

**MYTH AND SYMBOL IN JACK LONDON'S THE CALL OF THE WILD,  
WHITE FANG AND TAWFIQ AL'HAKIM'S HIMAR AL'HAKIM  
(AL'HAKIM'S DONKEY)**

**Dr. Huda A. Galaby**

**Assistant Professor**

**Faculty of Arts, Bisha University, Saudi Arabia**

*Abstract: Jack London is a folk writer. He has achieved a popularity so wide and so long – standing that he seems to have become a permanent legend in the American heritage. Tawfiq Al'Hakim belongs to a generation of Arab writers remarkably bold in their questioning of the values inherited from their immediate past and immensely influential in pioneering a form of modernism shaped by the example of Western Europe. Al'Hakim was considered a pioneer as he was the first Egyptian dramatist and novelist as well. The Call of the Wild, White Fang and Himar Al'Hakim (Al'Hakim's Donkey) are adventure romances. The Call of the Wild bears the influence of natural attraction and natural powers within man and animal. White Fang was conceived as a complete antithesis and companion piece to The Call of the Wild. London averred that he is going to reverse the process. Instead of the devolution of decivilization of a dog, he is going to give the evolution, the civilization of a dog. In Himar Al'Hakim (Al'Hakim's Donkey) the author recounts his experiences in an Egyptian village with a donkey and a French film crew. One point made in the book that, "Egyptian rural areas with neo-feudal economic conditions have lacked the beneficent French neo-feudal institution of the lady of the manor who would promote the caring society in Egypt." Al'Hakim highlights the dilemma of the disadvantaged, even though he did so by using a donkey as a protagonist.*

When literary critics used the word 'symbolism' What do they mean? In Theory of Literature (1942) Wellek and Warren suggest that in literary criticism the usage of 'symbolism' is confined to discussion of "...an object which refers to another object but which demands attention also in its own right, as a presentation".(189) This description of symbolism indicates the dual nature of the symbol in literature, existing on the level of representational realism (demanding attention in its own right) as well as pointing towards another object or area of experience. They also distinguish between two different kinds of mind in their understanding symbol:

There is a kind of mind which speaks of 'mere symbolism', either reducing religion and poetry to sensuous images ritualistically arranged or evacuating the presented 'signs' or 'images' on behalf the transcendental realities, moral or philosophical, which lie beyond them. Another kind of mind thinks of symbolism as something calculated and willed, a deliberate mental translation of concepts into illustrative, pedagogic, sensuous terms. (189)

S. T. Coleridge says in his book, *The Statesman's Manual*, that symbol:

Is characterized by a translucence of the special [ the species ] in the individual, or the general [ genus ] in the special ... above all, by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal. (437-8)

In a letter to her friend, the artist and critic Roger Fry, Virginia Woolf seems to have agreed with what Wellek and Warren suggest as an understanding of symbolism:

One has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together. I saw that all sorts of feelings would accrue to this, but I refused to think them out, and trusted that people would make it the deposit of their own emotions- which they have done, one thinking it means one thing another another. I can't manage symbolism except in this vague, generalized way. Whether it's right or wrong I don't know; but directly I'm told what a thing means, it becomes hateful to me. (385)

In my study, I tend to accept Virginia Woolf's explanation of symbol. It cannot be said that a symbol means a specific thing. An image can be a metaphor or a symbol and it can turn a symbol into a myth. This can be understood in Wellek's and Warren's explanation of the relation among the three terms:

Is there any important sense in which 'symbol' differs from 'image' and 'metaphor' ? Primarily, we think, in the recurrence and persistence of the 'symbol' an 'image' may be invoked once as a metaphor, but if it persistently recurs both as presentation and representation, it becomes part of a symbolic (or mythic) system. (189)

Myths are stories that narrate in an imaginative and symbolic manner the total and basic structures upon which a culture rests. Given this emphasis on what is fundamental to cultural meaning and value, the myth may appear to be fantastic and bizarre, because the mythic story cannot be explained in the terms of the ordinary conventions of the culture are understood as having their origins in the myth. Plato made use of myth and mythical modes as pedagogical ends to the deeper Truths of philosophy, and Aristotle levelled a more devastating attack on myths as fanciful stories that do not give the truth about human life and the world:

The fourth of our terms is 'myth' which appears in Aristotle's Poetics as the word for plot, narrative structure, 'fable'. Its antonym and counterpoint is logos. The 'myth' is narrative, Story, as against dialectical discourse, exposition; it is also the Irrational or intuitive as against the systematically philosophical: It is the tragedy of Aeschylus against the dialectic of Socrates.(190)

The Greek critique of myth was thus launched for the sake of a rational understanding and control of the world.

