

## Iwano Hōmei and Jack London: Naturalism and Its Heresy

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From a chronological point of view, Iwano Hōmei<sup>1</sup> (1873 – 1923) belonged to the age of naturalism. In fact, his work *Tandeki* (Self-indulgence, 1909), along with Tayama Katai's<sup>2</sup> *Futon* (The Quilt), is said to be a representative work of naturalism. Although Katai and Tokuda Shūsei<sup>3</sup> are acknowledged naturalists, Hōmei, while he worked along the lines of naturalism, is not accepted as such. His reputation is limited in scope.

Hōmei's literary view is startlingly bold and straightforward. He believed that actual life and literature are one and the same. While most of his fellow-craftsmen in the world of letters looked at human life objectively and mechanically, he tried to portray it with monistic description,<sup>4</sup> with the affirmation of impulsiveness of the ego, and prizing subjectivity. In short, his absolute principle in literature and in real life was the momentary unity of the cosmos by bringing the whole interplay of body and soul. He had to strive hard, therefore, to realize this idea and toiled hard at his work.

Hōmei claimed to stand for partial animalism,<sup>5</sup> thereby writing sexual stories. This is why one of his best works, *Gobusaku* (A Five-part

Work), was banned. The title *Tandeki* or *Hatten* (Development), one part of *Gobusaku*, manifested his literary principles, and yet was misunderstood to mean sexual emancipation at that time.

In the history of Japanese literature since the Meiji Restoration (1868), few writers are as creative as Hōmei. He is creative in the European sense of the word, and the budding of his creativity dates back to his childhood.

Hōmei's family was more or less well-off in the period of the Restoration when the samurai class suffered badly. He liked his father, who had been adopted into the Iwano family, better than his mother.<sup>6</sup> This boy, who could do anything at his home, had a hard time in school under the effects of an inner feud of the feudal clan with whom his father was in service.<sup>7</sup> He knew how important strength was, and was inclined toward authoritarianism, fostering both self-dependence and powerlessness as well. He kept up pride by reading, but was driven by the latter to become a dreamer as well as a strong man. Thus his boyhood experience affected his future career.

Hōmei's powerlessness was different from the sense of resignation generally accepted by the Japanese people. He accepted naturalism and the relationship of the powerful to the powerless. His philosophy was the survival of the fittest.

Hōmei's sense of powerlessness had nothing to do with sentimentality, a traditional Japanese esthetic. To him nature was a source of inspiration and a symbol of encouragement, an idea which was un-Japanese.

Hōmei, one of the five greatest naturalists, is less known than the other four: Katai, Shimazaki Tōson,<sup>8</sup> Shūsei, and Masamune Hakucho.<sup>9</sup> In 1906, he wrote *Shimpiteki Hanjūshugi* (Partial Animalistic Mysticism),

in which he expressed his views of life, art, and the world. He says art is life or art is action, adding that the purpose of literature is to set working the bitter struggle between body and soul to gain momentary ascendancy over each other, or to express the complete burning of intellect, emotion, and volition.

Hōmei familiarized himself with Emerson, deriving from him an idealistic pantheism and rugged individualism, exclaiming that the cosmos is spiritual and nature is transient. From the rugged individualism comes heroism, the central idea of his literature, as evidenced by the following statement: "The cosmos puts the footprints of the strong on anything they do. They survive and as they grow stronger, civilization advances."<sup>10</sup>

Hōmei prized the subjective style as absolute in accordance with the principle of impassioned action. He hated fatalism and expounded the freedom of ego and execution of self-fulfillment. Unlike his colleagues who were indifferent to society or politics, he encouraged heroism and upheld nationalism — exceptional for a Japanese naturalist.

When he began writing novels, Hōmei owed much to Katai,<sup>11</sup> as in *Tandeki*, a work which was full of indecent descriptions, but which was characteristic of him.

The story concerns a middle-aged dramatist and a young geisha, Kichiya, in a country town near Tokyo. Although he is married, the dramatist unwittingly falls in love with the geisha and wants to make her an actress, which eventually results in family trouble. He decides to give up his home life and to make money at the expense of his wife, but his attempt fails primarily because of Kichiya's insincerity and egoism. He returns to Tokyo and learns that the geisha is also in Tokyo. He goes to see her and, discovering that she is syphilitic, is upset and leaves

her then and there.

The story was a success because it kept pace with the trends of the times, creating a sensation, which planted in Hōmei a sense of self-awareness to write novels thereafter. Although this piece still was immature artistically, it could envision, to some extent, monistic description and present the crude, selfish consciousness of the ego. No other writer was more frank and vivid than he to describe the anomalous situation which implicated the hero and his sweetheart. A good example is the following conversation between Kichiya and her patron. The hero happened to overhear it: "Knowing that she was always like an animal in the mating season, I was suddenly reminded of her coarse skin. I broke out in goose pimples when I realized that, when Kichiya was near, I, too, seemed to be overcome by pure instinct. But what amazed me most was the sudden awareness that I seemed to be waiting for an opportunity to sniff out a bitch."<sup>12</sup> The style is outspoken, shrewd, and outrageous.

