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The Struggle and Self-identity in Jack London’s *The Call of the Wild*

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Abstract

*The study focuses on the struggle and self-identity in Jack London’s *The Call of the Wild*. It exposes the concept and perspectives of the power structure, class struggle, capitalism and peaceful living strategies. Also, it explores the dominance of heredity factors of a dog devolving into a wolf and seeking self-identity after the fulfilment of all his needs. The novel clearly portrays the character Buck the canine protagonist, as an icon of individualism. The theme of freedom, endurance and the harsh realities of life in the wilderness are woven throughout the narrative. The novel teaches us the survival techniques to come out from the life of struggles.*

Keywords: Struggle, Self-Identity, Determinism, Survival, Hereditary and Dominant.

Introduction

Jack London was an American novelist and short-story writer whose best-known works among them *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1906). He was renowned for his literary prowess and his adventurous personal life. He was a vibrant and often controversial figure, and he frequently made headlines. He was known for his jovial nature, and he readily championed the cause of the marginalized against any form of injustice. With his eloquence, London was highly sought after as a public speaker, particularly on topics such as socialism, economics, and politics. Many viewed him as a living embodiment of rugged individualism, attributing his remarkable success not to privilege but to his extraordinary mental acuity and vitality (Britannica). Jack London’s novel, *The Call of the Wild*, chronicles the journey of Buck, a domesticated dog, who is taken from his comfortable life in California and thrust into the unforgiving environment of the Alaskan wilderness during the Klondike Gold Rush. Forced to adapt, Buck undergoes a transformation, embracing his primal instincts in order to survive as a sled dog.

Thematic Analysis

There are many themes portrayed in the book, *The Call of the Wild*. However, the main theme is the concept of the survival of the fittest. Throughout the whole book Buck has to consistently change so he doesn’t die. The text states, “kill or be killed, eat or be eaten was the law; and this mandate, down out of the depths of time, he

obeyed” (London 97). At the story’s outset, the opening lines of a poet succinctly capture the essence of naturalism. By the late 19th century, Darwin’s theory of evolution and Spencer’s social Darwinism had gained widespread influence in scientific and theological circles. During this era, individuals from lower social classes faced oppression and limitations, leading to lives marked by suffering and constraint. The imperative to reconnect with nature and the principle of survival of the fittest became increasingly pronounced and urgent. Buck’s journey, transitioning from a privileged domestic dog to a resilient wolf, serves as a vivid illustration of the return to nature. Through his experiences, Buck undergoes a profound metamorphosis, reflecting the primal instincts of survival inherent in the natural world. “This ecstasy, this forgetfulness of living, comes to the artist, caught up and out of himself in a sheet of flame; it comes to the soldier, war-mad on stricken field and refusing quarter; and it came to Buck, leading the pack, sounding the old wolf-cry, straining after the food that was alive and that fled swiftly before him through the moonlight” (London 52).

Buck leads a life of ease and comfort as a domestic dog, but he finds himself idle and unfulfilled. With plentiful food and a kind master in the warm southern climate, his existence is tranquil. However, after being forcibly taken, he is thrust into a harsh environment where survival demands adaptation to adverse conditions. He learns to obey the man in the red sweater, enduring beatings to secure essential sustenance, confronted with brutality. Pulling heavy sleds through the snow, he employs cunning to navigate interactions with humans and other dogs. He even resorts to stealing food and digging holes for shelter, gradually adjusting to his challenging surroundings. Hal was the main antagonist. Hal and Charles lead Buck and a dog sled team in the Yukon. Enduring Hal’s cruelty, he stoically withstands pain and torment, displaying remarkable resilience. Ultimately, after enduring prolonged suffering, he fully embraces his primal instincts and rises as the leader of a pack of wolves, having successfully adapted to the unforgiving environment. “For two days and nights he neither ate nor drank, and during those two days and nights of torment, he accumulated fund of wrath that boded ill for whoever first fell afoul of him” (London 15).

Buck influenced by his human handlers, the novel primarily centers on his transition from a domestic dog to a wild wolf. Buck gradually regresses into a primitive creature, shedding traits unsuited to his new environment and embracing those essential for survival in the harsh wilderness. This transformation reflects the impact of Charles Darwin’s theory on London’s narrative, likening Buck’s adaptation to that of an evolving organism. As he taps into his innate wild instincts, he becomes less reminiscent of a pet and more akin to a wolf. Notably, his once soft paws toughen to withstand frosty conditions, his physique strengthens for labor in the traces, and he learns to endure the pain inflicted by human cruelty. Furthermore, his primal urges intensify as he develops a craving for live prey, indicating a deepening connection to his wild nature. “Buck felt vaguely that there was no depending upon these two men and women”(London 79).

Conclusion

The Call of the Wild is hailed as a masterpiece for its rich exploration of various themes, including the intricate relationship between humanity and the natural world. These themes are so profound and nuanced that they cannot all be fully unravelled. Jack London masterfully depicts the beauty and resilience of animals, as well as the deep connections forged between humans and their animal companions. Yet, he also confronts the harsh realities of society and the complexities of human behaviour. Through his novel, London exposes the veneer of civilization that masks the underlying contradictions and cruelties of capitalism. He critiques the hypocrisy inherent in societal structures and offers a sympathetic portrayal of those ensnared in hardship. London’s narrative serves as a poignant reminder of the stark realities of life, urging readers to contemplate the true essence of existence.

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