In the fourth century BC, the Greek mythographer Euhemerus developed the theory that gods were originally kings and heroes who were worshiped for their deeds. With the advent of Christianity, which set forth the distinctive nature of historical revelation of god in his son, Jesus Christ, the gods of an antiquity were either interpreted according to a Euhemerus' theory or held to be inferior demons. Christian writers later adopted allegorical interpretations of myths as moral or exemplary stories, and this approach persisted through the Renaissance.

The systematic study of myth, which began during the Enlightenment period of the Western World, inherited these two presuppositions, and many studies responded to the rational and historical critiques of myths. These studies ranged far and wide. The theories of Voltaire and Charles de Brosses (1709 -77) are two examples of this idea. Although differences of emphasis occur in their theories, both worked under the assumption that human history is progressive and thus the earlier stages were innocent, forming the basis for newer stages of human progress. Thinkers as diverse as Giam Battista Vico and Robert Lowth (1710 – 88) also admitted the basic premise of myth as the expression of the earliest stage. For Vico and Lowth, the myth represents all the subsequent

Meanings and relationships through which the history of a particular society is Expressed and experienced. This idea of Vico and Lowth is based on their analysis Of myth as poetic and oracular.

For literary theory, the important motifs are probably the image or picture, the social, the supernatural.. the narrative or story, the archetypal or universal, the symbolic representation as events in time of our timeless ideals ... in contemporary thought, appeal to the myth may centre on any of these, with a spread to others. (191)

Wellek and Warren admitted in Theory of Literature of a need for myth to modern Man:

Does modern man lack myth or mythology, a system of interconnected myth? This would be Nietzsche's view: that Socrates and the Sophists, the 'intellectuals', had destroyed the life

of Greek 'culture'. Similarly it would be argued that Enlightenment destroyed – or began the destruction of – Christian 'mythology' ... To speak of the need for myth, in the case of the imaginative writer, is a sign of his felt need for communion with his society, for a recognized status as artist functioning with society.(192)

The relationship of the mythic as both original and poetic was taken up by romantic Poets and writers, who saw the myth as not only the original and preferred expression of the novelty of culture but equally as the beginning of the linguistic forms that are now known as poetry and novel. The Romantic Movement expressed this point of view in various ways, influencing not only mythological studies but equally the more general interpretations of the ancient Western cultures of the Greeks and Romans. Romanticism is derived from medieval romances, which were fanciful tales of larger-than- life adventures and highly coloured sentiment. This association with a world of fantasy and myth is fundamental to Romanticism. Many of the features of Romanticism stem from the primacy of the imagination, fascination with the mysterious and inaccessible, empathy with nature, rebellion against traditional, social and literary norms; and the longing to break out of the confines of the here-and-now.

The seeds of Romanticism are to be found in an obsessive interest in the art Of the past, including its mythology and mystery. Literature, both past and Present, was a major source of inspiration for them. If classical texts were Chosen, they were often those that included elements of the supernatural, Such as the plays of Aeschylus. The mythic

creation that told of heroism and Love in a misty and ancient past, was favoured by Romantic writers and poets. Wellek and Warren stressed that we have to think of the writer as both 'maker', And 'possessed', as combining an obsessively held vision of life with a conscious, Precise care for the presentation of that vision. They admitted that literature and psychology cannot be separated and called the psychological study of the Writer; psychology of literature:

It is not difficult to discover the influence of Carl Jung and arestatement of the Jungian thesis that beneath the individual' unconscious' – the blocked – off residue of our past, particularly our childhood and infancy – lies the 'collective unconscious' the blocked – off memory of our racial past, even of our pre-humanity.

Jung has an elaborate psychological typology, according to which 'extravert' and 'introvert' subdivide the four types based upon the dominance respectively of thinking, feeling, intuition, sensation ... as a further guard against simplification, he remarks that some writers reveal their type in their creative work, while others reveal their anti-type, their complement. (84)

Jack London and Tawfiq Al'Hakim had in mind certain episodes and ideas connected to their peculiar selves. They were interweaving them in a clever legendary method, which give them the imprint of their myth. They had a lot of experiences. They knew well the ache and pain of machine age that considered man part of the life machine that turned him more like a monster than a man. In their great search for truth, they found it, ugly, horrible and abhorable. Tawfiq Al'Hakim's first person narrator hero of Raqisat Al'Ma'bad (The Temple Dancer,[ 1939]), is a self-confessed worshipper of the god of art who is temporarily distracted from his devotions by a beautiful Italian dancer. The narrator tells the dancer that he is one of those who 'fill the world with lies and misrepresentations.' She replies, "a well ordered lie is more beautiful than truth ... what is art if not a beautiful, well ordered lie." (58-9) London expressed the same meaning in a letter to the editor of the San Francisco Bulletin:

