

THE CALL

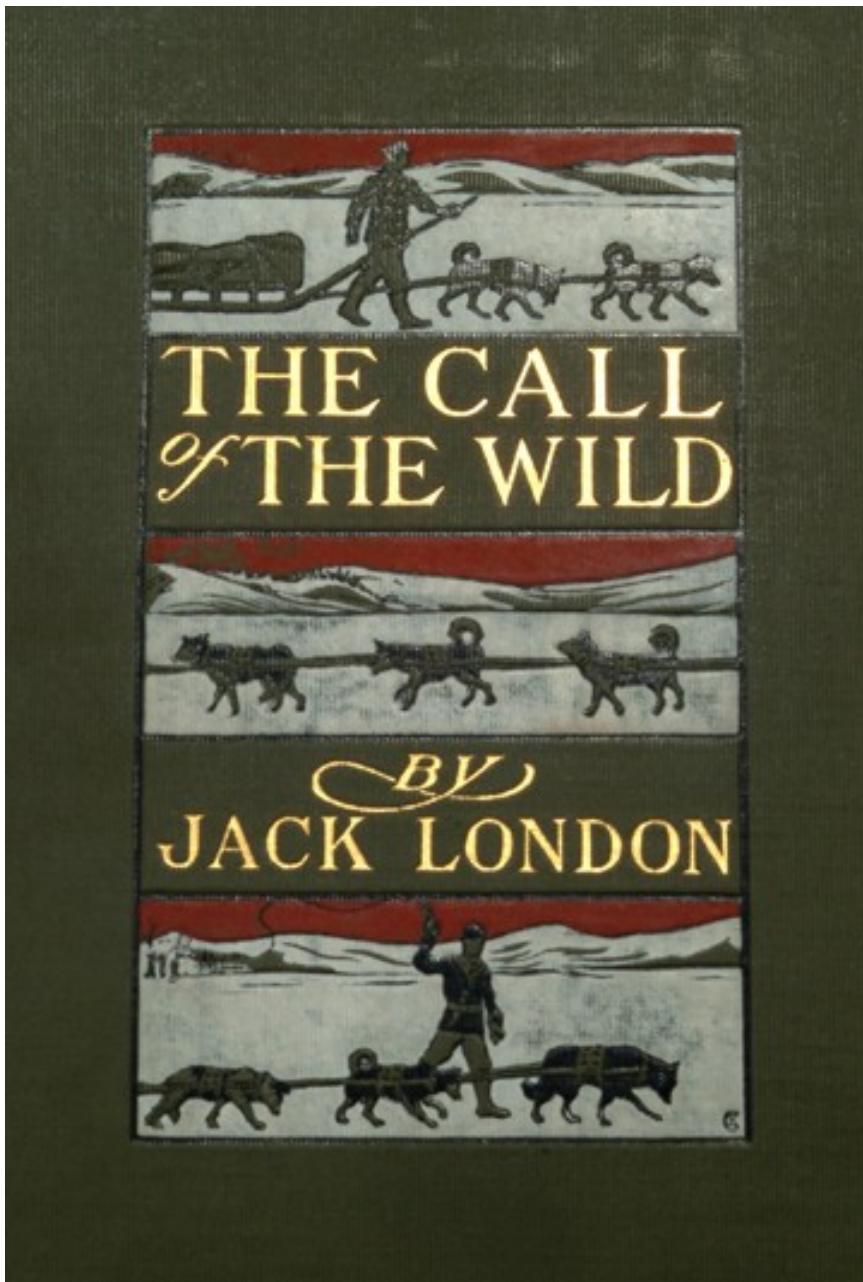
The Magazine of the Jack London Society

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The Call of the Wild selected for the National Endowment for the Arts' Big Read Program



Restoring the Lake on Jack London's Beauty Ranch

An Interview with Elisa Stancil



Elisa Stancil is the editor of ***Moonletter***, a key source of information about the valley's parks published by The Valley of the Moon Natural Historical Association. The annual cost is \$50 per year to belong to VMNHA. To join contact the association at 2400 London Ranch Road, Glen Ellen, CA 95442, or for more information e-mail Elisa at estancil@earthlink.net. Elisa's Company, Elisa Stancil Studios, specializes in restoration and decorative painting. To see some of their elegant work go to www.elisastancil.com.



***Call:* What is the Jack London Lake Alliance?**

Elisa Stancil: The Valley of the Moon Natural History Association is a cooperating association (all volunteer non-profit) serving three state parks. Jack London State Historic Park is one of them. We assist the Calif. State Parks with interpretive exhibits, fundraising, and special projects. The Alliance is a special project of the VMHA. We are raising awareness of the problem and raising funds to restore the lake, the path, the dam, and a portion of the dock, as well as funds to eventually repair the riparian areas downstream. Department of Parks and Rec. will write all contracts and oversee the actual work, and the Alliance will serve as project liaison.

***Call:* What is the end goal of the Jack London Lake Alliance project?**

Elisa Stancil: We plan to restore the lake and dam to the hidden treasure it once was, and provide a maintenance endowment to keep it beautiful for all the generations to come. We intend to restore the

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THE CWATER DIVERTER AT THE TIME OF ITS ORIGINAL CONSTRUCTION

riparian damage caused by decades of neglect, reducing the serious silt load in three streams running nearby, and contributing to the ecological stability of the region. Interpretive information will educate visitors to the project and the history of the lake, and education programs will involve students in maintaining the trails, the lake, and the stream health.

