In *The Sea-Wolf* (1904) and *Call of the Wild* (1903), Jack London depicts what Aristotle would call "the good life" (*eudemonia*)—the pursuit of not just "happiness" but "goodness": how to lead a just, meaningful, virtuous life. At the center of *eudemonia* is the development of the individual, which includes a broad education designed to enable both individual lives and communities of human beings to flourish. Thus, London remains an exceptional American author who not only exemplifies the literary movement of "Naturalism," but also who explores philosophical questions. London's fiction depicts a frightening vision of sociological determinism and, even more importantly, an existential worldview, which prefigures authors such as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre at the mid-point of the 20th century.

In *The Sea-Wolf*, Jack London pits the brute force of nature against human culture, both of which present ways of being in the world. On the one hand, nature, as symbolized in Wolf Larsen, the novel's protagonist, is a blind force, while, on the other hand, culture, as symbolized in Humphrey Van Weyden, the novel's narrator, appears to be a calculated way of making meaning, a self-serving mechanism that works with human agency. By presenting these two seeming contraries, London works out a philosophical system that combines elements of each realm. The subject of the *Sea-Wolf* is the search for the Good life, which, according to London, means enduring existential crises and striving to attain a sense of balance.

Wolf Larsen, the captain of a schooner named *Ghost,* and for whom the novel is named, depends on might, acting without compromise. He is a severe man who survives on instinct. This severity can be likened to dominant animals: lions, tigers, bears, all of which act upon impulses, ultimately following an ego-based *telos:* self-preservation. Conversely, Humphrey Van Weyden, pejoratively called "Hump" by fellow crewmates,

has existed entirely as a result of the society he was born into. Because he has inherited wealth, he has never done manual labor; he views himself a "scholar" and "gentleman." Unlike the brutal natural world, the civilized one from which Van Weyden comes exists purely because of compromise and tolerance. These two characters show possible roles for human beings in the early 20th century.

Wolf Larsen appears as both a lion and a raging storm:

> Though this strength pervaded every action of his, it seemed but the advertisement of a greater strength that lurked within, that lay dormant and no more than stirred from time to time, but that which might arouse, at any moment, terrible and compelling, like the rage of a lion or the wrath of a storm. (849)

Thus, his physical strength and moral deficiencies help define the antipodes London explores in the novel. Within the first moments of the narrator's interaction with Wolf, the narrator sees Wolf beat a sixteen-year-old boy who defies his orders (856). Throughout the novel Hump and Wolf engage in philosophical dialogue about the nature of life. At first it seems as if Wolf is vulnerable and empathetic, but recurring outbursts of anger remind us of Wolf's brutality. Wolf is a fiercely intelligent, self-educated man; however, he cannot accept the ideals of the academic world because of the harshness of life on the open sea. Wolf sees Nature as relentless and cruel; the only way to beat it is to be crueler, "The big eat the little that they may continue to move, the strong eat the weak that they may retain their strength. The lucky eat the most and move the longest, that is all" (870).

Germanic philosophy (Nietzsche) and early psychological and socio-biological (Huxley, Darwin, Spencer) theory influenced London's philosophy. He depicts these

meaning-making systems in his writings, not necessarily as *his* viewpoints, but as, as Tavernier-Courbin points out, the distinctive perspectives of London's characters:

> London was fascinated by abstract concepts and by the clash between conflicting concepts, which he repeatedly dramatized in his work, thus often leading critics to conclude that he was philosophically confused. Whether one sees this as intellectual confusion or as the manifestation of a remarkable imagination and wide powers of identification is up to the reader's personal bias. If one takes individually any one of London's stories at face value, one will be led to conclude that he is at once a racist, a Nietzschean, a fascist, a humanist, an animal lover, an animal hater, a socialist, an elitist, a spiritualist, a materialist. But if one considers his work at large, one cannot but conclude that he was a man exploring the human fact in all its aspects, both beautiful and ugly, as objectively as he could. (Tavernier-Courbin 9)

London invites his readers' to engage in a dialogue with his characters, requiring the reader to ask: Are their perspectives legitimate? What are the flaws in their understanding of life? Much like reading a philosophical work, in which the reader converses with the philosopher on the assumptions and conclusions reached, London's characters examine their selves and didactically converse with one another. While each vies for a particular way of seeing the world, London does not authenticate one perspective over another. Thus, as in the case with Wolf, London presents a novel of multiple perspectives.