I have sailed and traveled quite extensively in other parts of the world and have learned to seize upon that which is interesting; to grasp the true romance of things, and to understand the people I may be thrown amongst. (3)

Most important, however, in both London's and Al'Hakim's works is the disclosure of three essential factors that account in large measure for their success as writers: to seize upon that which is interesting, to grasp the true romance of things and the people may be thrown amongst. Human interest, romantic imagination and sympathetic understanding are the major ingredients in their works. In Al'Hakim's works, struggle is not necessarily between man and destiny. The unseen forces and nature are part of man's fate and issued them the truth of existence: the way things are.

Jack London was a true and persevering fighter but he lost his personal life's taste. He lived his novels and his life ended the same end of his hero Marten Eden. He applied his ideas and thoughts of the meaning of life and led a life of a legendary novelist. The Call of the Wild bears the influence of natural attraction and natural powers within man and animal. It was designed as a long short story of 6000 words but it went too far. White Fang was conceived as a complete antithesis and companion piece to The Call of the Wild. London averred that he was going to reverse the process. Instead of the devolution of decivilization of a dog, he is going to give the evolution, the civilization of a dog-development of domesticity, faithfulness, love, morality, and the amenities and virtues.

In Himar Al'Hakim (Al'Hakim's Donkey, 1940) the author recounts his experiences in an Egyptian village with a European film crew. Jack London's wilderness is replaced by Egyptian countryside which bears wilderness as an abstraction symbolized in a way of life and estrangement within one's own civilization and country. Instead of a donkey developing of domesticity, Al'Hakim gives devolution of decivilization of a donkey. A domestic donkey cannot

live in the wild like Buck in *The Call of the Wild* and cannot live amidst a chorus of city women rubbing his ears and calling him the blessed wolf like the dog in *White Fang*. So death puts a sharp and clear end to the fable. Al'Hakim gave his donkey a name; Al'FaYlasouf (the philosopher) and the philosopher refused to live. The philosopher could not change the ills of his society and preferred to die the day his owner leaves Cairo to France.

*The Call of the Wild*, *White Fang* and *Himar Al'Hakim (Al'Hakim's Donkey)* are adventure romances. Hasty reading may reveal their romantic- adventure qualities, yet there is much more to the novels than mere entertainment. If Romantic qualities are understood as arousing visions of the modern world, this leads to a Romantic necessity in both of London's and Al'Hakim's naturalism.

Modern Romanticism may be defined as the storming by private vision and Power to comprehend and affect the universe; both London and Al'Hakim are, Very simply, Romantic in their exultation of private vision which they take to be Visions of the modern world. But as every nineteenth-century man came to fear, And as every twentieth-century man come to know, there are two worlds against which to storm: the supernatural and the natural. Perhaps in keeping with the modern temper these had better be called 'forces'. Faust fought the devil, but could not win against the supernatural force; Santiago; in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), fought old age, the Marlin's strength and will and finally the Marauder Sharks, but could not win against these natural forces. Yet, both these men are 'heroes' of a private struggle against the forces that enclose them. Both of London's and Al'Hakim's protagonists had to struggle, however, in different worlds; the wild and the civilized. London's protagonist won while Al'Hakim's protagonist withdrew when his tie with life was broken to die.

In *Himar Al'Hakim (Al'Hakim's Donkey)* the author recounts his experiences in an Egyptian village with a donkey and a French film crew. One point made in the book is that, " Egyptian rural areas with neo-feudal economic conditions have lacked the beneficent, French neo-feudal institution of the lady of the manor who would promote the caring society in Egypt." (84) Al'Hakim highlights the dilemma of the disadvantaged, even though he did so by using a donkey as his protagonist.

London led a life and career marked by periods of good and bad fortunes; his Experiences and knowledge are reflected in his novels, particularly his socio- Political and economic views. He believed in socialist causes while supporting Nietzschean 'superman' theories. It is his owner John Thornton – becomes a Good socialist; that is, Buck works for the common good rather than for his Individual advancement. Deprived of Thornton's guidance when his mentor Dies, Buck reverts to the Darwinian survival of the fittest and the Nietzschean Superman principles for his own protection exemplified in the will to power the weirdness of the atmosphere is part of the 'call to adventure' described by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, which "signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual centre of gravity from

within the pale of society to a zone unknown." (58) This is what London planned for Buck. The plot is animated by one of the most basic of archetypal motifs: the myth of the hero. The call to adventure, departure, initiation, the journey to the mysterious life-centre, transformation and are present in Buck's progress from the civilized world through the natural and beyond to the supernatural world. The world of Buck can be defined as a fateful region of both treasure and it may be represented as: a distant land, a forest or profound dream state; but it is always a place of strangely unimaginable torments and impossible delight. This fateful region is a far cry from Judge Miller's pastoral ranch and from the raw frontier of the Klondike gold rush: it is the landscape of myth.