The dramatist did not try to look at things; instead he was carried away by his feelings. Thinking that he still was wanting in self-indulgence, he went to extremes, striking a new life attitude. The heroine could handle four men at one time, proving to be wanton. Although reason and self-consciousness swayed in his mind, he was unable to extricate himself from the dilemma, and there was the devil to pay. Here is the tenacity of self-indulgence. The author's unvarnished presentation of the hero's anguish resulting from his unbridled amorous life provided the novel with a special poignancy.

It was chiefly because of a series of novels called *Gobusaku* that Hōmei found his way into the literary world and established his fame.

He gathered material from his business experience between 1908 and 1909, portraying his love affair with impassioned efforts.

*Gobusaku* includes *Hatten* (1911), *Dokuyaku o Nomu Onna* (The Woman Taking Poison, 1914), *Hōro* (Wandering, 1910), *Dankyo* (The Broken Bridge, 1911), and *Tsukimono* (Obsession, 1918). The sequence of events constituting the content of these novels is not consistent with the order of their publication. The series can be divided into two parts: "Before Hokkaido" and "After Hokkaido."

Tamura Yoshio, a behaviorist philosopher of momentarism, the cult of living from moment to moment, succeeds his father to run a rooming house, but, leaving his business to his wife, reads or writes and loves a young woman, Shimizu O-tori, who stays at his house. She is fair-skinned although loose, and readily agrees to sleep with him. He secretly rents a room near his house and takes her to a hot-spring hotel. Soon she catches his disease, bringing her happy life to an abrupt close.

Yoshio's wife, Chiyoko, devoted to astrology, wishes O-tori evil and storms into her house in a rage. Yoshio, abandoned by all of his friends but Kashu, a boyhood friend, finally finds all doors closed against him. In order to meet this difficult situation, he plans to go into business.

*Hatten* won fame, but was suppressed simply because it was sexually provocative. This is more than expected, for Hōmei believed firmly that it was a novel of thought, or the manifestation of his ideological anguish. The love affair, although it looked reckless, was not motivated by mere instinct, but rather by a positive or assertive fulfillment of his momentarism. He assumed a critical attitude toward Katai's conventional naturalism which emphasized exposé. He instead discovered in thought or intellect a new type of beauty and created a hero unprepared to face the crisis

of daily life. Instead of describing his hero or heroine beautifully, he produced a behaviorist philosopher, with his questioning soul, struggling with a daily crisis and endeavoring to find the beauty of the mind in momentarism; undertaking a crab-canning enterprise in Sakhalin, he hoped to achieve that action, whatever it is, which produces literature.

*Dokuyaku o Nomu Onna*, one of the best parts of *Gobusaku*, showed Hōmei's skills in realism. Chiyoko and O-tori hate each other. The latter presses Yoshio to make an honest woman of her, but to no avail. She even attempts to kill herself. Becoming bored with her, he contemplates a separation, forcing her upon Kashu after paying a doctor's fee, yet he still is drawn to her. One day he learns of Kashu's relations with her and inadvertently gets furious. Ultimately he is determined to go to Sakhalin to find in business an outlet for the violent passions of his instinctive ego. He obtains money with difficulty and leaves Tokyo triumphantly, seen by O-tori alone.

Most striking in the story are the portrayals of a human beast in profile.

O-tori seemed to sit still. ... As soon as the quilt was removed, Yoshio felt a chill creep over him; something glittering went past his throat in a flash.

"Well, let me see. What a start you've given me!" So thinking, he sprang to his feet with face turned away from her softly, and said, "What are you trying to do?"

"I'll kill you! I'll kill you!"

The kitchen knife had already been grabbed by his hands, and the two, without saying a word, stared at each other.<sup>13</sup>

This is ugly indeed, uglier than anything else. O-tori, no longer a woman, is exposed as a white beast. Both O-tori and Chiyoko looked dirty and played the parts of most abominable women. Their sensual figures and tricky psychology arising from their entanglements with Yoshio were

elaborately written and proved successful as a novel.

Hōmei, despite being a poet, did not succumb to sentimentality, controlling his use of flowery language. He was audacious and honest. Most impressive was his scandalous life with O-tori. Although he had decided to say good-bye to her once and for all, he tried, festered by jealousy, to get her back from Kashi. Here one can witness the grim tenacity of human passions which cannot be controlled by reason, and feel as if looking into the abysmal depths of life.

*Hōro* evoked an immediate response and, together with *Dokuyaku o Nomu Onna*, attracted more people's attention than the other three. It was one of the best-known naturalistic novels of the day. Yoshio returns penniless from Sakhalin to Hokkaido to stay with his friend and embarks, in vain, upon the reconstruction of his business. Meanwhile, he has taken to drink and women, beginning to know a prostitute and discovering that she is the incarnation of his life philosophy that art is action and he desires to share with her his sorrow and agony.

