

Struggle for Existence: A Critical Study of Jack London's the Call of the Wild

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Abstract

This paper attempts to analyse the notion of struggle of existence in Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* authentically. The main character, Buck, is an icon of individualism. When Buck is first put into a crate and severely beaten by the man in the red sweater, he does not exhibit his primal beastliness because he has been introduced as a civilised dog. Buck is a powerful, individualistic figure who shows the effectiveness of love- and solidarity-based comradeship in the face of natural pressures. Cooperation must be balanced with individualism. In order to be trained as a sled dog, Buck is abducted from his home in the Santa Clara Valley of California and sent to Alaska. Buck is introduced to the "survival of the fittest" world through a variety of encounters. As an individual, Buck fights hard to survive, often in harsh environments and while serving multiple masters. Until he realises who he truly is, he skilfully navigates all obstacles. In the novel, Buck's immoral traits are banned, including his sneaky fish theft from Pike, cunning expulsion of Spitz during the struggle for leadership, and wilful defiance of Hal and Charles' orders. His survival instinct prompts him to abandon civilisation and live peacefully as a wolf only at the story's end.

Keywords: Individual, Struggle, Civilization, Survival, Freedom

Introduction

Jack London (1876-1916), one among the immortals of world fiction, is a compelling storyteller and a writer of extraordinary vigour. He is still extensively read and given serious consideration by intellectuals in Europe and Russia. Because of the numerous illustrations and accurate descriptions in his books, readers experience dramatic impacts. He balances precariously on one foot in each branch of the divided stream, drama, and fiction, like a giant

who is both gruff and unsteady. He struggled against his upbringing and surroundings before finding success and notoriety through self-education. In general, three themes are abundant in London's works. They are the idea of "survival of the fittest," "determinism" as the universe's governing principle, and "the supremacy of the white man."

London's *The Call of the Wild*, published in 1903, is his best and most widely read work. Two separate dogs served as the immediate sources of inspiration for the novel, *The Call of the Wild*. One of them was real, while the other was made up. London was motivated to write about Marshall and Louis Bond because they had travelled to the Klondike with their two dogs from the ranch of their father, Judge Bond, close to Santa Clara Valley. Jack, one of the dogs, was highly regarded in London. Based on scientific and evolutionary variables, he took that real dog, tweaked it to suit his preferences, and gave it the name Buck. Determined outcomes, survival, and violence are the main themes and motifs throughout Buck.

Determinism is, of course, a fundamental theme. It conveys the idea that environmental impact and natural law are stronger than Buck's will. The idea that survival is the primary incentive in animal life provides a point of view from which all emotion, motivation, and conflict may be examined. The topic of survival emerges from the application of determinism to biological competition. With the emphasis shifting from tradition to survival, the subject of violence becomes more prevalent. Animal survival depends on violence, on using force to overcome force. That influence also led London to develop the based-on-truth character Buck.

Buck is a friendly large dog, but one of his forebears in the family tree was a wolf. The key elements that Jack London needed to construct a fantastic piece of fiction about the legendary dog were provided by the natural and evolutionary factors. Buck, a mixed-breed St. Bernard and Scotch shepherd, is taken from his cosy home in California and sold to a buyer. He is taken to the Yukon and brutally trained as a dog team member, where he swiftly picks up the law of clubs, fangs, and learns how to survive in the cold wilderness. To do this, he must be stronger and shrewder than the other dogs on the team. The seven chapters in *The Call of the Wild* can be divided into four main movements, much like in a play. Each of these movements has a unique topic, rhythm, and tone; they are all brought to a dramatic climax by an intensely dramatic incident; and each represents a particular step in the hero's development from a phenomenal into an ideal figure.

The domestic dog Buck, a half Scottish-shepherd and part Saint Bernard, is transported from his cushy life in warm California to a Yukon landscape and later becomes the head of a dog sled team. This is the plot of *The Call of the Wild*. It introduced the American novel to a new level of reality. It is evidence of the theme of survival as well as the inherent primitivism of every human psyche. When Buck's human owner is killed by Red Indians at the end of the novel, he severs his ties to civilization, joins a pack of wolf, and his long-buried instincts reappear.

These recurring topics influence a lot of London's work. London's intellectual influences during his mature life included Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin. Writings by London were heavily influenced by social Darwinism and its premise of survival of the fittest. *The*

Call of the Wild is a good example of this concept. Animals that have been personified in London play a more intricate role in forming the semantic realm of fiction. His most famous piece is the tale of a domestic dog that transforms into a wolf.

In the end, Buck is made immortal by London. Buck's persona as he first appears in *The Call of the Wild* is that of a polite, nice-dog. Buck has discovered passion in the second stage, which is an expression of the shadow: a ferocious hatred of Spitz and a passionate love for John Thornton. The adoption of a third and final mask—a mythical or archetypal mask that becomes the exact incarnation of Buck's shadow—comes during the third stage of Buck's devolution, which also involves the shedding of this new social disguise. His relationship with John Thornton and the development of his fervent love for him represent a turning point in Buck's progress.