London portrayed in *The Call of the Wild* a vivid picture of the disadvantaged though he did so by using a dog as his protagonist. This was very real and deeply significant to him, as may be realized by reading the most lyrical passage he ever wrote, the last sentence of *The Call of the Wild*:

But he is not always alone. When the long winter nights come on and the wolves follow their meat into the lower valleys, he may be seen running at the head of the pack through the pale moonlight or glimmering borealis, leaping gigantic above his fellows, his great throat a bellow as he sings a song of the younger world, which is the song of the pack. (140)

Jack London's friend, the California poet George Sterling, called Jack Wolf. Richard O'Connor in his book, *Jack London: A Biography* (1964) asserted That London liked this 'wolf image':

... he stamped his wolf image as frequently and indelibly as possible on everything his life touched, at the bottom of his letters to friends, on his dream castle, on his book titles. Contrary as this lupine fetish was to his innately gregarious nature, he evidently liked to think of himself as a wolf, running free, proudly alone, as he loped through the wilderness, a throwback to the animal state for which he atavistically yearned. (160)

Both Buck and Al'Faylasouf in *The Call of the Wild* and Himar Al'Hakim can work with Their kind for mutual benefit. But without leadership or guidance, they must take care of themselves, or they will not endure. The cruelties of life are severe for all of them; man, dog and donkey; and here the dog Buck and the donkey Al'Faylasouf can be seen as allegory for everyman, in the ancient medieval sense, symbolizing the plight of the oppressed and downtrodden everywhere in their struggle to maintain life. London portrayed a vivid picture of the trouble of the disadvantaged by using a dog as his protagonist and so did Al'Hakim by using a donkey as his protagonist.

Al'Hakim said in his book *Himari Qala Li (My Donkey Told Me)* (1945) that his donkey is of great importance to him and considered his silence a teaching of philosophy:

For me, the donkey is a sacred creature of significance as the scarab for ancient Egyptians. I know it whilst I was young; my parents bought me a young handsome donkey ... (11)

Both London's and Al'Hakim's function of myths tend to concern themselves with the modern world, their works have patterns of mythological references running through them. Their myths and symbols are used to hold the central lines of their novels. They take the readers from the opening sentence to the last, to the depths of life; primeval and modern, civilized and wild. The opening paragraph of London's fable *White Fang* is a proof of the aforesaid idea:

Dark spruce forest frowned on either side the frozen waterway ... The land itself was a desolation, lifeless, without movement, so lone and cold that the spirit of it was not even that of sadness. There was a hint in it of laughter.. that was merciless as the smile of the Sphinx.. It was the masterful.. wisdom of eternity laughing at the futility of life. It was the wild, the savage, frozen-hearted Northland Wild. (169)

Al'Hakim admired the donkey's animality and despised man's savagery and violence. His chosen totem animal was a donkey. He wrote five books in which such animal, from the depths of primeval, is depicted as a symbol and totem as the scarab for ancient Egyptians. The scarab was placed by Egyptians in their tombs as a symbol of resurrection. Resurrection was Al'Hakim's main theme or central line in many of his novels and plays. He considered it part of the legacy of the Egyptians that lies in the depths of their subconscious. This attitude towards the donkey is an image, a symbol of a mythologized human being. Al'Hakim's admiration of animals can be recognized in his conversation with the photographer's wife in *Himar Al'Hakim*:

... The idea of evil is not found among animals. Most animals are lovers of peace, fraternity, and serenity ... Few animals that are cold wild beasts did not know enmity for the vanity of it. Man is the only creature who finds in enmity towards his fellowman honour and glory. (71)

London and Al'Hakim had no wish to negate themselves in favour of becoming animals; both the London dog or wolf and Al'Hakim's donkey are presented not as themselves but as the novelist's feel that they would feel if they were embodied in the form of a dog or a donkey. Parallels between *White Fang*, *The Call of the Wild* and *Himar Al'Hakim* can be seen clearly. Both *Buck* and *White Fang* spend their early days in a secluded retreat (*Buck* at Judge Miller's state, *White*



Fang in the cave). The protagonist in Himar Al'Hakim spends his early days in Al'Hakim's place. Once launched into the world, each discovers the brutality of nature through encounters with other animals (Buck learns the law of Fang from the death of Curly and Spitz, White Fang learns the law of meat in numerous clashes with creatures of the wild); and each learns to submit to the law of the club – the rule of man – by suffering a beating (Buck by the man in the red sweater, White Fang by Gray Beaver). Himar Al'Hakim has no encounters with animals not with man but that of life and death.

