic," "utopian," or "paradisical" South Pacific and the contemporary reality of degradation. The other, related to it, is the well-worn theme that Pacific Islanders were a dying population.

We see in London's comments about the Marquesans some of his most egregious statements about race in which he expresses his abhorrence of the mixing of races and his belief that pure "types" are dying out. Related to this fear is another that was common throughout nineteenth- and early twentieth-century colonial worlds, the fear of "half-breeds" or of "mongrelization."

However, as London scholars Reidl and Tietz have noted, by the time London weighed anchor from San Francisco on April 23, 1907, the Pacific Islands had already been in racial turmoil for some 300 years (2006, 14). It was only a mere fifty years between when Melville had been in the Marquesas and when London arrived there; hence, the images of a pure Marquesan people that London had in his imagination were just that: fantasies, figments of his imagination (Ellis 1997).

What we see in London's reactions to the Marquesans he encounters is a projection of his own racial fears. As Jeanne Campbell Reesman points out in her study of Jack London's views on race, "The worst fear for racialists," a term she uses to describe London, "was miscegenation and the production of what they called 'mongrels'" (2009, 43). This latter phenomenon caused "a phobia London found hard to relinquish. Racialists thought they were doing their scientific and civic duty by warning of 'mongrelization.' . . . Their aims and their fears found a home in London, in part due to his own anxieties about his 'mixed' heritage" (Reesman 2009, 43).

There are two another common western tropes about Pacific Islanders frequently found together. On the one hand, there is the prurient fascination with Pacific peoples' cannibalistic pasts, and, on the other hand, a discourse of relativism that goes back at least to Michel de Montaigne's essay "Of Cannibals" (1580), that simultaneously condemns this horrific practice while vouching for the otherwise nobility or *naivité* of the Noble Savage and arguing for a similarly savage past of our own, tropes that London demonstrated with his tale of the double-crossing captain who got his due at the hands of a Marquesan chief.

Toward the end of the chapter London wrote rhapsodically, almost hauntingly, about the soft Marquesan night:

> The air was like balm, faintly scented with the breath of flowers. It was a magic night, deathly still, without the slightest breeze to stir the foliage; and one caught one's breath and felt the pang that is almost hurt, so exquisite was the beauty of it. . . . Only to snare our attention with the painfully ironic observation that "[n]ear by, a woman panted and moaned in her sleep, and all about us the dying islanders coughed in the night" (*Snark,* 109).

Thus ends the chapter.

Chapter XII: The High Sea of Abundance—London as Ethnographer

In stark contrast to the Marquesas, the highlight of London's Pacific voyage was the time he spent in the Society Islands where he made the acquaintance of Tehei, an accomplished sailor, and his hospitable and genial wife, Bihaura. London met Tehei in Raiatea where he had admired Tehei's exceptionally fine outrigger canoe. This is the one instance in *The Cruise of the* Snark where London the seaman expressed his admiration for a Pacific Islander's acumen as sailor and craftsman:

> It was not a mere boat, not a mere canoe, but a sailing machine. And the man in it sailed it by his weight and his nerve—principally by the latter. . . . "Well, I know one thing," I announced. "I don't leave Raiatea till I have a ride in that canoe" (*Snark,* 123).

And, of course, he did. Not only did London sail with Tehei on his canoe, like Captain Cook before him, who also enlisted the navigational acumen of a Society Islander on his Pacific voyages, London invited Tehei and his wife to join them on their voyage. Before doing so, Tehei and Bihaura had insisted that Jack and Charmian be their guests at their home on the nearby island of Tahaa.

London wrote about this experience in Chapter XII of *The Cruise of the* Snark, titled "The High Seat of Abundance." He started the chapter with a quote from William Ellis's *Polynesian Researches* (1833). Ellis, a member of the London Missionary Society, wrote one of the first published accounts of the people and cultures of the Society Islands:

> On the arrival of strangers, every man endeavored to obtain one as a friend and carry him off to his own habitation, where he is treated with the greatest kindness by the inhabitants of the district; they place him on a high seat and feed him with abundance of the finest food.