Wolf develops a series of philosophical justifications for why he acts the way he does based upon his experiences. His philosophy does not encompass the entirety of one

particular path; rather, he picks and chooses certain passages from the Bible, such as the following passage he interprets from Ecclesiastes, in order to justify his actions:

> Is not this pessimism of the blackest? – 'All is vanity and vexation of spirit,' 'There is no profit under the sun,' 'There is one event unto all,' to the fool and the wise, the clean and the unclean, the sinner and the saint, and that vent is death, and an evil thing, he says. For the Preacher loved life, and did not want to die, saying, 'For a living dog is better than a dead lion.' He preferred the vanity and vexation to the silence and unmovableness of the grave. It is loathsome to the life that is in me, the very essence of which is movement, the power of movement, and the consciousness of the power of movement. Life itself is unsatisfaction, but to look ahead to death is greater unsatisfaction. (907)

Instead of adhering to a philosophy and living his life accordingly, he acts and then uses philosophy as a way to rationalize himself. Wolf admires his brother, named Death, for his ability to act without the need to understand. Wolf sees that Death "is all the happier for leaving life alone. He is too busy living it to think about it. My mistake was in ever opening the books" (904). London demonstrates how this kind of existence, although based on an acceptance of the world's brutishness, is wholly unsatisfying. In *Solitary Comrade: Jack London and His Work*, Joan Hedrick points out that this quote of "My mistake was in ever opening the books" is actually a direct quotation from a letter London wrote in 1902 (128). Hedrick further makes the connection that London is exorcising his own demons of the mental isolation that eventually resulted in Alcoholism. Wolf, too, is a tormented individual; he is physically isolated from civilization in the ocean and intellectually removed from the fellow sailors. Wolf's

physical and intellectual superiority makes him stand apart from among other men. This isolation has caused him to hate others. For example, Wolf refers to the other men as "swine" and humanity as moldy bread. Thus, everyone is afraid of him, and, on many occasions, Hump comes upon Wolf with his face buried in his hands calling on God (900). Wolf despairs because he is disgusted by what appears to be an insignificant world.

As Hump comes to know Wolf, Hump sees Wolf's physical superiority along with his clear-headed rationality and wonders why Wolf never became a great man. Wolf's perspective gives the reader the clearest understanding of why Wolf hates his life and acts the way he does towards others:

> No man makes opportunity. All the great men ever did was to know it when it came to them. The Corsican knew. I have dreamed as greatly as the Corsican. I should have known the opportunity, but it never came. The thorns sprung and choked me (903-904).

In referring to the abstract ideals of the Corsican, Wolf sees himself as an idealist who has never had the chance to actualize his dream. Thus, even though he imagines becoming something other, he has survived by living the life of an animal, responding to his perceived difference with bitterness. Wolf's disillusionment has led to a life that values nothing. This over-experience within a severe environment has to lead to a life of brutishness if one is to survive. Hump as an inexperienced, naïve "landlubber" only sees the ideals of morality and culture in the abstract because he has never been in an environment where action is necessary to survive. London, through demonstrating the two polarities of Wolf and Hump, argues for a middle path, one that Hump eventually develops and understands to be a proper way to live.