The events depicted in the Call of The Wild are closer to what one wants to see happen: because we desire the basic, the "natural", the "what is" to win and not the world of street cards and sentimentalism that we have made. White Fang, like The Call of the Wild, is about freedom and bondage. Unlike The Call of the Wild it insists that civilization, for all its discontents is a bondage worth setting for. Himar Al'Hakim like London's fables is about freedom and bondage. Unlike them, freedom is realized through death. Buck's highest achievement is to kill; finally, he achieves the killing of a man, "the noblest game of all." (137)

London and Al'Hakim have basic difference in seeking truth. Al'Hakim tried to find it through self-knowledge. London looked for it in the desolate lifeless Northland Wild. The North is the background that determines character and action, bringing out in men certain qualities from the psychic depth of the race of all living beings. If one tries to come to understanding the symbols of London's wolf and Al'Hakim's donkey, these animals can be seen in London's and Al'Hakim's mirrors. London's companion would be the wolf whereas Al'Hakim's companion would be the donkey. The two authors can be painted as the old Greek heroes were pictured with their animals. There is, first, the archetypal image of the wolf as both preserver and destroyer, embodying the two conflicting wishes of mankind, the life wish and the death wish. The donkey's image is portrayed as a careless philosopher, embodying refusal to be fed.

In the story of creation according to Norse mythology, the sun and the moon are pursued by a pack of wolves that try to devour them and thus end everything. The wolf is also a creature of Odin, feasting on the slain and haunting the warrior paradise; with one great, grey wolf knowing his time will come. In Greek mythology, where everything was conceived in the likeness of man or beast, the wolf is the destructive principle; but by carrying away the old and unfit, he made way for new life and thus shared in the creative function.

The lesson that Buck must learn is how to cope with his loss of identity, he is feeling of alienation, and his loss of faith in a world he neither created nor knew existed. In other words, Buck's problem is now to survive in a hostile world; not surprisingly, it is the same problem faced by modern man. Buck learned the law of club and fang:

And Buck was merciless. He had learned well the law of club and fang, and he never forewent an advantage or drew back from a foe he had started on the way to Death... He must master or be

mastered; while to show mercy was a weakness. Mercy did not exist in the primordial life. It was misunderstood for fear, and misunderstandings made for death. Kill or be killed eat or be eaten, was the law; and this mandate, down out of the depths of time, he obeyed. (110)

Al'Faylasouf could not survive in a civilized hostile world. His problem is the same problem faced by the primitive man. He could not survive in a civilized world. Unlike buck, Al'Faylasouf came to a world of negation. He did not learn the lesson of survival. Al'Hakim's last sentence of his book respected the donkey and liked him:

I had always a vague feeling of liking that young donkey. My liking was far from pity; it was appreciation. I thank God that he died before growing to be ridden. I felt ashamed of that because I listen to whispers- while he passed calmly- coming from his fathomless soul: O! Time! Time! When does your justice prevail to enable me to ride? I am a simple ignorant but my master is more ignorant. (146)

Both London's and Al'Hakim's novels are the products of distinct constellation of experiences, readings and creative experimentation in their own lives. Their prolific outputs allow to trace the interdependent evolution of thought and art that suggests not the creatively static authors of critical conventions, but dynamic and mutable artists intent on refining their work.

### **Bibliography**

Al'Hakim, Tawfiq. (1940). *Himar Al-Hakim (Al'Hakim's Donkey)*. The translation is mine. Cairo: Maktab'a Misr.

Al'Hakim, Tawfiq. (1945). *HimariyQala Li (My Donkey Told Me)*. The translation is mine. Cairo: Maktab'aMisr.

Coleridge, S.T. (1953).*The Statesman Manual: (Complete Works)*. Vol 1., New York: ed. Shedd.

London, Jack. (1993).*The Call of the Wild, White Fang, and Other and Other Stories*. New York: Penguin Books.

London, Jack. (1956). *Letters from Jack London*. New York: ed. King Hendricks and Irving Shepard.

O'Connor, Richards. (1964). *Jack London: A biography*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Wellek, Rene and Warren, Austen. (1962). *Theory of Literature*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc.

Woolf, Virginia. (1928). *A Change of Perspective: The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. London: Penguin Books.