

Jack London's Writing Motivation for *The Call of the Wild*

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Abstract—The American author Jack London (1876–1916) has long been popular as a writer of primitive nature. His works have been scrutinized by critic all over the world from both thematic and aesthetic perspectives. Up to now, some critics come to realize the importance, so they begin to view Jack London in light of the most urgent present environmental protection. From this point of view, *The Call of the Wild* is Jack London's most typical and powerful work of nature, in which London is shown as being opposed to human mistreatment of animals and human intrusion into nature, for both nature and animals are seen by London as having intrinsic value on which human life depends, and Jack London's ecological ideas could be vividly embodied in the novel. Meanwhile, human urgently call for a new harmonious coexistence, which rests on human responsibility to nature, and an eventual return to nature. This article will analyze his writing motivation of *The Call of the Wild*.

Keywords—Jack London, Buck, *The Call of the Wild*, writing motivation

I. INTRODUCTION

Jack London's novel *The Call of the Wild* is the masterpiece of the naturalism [1]. Buck, the son of a Scotch shepherd dog, is born and brought up as "a sated aristocrat". He is kidnapped and beaten until he is "metamorphosed into a raging fiend" before being clubbed into insensibility and subjection by a dog-breaker. He is shipped to Alaska at the time the 1897 and put into a sledge team, of which he at length makes himself leader by overcoming his predecessor in a ruthless fight. He passes from one owner to another, from the skillful and considerate to the incompetent and brutal[2]. Under ill treatment Buck at last rebels and is rescued by John Thornton, a gold prospector, who becomes his ideal master. He saves Thornton from drowning and later wins a wager for him by pulling a sledge with a half-ton load. Buck begins to be made restless by the howling of timber wolves and makes occasional excursions to them in the forest. When Indians attack the camp he tears at their throats and drives them off, but Thornton is already dead. A wolf pack then moves in. Buck withstands them, but soon he finds the call of the wild irresistible and runs with the pack[3].

II. BACKGROUND OF THE CALL OF THE WILD

London believed in evolution and determinism and he was influenced in particular by Darwin and Spencer about the influence of heredity and of the milieu, as evidenced by his

work *The Call of the Wild*. But these beliefs were tempered by a deep love of humanity and a loathing for the cruelty that often characterizes man's treatment of animals and other men[4]. London's accurate description of the inhumanity of man is not a gloating over blood and knuckles, as so many critics have claimed, but an expression of his abhorrence of cruelty and his belief that the best way to expose it is to describe it unemotionally and accurately. Indeed, London believed that the novel should neither preach nor satirize but only dramatize life objectively, never drawing conclusions, because the conclusions are implicit in the material[5]. He intended the novel to be a powerful social tool but felt that an accurate and objective picture of society and mankind, presented with clinical detachment, is more effective than a compassionate dramatization of man's misery. London made his point clear in a vibrant defense of Kipling's methods and the apparent heartlessness of his descriptions.

The Call of the Wild does not dramatize directly the social problems of the day but focuses on the 1897 Gold Rush, including a vivid portrayal of Klondike types as embodied by the four sets of masters who in turn own Buck: initially, the essentially fair and efficient government couriers François and Perrault, and later the "Scotch half-breed" in charge of the mail train, who along with the other drivers is also just, despite harsh circumstances, and who respect the dogs and spares them what suffering he can. The last two sets of the masters Buck works under are dramatically opposite: first, the self-indulgent, ignorant, greedy, and hypocritical Mercedes, Charles, and Hal, who have no respect for the dogs and are made to stand for the worst of the "chekakos"; then John Thornton, the ideal master, "who saw to the welfare of his dogs as if they were his own children, because he could not help it." Clearly, London cannot dramatize through the eyes of a dog all, or even most, of the social reality of a Klondike invaded by a quarter-million gold hunters, of whom only a scant fifty thousand made it to Dawson city and the North. What he could do was making the human characters he portrayed widely representative of Klondike types he knew and had heard of—types who recur frequently in his other stories of the North[6].

III. JACK LONDON'S WRITING MOTIVATION IN THREE STAGES

The influence of the milieu and heredity, the concept of the survival of the fittest, and adaptation as the key to survival are of overwhelming importance in *The Call of the Wild*, which dramatizes the concept of devolution—the return of a civilized being to the primitive when his environment itself has changed

from one of mellow civilization to one of brutality where the only law is eat or be eaten, kill or be killed [6]. Until he is kidnapped, Buck lives the life of a sated aristocrat on Judge Miller's estate. His education into the harsh realities of an unprotected life begins shortly after he is abducted and endures a two-day-and-night train journey during which he is vilely treated and neither eats nor drinks. Although his rage knows no bounds and although he is a large, powerful dog, he is no match for a man who is "no slouch at dog break in" and knows how to handle a club efficiently. The man in the red sweater finishes Buck off with a blow directly on the nose and a final "shrewd blow" that knocks him unconscious [7]. Buck thus learns his first lesson: a man with a club is a master to be obeyed, though not necessarily placated." That club was a revelation. Buck's next lesson takes place on Dyea beach when Curly, whom he has befriended, is killed by the huskies when she makes friendly advances to one of them. In two minutes, she is literally torn to pieces. "So that was the way. No fair play. Once down, that was the end of you. Well [Buck] would see to it that he never went down".