Like Wolf's imbalanced way of approaching reality, Hump's initial social acceptance and inclination toward passivity is unnatural because it is immersed in the opposite within the modern cultural realm of humanity. When asked by Wolf what he does for a living, Hump replies, "I confess I had never had such a question asked me before, nor had I ever canvassed it. I was quite taken aback, and before I could find myself had sillily stammered. "I – I am gentleman."" (852-853). Being a groomed man among brutes is isolating for Hump and he is the object of some resentment from the sailors and even within himself, as demonstrated by Wolf's response to Hump's claim to having an income, "Who earned it? Eh? I thought so. Your father. You stand on dead men's legs. You've never had any of your own. You couldn't walk alone between two sunrises and hustle the meat for your belly for three meals" (853). The educated Hump assumes that because he can understand things in a book he can put what he reads into practice. For example, he is horrified when an ill-meaning sailor throws another sailor overboard. In another moment, the cook onboard steals from Hump. Until these experiences at sea, Hump has been overly idealistic as a result of inexperience and the mind he has developed "at the expense of his body and instincts" (Forrey 132). Thus, he exists in a culture created by weak human beings who fall short of their body's abilities, an unbalanced existence in which human beings, rather than drawing upon experience, project what they have read onto the world.

Humphrey cannot understand Wolf because of his independence and lack of morality. Hump sees Wolf as inferior; Hump's exalted position enables him to withdraw from the world into a convulsive, distanced space. He cannot stand up for himself and acts cowardly at the beginning after being taken on Wolf's boat, even offering Wolf and sailors on a nearby boat a thousand dollars to take him back to shore (856). After having

been exposed to the violence and having his money stolen from him, Hump realizes how little his philosophical morality means if no one but himself adheres to it. At one point the tensions on the boat between the sailors and seal-hunters become so great that there are a series of fights and murders. Hump sees that these people place no value on the lives of others, and the only value they uphold personally is that of self-preservation. He realizes that in order to survive this boating experience he too must adopt a strong sense of self-preservation in spite of the metaphysical values he has been, thus far, dependent upon for understanding:

> He had opened up for me the world of the real, of which I had known practically nothing and from which I had always shrunk. I had learned to look more closely at life as it was lived, to recognize that there were such things as facts in the world, to emerge from the realm of the mind and idea and to place certain values on the concrete and objective phases of existence (939).

As the story develops Hump becomes physically strong and experienced in the ways of sailing and seal hunting. He understands the importance behind action if one is to survive in a brutal world. Values are dependent on a culture that recognizes and upholds them; therefore, morality cannot be absolute. The character, Johnson, is significant in that he defies Wolf on the principle of being a self-dependent man. Johnson does not submit his will to Wolf's, is severely beaten for it, and eventually left to drown. His violent treatment demonstrates that Wolf's isolation is self-created. His greatness is only relative to those he surrounds himself with. There are always men that are stronger, more intelligent, or in a word, better. As an egoist who is often blind to needs of others, Wolf is not the typical protagonist. In his book, *Jack London*: *Adventures, Ideas and*

*Fiction*, James Lundquist says of Wolf that, "The nihilism implicit in his materialism makes him into a prototype of the twentieth-century anti-hero, doomed to extinction because he alienates himself from others through his own intellectual rebelliousness" (128). Wolf cannot accept that his life is insignificant. At the very least, Wolf believes he is greater than the "swine" that surround him. But Hump comes to understand his physical abilities and develops the mental capacity for understanding things outside of direct experience, he realizes he may not be physically stronger than Wolf, but he is a stronger *human*.