As Buck devolves, London's treatment of the subject of heredity takes on an ever-greater mythological and archetypal quality. Even if Buck moves backward (retrogression), he acquires the additional allure and mystique of the wild. He is all strength and beauty, but he also finds danger to be fascinating. Why does Buck desire to become a predator like a wolf? Always more romantic than their prey, predators. Even though both animals are physically attractive and graceful, the tiger is more romantic than the antelope because human admiration for the predator's beauty and the precision of his movements is linked to human fear of the danger the predator represents, while human admiration for the antelope's beauty is linked to human pity for the animal's obvious fate. Pity is not a romantic feeling since it distances itself emotionally from its object and demeans it. Everyone wants to be the tiger instead of the antelope, the victor instead of the defeated. Since of this, the tiger is appealing to anyone's imagination and is unconscious because everyone admires him and wants to be like him (tiger).

Automatic identification with the antelope would imply a desire to die, which is not good for the long-term survival of any one's own species. His inherited traits include responding to the call of the wild, changing into the alpha wolf of his group, and taking down moose and Yeehats. Anyone would wonder why Buck did not show the same trait earlier to his tormentors, such as the gardener Manuel, the man in the red sweater, Francois, Perrault, the Scotsman, Charles, and Hal, if the wolfishness had been an inherent quality of Buck and because of that he could have killed the Yeehats in the end.

London admitted the reply of Darwin for the above question, "It is scarcely possible to doubt that the love of man has become instinctive in the dog" (Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, 151). Although the man in the red sweater is tying a rope around Buck's neck, he never questions how much men adore him. "Buck had accepted the rope with quiet dignity. To be sure, it was an unwonted performance; but he had learned to trust in men he knew and to give them credit for a wisdom that outreached his own" (494). Reversed happens during Buck's wolf transition. The acceptance of Buck's wolflikeness is the result of natural selection. His preferred variety is that of a wolf, and his rejection of harmful variation is that of a dog.

Additionally, Buck chooses his wolflikeness as his main trait solely for survival. In the end, he rises to become a wolf pack leader rather than becoming a victim like a dog. *The Call of the Wild* heavily emphasises the importance of heredity, the environment, the idea of the survival of the fittest, and adaptation as the key to existence. The return to the primitiveness from civilisation, where the environment is altered to savagery, where the law is: eat or be eaten, kill or be killed, is a theme that is more heavily explored in the novel than that of evolution. In *Jack London -An American Radical*, Carolyn Johnston avers,

In *The Call of the Wild*, Jack London casts his version of a superman as the protagonist in animal form. Buck is a strong, individualistic character who demonstrates the power of comradeship based on love and solidarity against environmental forces. (81)

London makes Buck a living legend despite the fact that he is transformed into a primitive beast. Buck has developed traits like courage, endurance, leadership, loyalty, a passionate ability to love, and a complete disregard for risk while romantically defending or avenging those he loves despite his beauty and romantic appeal. He possesses the aforementioned traits as a result of his surroundings.

Although significant, heredity and environment are not only the sole drivers of animal and human behaviour; they also influence their love of freedom. Following Thornton's demise, Buck responds to the call once more, and this time he battles alongside the entire wolf pack and achieves the hero's resounding victory. As the hero should, Buck does not come back; instead, he stays in the wilderness and is left to go with the pack in the frigid northern winter. Buck is left in the depth of consciousness if self-attainment is consciousness. He stares up into the sky and howls like a wolf whenever he hears a familiar call coming from the woodland. He moves steadily and amicably toward the woodland alongside the timber wolf. He would be wary of the wolf if he had merely been a dog. His slaughter of the bear had a distinctly wolflike quality to it.

Buck is pleased with his strength and ability to communicate with the wolverines. His outward look has also evolved through time. His larger head resembles a wolf, and his muzzle is the longest wolf muzzle of any wolf. His interior traits alter along with his outward look. He is strong due to his cunning and shepherd intelligence. "His cunning was wolf cunning, and wild cunning; his intelligence and St. Bernard intelligence; and all this, plus an experience gained in the fiercest of schools, made him as formidable a creature as that roamed the wild" (534). He quickly changes as a result of his trip to the forest. He transforms into a wild animal, creeps silently, cat-footed, a passing shadow that appears and vanishes into the shade. He moves like a snake while stalking live prey like a wolf. His slaying of the moose resembles a wolf's act in many ways.

Following his release from all human ties, Buck decides to follow the wolf's life path. He develops into the wolves' unrivalled leader. Darwinian natural selection cannot occur if there are blending hereditary components since each generation sees a halves of the available variation. Despite being in the worst possible circumstances, his wolfishness causes him to turn into a wolf and stays that way for the rest of his life because the genetic components are continuous.

logically and intellectually *The Call of the Wild*'s successful Naturalism makes it pleasant. Buck is actually capable of surviving. He eats the raw meat meal piece by piece since he is flexible at his core. If he had objected to the man in the red sweater right away, he would have perished and the scheme would not have progressed. A dog that would never submit or obey was finally "killed in the struggle for domination," according to Buck (497). He learns to obey from his wisdom. Buck only learns food theft from Spitz. Buck has not needed to steal food because he has lived like a satiated nobleman in Judge Miller's home.