The Londons' visit to the couple's home developed into a four-day holiday. It was one of the only times—if not *the* only—during their eighteen-month voyage when they actually stayed in the home of islanders:

> We were certainly in the high seat of abundance. First, there was glorious raw fish, caught several hours before from the sea and steeped the intervening time in lime-juice diluted with water. Then came roast chicken. Two coconuts, sharply sweet, served for drink. There were bananas that tasted like strawberries and that melted in the mouth, and there was banana-poi that made one regret that his Yankee forebears ever attempted puddings. Then there was boiled yam, boiled taro, and roasted *feis*, which last are nothing more or less than large, mealy, juicy, red-colored cooking bananas. We marveled at the abundance, and, even as we marveled, a pig was brought on, a whole pig, a sucking pig, swatched in green leaves and roasted upon the hot stones of a native oven, the most honorable and triumphant dish in the Polynesian cuisine (*Snark*, 128).

London was clearly impressed with Tehei's and Bihaura's kindness and generosity:

> . . . of all the entertainment I have received in this world at the hands of all sorts of races in all sorts of places, I have never received

> entertainment that equaled this at the hands of this brown-skinned couple of Tahaa. I do not refer to the presents, the free-handed generousness, the high abundance, but to the fineness of courtesy and consideration and tact, and to the sympathy that was real sympathy in that it was understanding (*Snark*, 129).

However, he then concludes with a statement that anthropologists might find, at the very least, naïve—after all, London had read Ellis on the customs of the Society Islanders—if not patronizing:

> Perhaps the most delightful feature of it was that it was due to no training, to no complex social ideals, but that it was the untutored and spontaneous outpouring from their hearts (*Snark,* 129).

London scholars consider this chapter one of the weakest in the book (Moreland 1982; Reesman 2009). However, as an ethnographer, I find it one of the most significant and insightful—both for London's description of a key element of Pacific Island cultures and for its revelation of London's character. We see in this experience with Tehei and his wife the positive impact that specific Pacific Islanders had on London. As Jeanne Campbell Reesman points out in *Jack London's Racial Lives*: "It is in the 'specific situation' that London is least racist; like socialism, race for him had its personal and its abstract formations, and he is better in the particulars than in the theories" (2009, 7).

Not only did London hire Tehei as crew, according to Reidl and Tietze (2006, 106), he was the inspiration for Otoo, the protagonist of "The Heathen," considered to be one of his finest short stories. They consider the story to be London's "paean to the virtues of true comradeship," the type of relationship between two men that London had longed for and seemingly found in his friendship with Tehei (Reidl and Tietze 2006, 262). Although Reidl and Tietze recognize the difference between fact and fiction, it does appear that in Tehei London found a fellow "Man-Comrade"—a combination of athleticism, technical skill, kindness, and generosity of spirit in another man—that he had told Charmian he not only admired, but longed for.[20]

Chapter XV: "Cruising in the Solomons"—London's "Heart of Darkness"?

If the Londons' decision to accept Tehei's invitation to visit Tahaa resulted in one of the happiest experiences on their voyage, their decision to accept an invitation from an Australian labor recruiter to go "blackbirding" (as the recruitment of Melanesian laborers was derogatorily referred to) in the Solomon Islands represented the nadir.

By this time London was physically debilitated from recurring attacks of malaria, tropical ulcers that refused to heal, and a strange disease (later determined to be pellagra) that was slowly eating away at the skin on the backs of his hands. With his typical ironic touch, the "cruise" London describes in "Cruising in the Solomons," was one of the most harrowing incidents he and his crew endured during their entire time in the Pacific. In accepting Captain Jansen's invitation to accompany him on board the *Minota* on a labor-recruiting trip in Malaita, one of the most populous of the Solomon Islands, to round-up island men to work as indentured laborers on plantations in Queensland and Fiji, London's entourage was caught up in events that were not of their own doing but that dramatically demonstrated the racial tensions between islanders and whites characteristic of Malaita in 1908.[21]

The drama began when a brewing storm caused the *Minota* to crash on the reef, dangerously close to unfriendly Malaitans on shore. As London recounted:

> When the *Minota* first struck, there was not a canoe in sight; but like vultures circling down out of the blue, canoes began to arrive from every quarter. The boat's crew, with rifles at the ready, kept them lined up a hundred feet away with a promise of death if they ventured nearer. And there they clung, a hundred feet away, black and ominous, crowded with men, holding their canoes with their paddles on the perilous edge of the breaking surf. In the meantime the bushmen were flocking down from the hills, armed with spears, Sniders, arrows, and clubs until the beach was massed with them. To complicate matters, at least ten of our recruits had been enlisted from the very bushmen ashore who were waiting hungrily for the loot of the tobacco and trade goods and all that we had on board (*Snark,* 169).