With Hokkaido and its nature for a background, the story depicted the hero living in the crisis of life. The author's subjective philosophy went well with objective description. The result was that *Hōro* was more virile and larger in scale than any other naturalistic work of the time. What is questionable here, however, is whether or not what Hōmei thought to be great is really worthy of the name. For instance, he looked upon a prostitute "as the miniature of his principle."<sup>14</sup> He really believed this. This is open to question, and one may well think that his philosophy becomes an illusion and looks like that of a modern Don Quixote.<sup>15</sup>

In *Dankyo* Yoshio's affair with the prostitute drags on. Soon he

goes on a tour of Hokkaido with a politician, coming in touch with its desolate nature and the lives of the Ainu, and returns to Sapporo where he finds O-tori chasing after him like a woman possessed. At once she calls upon him to pay a doctor's fee for her and picks a quarrel with him. Before sleeping, she even threatens to kill him again unless he cures her of the disease. He reluctantly borrows money from the politician and she is admitted to a hospital. At the same time, his business becomes quite hopeless and then, feeling a gap which is too deep to fill toward O-tori and the prostitute, finally parts from the latter and "finds himself to be standing motionless as a person confronting a broken bridge."<sup>16</sup>

O-tori is in the hospital while Yoshio loses his vigor, growing weary of himself. During a speech given at a middle school, he says: "I'm an emperor of the universe, or better yet, I'm the universe itself. Why are you laughing at me?"<sup>17</sup> Then rumor has it that he has become insane. His friends refuse to deal with him. Unable to work out a plan for financing his stay in Hokkaido, he is utterly helpless and greets winter with a heavy heart. "My body and spirit, word and action, and principle and actual life — these things, I feel, have become separated from one another, a discord growing wider and wider. I cannot help but confess that the shadow of death is hanging over me."<sup>18</sup> Pressured by O-tori, he feels like killing himself. They don't love each other, though. Just before he is ready to die, his blood boils with rage. They leap into a river, while O-tori, who has already become hysterical, calls her former lover's name. Fortunately, however, they fall on lingering snow, escaping death, and trudge along on foot toward their home. This is pathetic and ludicrous indeed.

That night Yoshio finishes the critical essay *Hitsū no Tetsuri* (Philosophy



of *Sorrowful Pains*, 1910). With its completion, he regains his courage. Thus, getting money somehow, Yoshio and O-tori head for Tokyo, but, having a fit, she is admitted to a hospital again. He returns in a miserable state alone. Later on he learns that she has returned with a former lover after indulging in a secret rendezvous. Taking this opportunity, he finally makes up his mind to be through with her and reflects: "I'm no longer possessed by some evil that has tormented me or done me good during the past year and a half."<sup>19</sup> And the last work of *Gobusaku* comes to an end.

Hōmei's literature is ruthless and without mercy. Although he was pressed for money most of the time, he never changed his basic attitude. He put his ideas into action with an attitude that was so thoroughgoing that no other modern writer was able to match it. For example, the feudal family system, one of the most crucial problems in modern Japanese literature, was out of the question for him, for he married without his parents' consent, and when he lost affection for his wife, he readily left her. This sort of thing was done three times, and he ignored the scandal which arose. Here one can see in him the image of a nature boy and his innocence<sup>20</sup> — a lively, callous Don Quixote.

*Gobusaku* was more than a plain record of the author who had to withstand the pains of life. It presented the image of his actual life, and his encounter with O-tori was taken as divine providence.<sup>21</sup> Yoshio continued an illicit connection with O-tori and undertook the canning business — these two events were sensational and conveyed a broader view of phases of life. When his wife began to lose the impulsiveness of ego, he did not hesitate to go without her. He says in *Hatten*: "I don't care for a woman if she leaves me. Curses upon her!"<sup>22</sup> In other words,

his philosophy emphasized an outcry of self-fulfillment, or of the survival of the fittest, and then he promoted a spiritual movement called the *Nihon-shugi* (Japanism) in his later years when he became interested in Shinto, thus establishing his own original position as a theorist. Naturally this was a political ideology, the one his naturalist colleagues consciously guarded against. This is something extraordinary about him. Moreover, he criticized socialism, saying that it would stand in the way of individualism, adding that society should work for a genius or a strong man, and stressing the need of genius education.<sup>23</sup>

In *Dokuyaku o Nomu Onna* there is a scene in which O-tori tried to stab Yoshio who pretended to be asleep. Had it not been for such intense moments, she would have represented, after all, an insignificant experience for him. Hōmei portrayed her quite objectively, which was in line with the main stream of naturalism. What distinguished him from Katai, Tōson, and other naturalists, however, was that as far as she was linked with the hero's insistence on the impulsive and unthinking self, the woman, although not important, was able to personify the extraordinary and substantial moment. *Gobusaku* would otherwise fall into the dilemma of trivialism as a poor caricature of naturalism.