Because there is a shortage of food, Buck undertakes food theft. He is conscious of his progressive decline. He discovers that the other dogs and men nearby are not town dogs and town men because he has been a trained and civilised dog. "They were savages, all of them, who knew no law but the law of club and fang" (499). He's witnessed horses being trained for hauling. He had never before noticed dogs being harnessed. When Francois fastens him to a sled, he initially becomes confused, but later on in the story, he battles to gain control over dragging the sledge. He is aware that Francois expects "instant obedience" from him (499). Due to the blanket of snow covering the entire area, Buck has a difficult time resting. The first time he meets the snow, it bites him like fire. But he must spend the entire night sleeping in the snow. He learns a fresh lesson when he discovers that every other dog has dug holes in the snow. "Buck confidently selected a spot, and with much fuss and wasted effort proceeded to dig a hole for himself" (500). His body heat quickly fills the space, and he quickly falls asleep.

Dave and Sol-leks are separated by Buck on purpose so that he might learn from them. "Apt scholar that he was, they were equally apt teachers, never allowing him to linger long in error, and enforcing their teaching with their sharp teeth" (501). Buck finds it simpler to follow the instructions than to ignore them. "Buck found it to be cheaper to mend his ways than to retaliate" (501). Buck may like lying next to the fire with his forelegs stretched out in front of him, head raised, and eyes twinkling dreamily at the flames. Although he remembers the above incident, which he had frequently in Judge Miller's home, he is well aware that this type of memory has no influence over him.

Buck is a ruthless hunter when taking down the animals. He is well-versed in the law of the club and the fang. He must become master or become a slave. If he is merciful, it will be a sign of his frailty. Mercy is thought to be synonymous with dread and death since it did not exist before the beginning of life. After Thornton is slain, Buck must abide by the maxims "eat or be eaten," "kill or be killed," in order to survive. His body adapts to the alterations in order to survive. He develops wolf-like white fangs, and his muzzle also widens. He eventually turns into a wolf pack legend. In *Jack London: Essays in Criticism*, Ray Wilson Ownbey avers, "While the final outcome of the story argues not for a victory for the 'dominant, devolved race,' London still asserts that the Anglo-Saxon species has evolved, to its superiority through its struggle for survival" (86).

Unlike the human beings in London, Buck lacks morality. As Buck learns to steal and kill in order to survive, his moral character deteriorates as a result of his adaption to the harsh Northland environment. Due to John Thornton's affection at that precise moment, Buck

changes from civilization to the primitive and vice versa. He is showered with love by his master John Thornton after he saved him from a nasty master. London appears to be making the case that cooperation, as shown by Thornton and Buck and by Buck and the pack of wolves, is necessary for survival and that the battle itself bestows dignity on the participants.

The lesson of London is that love is ultimately the self-justifying value and that survival depends on cooperation and adaptation. A person can escape the self, reason, and loneliness traps via love alone. London connected socialism with the love of man as a remedy for harsh individualism.

At first look, *The Call of the Wild* appears to be completely removed from any traditional society and hence devoid of its conflicts, but in reality, the story uncovers a number of connections to the social structures of that culture. The plot revolves around the traditional and even heroic virtues of love and fair play. In an environment of ease and affection, Buck starts to feel content and pleased. When he is taken from his family and sold into servitude, traditional justice is betrayed, but he rises to the occasion by using his courage and leadership skills. Although they are portrayed as atavistic, they nevertheless possess “moral” traits that are valued in Western literature. And as Buck reacts to John Thornton’s love, they are given new dignity: Chivalry, which originates from the deep core of Europe, has a profoundly deep-seated influence on the subordination of strength and courage to kindness and love. Buck’s chivalrous revenge on the barbaric Indians for the murder of his beloved master Thornton dates all the way back to the Crusades. These arguments are compelling, but it would be regrettable to give up on human society. The call liberates a civilised man, especially an American, and symbolises the need for freedom and purity that permeates every human interaction; nevertheless, one retreats in order to return with renewed vigour.

In the novel, Buck embodies the human virtues that are always a little tainted -rebellion and escape - as well as the human traits that are always a little tainted in the real world. He “sings a song of the younger world,” which is the song of the American fantasy of innocence and academic purity, when man was only born and society had not crushed him down under its load of falsehood, running at last, full-throated into the pale moonlight, exulting in his freedom and strength. In this context, *The Call of the Wild* reads more like a song than a novel. In any case, London successfully blends form and subject in this instance. Buck is a rebellious individualist who eventually quits society altogether. It is not particularly strange that his idol should be a dog because a flawless escape is unnatural.

Conclusion

In *The Call of the Wild*, London escaped the oppressive reality of the struggle for survival in civilization that he had witnessed in the slums of London in favour of a world he had imagined, a tidy, lovely, primitive one where he was convinced that the fit, whether they be man or beast, can and will survive.

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