Call: How is the project progressing at this point?
Elisa Stancil: To date we have raised over \$70,000 in individual donations, and The Department of Parks and Rec. has allocated over \$70,000 for studies that need to be done. We have early engineering completed, preliminary CEQA is completed, and a full survey of the lake and surrounding landscape is finished. The Sonoma Ecology Center and the Community Foundation of Sonoma County have been working with us as well as a host of volunteer technical advisors. The community has been very supportive. The overall project is expected to cost as much as a million dollars. The dam and lake portion is presently being estimated by two lake restoration specialists, and dredgers and soils companies are studying how to best remove



THE CONDITION OF THE WATER DIVERTER TODAY

the excess soil. The first phase, the repair of lake and dam, could cost less than \$500,000. The project could start as early as this time 2010, provided enough funds are raised.

Call: Can you speak about the original building of dam and the creation of the lake on Beauty Ranch?

Elisa Stancil: Let me share with you Gustav Stickley's response to this question: "In 1913 Jack London decided to dam a low area on the slope of Sonoma Mountain. While he travelled and continued to write, his sister Eliza Shepard oversaw the building of the dam, following designs developed by Jack. In 1914 she added a boat/bath house, built of rough logs. This dam and the dock and bath house are considered great examples of the "utility and beauty" that Jack revered, and are precursors to the Craftsman style building that was soon to follow, nation wide." (Gustav Stickley)

Call: How was the lake used in Jack London's time?

Elisa Stancil: The winter run off and the two natural springs that fed the lake did not provide enough water for year round irrigation or recreation. In 1914-1915 Eliza, under Jack's

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direction, diverted water from Graham Creek, using pipe left over from the Pan Pacific Exposition. This caused an interesting water rights dispute that was settled in court. The diverter, an ingenious design, allowed water to be siphoned off from one main set of valves, to four or five different locations downslope, for irrigation.

Call: Historically, how is the lake an important landmark for Jack London's legacy?

Elisa Stancil: The diverter, and the many levels of irrigation designed by Jack, were ahead of their time. Numerous letters and telegrams between Jack and Eliza demonstrate the importance he placed on the irrigation from the dam. In addition, the dam created the lake that in turn provided wonderful recreation for fishing, boating, and swimming. The lake was the site of a barbecue and picnic tables, and was used like a mini Bohemian Grove for many years following Jack's death, while the property was a guest ranch, and following that, as a family get away. The silence, the fact that no one can access the lake today unless they ride in, cycle in, or hike in, and the memories of generations and generations of visitors make the lake a wonderful touchstone to the era in which London lived and wrote.

Call: What is the condition of the lake and dam today?

Elisa Stancil: Today the lake is nearly silted in. The dam is leaking and has lost its protective top cap. The diverter that drains the lake and maintains the level during strong winter storms is broken, and water now overtops the dam, causing massive erosion downstream. The lake is clogged with algae and rushes, and the water is warm and nearly stagnant for many months. The bath house is stable but closed, and the dock is no longer present. The barbecue and outdoor fireplace, split rail fence and path around the lake are gone. Elisa at the lake.



Elisa at the Lake. She is holding a photograph of Irving Shepard fishing in the 1940s.

To see an issue of *Moonletter* online go to:
[www.jacklondonpark.com/spring_moonletter_2008_color\[1\].pdf](http://www.jacklondonpark.com/spring_moonletter_2008_color[1].pdf)

Call: How can the members of the Jack London Society contribute to the Jack London Lake Alliance Project?

Elisa Stancil: Please write to the California State Parks Foundation, the State Parks Commissioners, the Governor, and the Department of Parks and Recreation requesting this project be funded. Also please go to our website, www.jacklondonlake.org to learn how to donate yourself to this important project. You can also assist us by spreading the word, we really appreciate the help!

THE CALL OF THE CRITICS: JACK LONDON, *THE CALL OF THE WILD*, AND ITS EARLY REVIEWS

BY MATTHEW EVERTSON



Matthew Evertson
is an Associate Professor in the Department of English and Humanities at Chadron State College in Chadron, Nebraska, where he teaches American Literature, Native American Literature, Western American Literature and Writing. He is currently working on a book-length comparative study of Stephen Crane and Theodore Roosevelt tentatively titled *Strenuous Lives: Stephen Crane, Theodore Roosevelt and the American 1890s*. He is also currently teaching, researching and writing about the regional influences upon the literature of the Great Plains.

1903 brought fame to Jack London, the bulky Californian who was at home in loose clothes and open sky, for that was the year of *The Call of the Wild*. From that point on, London was seldom far from the public eye. Controversial and passionate, he was the first writer to ever make a million dollars. Responding to a wide-eyed America, still licking its Civil War wounds and stepping with unsure feet upon a new century—like London's dog-hero Buck when he first encounters northland snow—the magazines of the day recorded and responded to the changing tastes, views and lifestyles of post-reconstruction America. Part of the London legend has its genesis in these magazines that reflected the tastes of a changing American society and took part in shaping them.