As an attempt to kill the hero marked the climax of the first section, so did the attempted double suicide in the second one. Yoshio and O-tori, as soon as they realized that they were safe, had a quarrel about the comb she had lost on the riverbank, as if nothing dangerous had happened just a few moment ago. This was ludicrous and grotesque, too. A sense of attachment to real life still dominated them. He worked hard for self-fulfillment in accordance with the principle of impassioned action, repudiating all admiration, sentimentality; resignation, and indifferent

observation. Herein lies his heroism, which drew a dividing line between naturalistic trivialism and his literature.

The conclusion is that his naturalism was an *heretical* departure from the conventional literature of naturalism, the keynote of which was to describe mediocrity based upon truth and fact.

Jack London (1876–1916) appears to have been a born adventurer. He is said to have been the illegitimate son of an itinerant astrologer. The astrologer was deceptive and flatly denied responsibility. His mother, when London was eight years old, married another man who was sincere but undependable, so London had to move from place to place near San Francisco: a nightmare of unending deprivation.

Working as a newsboy, London completed middle school but, because of his foster father's ineptness, was forced to take care of his family by finding a job in a cannery. He was paid so poorly that he became captain of an "oyster pirate ship" in the Bay of San Francisco, making much money but living a wild life. To make a new start, he became a deputy for the fish patrol to police the same waters he had pillaged. At the age of 17, he shipped out for the Bering Sea. He returned to San Francisco where he saw jobless people everywhere, wandering in search of work.

In the spring of 1894, a nationwide movement to save unemployed workers arose and many people began to march to Washington. London quickly joined the movement, but deserted it shortly, roving the country as a hobo. He understood in these journeys that there was something basically wrong with a society that had poor people. He also turned to reading the *Communist Manifesto*. He was astounded by what he read

and obtained the fundamental concepts of his socialism, and then decided to become a writer.

In order to become a writer or to contribute to the destruction of the existing social order, London felt that he should learn much more about society and himself and was prepared to use any means to achieve this end. He entered high school first and then the University of California, Berkeley, but remained there for little more than one semester. Gold was discovered in the Klondike then, and adventure and the lure of easy money beckoned him. Although he mined no gold during his stay there and his strenuous traveling ended in failure, he learned enough from his observations of life about him to earn a fortune later — to cash in on his experiences.

Coming back to San Francisco, London began to turn the material collected in Alaska into finished stories, while reading Darwin, Spencer, Marx, Nietzsche, and whatever else he could lay his hands on. How much of what he understood from these authors remained with him and influenced him is too difficult to say exactly, but the concepts of Marx are said to have been blended with doctrines from Darwin, Spencer, and Nietzsche.<sup>24</sup> He could not decide whether he was a disciple of Nietzsche or of Marx.

*The Call of the Wild* (1903), upon publication, became a sensational success and made London a popular writer of his day. The story concerns a crossbreed dog, Buck, who led the life of an ordinary dog until he was kidnaped and taken to the Klondike where there was a growing demand for sled-dogs. When the call of the wild asserts itself after the death of his master, he is drawn back to life with a wolf pack.

On the way to Alaska, Buck, preeminently a fighter, sees that

“he stood no chance against a man with a club.”<sup>25</sup> Later on in Alaska, he finds a world of violence “under the law of club and fang,”<sup>26</sup> unlike the world of civilization where he used to live under the protection of love. While going through hardships and accommodating himself to the new mode of life, he strongly feels the truth of the law of the survival of the fittest. In order to survive in the hostile Northland environment, therefore, he realizes that his fastidious ways will never do in this world of the club and the fang, while he becomes more and more conscious of the new stir or thrill arising within him. Finally he becomes aware of the unbridled will-to-power coming back to life.

The owners of the dogs change and the new people, being cruel and merciless, cause several dogs to die because of hard toil.<sup>27</sup> Buck is also going to be killed when a white man rescues him. Feeling a sense of love toward his new master, the dog rescues him from danger twice. From this time on, he now and then hears a mysterious call sounding deep in the forest, the resurgence of the primitive wolf-instincts in a domesticated dog. One night he discovers a wolf and goes off into the forest. When he returns, he finds his master killed by the Indians and, in a rage, kills them for revenge. Released from the bond of love, Buck comes more alive to a stirring of the new life in the forest and joins a pack of wolves. Thus he incarnates the eternal mystery of creation and life as he is transformed into the immortal Ghost dog of Northland legend.

The story raises a couple of problems in the understanding of London's literature and its implications. The major theme of a dog becoming domesticated in the world of civilization and returning to the dominant primordial beast is based upon atavism<sup>28</sup> — the reversion to the wild — and, in developing this primordial vision, London followed

Zola's determinism, focusing on the problem of the influence of environment. Buck learns the lesson of a club, followed by the realization that the primitive Northland is a world in which the law of fang prevails, so only the strong can have any chance of survival. Then he tries to be stronger and craftier, wishing to break with the codes of civilization; while eating birds and animals, he grows into a carnivorous animaland, lured by a call of the wild, reverts, step by step, to his wolf origins — the story of the devolution of a dog.