Later, the *Ghost* picks up a woman, Maud Brewster, over whom Wolf and Hump battle. Hump stands his ground against Wolf, and, through Maud's confidence, he overcomes his shameful inexperience, while continuing to be rooted in a culturally cultivated moral understanding. Wolf becomes overwhelmed with intense headaches (later found to be strokes) that make him permanently blind. At this point Wolf's true ruthlessness comes out, and he does everything he can to try and sabotage Hump and Maud's survival. He eventually dies with the final scene of him replying "B-O-S-H" to the question of the existence of immortality (1070). Wolf's steadfast nihilism and self-serving morality leave him isolated in his final moments of life. Right up until he dies, Wolf maintains his trademark mental precision, but his body has given out. He can no longer speak, see or move, but his mind is still active. The imprisonment of Wolf's intellect expresses the relationship of the body to the soul. Consciousness is self-contained and, no matter how vivid and brilliant it may be, it passes when physical energy dissipates. London eloquently describes such a moment in his short story, "The White Silence":

> Nature has many tricks wherewith she convinces man of his finity, -- the ceaseless flow of the tides, the fury of the storm, the shock of the earthquake, the long roll of heaven's artillery, -- but the most tremendous, the most stupefying of all, is the passive phase of the White Silence. All movement ceases, the sky clears, the heavens are as brass; the slightest whisper seems sacrilege, and man becomes timid, affrighted at the sound of his own voice. Sole speck of life journeying across the ghostly wastes of a dead world, he trembles at his audacity, realizes that his is a maggot's life, nothing more. Strange thoughts arise unsummoned, and the mystery of all things strives for utterance. And the fear of death, of God, of the universe, comes over him, -- the hope of the Resurrection and the Life, the yearning for immortality, the vain striving of the imprisoned essence, -- it is then, if ever, man walks alone with God. (22)

Similarly, by the time of Wolf's death, Hump has developed a complete understanding of life, one that encompasses the "concrete and objective phases of existence" with faith in moral truths. For Hump, a life that is based in both the physical and metaphysical, rooted in direct experience and learned faith, renders the human condition with no false pretexts.

The moral philosophy Hump initially holds onto as absolute and applicable in all situations is shown to be a cultural construct dependent on where it is practiced. Hump's awakening to the brutal world of sailing and seal hunting shakes him out of his unapplied ethics; however, his faith in the goodness of humanity perseveres throughout. Contrastingly, Wolf never develops traditional "morals." London says this of Wolf-like mindsets, "The superman is anti-social in his tendencies, and in these days of our

complex society and sociology he cannot be successful in his hostile aloofness. Hence the unpopularity of the financial supermen like Rockefeller; he acts like an irritant in the social body" (qtd. in Lundquist 129). These two approaches are the result of upbringing and are dependent upon contingencies one has no bearing over. Hump is born into a life of education and culture and developed his understandings through this; whereas Wolf is born into a cold, harsh reality of sailing.

Comparing and contrasting the mindsets of Hump and Wolf and their subsequent developments through *The Sea-Wolf* shows the consequences of both the two men's environments and also the choices they make: the way they respond to the environment and create their individual sense of reality. The temptation to accept Wolf's philosophy is strong, especially in times of intense isolation, but it's important to point out that when Wolf dies, the novel ends. The battle between the conflicting perspectives is over, and the reader must decide which is the better way to live. Through Hump's ability to overcome and beat Wolf, the novel advocates the importance of cultivating an autonomous sense of morality derived from cultural understanding *through* experience rather than pure abstraction. Humphrey Van Weyden goes on to live and be happy with Maud, while Wolf, the embodiment of what it means to be strong—physically and mentally, wholly independent from society—is left alone on an island to die. As he has lived as an animal, Wolf dies as one too. Such explicit metaphors are not only important to understand *The Sea-Wolf* but also to understanding the objective distance London creates by using such metaphors and by crafting other tales with non-human protagonists