The Call of the Wild was originally released in five weekly installments for *The Saturday Evening Post* from June 20 to July 18. A Macmillan cloth-bound text was published shortly afterwards, and the critics of both popular and literary periodicals pounced. Comparing London to some of the most popular and respected literary legends of the day like Twain, Kipling, Harte, and Norris, reviewers employed vivid and powerful language that spoke of a pioneering treatment: vital, primi-

tive, primeval, native, original, thrilling, innovative, an epic, with beasts, brutality, struggle, animals and nature galore. A promotional advertisement in the *New York Times Saturday Review of Books and Art*, on July 25, 1903, the same issue which ran an enthusiastic full-page review of the book, took note of such praise:

FIRST EDITION, OF 10,000 COPIES, EXHAUSTED.

SECOND EDITION, 10,000 COPIES, ON THE PRESS.

And quoted reviews:

A Tale that is literature . . . the unity of its plan and the firmness of its execution are equally remarkable . . . a story that grips the reader deeply. It is art, it is literature . . . It stands apart, far apart . . . with so much skill, so much reasonableness, so much convincing logic. -*New York Mail and Express*

JACK LONDON is one of the very few younger writers who are making enviable records for themselves . . . The literary quality and the virile strength of his stories increase . . . for the present at least he is without rival . . . His latest volume is his best . . . in the picturesque and imaginative quality of the born story teller . . . The book is a series of remarkable pictures . . . but above all it is a picture of dog life that in its wonderful imaginative quality stands quite alone . . . possesses an originality and a sort of virile poetry . . . a most exceptional book. -*New York Commercial Advertiser*

A BIG STORY in sober English, and with thorough art in the construction . . . a wonderfully perfect bit of work . . . a book that will be heard of. The dog adventures are as exciting as any man's exploits could be, and Mr. London's workmanship is wholly satisfying. -*The New York Sun*

THE STORY IS one that will stir the blood of every lover of a life in its closest relation to nature. Whoever loves the open or adventure for its own sake will find 'The Call of the Wild' a most fascinating book. -*The Brooklyn Eagle*. ("Story" 513)

Macmillan could hardly have been objective in an advertisement for one of its writers, but clearly the com-

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Here was a writer, an American, not afraid to challenge the establishment and chart out new territory; he was ready, if you will, to lead the pack in a new type of literature distinct to the United States.

pany saw potential in London, sensationalizing the favorable reviews of the time. From the beginning London was also quite aware of his audience, and was more than willing to respond to their wishes. As Susan Ward explains in her essay on his relationship with his editors and reading public, London wrote “for art’s sake and for money” (Ward 16). The marketing of London couldn’t have been better timed with what the public wanted to read. “During the latter half of the nineteenth century,” she writes, “local-color fiction was an important magazine staple [...]” (Ward 16). The excitement of exploring a new, if not final, frontier meant London was able to find an eager market for his Yukon stories. Ward points out that London’s keen business sense made him very responsive to his editors and publishers, who were in turn sensitive, hopefully, to the desires of the reading public. As a letter to his editor, George Brett, on March 25, 1903 shows, London sensed *The Call of the Wild* would be most important in gaining him followers: “I am sure that pushing the book in the manner you mention will be of the utmost value to me, giving me, as you say, an audience for subsequent books. It is the audience already gathered, as I do hope you will gather in this case, that counts” (*Letters* 357). Incredibly, London was even considering changing the title of the book to “The Sleeping Wolf,” but relied on Brett’s judgment as he knew “the publishing end of it, and the market value of titles, as I could not dream to know” (*Letters* 357). London was clearly looking ahead, hoping for success enough with his book to go on to bigger and better things. As he explains to Brett in the same letter, “I cannot convey to you the greatness of my pleasure at knowing that the book has struck you favorably; for I feel, therefore, that it is an earnest of the work I hope to do for you when I find myself. And find myself I will, some day” (*Letters* 357-8).

While London was trying to “find himself,” his book was leading the pack. A neophyte in the book selling business—which would have a great deal of influence on his later works—he was yet “untainted” by success, and it is the easy naturalness of the book with its unique plot and perspective that appealed to so many readers at once and garnered such positive reviews. The safe and simple story of Buck’s journey was having an unexpected impact on its audience. “The author with an art that is ex-

quisite has taken for his hero the canine offspring of a St. Bernard father and a Scotch shepherd dog mother,” proclaims the *Independent*. Trying to describe the titanic change that befalls this dog, other reviewers illustrate the peaceful life Buck is forced to leave when he is kidnapped from his home in California, “where he has led an easy and irresponsible life, to be broken into the service of sled-hauling in Alaska” (Payne). Reviewers describe Buck’s transformation with excitement and electricity when he is thrust into his exotic northland setting. Here begins his struggle for existence against cold, hunger and toil, the hostility of beasts, and the brutality of men—a struggle that develops in him the instinct of self-preservation, and makes him, like his wild ancestors, crafty, patient, keen of senses, strong of sinew, and ferocious in fight. (*Nation*)

Other critics vividly recount Buck’s graphic fight to the death with the evil sled-leader, Spitz, winning his place at the head of the dog team. Still others focus in with empathetic language describing the harrowing ordeal of the irresponsible owners who almost destroy Buck and his team by driving them too hard on too little. Equally emotional, other reviewers focus on the love relationship between Buck and John Thornton; having saved each other’s lives, they become closely attached. But what moves the critics most, and what they describe as the revolutionary aspect of the story, involves the last part of the story, where Buck is drawn more and more to the perimeters of civilization in pursuit of the elusive call he hears within:

[...] civilization gradually drops away from him, until the end, the last and best of his masters having been slain by the Indians, he abandons civilization for good, and joins the wolf-pack, of which his strength and craft at once make him the leader. (Payne)

Engaging readers with the type of mystery that fills the final pages of the book, reviewers were not afraid to give away the unique ending where Buck becomes the “ghost dog” of the far north, a lingering legend among the Yee-hat tribe, a pervasive symbol of the mystery and ancestral emotion incumbent in the primitive call.