Earlier London had explained that six months before the *Minota* had been captured by Malaitans as part of a revenge mission. Not only had her previous captain been chopped to pieces with tomahawks, but, referring to the practice in the Solomon Islands of headhunting, ". . . according to the barbarian sense of equity on that sweet isle, she owed two more heads" (*Snark,* 157).

The potentially dire incident ended safely when London, asked by the *Minota*'s captain to try to get a message to the captain of another boat in the area, decides to ask a missionary who appeared nearby in a small whale-boat, to help him get a Malaitan to take a message to the other captain:

> "I know what you think," the missionary called out to the Malaitans in their canoes. "You think plenty tobacco on the schooner and you're going to get it. I tell you plenty rifles on schooner. You no get tobacco, you get bullets." At last, one man, alone in a small canoe, took the letter and started (*Snark,* 170).

Three hours later, another whale-boat lead by a Captain Keller, came to their aid:

> . . . wet with rain and spray, a revolver in his belt, his boat's crew fully armed, anchors and hawsers heaped high amidships, coming as fast as wind could drive—the white man, the inevitable white man, coming to a white man's rescue (*Stark,* 170).

Although this adventure ends well for London's entourage, Captain Jansen, and the *Minota*, and although London's statement about "the inevitable white man" tend to reinforce the sense of London as a racist, I think that it is also possible to see in this phrase a sense of irony on London's part. Embedded in this vignette, which for his readers at the time would have reinforced images of the savage heathen are all the elements of the colonialist enterprise in Melanesia at the turn of the century: labor recruiters, missionaries, naked islanders armed with tomahawks, bows and arrows (plus a Snider or two).

Yet London appears to have been genuinely repulsed by the often excessive violence inflicted on the islanders by the labor recruiters and the plantation managers he met in the Solomon Islands. Indeed, Riedl and Tietze suggest that in Malaita, "[l]ike his literary hero, Joseph Conrad, London became increasingly absorbed by the 'fascination of the abomination.'" They go on to suggest that "in the weird and problematic motivations, the wild potential for moral corruption, the inhuman savagery of which both sides in the venal project were capable, and the stench and rot and meaninglessness at the core of this racial interaction, London found his own heart of darkness" (2006, 27)—and he was repelled by it.

London's Contributions to a "History of the Present"

As has been noted about London in general, what is most telling about his representations of Pacific Islanders in *The Cruise of the* Snark is the "patchwork inconsistency of Jack's racial thinking" (Reidl and Tietze 2006, 107). Although he expresses an affinity toward the Polynesians he meets in Hawai'i and the Society Islands, his characterizations of Melanesians are a study in contrast. For example, in "Cruising in the Solomons" London plays up the image of Melanesians as primitive natives, describing Solomon Islanders as ". . . naked savages. And when I say naked, I mean naked. Not one vestige of clothing did they have on, unless nose-rings, ear-plugs, and shell armlets be accounted clothing" (*Snark,* 159).

For London, it was the "soft primitivism" of Hawai'i and the Society Islands that had the most lasting attraction for him. It is not difficult to conclude that London felt more comfortable among the lighter-skinned Polynesians—and, perhaps not surprisingly, among those islanders who had been more westernized as a result of their lengthier and more concentrated colonization by Europeans and Americans—than among the darker-skinned Melanesians in the more remote locations of the Solomon Islands. Perhaps, however, if London had been feeling better and been able to stay longer in the Solomon Islands, he would have had the opportunity to get to know some of those "naked savages," and his opinion of them might have changed or at least become more nuanced.

Nevertheless, I suggest that it was the combination of London's experiences in the Society Islands *and* the Solomon Islands that together had a transformative impact on his ideas about racial mixing. Although in the accounts of his travels that he wrote at the outset of his voyage across the Pacific London appears to have been more interested in his own adventures at sea than he was in conveying information about the peoples and cultures of the Pacific Islands, once he left the South Pacific and returned to California, his experiences with Pacific Islanders never completely left his mind. Until his death in 1916, he continued to return to Hawai'i and to write short stories and novels based on people and events he had either witnessed or heard about on his cruise on the *Snark*.