Two of London's most well known stories— *Call of the Wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1906)—have a dog and wolf, respectively, as protagonists; as a result, critics and

often the public have relegated London to being a children's author. According to Susan Ward of *Children's Literature*, many of London's archetypes and methods of story-development are indicative of children's tales. She says these consist of the "boy-hero" overcoming adversity by becoming strong and confident, resolving with happy-endings and explicit moral messages. She also includes letters in which London talks about writing directly to a juvenile audience (97). But, if one studies London's biography and complete writings, one can see how his children's tales are only a small segment of his writings. London's career as a children's writer began "in September of 1899 [when] the Companion published his "The King of Mazy May," and over the next eight years, he wrote sixteen more stories for the Companion, two stories and a novel for St. Nicholas, and one short story for Holiday Magazine for Children" (92). While that number may seem like a large portion of an author's writing, London wrote over twenty-three novels and dozens of short stories. Ward recognizes this conscious direction; she shows that London in fact changed his story's endings, especially in "To Build a Fire," in order for it not to be "for boys merely" (97). George R. Adams' article entitled "Why the Man Dies in 'To Build a Fire,'" also addresses this shift in ending from the original 1902 version, where the protagonist survives, to the 1908 version that has the protagonist dying at the end as a conscious development by London towards a theme intended for adult audiences (27). Adams asserts that, by allowing the protagonist to die, London is altering his story to include "adult" ideas of social theory and environmental values.

In "Jack London's Enduring Appeal," Eric Williamson argues London's direct form and style, both of which highlight an overwhelming sense of isolation, make his work significant. Williamson states:

> London works toward his own metaphysical system, and in order to develop that system, he must get man alone and by himself in the vastness of a brutal and indifferent cosmos. London's appeal is universal because try as we might to convince ourselves that we are otherwise, we are subject to the whims of nature and circumstance. We are creatures of the flesh, and the flesh is rotting. London plucks a universal string because he is concerned with the primordial condition of man's isolation, an isolation that is shared by all humanity (792).

Thus, London's writings attempt to overcome this individual isolation by creating an object in which they can be recognized collectively. For London, technology, modernization and capitalism have created a world of high specialization, which leaves individuals alienated; modern American culture has created a society that denies the isolated pensive reflection in which it is rooted; the degrees to which the distractions increase only match the feelings of meaningless. Caught between the two worlds of the tangible, labor-intensive work of the blue-collar worker and the abstract gossip of the intellectual, London felt disconnected from an irrelevant society that seemed to serve its own ends, as distinctively expressed in his metaphor of social life to a theatrical show:

> I had seen the same show too often, listened too much to the same songs and the same jokes. I knew too much about the box-office receipts. I knew the cogs of the machinery behind the scenes so well, that the posing on the stage, and the laughter and the song, could not drown the creaking of the wheels behind.

> It doesn't pay to go behind the scenes and see the angel-voiced tenor beat his wife. Well, I had been behind, and I was paying for it. (qtd. in Hedrick 85)

Modernization has created a degree of loneliness. Often loneliness isn't recognized until one realizes that he is not as happy, able, or prosperous as others. Increased access to a variety of forms of media has led to dissatisfaction with the average individual day-to-day life. London's fiction remains relevant for their ability to describe isolation as beautiful, meaningful and necessary. London's characters in his "White Silence" "are early taught the futility of words and the inestimable value of deeds" (23).

London emphasizes the importance of clarity and dedication to hard work in his advice to upcoming writers in his personal letters (*The Letters of Jack London: Volume One*). This message is one seen throughout his work. The brute, physically superior and hard-working Wolf Larsen in *The Sea-Wolf* is given profound sympathy from the more cultured and college educated Humphrey because of his dedication to the value of intense labor. Eventually Wolf loses out because Humphrey develops an appreciation for hard-labor while maintaining moral values that allow for *clarity* with respect to social interaction. The message is expressed throughout much of London's work, as Servanne Woodward's points out in "The Nature of the Beast in Jack London's Fiction." Woodward contends that, with both *Call of the Wild* and *The Sea-Wolf*, those who are purely brutish with little or no inclination towards emotional and intellectual pursuits are always defeated. Woodward also contends that this brutishness does not only exist in nature, and those overly confined to highly developed societies become ruthless in their own forms. In London's essay, "What Life Means to Me" (1905) he describes society:

> Nor did I fare better with the masters themselves. I had expected to find men who were clean, noble, and alive, whose ideals were clean, noble, and alive. I went about amongst the men who sat in the high places — the preachers, the politicians, the business men, the professors, and the editors. I ate meat with them, drank wine with them, automobiled with them, and studied them. It is true, I found many that were clean and noble; but with rare exceptions, they were not *alive*. I do verily believe I could count the exceptions on the fingers of my two hands. Where they were not alive with rottenness, quick with unclean life, they were merely the unburied dead — clean and noble, like well- preserved mummies, but not alive. In this connection I may especially mention the professors I met, the men who live up to that decadent university ideal, "the passionless pursuit of passionless intelligence." (*No Mentor but Myself* 92)

By "alive," London indicates that his successful characters exemplify the ability to negotiate between civilization and nature. Since there is no way to live "in nature" as a human aside from withdrawing completely from civilization, London portrays the simpler life of the working-class to be less of an illusion than the one held by the "masters." It is the blue-collar worker creating the material enjoyed by the "cultured" capitalist.

London's disgust for the amorality and exploitation of those few at the top of society pervades "What Life Means to Me." Once London reaches the point of being a recognized writer (and a member of high society); however, he describes the "abnormal developed" business intellect of the "elite" as based in "crime and betrayal" (93). London, shocked and appalled by such people, remarks:

> The imposing edifice of society above my head holds no delights for me. It is the foundation of the edifice that interests me. There I am content to labor, crowbar in hand, shoulder to shoulder with intellectuals, idealists, and class-conscious workingmen, getting a solid pry now and again and setting the whole edifice rocking. Some day, when we get a few more hands and crowbars to work, we'll topple it over, along with all its rotten life and unburied dead, its monstrous selfishness and sodden materialism. (94)

For London, freedom must be sought outside the social order. It is found through the individual development of the body and mind, not through climbing social hierarchy. As with Hump, Wolf, and London's well-know animal protagonists, society is imprisoning. Freedom cannot exist independent of the individual. Instead, as with Hump, the individual must actively pursue goodness with confidence in her singularity in order to be free, something London also demonstrates with animal protagonists.

Because of the nature of this theme, especially in the overt emphasis on the importance of culture and society in the early 20th century, London often personifies animals instead of using humans in his stories. By using animals that have been cultured, especially in *Call of the Wild*, London comments upon society. In *Solitary Comrade: Jack London and His Work*, Joan D. Hedrick argues that much of what is perceived to be the dog-protagonist's (Buck's) thoughts and intentions are really London's that could not be expressed directly. Throughout *The Call of the Wild*, Buck consistently feels the instinctual overwhelm the rational understanding civilization afford. In *The Call of the Wild: A Naturalistic Romance*, Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin describes this growth as "gained knowledge from the depth of Time, and such knowledge cannot be discarded once it has become part of the conscious self" (59).

London may even have developed this reversion to a "state of nature" as a means to allow for the modern contradicting obligations of the individual: of the society and to the self.

Buck starts out as the spoiled pet of a well-to-do judge in Santa Clara Valley in California. He is stolen from the judge by the gardener's helper and is sold to work in the gold rush of the Klondike. Once in the wilderness of the North, working as a sled-dog, Buck has to learn how to survive. London sets up this "learning" as a reversion to the primal instincts dormant within Buck. As a result of his physical superiority and the possession "of a quality that made for greatness- imagination" (788) and the various tests that prove these two assertions, Buck becomes the dominant sled dog within his team quite quickly. In the remote and desolate North, those that survive do so at any cost. But Buck not only survives, he also thrives until he is sold to a group consisting of a woman, her husband, and her brother. They eventually run their dogs into malnourished exhaustion. Buck takes a stand and refuses to go any farther; he is nearly beaten to death by the woman's brother, Hal, until a nearby camper, John Thornton, intervenes. Buck never forgets John Thornton's help, vying to give his life for Thornton's safety. In a compelling scene of love between the two, Thornton hurriedly accepts a bet that Buck can break a sled out of the snow carrying 1,000 lbs of flour. What follows is the plea Thornton offers to Buck just before the showdown:

> He did not playfully shake him, as was his wont, or murmur soft love curses; but he whispered in his ear. "As you love me, Buck. As you love me," was what he whispered. [….] As Thornton got to his feet, Buck seized his mittened hand between his jaws, pressing in with his teeth and

> releasing slowly, half-reluctantly. It was the answer, in terms, not of speech, but of love. (817).