The Call of the Critics

While the critics echoed one another in their enthusiastic treatment of his unusual plot and point of view, there was greater debate on how to categorize London's work in a multi-dimensional literary period. Leaving the turbulent nineteenth century, the literary climate of America was complex, what Earl J. Wilcox in an introduction to *The Call of the Wild* described as "an age of unusual ferment in sociological, political and ideological patterns" (Wilcox 3). Magazines were more popular than ever, publishing serially some of the most noted works of the day, and London promised to be a distinctly American voice that they could call their own. "*The Call of the Wild* is almost epic," proclaimed *The American Monthly Review of Reviews*, in November of 1903:

The story is vital and true and in it and through it you feel the lash of the northern wind, the oppression and the exaltation of the undiscovered, primitive land, the mysterious, ruggedly poetic touch of the primitive nature: you yourself hear the insistent call of the wild. ("Glance" 633)

Boston's *The Literary World* also found praise for this new depiction of nature. Decrying the "laureates of nature" producing volume upon volume of "dull 'natural history' books," this reviewer was pleased to find a "new key in which to sound the praises of nature and animal life." London, according to the author, had offered "a story of the robust variety which is never the work of any but a strong and original mind" ("Nature" 229). In contrast, the reviewer for *The Critic* writes "this is not a nature book, but a strong, vital tale of a splendid sled-dog in the Klondike." The nature that does occur, the reviewer says, is "human, brute, primeval earth nature [...]." The author goes on to boast, "If Kipling had written a third 'Jungle Book,' it might have been 'The Call of the Wild.'" *The Jungle Book* had been released in 1894, and *Just So Stories* were new in 1902, so that Americans were quite in the thick of Kipling's work. Review after review would draw the comparison between the two "naturalists," so much so that London would ultimately earn the epithet "Kipling of the Klondike." The November 1903 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, also made the comparison in its "Books New and Old," section: "No modern writer of fiction, unless it be Kipling, has preserved so clearly the distinction between animal virtue and human virtue" ("Books" 695). London's ability to aptly write of both human and animal nature, however, struck a more responsive cord in

this reviewer, already envisioning the possibilities of a major, uniquely American, literary work. The author proclaims it "is a story altogether untouched by bookishness." The simple directness of the story, the author writes, is impressive in its own right, beyond the deeper complexities of what London had accomplished. "A bookish reader," the critic writes, "might conceivably read it as a sort of allegory with a broad human application; but its face value as a single minded study of animal nature really seems to be sufficiently considerable" ("Books" 695). Such innovations, according to this reviewer, were uniquely the product of an American mind, and he called for allowing the author to "stand upon his own feet" even as others are calling him the "American Kipling" ("Books" 696). The reviewer sees something unique in London's work, beyond Kipling's interest with "primitive human nature." The critic differentiates London: "this is a study of primitive dog nature" ("Books" 696).

The reviewers in the August 1903 *Life* magazine also echoed the sense of a distinctly new American voice:

It now seems likely that Jack London will

While the critics echoed one another in their enthusiastic treatment of his unusual plot and point of view, there was greater debate on how to categorize London's work in a multi-dimensional literary period.

receive through his new book, *The Call of the Wild*, that recognition which he has richly earned by his earlier work. He is destined to be to Alaska what Mark Twain and Bret Harte have been to the Mississippi and California, and in his interpretation of the natives, animal and human, he adds a touch of Kipling. ("Latest" 172)

E. F. Harkins, in his "Little Pilgrimages Among the Man and Women Who Have Written Famous Books—#6," which appeared in Boston's *Literary World* in December of 1903, called for an end to the comparisons to Kipling, suggesting that London had "studied" his Kipling well, but that the "young student might well have claimed to be a master of his own right" (Harkins 337). Harkins sees more to London than a "servile" imitator, writing that, "many 'Kiplings' have come—and gone," but that London's approach is unique, and the

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comparison does him little credit. “Of course, it was not his fault that the critics made the invidious comparison,” Harkins writes. “Lazy and superficial critics are for ever doing that sort of thing” (Harkins 337). London is innovative, he argues, if not better, and other critics echoed the same praise; America could produce artists who write as well as England’s best. Not afraid to paint his portraits graphically, London’s realism served as ammunition critics could volley at the entrenched literary establishments excluding the pioneering works of American writers. The romantic influence, so pervasive in other works, didn’t seem to affect London: “There is no sentimentalizing in the way Mr. London depicts his nature,” writes the reviewer of *Current Literature*. Here was a writer, an American, not afraid to challenge the establishment and chart out new territory; he was ready, if you will, to lead the pack in a new type of literature distinct to the United States. “The book rises above mere story telling,” the critic writes, “and possesses elements of the best in literature—scope, vitality and fullness” (369).