Even though aspects of London's writing in *The Cruise of the* Snark reinscribed well-worn western stereotypes of Pacific Islanders, I suggest that scholars of the history of Pacific Island cultures take a closer look at the rich trove of data—visual, material, and textual—that Jack London and his associates produced during their sojourn in the Pacific. The material objects, photographs, short stories, notes, scrapbooks, and travelog, *The Cruise of the* Snark, are important for our deeper understanding of the "history of the present" in the Pacific. They can give us new insights into a transitional moment in American intellectual life at the dawn of the twentieth century, a moment when individuals such as London—always wanting to be in the vanguard of new developments, always searching for new adventures and vistas—began to envision a new understanding of the United States' relationship with the Hawaiian Islands and, by extension, with the vast Pacific and its many island cultures.

There is no doubt that we can still see in many of London's comments about Pacific Islanders traces of familiar nineteenth-century racist discourses. We can also see in his admiration of the physical prowess and bodily perfection of Pacific Islanders, such as Duke Kahanamoku and Tehei, the perpetuation of certain long-standing western stereotypes of Pacific Islanders. However, in his obvious distain for the arrogance and violence of the British plantation owners he encountered in the Solomon Islands, we also see an incipient self-consciousness about the injustices westerners were inflicting on Pacific Islanders. And, although it can be argued that the enthusiasm London's experiences in Hawai'i engendered about the possibilities the islands offered the United States as a new imperialist Pacific frontier (Eperjesi 2005), it can also be argued that these same experiences opened London to a broader understanding of racial integration. For example, when London returned to Hawai'i in 1915 and 1916, he gave talks at the Pan-Pacific Union, an organization created by his friend Alexander Hume Ford whom he'd met on his first extended visit to Hawai'i in 1907. His 1915 lecture, published as "The Language of the Tribe" reflects what some have identified as his recognition of "the value of racial mixing and interaction . . . he now saw that interaction between races and cultures is inevitable, and that communication and understanding between races is both necessary and good" (Loudermilk 2006).

Even though from our present postcolonial perspective many of London's descriptions of Pacific Islanders in *The Cruise of the* Snark reinscribe well-worn stereotypes of cannibals and head-hunters, Adonises or paradises lost, my aim here has not been to rehash Orientalist arguments about western representations of the Other, nor to echo the recent work of London scholars, such as Reesman or Riedl and Tietze, who argue for the value of London's enlightened view of race relations in his South Seas fiction, exemplified by the short stories London wrote on his return from his aborted cruise around the world.

Ironically, when London sold the *Snark* in the South Pacific—for a fraction of its original cost—the new owners turned the vessel into a blackbirding ship. In her memoir, *I Married Adventure*, Martin Johnson's wife, Osa Johnson, recalled seeing the *Snark* in the summer of 1917 when she and her husband cruised the same Melanesian waters where Martin and Jack had first encountered the blackbirding trade:

> [Our] ship stopped at the little port of Api [Epi, in present-day Vanuatu] to leave mail and supplies and to take on copra. Leaning on the rail we were watching the activity in the harbor when Martin straightened suddenly. His face was drawn and tense. I followed the direction of his gaze, but all I saw was a small, dirty recruiting ship.

> . . . The paint had once been white under all that filth, and her lines were beautiful. Suddenly my breath caught in my throat. "Not the *Snark*!" I said. . . . I looked up at Martin. He shook his head. "I'm glad Jack and Charmian never saw her that way," he said, swallowing hard (Johnson 1940, 128).

The irony of the *Snark* becoming a recruiting ship would not have been lost on London, for not only did the ship, in a negative sense, become what it beheld in the Solomons, its very demise and decreptitude could be seen as symbolic of the rotten system of blackbirding and its violent race relations that sparked within London the ember of a new vision for a different future for racial intermingling in the Pacific. The *Snark* had been the vehicle that transported London through the Pacific and allowed him to experience a personal as well as political transformation in how he viewed such things as racial intermixing and the future of not only the Pacific Islanders, but, by extension, of the United States.

NOTES

1. The impetus for this article came from an invitation from the Pasadena Public Library and the Huntington Library, San Marino, California in October 2008 to present a lecture as part of their National Endowment for Humanities endowed "The Big Read," an event focused on Jack London's *Call of the Wild*. Much of the research for this paper is based upon my use of the extensive Jack London archives at the Huntington Library. In particular, I want to thank Huntington archivist Sara S. Hodson for her help with the London archives and photographs. The book she and her colleagues published on the collection of London photographs at the Huntington was especially helpful (Reesman, Hodson, and Adam 2010)

2. See, for example, Jennifer Ratner-Rosenhagen's discussion of London's interest in Nietzche in her book *The American Nietzsche: The History of an Icon and his Ideas* (2011).