Adapting to a new environment also entails learning other lessons, not only simple lessons such as digging a sleeping hole in the snow or eating fast, but also lessons involving major moral changes. Buck learns to steal, and London makes it clear that his first theft marks him as fit to survive in the hostile Northland environment. Among other moral qualities Buck sheds are his sense of fair play and mercy, values reserved for gentle climates. In the northern wilds, survival is the only goal, and ruthlessness the only way to survive. Thus Buck learns through experience and proves that he is eminently adaptable and fit. His body also adapts well to the new demands of the environment: he loses his fastidiousness, grows impervious to pain, achieves an internal as well as an external economy, making the most of whatever comes his way; his senses develop to an incredible acuteness, and forgotten instincts come to life in him [7]. Because heredity also plays an important role in his survival, the basic instinct which comes to life in Buck is the instinct to kill. The hunt of the snowshoe rabbit marks the awakening of Buck's desire to kill, and he immediately challenges Spitz to a fight, which he wins largely because the knowledge of ancestral fighting techniques instantly comes into true.

After defeating Spitz, and while the pack closes in on his crippled enemy, Buck has indeed come of age. Although his education is not finished, he has proven that he is one of the fit. Once Buck has proven himself on the hereditary and environmental levels and has reverted to instinctual patterns of behavior. But life with John Thornton, which could in other circumstances, has heralded a return to the tame, is merely an interval in Buck's evolution, and the call of the wild keeps on summoning him until he has returned fully to the life of his ancestors and become a part of nature. In the last stage of Buck's devolution, London's handling of the theme of heredity becomes increasingly mythical and archetypal. Clearly, London could not have been aware of the extent to which his dramatization of Buck's return to the wild exemplifies C.G. Jung's theories of the unconscious [8]. Nevertheless, Buck offers a perfect harmonization of Jung's progression and regression principles. It is the emergence of his collective

unconscious added to his physical power and intelligence which allows Buck to survive. Throughout most of the book, Buck's persona and shadow are in equilibrium. He fulfills a social role where work is all-important, and, at the same time, he is in tune with his instincts.

The third stage of Buck's evolution consists in the shedding of his new sled-dog persona to adopt a third and final one: a mythical or archetypal persona that becomes the very embodiment of his shadow, as his earlier dog-persona recedes into his personal unconscious [8]. In fact, in London's stories of the north, human survival demands virtues such as courage, integrity, and brotherhood. Like dogs men must change both physically and morally, as only the strong survive; but they must change for the better morally as well as physically, substituting "unselfishness, forbearance, and tolerance" for the courtesies of ordinary life. Those who fail usually die a useless and shameful death after having lived without dignity, such as the protagonists of "In a Far Country" and the miserably incompetent Mercedes, Hal and Charles in *The Call of the Wild.*, who neither "toil hard, suffer sore, [nor] remain sweet of speech and kindly", and who embody the antithesis of what man should be in the northern wilderness. Unlike Buck, London's ideal heroes, such as Malemute Kid and John Thornton, have not lost their moral nature.

IV. MEANINGS OF JACK LONDON'S MOTIVATION IN THE CALL OF THE WILD

In view of *The Call of the Wild*, Humans Domesticated pet dogs seem to be pampered, but in reality they must be based on human's principles. Life, due diligence, become a "good dog" in line with human norms. In dog vendors' view, only the wooden sticks and the cages and under the threat of the cage, the dogs can be submitted and followed suit. This process reflects Jack London's deep understanding of the relationship between humans and animals [9]. With an image of a young and inexperienced dog (wolf) comes into the reader's eyes and he can't help laughing with affection and understandings. Humor and wit make London's stories appear to be more relaxing and active under the atmosphere of cruel and indifferent nature and society. With his extraordinary writing techniques, amazing way of figure portrayal, humorous and witty language, Jack London makes us cry with his heroes' cry and laugh with their pleasure. This is Jack London, a real great writer, what he left the reader is not only these brilliant and immortal works and vivid images but also a spirit, a style that we can benefit and enjoy all our lives [10]. Actually, London tried to interpret the complex society from different angles and on different levels. At the end of the story, Buck went back to the wild, which is just what London wanted to express, to the nature of life [11]. Jack London expressed his intention on human and nature in *The Call of the Wild*. that human beings should respect the nature and coexist with the nature [12]. To understand the relationship between human and nature helps to understand human nature. Jack London concluded with "Survival of the Fittest" in *The Call of the Wild* [13].

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