This plot is parallel to Frank Norris' *Vandover and the Brute* (1914), a novel concerned with how a man changes into an animal in a certain environment. A dog plays a dominant role in *The Call of the Wild*, while *Vandover and the Brute* deals with a young man. A man changing into a wolf is considered a moral degeneration. On the other hand, decivilization of a dog implies nothing of the sort. The canine protagonist struggling heroically against the awesome forces of nature in the white silence is best characterized as a glorious victor or a great champion. Buck progresses from the civilized world through the natural and beyond to the supernatural world.

For a dog to return to a natural state means the recovery of a natural order while turning his back on an artificial civilization, an idea which is anti-naturalistic. The fact that Buck was born in a big house and lived there comfortably is tremendously unnatural.

By placing a canine hero in the center of his plot, London is said to have been able to ward off the danger of the self-contradictions his fellow naturalists were bound to meet with. Nonetheless, he had a longing for the fittest or the strong and went in the direction of anti-naturalism, although he had responded to naturalism and accepted the

theory of evolution as undeniable. Sympathizing with socialism yet admiring supermanism, although they are opposed to each other, he combined and developed them into heroism, a kind of idealism, for his socialism was completely dominated by the success mythology.

London wrote a number of works running up to 50. There are two main literary currents which distinguish him from others. One emphasizes the idea of superman with *The Call of the Wild* standing first on the list; *The People of the Abyss* (1903), *The Iron Heel* (1907), among others, advocate socialism.

London published in 1906 *White Fang*, a companion piece to *The Call of the Wild*. The story is set against a wild Alaska background. Gaining the strict lesson of nature, "EAT OR BE EATEN,"<sup>29</sup> White Fang is moved to a primitive society of Indians, where he knows his ways are rapidly becoming civilized. "The code he learned was to obey the strong and to oppress the weak. ... His development was in the direction of power."<sup>30</sup> Then he is sold to a white man who has in him a devil, undergoes training for a dogfight, and becomes brutal. However, he is taken care of by another kind white man — "It was the beginning of the end for White Fang — the ending of the old life and the reign of hate. A new and incomprehensibly fairer life was dawning."<sup>31</sup> Thus he learns to adjust himself in many ways to his new mode of life.

*White Fang* itself, conversely to *The Call of the Wild*, dealt with a wolf-dog who was finally domesticated. The latter dealt more accurately with the rebirth of primitive instincts in the wilderness, the true life impulses; in the subject matter showing that the wolf-dog survives under extreme society and exults in the glorification of heroism, these two stories are virtually the same.

In the year after *The Call of the Wild* came out, *The Sea Wolf* appeared, a work considered to be best to evaluate London and his literature. All the critics<sup>32</sup> saw in him the glorification of Wolf Larsen, the Nietzschean superman.<sup>33</sup>

The novel is written with Humphrey Van Weyden as a narrator who talks about his experiences. Humphrey, a scholar and a dilettante, is a single man, writing literary criticism and living as he likes. One day his ferryboat collides with another one and sinks fast, but he is rescued by a passing boat, which is the *Ghost*, a Bering Sea seal-hunting schooner. Ignoring the young man's plea, Captain Wolf Larsen decides to have him as a cabin boy.

Humphrey, staying overnight, discovers here a world of violence where everything really exceeds rational formulas for conduct and ethics and where Larsen is a regular devil, the symbol of brutality, reigning over his crew with force which is as ruthless as a beast. "He was a magnificent atavism, a man so purely primitive that he was of the type that came into the world before the development of the moral nature."<sup>34</sup> He is totally amoral, contemptuous of civilization's slave morality: the perfect type of the primitive man. However, Humphrey receives a surprise of a totally different sort when he goes into the captain's room and discovers books and notes with such names as Shakespeare and Tennyson, Tyndall and Darwin, and others. He cannot reconcile these books with the man from what he has learned. In addition, Larsen's language is clear and correct in the conversations he has with Humphrey. Immediately he becomes an enigma, for his expressions of brutality are not compatible with a high level of intellect.

Larsen's strength is more impressive than his height. "It was a



strength we are wont to associate with things primitive, with wild animals, and the creatures we imagine our tree-dwelling prototypes to have been —.”<sup>35</sup> He can jump six feet at one leap; lift up a man with one hand; crush a sailor easily like a mop and squeeze potatoes into juice in his hand.<sup>36</sup> Thus the philosophical, herculean sea captain has dominated the *Ghost* with an iron hand and will power, as a superman endowed with intellect and strength.

The captain and his crew rescue some people who have met with a typhoon and escaped from a sunken vessel. Among them there is a woman poet, Maud Brewster. Humphrey, who has reviewed her poetry earlier, is surprised at her beauty and notes that she is in striking contrast to Larsen — one is the finished product of the highest civilization, the other the culmination of all savagery: the extreme ends of the human ladder of evolution. When the rugged individualist superman<sup>37</sup> tries to conquer her by force, Humphrey hurls himself on the man. While they struggle, Larsen is suddenly struck by a severe headache. Taking advantage of his incapacity, Humphrey and Maud successfully flee in an open boat.