In his August 1903 review in *Reader Magazine*, J. Stewart Doubleday was equally impressed with the directness of the 24-year-old London. “Mr. London is one of the most original and impressive authors this country has known,” he writes, proclaiming the young writer’s power “lies not alone in his clear-sighted depiction of life, but in his suggestion of the eternal principles that underlie it” (408). Doubleday also highlights the originality of London as a distinct American voice, praising him with words that speak of inspiration, insight and genuine pioneering talent:

filled from cover to cover with thrilling scenes [...] every sentence is pregnant with original life; probably no such sympathetic, yet wholly unsentimental, story of a dog has ever found print before; the achievement may, without exaggeration, be termed “wonderful.” (408)

Doubleday’s enthusiasm continues as he marvels at the way the action, and especially the violence, pulls the reader into the story. “Hang it Jack London, what the deuce do you mean by ‘drawing’ on us so?” he asks. “But we forgive the writer at last because he is so true! He is not sentimental, tricky; he is at harmony with himself and nature” (409). With almost missionary zeal, Doubleday celebrates London’s unique appeal, declaring, “his voice is the voice of a man in the presence of the multitude, and he utters the word that is as bread to him” (408).



Other reviewers were quick to respond with equally persuasive tones, often using a heightened or familiar language to emphasize their enjoyment of the book. Describing it as a “thrillingly touching story of a dog’s life,” the critic for the *Overland Monthly* in September 1903 finds “pride” to be the major lure of *The Call of the Wild*, a book full of “great power and of intense interest. [...] Whether in beast or human the keynote of effort, and the reason for endurance, may be found in pride. An incentive as powerful as the instinct for self-preservation,

success is proportionate to its strength” (“Keynote”). The critic finds fault in the emphasis placed on Buck’s “harking back to his forbears of the wilds,” traits the critic finds made “unduly significant” since “the terrible lesson the book would seem to give of the inevitability of primitive conditions making savage even what has been trained civilization is not properly balanced” (“Keynote”).

This critic discounts what Doubleday found the most “thrilling” aspects of the story, and what modern critics normally point to as the chief significance of the story, the atavistic appeal of Buck’s transformation. It has been argued that London was able to take such bold theoretical leaps because the character who returns to the primitive is not human. Still this critic did not buy that aspect. “The stress given to pride in man and beast is the truest note struck,” he writes, “and marks the strongest passages in the book” (“Keynote”). This reviewer responds most favorably to the sense of energy in the book suggestive of a nation bursting forth, trying to answer its own inner call and destiny.

The character that embodies this pride is not the undaunted frontiersman, of course, but a dog whose adventures London, in all his vividness, would never have been able to capture through a human point of view. Clearly, the critic for the section “Notable Books of the Day” in the October 1903 *Literary Digest*, was captivated with Buck’s perspective: “... he is a dog lifted by the imagination of Mr. London as high above ordinary dogs as Achilles is lifted above ordinary men.” The reviewer furthers his perception of the “epic” nature of the story by comparing the way the humans drift in and out of the story, serving as a backdrop to the true characters, the beasts, just as “the gods furnish a background for Homer’s or Vergil’s heroes.” Buck, the hero, outlives the men, the critic writes, leaving the reader with a final mythical glimpse as the dog rejoins the primitive embodied in the wolf pack.

The critic further applauds London for not writing a work of “science” or a “treatise on natural history.” “It is

Hamilton, describing how London smokes “long brown cigarettes which he rolls deftly with one hand,” suggests to him that “the public would like to know something of the man as well as the author,” to which London responds:

**“THERE IS VERY LITTLE TO TELL.
SOMEHOW THE THINGS THAT
COUNT DON’T GET INTO WORDS.”**

a work of art,” he writes, “not of science [. . .] Mr. London has given us a piece of lasting literature, or we are much mistaken.” The critic for *The Independent* in August of 1903 was equally impressed with London’s voice in Buck, a hero and vigorous embodiment of the energies of a new nation: “To this dumb animal he has given a personality far more vivid and taking and one having a far higher human interest than is many a man or woman sketched upon the printed pages of a record-selling novel. The author of this review finds *The Call of the Wild* a “notable achievement” in the “multitude” of nature books of the day. This critic was also struck by the simplicity, the intensity, of the novel, yet at the same time was trying to convince of the originality and seriousness of the tale. The critic for *The Independent* echoes the reviewer for *Atlantic Monthly* who questioned whether to read it as a “bookish” person aware of the allegory and deeper complexities, or for the sheer enjoyment of the tale: “Mr. London has written a story that is more than simply readable, even tho(ugh) it utterly lacks what some have thought to be absolutely essential to a story—the humanly sentimental element.”