3. Refer to Finney and Housten, *History of the Ancient Hawaiian Sport of Surfing* (1996).

4. Martin Johnson and his wife Osa later became adventurers and filmmakers best known for their expeditions and travelogs in Africa. However, Johnson's career as an explorer and entrepreneur of the exotic began with his voyage with London on the *Snark* (Johnson 1913; Johnson 1940; Imperato and Imperato 1992; Ahrens, Lindstrom, and Paisley 2013).

5. London's very choice of a name for his boat, the *Snark*, is a reference to Lewis Carroll's poem, *The Hunting of the* Snark (2006 [1876]) and the perhaps ironic idea of an unattainable or at least fanciful goal. As Sidney Williams and Falconer Madan have said of the poem: "it describes with infinite humour the impossible voyage of an improbable crew to find an inconceivable creature," *In Handbook of the Literature of the Rev. C.L. Dodgson,* as quoted by Martin Gardner in Carroll and Gardner (2006 [1876], xxxii).

6. London not only had an advance and royalties from his publisher, Macmillan, to help pay for the trip but also had complicated arrangements with *Woman's Home Companion*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Collier*'s to provide them with different types of articles (Reesman, 2009, 118).

7. While in Sydney, London covered the famous Burns-Johnson fight in which the African-American Johnson soundly defeated the white Canadian Tommy Burns (1970). For more details about the fight, see James Haley (2010: 256–57) and Earle Labor (2013).

8. For other work that deals with issues of race in London's nonfiction, see Metraux (2009). Metraux argues that London was ahead of his time in many of his insights about the rise of Japan and China as powers to be reckoned with in the west.

9. Slocum had the distinction of accomplishing the first solo circumnavigation of the globe.

10. For more discussion of London's ideas of a Pan-Pacific society, see Jeanne Campbell Reesman (2009). See also Daniel Metraux's (2009) comments concerning London's prescience about the political and economic rise of China and Japan in the twentieth century.

11. There is an interesting story waiting to be told about the role of writers, including Mark Twain, Robert Lewis Stevenson, and London and their accounts of leprosy in Hawai'i. For more details about London, see James Slagel (1996: 172–91) and Rod Edmond (1997), as well as A. Grove Day's introduction to *Stories of Hawaii by Jack London* (1986).

12. For a negative appraisal the legacy of London's writing about the Hawaiian Islands, see John Eperjesi's essay (2005: 105–29. For more about the ancient sport of surfing in Hawaii and Duke Kahanamoku, see Finney (1959) and Osmond, Phillips, and O'Neill (2006).

13. The term is Polynesian in origin, meaning "people" or "person." After colonization, workers from Pacific Islands employed in British colonies and in the North American fur trade and goldfields were referred to as Kanakas.

14. For more about Ford, see Valerie Noble (1980). Among other things, in 1908, Ford founded the famous Outrigger Club in Honolulu, thus contributing to the development of Hawai'i as a center of cultural tourism. For more on the topic of Hawaiian cultural tourism, see Desmond (1999) and Eperjesi (2005).

15. Jeannette DeWyze, "90 Years of Curl: Who Caught the First Wave?" *San Diego Reader*, December 14, 2006.

16. The story is told that Duke's name was first given to his father by Queen Liliokalani. His father then passed the name on to his son (Osmond, Phillips, and O'Neill 2006).

17. Jack London Archives, Huntington Library, London Photographic Collection. See also Reesman, Hodson, and Adam (2010)

18. Jack London Archives, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, album no. 57. Photo no. 07158.

19. The House of Happy Walls is part of the Beauty Ranch complex at Jack London State Park, Glen Ellen, California.

20. Reidl and Tietz quote from a letter London wrote to Charmian in 1903 (2006, 105). The letter is found in Jack London, Letters (1988: 370–71.

21. In discussing the history of the British pacification of Malaita, historian James Boutilier points out that Malaita, the most populous of all the islands in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, supplied the bulk of indentured labor for plantations in Queensland and Fiji. This experience, combined with the effects of imported firearms and the large-scale repatriation of laborers from Queensland in 1906, a year and a half before London arrived there, "confused and delayed the pacification process" (1983: 45).

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