The boat unexpectedly lands on an uninhabited islet, and later on the *Ghost* is discovered washed ashore on the island, with Larsen left alone, abandoned by all of his crew. He looks haggard and is blind — the whole thing is so unlike the Larsen the young man has known. The captain sinks fast, unable to speak any more and dies soon after the repair of the ship has been completed. The schooner, seaworthy once again, heads out to sea as the story ends.

Leaving high school in mid-course and studying hard through one summer, London, who passed the university entrance examinations, is

supposed to have been very clever. However, he left the University without taking a course and learned a lot about whatever came in handy, digesting it in his own way. He was deficient in intellectual training. The untutored mind of young London was conspicuous, especially in the first part of the story. For instance, Larsen, capable of killing his people mercilessly, could read vastly in Shakespeare and Tennyson; he was a man of strong vital energy with a philosophy shared by Darwin, Spencer, Marx, and Nietzsche. However, Larsen's beastly action was forceful enough to overshadow the inconsistencies of this opposing theory. The second part, in which Maud made her appearance, becomes a sentimental shambles, throwing the whole plot off balance and turning a study in naturalism into a deserted island romance.

Nietzschean characters often appear in London's works. There is no denying that the power of a superman and his aristocratism are contradictory to socialism. To admit the existence of the superman is to celebrate the will of man, which is apparently inconsistent with naturalism, so that London's naturalism may be quite foreign to Zolaism which laid stress on a biological determinism in terms of heredity or environment.

Larsen is a man who transcended the destructive power of nature: the he-man-type, masculine, and almost a god in his perfection. However, the *Ghost* is a miniature of human society, a little floating world. As Larsen says, "I believe that life is a mess. ... The big eat the little that they may continue to move, the strong eat the weak that they may retain their strength."<sup>38</sup> Darwinism absolutely governed the clipper. In order to become strong or to survive, therefore, there was no other choice for one but to take a superman action by making the best use of his strength and intellect. In other words, Larsen, vacillating between

a struggle for existence and the law of natural selection, was motivated by strength not to be victimized under the merciless laws of nature. The fact that he was often plagued and reduced to agonized helplessness by massive headaches of unknown origin and that he became blind is symptomatic of the human weakness of the "superman." After all, even the superman could not be free from naturalistic determinism. That being the case, there is no reason whatsoever to think that Larsen deviates from Zola's naturalism.

In *The Sea Wolf* there is another character along the lines of the superman. He is Humphrey, who has never done hard labor in his life and has lived a peaceful existence — the life of a scholar and a recluse on a decent income. And yet he was thrown into a situation which was unparalleled and undreamed of, to learn to be responsible for himself. As a matter of fact, he suffered from devastating misery and an unforgettable disillusionment on the ship where no idea of good or evil prevailed; nor was there any room to admit his idealistic view of life. Thus, by coming into contact with the essence of nature, he threw away an amateurish idealism and grew into a very responsible<sup>39</sup> fighting man, discovering a new image of himself. He is taught the value of labor and the absurdity of standing idly on his father's legs. Larsen was the man who had let him open a world of realities and given him the courage to be independent. It can be construed thus that an escape from the *Ghost* and a successful life on an island were a perfect realization of the experience and lesson he had obtained from life on the ship. He toiled hard and finally succeeded in reconditioning the ship — this is the work of a superman, miraculous and incredible. And now, for the first time, he became conscious of his manhood. The primitive

depths of his nature stirred. Finding himself responsible for himself, he has much for which to thank Larsen.

There is a big difference, however, between London's views of nature in connection with the characterization of these two supermen. Zola's naturalistic view of nature is prevalent in Larsen, while an American view of nature — nature as Mother Earth, hugging humanity warmly and watching their growth tenderly — embraces Humphrey, an indication of two thematically different episodes. Coupled with sentimentality disclosed in the closing chapters, as has been noted, *The Sea Wolf* becomes vastly controversial. Nonetheless, in the sense that even the superman cannot be saved from determinism, London's view of nature is basically the same as Zola's. Here one can see in London the American variety of naturalism — *heresy* — from the creation of Wolf Larsen.

In *Martin Eden* (1909), a story about the Dark Fall — about the price man has been condemned to pay for the unhappy gift of knowledge<sup>40</sup> — London also produced a superman with strong mental power. The hero, Martin Eden, makes a superhuman effort to extricate himself from the situation he is placed in, reaching the top of the ladder, and finally becomes famous and wealthy like an Alger hero. However, he finds that all his zest for life vanishes. The prominent people whom he comes to know he finds disappointingly dull. The society girl whom he thinks he loves eventually bores him.

As Eden's boredom and unhappiness increase, so does the intensity of his disillusion with socialism. This is clear in the following:

As for myself, I am an individualist. I believe the race is to the swift, the battle to the strong. Such is the lesson I have learned from biology, ... I am an individualist, and individualism is the hereditary and eternal foe of socialism.<sup>41</sup>

Hating socialism and ruined by success, Eden reaches the height of his fame; the internal drive to the unattainable was superhuman and the end of his rope at the same moment. Having turned his back on both high and low society, he is very much alone. In an effort to shake off his mounting depression, he kills himself, a suicide denoting the surrender of the superman tired from the competition with nature. Eden after all was not free from determinism either. Here is also the same image as Larsen's — *heresy*.