As London was pressed into the shaping of America’s new literary landscape, critics matched such serious considerations with careful debate of the young writer’s style. As deeply impressed as the majority of the critics were of the young London’s heretofore greatest work, others were quick to provide a scholarly reading, pointing out possible deficiencies. Writing for *The Dial*, an esteemed literary magazine of the day, William Morton Payne’s restrained response contrasts the enthusiasm of other more popular reviews in 1903. He admits that the story is “clever and appealing,” but that London creates a great deal of skepticism in the story, granting that the skill of the author prevents it from becoming too unbelievable: “Doubts arise afterwards, and they are probably legitimate, but while the spell of the story is upon us, we

are willing to allow that a dog may have the complex inner life which is here depicted” (Payne).

Restrained as he is, even Payne cannot resist proclaiming that “Mr. London has not a little of the magic which makes *The Jungle Book* almost the best of Mr. Kipling’s writings” (Payne). The reviewer of *The Nation* in October of 1903 offers the same tempered praise as Payne. Explaining that the ferocity of the “husky dogs” is exaggerated throughout the book, the author qualifies his criticism by stating the story is not proclaiming itself as “strictly true,” in the first place. The critic also complains of the want of Arctic scenery: “the author subordinates persons and scenes in order to tell his dog story with simple directness. He is least effective in the fanciful pages where Buck remembers the youth of his race and thrills to the call of the wilderness” (287). But for the most part, the critic’s review is overwhelmingly positive. His doubts waver as the critic’s before him did: he finds the idea of Buck’s answering his primitive call “fanciful” yet at the same time admits “the possibility of a dog’s retrogression is an interesting question” and that “given such an exceptional individual as Buck, and such surrounding conditions, one must hesitate wholly to deny it.” Whether it was in the interest of these critics to further London’s reputation or not, their skeptical readings, balanced by their enjoyment of the book, must have legitimized what those readers would normally scoff at as a fanciful or childish tale.

A book receiving such resounding praise, however, could but have similar energies directed against it. The October 1903 review in *Gunton’s Magazine* departs completely from the pack of the majority and delivers a scathing review, his only conciliation being that despite the book’s “loose and often false” style, the effect is “the most characteristic and most enduring picture” of Arctic life yet written (865). But as the author states,

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“this is all that can be said in its favor.” The critic’s main complaint is the seeming amoral tone he finds in the text: “It is a story of brutality, unredeemed either by truths taught of this wild life, or by any moral result at the close [...] the effect of the book can not be but injurious to every impressionable mind that may read it” (865).

The critic continues to attack the “message” of Buck’s “decline” into savagery. Buck’s struggle to survive and learn the ways of the wild is seen also as the “decay” of the dog’s moral nature. The critic seems most repulsed by passages that explain Buck’s adaptation of the skills of stealing. “We doubt if even in the roughest camps in Alaska that sneak-thievery is considered a particular virtue,” the critic writes. Utterly put off by the end of the review, the author declares, “The book is as disagreeable reading as can be found, and is about as false in its art and teaching as anything in the regions of dime-novelism” (866). This passionate reviewer shows that even those who did not like London’s work appreciated the power of the story—for here was something new, which required a heightened approach, and the reviewer shows the same concern for the acceptance of American artistry abroad. At the same time, the critic arouses the reader’s curiosity by highlighting the shocking aspects of the story, what he refers to as “unredeemed brutality.” While decrying the story, the reviewer legitimizes the importance of the work and its controversial impact.

With the resounding popularity of the book, it was no wonder that people wanted to know more about the *author*. In September of 1903, *Reader* magazine published one of the first interviews with London, taking advantage of the success of his latest work. The interviewer, Fannie K. Hamilton, begins her story in the same sensational tone of the reviewers proclaiming, “Jack London is a genius unspoiled in the making” (278). Hamilton then sets out to paint a romantic portrait of one who not only wrote *The Call of the Wild*, but lived it. “The heart quickens,” she writes, “over this out-of-the-age boy who, when only nine, started in single-handed to conquer circumstance” (278). Hamilton discusses the early hardships of the author, proclaiming “it was character building of the heroic type, the more remarkable that, being his own godfather, literary and otherwise, he might at any moment have shirked his destiny” (278). Hamilton then goes searching the persona, literally being created on the pages of those early magazines:

Simple, tender, loyal, as human as a child, a hint of diffidence and deference mingling in a singular charm of manner, with no complexities, no affectations, but a curious and unmistakable impression of power reaching through and above everything, there is something about this young man that strikes home. (278)

Hamilton, like the critics who responded so favorably to his book, is in the process of crafting out a legend. She explains how he “battled” the odds, London’s own words expressing his early distress. “To-day he is a celebrity, a young literary giant with an established reputation on two continents, and for once the critics are unanimous in distinguishing literature from prose” (280). This, a mere two months after the book’s release.

London’s response: “Work will carry a man anywhere. The four great things are, Good Health, Work, a Philoso-

Brett bought the publishing rights outright, no royalties, for \$2000. The Saturday Evening Post paid London \$700. For what would be his most enduring and acclaimed work, London received a total payment of \$2700.

phy of Life, and Sincerity. With these you can cleave to greatness and sit among the giants” (280). The tailor-made expressions of a self-made man couldn’t have been more appropriate at the time. London, with the help of the press, began shaping himself out to be just what the reading public expected. Hamilton describes the scenic, yet modest, setting of his home with its expansive view of Oakland and San Francisco bay. She seems enthralled with London, with his lifestyle, a picture she sets glowing for the readers. “He is one of the most approachable of men, unconventional, responsive and genuine, with a warmth of hospitality which places the visitor in the immediate footing of a friend. In fact, Jack London, boyish, noble and lovable, is made up of qualities that reach straight for the heart” (280).

In retrospect, this period in London’s career, so vividly probed by Hamilton, so aroused by his critics, bears witness to the very birth of a star. The earliest reaction of critics, publishers and advertisers was to treat him as a possible national treasure. The press would go on to have so much influence in London’s career, what he wrote, how he lived; the later half of 1903 bears witness to the birth of this all, first in the reviews that launch his story with vigor, and then in the early uncovering of what

-Continued on page 11

London and the Machine in the Garden

would become one of America's most famous literary personalities.

Hamilton, describing how London smokes "long brown cigarettes which he rolls deftly with one hand," suggests to him that "the public would like to know something of the man as well as the author," to which London responds: "There is very little to tell. Somehow the things that count don't get into words." The rest of the interview, three pages worth, is full of London's history—the little to tell. With explanations London knows will take part in shaping his reputation, his modesty gives way and his thrilling biography flows out like one of his expansive stories: working for a living before he was nine, oyster pirate and salmon fisherman shortly after—sailing to Japan as a teenager, and his first attempts at writing. London explains that at nineteen he began High School, attended a year, then, after three month's cramming to pass the entrance exam, entered the University of California. Forced to quit school for lack of money, he began a series of laborious menial jobs and in 1894 tramped 10,000 miles across America and Canada in pursuit of a "sociological investigation." In 1897, he says, he left for the Klondike where he "found himself." On his return home, he went through several more menial jobs until finally he decided to make his living as a writer. These revelations, the conscious "little to tell" London crafts into the interview, would become a major foundation in the creation of his legend. "Mr. London radiates courage and intensity of purpose," proclaims Hamilton, "but experience, as well as sheer grasp of mind, tends to make life a serious thing to him" (281).

In a letter to George Brett on March 10, 1903, Jack London apologizes for having already sold the American serial rights for *The Call of the Wild* to *The Saturday Evening Post*, but encourages Brett to seek the publishing rights: "As a book, however, under the circumstances as they are, you may succeed in getting a fair sale out of it," he writes (*Letters* 351). Brett bought the publishing rights outright, no royalties, for \$2000. *The Saturday Evening Post* paid London \$700. For what would be his most enduring and acclaimed work, London received a total payment of \$2700 (London 116). *The Call of the Wild* has gone on to sell millions of copies, and has never been out of print since its initial release. But *The Call of the Wild* was far more valuable to London in the literary reputation he built. The earliest success is caught in a snapshot of what his first reviewers thought, before all the politics of the literary canon that now, frequently, excludes London. The rest of his career would see the man and his work gradually mesh so that the public eventually was unable to tell them apart, but in the earliest days of his newfound success, one can sense the excitement surrounding America's newest literary voice.

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Davide Sapienza and Chris Million discuss Jack London at the ALA Symposium on Naturalism

NEWS AND NOTES

CALL FOR PAPERS

The 9th Biennial Jack London Society Symposium

The Jack London Society seeks one-page paper proposals for the 9th Biennial Jack London Society Symposium to be held Oct. 10-12, 2008 at the Huntington Library, San Marino, CA. Hotel reservations can be made at the Westin Pasadena (866-716-8132). Registration for the conference will be \$100. There will be an opening reception the first evening and a banquet the second evening. Keynote speaker will be Thomas R. Tietze, incoming JLS President. Proposals along with complete contact information for all panelists should be sent to Jeanne Campbell Reesman by July 30, 2008 at jeanne.reesman@utsa.edu.



Jeanne Reesman, Earle Labor, Jeff Turpin, and Jeff Jaeckle show some unity at the ALA Symposium on Naturalism

The Iron Heel at MLA 2008

Barbara Foley is planning a special session commemorating the 100th anniversary of Jack London's *The Iron Heel* at the 2008 MLA convention (to be held this year in San Francisco, December 27-30). Papers can focus on any number of issues, including: (1) the strengths and/or shortcomings of the novel's class analysis of fascism (even if the term is not deployed); (2) pedagogical approaches to the novel; (3) the novel's relationship to 20th-century literary radicalism; (4) its relation to gender studies, race/ethnic studies, issues of imperialism/internationalism; (5) its treatment of the eventual emergence (inevitability?) of communism after the long dark night of the iron heel; (6) its relationship to the rest of London's oeuvre. If you are possibly interested in participating in this session, contact Barbara Foley at bfoley29@aol.com.

Dale L. Walker's 20-part, 94,340-word series on Jack London's short fiction is now complete and available on the World of Jack London website at www.jacklondons.net. Plot description, commentary, with extended critique on the more important of London's short stories. All 197 of London's stories are linked to this first-of-a-kind series by the award-winning American writer.

Papers on Jack London presented at the ALA Symposium on Naturalism Newport Beach, CA Oct. 5-6 2007

“The Wide World of Jack London: A Biographical Odyssey,” Earle Labor, Centenary College of Louisiana

“Islands, Isolation, and Adaptation: Expanding the Geography of London’s Naturalism,” Jessica Greening Loudermilk, University of California, Davis

“‘After all, she was only a woman’: The Seafaring Heroines of Frank Norris and Jack London,” Anita Duneer, College of the Holy Cross, in Worcester, Mass.