London, unlike Hōmei, became aware of social consciousness and wrote *The People of the Abyss* and *Iron Heel*. Through these books one can learn about his views of society, but rampant individualism and socialism, like oil and water, don't mix. In point of fact, he lost his interest in the socialist movement, suddenly changing into an ultra-nationalist.<sup>42</sup>

The early years of the twentieth century in America were a period when liberalism set the fashion in domestic politics. It was also a period when, with the advance into the Caribbean Sea after the Spanish-American War as a turning point, there was an increasing interest in foreign countries, such as the construction of the Panama Canal and the annexation of Hawaii and of the Philippines. The end of the frontier in the closing years of the last century was the most probable reason for the enthusiasm of discovering overseas frontiers. America was not alone in its imperialistic expansion policy. In almost the same period, Japan was also turning toward foreign countries after victories in the wars against China and Russia. Viewed in the light of the current interpretation of Nietzsche, Hōmei and London are similar to each other although this is quite accidental.

It would be interesting to note that naturalism, despite its glorious literary achievements, saw a radical change in the phase of its development with the appearance of Hōmei and London. Both of these writers, although they accepted naturalism, were not always of the same mind and often went their own way, creating its *heretical* quality and presaging its inevitable transformation. Naturalism then began to lose its integrity and finally declined in popularity.

### Notes

- 1 Japanese personal names are given in the Japanese order of surname first. When they are mentioned again, I have used only the given name, i.e. Hōmei.
- 2 Tayama Katai (1871–1930), with the publication of *Juemon no Saigo* (The Death of Jūemon) in 1902, came to emphasize objective description. Then, through *Rokotsu naru Byōsha* (Candid Description), he embarked upon the naturalistic movement, publishing *Futon*, by which he was able to establish himself as a well-known writer. Thereafter, *Sei* (Life), *Tsuma* (Wife), and *En* (Relation), a trilogy, and others came out one after another. Later on, however, he gradually came to an impasse, expressed a sympathy for Joris Karl Huysmans, turned to symbolism, and grew increasingly interested in religion.

The major theme of *Futon* concerns the author's love affair with a young woman student. He is married, but feels a sexual impulse toward her while he tries to pose as a teacher. The novel shocked the reader for its bold exposure of the writer's life, and as the confession of a middle-aged man, with fleshly appetites. *Futon* was the first work which described the dark psychology and feelings of the author with the material borrowed from his personal life. The story would not be

important today, but in those days it was so unusual that it caused a great sensation. This is why the story won much fame and led to a new special novel form called the *watakushi shōsetsu* (the "I" novel) in which writers wanted to represent things around them.

3 Tokuda Shūsei (1871–1943) established his reputation as an influential naturalist with the story *Arajotai* (A New Couple, 1908). Thereafter, he finished *Ashiato* (Footsteps) and *Kabi* (Mold), which won him fame. He described minutely in rigid realism the material gathered from common daily life, paving the way for *watakushi shōsetsu*, which reached its peak around the 1920s.

4 Includes *Boku no Byōsharon* (My Theory of Description), *Byōsharon Hotsui* (Supplement to Theory of Description) and *Ichigenbyōsha no Jissaiteki Shōmei* (A Practical Demonstration of Monistic Description). He says in these articles that a writer should write through the eye of a narrator, otherwise it will be a lie and become abstract and indirect in idea. His standpoint was taken in opposition to Katai, who says, "If one picks up grains of sand one by one, it will eventually present the whole panorama of a beach." Cf. Ino Kenji, *Introduction to Iwano Hōmei* (The Complete Works of Modern Japanese Literature, Vol. 29; Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1965, p. 400). His theory of monistic description was made complete while he was writing *Gobusaku*, part of which was revised later according to his point of view.

5 *Shimpiteki Hanjūshugi* was written when he went to naturalism from mysticism. Later the word *mysterious* was struck off. The book begins with Maeterlinck's mysticism and Emerson's theory of nature, and concludes that art is momentary. Every creature living on earth is accidental and is without purpose. Therefore, human existence is made

possible by a reconciliation between body and soul. Human relationships continue moment by moment, while striving to gain ascendancy over each other. Hence the word *partial animalism*. Literature exists every moment and is produced by a genius who can tolerate the bitterness of life and who can depict his life in a realistic way. Cf. Kataoka Ryōichi, *A Study of Naturalism* (Tokyo: Chikuma-shobo, 1957), p. 124.