“Teaching *The People of the Abyss* in a Course on Naturalism,” Susan Nuernberg, University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh

“‘Thum of Circumstance’: Naturalizing the Assimilationist Narrative in Jack London’s *White Fang*,” Gina M. Rossetti, Saint Xavier University

“The Textual History of Jack London’s *Martin Eden*,” Kenneth K. Brandt, Savannah College of Art and Design

“‘It is the Story of a Dog’: A Newly Recovered Interview with Jack London,” Gary Scharnhorst, University of New Mexico

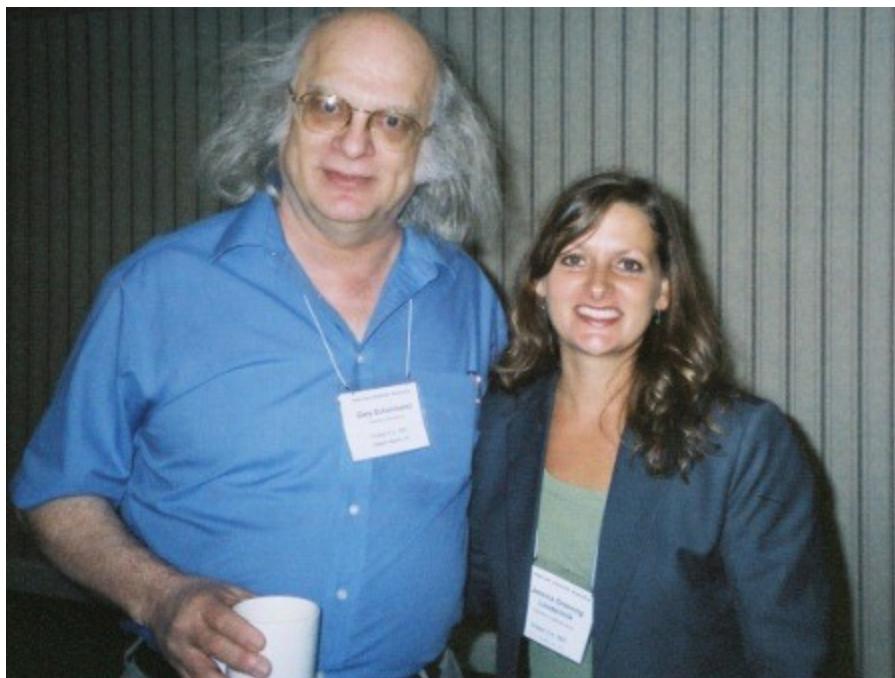
“Buck’s Strenuous Evolution,” Pamela Harper, University of North Texas

“Who Killed the Italian Wilderness? Why We Never Had a Naturalist Literary Tradition,” Davide Sapienza, Songavazzo, Italy

“Accelerating Evolution: Social Reform and the Baldwin Effect in Jack London’s *The Iron Heel* and *Before Adam*,” Scott Eric Kaufman, University of California, Irvine

“The Demise of the Fittest: Martin Eden as Spencerian Anti-hero,” Stephen Armstrong, Kingsborough Community College, CUNY

NEWS AND NOTES



Gary Scharnhorst and Jessica Loudermilk enjoy a break between sessions at the ALA Symposium on Naturalism

NEA Selects *The Call of the Wild* for its “Big Read” Program

The National Endowment for the Arts has chosen *The Call of the Wild* for its program, “The Big Read,” a nationwide initiative to promote reading. NEA Chairman Dana Gioia and his staff recognize Jack London’s novel as a classic that can be read and re-read by people of all ages. The novel join such other works as *The Great Gatsby*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in the Endowment’s funding program. All across the U.S., libraries, schools and community groups can apply for funding to present book discussions, lectures, film screenings, and other events to promote literary reading. For further information, see www.neabigread.org.

Sue Hodson
Curator of Literary Manuscripts
The Huntington Library

Two New London Collections

Daniel J. Wichlan's new book *Jack London: The Unpublished and Uncollected Articles and Essays* has been released. It offers a collection of London's rarest nonfiction writing which is either published for the first time anywhere; published in the United States for the first time; or reprinted for the first time in almost 100 years. The book may be purchased online at authorhouse.com, amazon.com or barnesandnoble.com. It can also be ordered from your local bookstore. The book is available in either a paperback (ISBN 9781434332844) or hardcover (ISBN 9781434332851) edition.

The Complete Poetry of Jack London, also edited by Wichlan has just been release by Little Tree Publishing (ISBN: 978-0-9789446-2-9). Order online: www.littleredtree.com or by phone: 860-444-0082. This collection brings together all the poetry, published and unpublished, of Jack London. The book contains the poetry embedded in London’s writing and correctly identifies previously unattributed authors and defines the poetry probably written by Jack London. Included are two published plays in verse, and book inscriptions Jack London wrote in his first editions.



***The Call* is produced twice yearly at the Savannah College of Art and Design, Department of Liberal Arts, P. O. Box 3146 Savannah, GA 31402-3146 (www.scad.edu). Members are encouraged to send their London related items to Kenneth Brandt at the above address or via e-mail at kbrandt@scad.edu.**

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