- 6 Ōkubo Norio, *Iwano Hōmei* (Tokyo: Namboku-sha, 1963), p. 39.
- 7 Ōkubo Norio, *Iwano Hōmei and His Times* (Tokyo: Tōki-sha, 1973), pp. 11-13.
- 8 Shimazaki Tōson (1872–1945) began his career as a poet and turned his interest to actual life and wrote prose. *Hakai* (Broken Commandment), one of the best-known naturalistic works, was published in 1906, causing public discussion. It concerns an honest and humble country school-teacher, an outcast. The process of the young teacher's self-awareness of individuality and opposition to social conventions and morality is described. *Hakai* is one of the first novels which dealt with a man's social problems as the author's own problem, although a few other social novels appeared before it. Tōson, however, did not go in the direction of social consciousness.

His works include *Haru* (Spring), *Ie* (Two Households), *Shinsei* (New Birth), and others.

- 9 Masamune Hakucho (1879–1962) became a Christian in 1897. Although he renounced Christianity later, it cast a shadow over the keynote of his view of life. He published his maiden work in 1904 and received much acclaim as a prominent naturalist with the publication of *Jin'ai* (Dust) in 1907. He occupied an unshakable position in literary circles after *Doko-e* (Where to?) in 1908. His outstanding works include *Jigoku*



- 150 Iwano Hōmei and Jack London : Naturalism and Its Heresy  
(Hell), *Biko* (A Glimmer), *Doro Ningyo* (Mud Doll), and *Irie no Hotori*  
On the Banks of the Inlet).
- 10 Masamune Hakucho, *Iwano Hōmei* (The Complete Works of Modern  
Japanese Literature, Vol. 13; Tokyo: Chikuma-shobo, 1954), p. 387.
- 11 Masamune Hakucho, *A History of the Rise and Fall of Naturalism*  
(The Complete Works of Modern Japanese Literature, Vol. 67; Tokyo:  
Chikuma-shobo, 1957), p. 358.
- 12 *Iwano Hōmei* (The Complete Works of Japanese Literature, Vol. 13;  
Tokyo: Shincho-sha, 1965), p. 33.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 226.
- 15 Yoshida Seiichi, *A Study of Naturalism*, Vol. 2 (Tokyo: Tokyo-do,  
1964), p. 305.
- 16 *Iwano Hōmei* (The Complete Works of Modern Japanese Literature,  
Vol. 29; Tokyo: Kōdan-sha, 1965), p. 287.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 298.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 322.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 352.
- 20 Yoshida Seiichi, *op. cit.*, p. 315.
- 21 Yanagida Tomotsune, *A Study of Iwano Hōmei* (Tokyo: Meiji-shoin,  
1969), p. 14.
- 22 *Iwano Hōmei* (Kōdan-sha), *op. cit.*, p. 85.
- 23 Showa Women's University, ed., *A Series of Modern Literature: A Study*,  
Vol. 19 (Tokyo: Showa Women's University Press, 1962), p. 274.
- 24 Philips S. Foner, *Jack London: American Rebel* (New York: The Citadel  
Press, 1964), p. 34.
- 25 Jack London, *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* (New York: Bantam

Books, Inc. 1963), p. 28.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

27 Cf. Here "one notices how delicately London kept this story within the limits of credible animal behavior. The human beings are good or bad, efficient or useless, only to the degree that they affect the well-being of the dogs." (Maxwell Geismar, *Rebels and Ancestors: The American Novels, 1890-1915* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1953], p.149.)

28 Cf. "Atavism is a condition in which one's primitive self, with its assumed strength and ferocity, is close to the civilized surface." (Charles C. Walcutt, *American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream* [Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1956], p.91.)

29 *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 189.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 251.

32 Cf. "One does not go to sleep over the book," wrote Ambrose Bierce in a letter to George Sterling in 1905. "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. You 'can't lose' Wolf Larsen. He will be with you to the end." (Earle Labor, *Jack London* [New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974], p.94.)

33 Cf. "His mind rejected the Nietzschean doctrine of the superman, but his temperament accepted it with a deeper logic." (Robert E. Spiller, ed., *Literary History of the United States* [New York: The Macmillan Co., 1948], p.1035.)

34 Jack London, *The Sea Wolf* (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1960), p. 68.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

36 Cf. "London, who was extremely narcissistic and exultantly proud of his own medium-sized but powerful body, spared few details in his ecstatic descriptions of the physical appearance of this man who so resembled himself." (Kenneth S. Lynn, *The Dream of Success: A Study of the Modern American Imagination* [Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1955], p.93.)

37 Charles C. Walcutt, *Seven Novelists in the American Naturalist Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), p. 133.

38 *The Sea Wolf*, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

39 Cf. "The effect of naturalism as a doctrine is to subtract from literature the whole notion of human responsibility." (John W. Aldridge, ed., *Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction 1920-1951* [New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1952], p.374.)

40 Earle Labor, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

41 Jack London, *Martin Eden* (New York: Amsco School Publications, Inc., 1936), p. 207.

42 Cf. "London's synthesis of the various ideas which he found in what he called 'the book' is muddled and contradictory. He combined with Marxist socialism a reverence for the Nietzschean superman and a Kiplingesque belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race over lesser breeds without the law." (*The Bodley Head Jack London* [London: The Bodley Head, 1963], p.9.)