Buck and Thornton's companionship is the last of Buck's relations to humans. While Buck is hunting, Thornton is killed by the indigenous people of the area, the Yeehats. The call of the wild has been increasingly strengthening within Buck; just before Thornton is killed, Buck is described, "His cunning was wolf cunning and wild cunning; his intelligence, shepherd intelligence and St. Bernard intelligence; and all this, plus an experience gained in the fiercest of schools, made him as formidable a creature as any that roamed the wild."(824). By the end of the novel, Buck joins up with his "wolf brothers" and "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" (832).

Hump undergoes this physical strengthening of the body through intensive labor, while also having the natural inclination towards higher intelligence than pure brutes in *The Sea-Wolf*. Buck escapes society by becoming so superiorly independent that he has no need for the hindrance and demands of humans. Instead it is the call of the wild that compels him to return to an original state based on subjectivity. Within society, Buck sacrifices himself and his abilities for those above him, but, once his skills are completely developed, he answers only to himself. Hump is London's attempt at extracting this idea of independence with little need for society to a human protagonist. Hump overcomes Wolf Larsen and survives a brutal ordeal in the *Ghost* because he too develops an understanding of life that is self-sustaining. His morality and intelligence allow him to maintain faith in the nobility of humanity, yet he is aware of the malevolent capabilities of man. His body must also be developed so that it can be used for what it's

physically intended. For London, an intelligent mind that is limited by the body cannot fully engage in the world. Both Buck and Hump undergo an intense physical and mental transformation in order to demonstrate the vivacity needed for the manifestation of London's ideal.

In making his protagonist an animal, London creates the absolute morality humanity has seemed to desire. For Buck, there is no question of what is right or wrong; rather, he just acts in accordance with his instincts. Buck has no hesitation in his actions because he is never afforded it. What's ethically right for Buck keeps him alive; however, in naturalistic style, London, much like the indifference of Nature, presents Buck's violent acts without making value judgments on their moral implications. What distinguishes Buck from Wolf is that Buck is an animal based on instinct, where Wolf is a man. As an animal acting in accordance with instinct, Buck's vengeance on the Yeehats is not portrayed negatively because it is the way of things in the natural world; just as a mother bear defends its cub from wolves, Buck attempts to defend John Thornton. Those that are stronger kill those that are indefensible; therefore defense is not only a question of morals but also of survival. In the modern human world, survival is not as absolute; the idea of the great consuming the small differs from the animal world in that humanity has society and culture dependent on morality for its continuation. Wolf moral sense is based upon the false supposition that has long been irrelevant in human society. Instead, it is a response to the injustice experienced by unfulfilled dreamers, exploited idealists, and unrecognized egotists.

According to Tavernier-Courbin, it was London's experiences in the East End of London, just before he wrote *The Call of the Wild* that showed him the sub-human conditions civilization produce first-hand:

> It is thus hardly surprising that London felt compelled to write a book dramatizing the need for a return to nature after this brutal vision of an urban jungle and of the human beings who lived in it in various states of degradation, starvation, and misery, bullied mistreated, and ignored by the higher levels of society (43-44).

Thus, the majority of the personal despair London writes of in his personal letters is the result of a conscious conflict between the innate belief in the nobility of humanity and the sickness its culture has produced (*The Letters of Jack London Vol. 1: 1896-1905).* Hedrick explains London's alcoholism as a response to being, "a prisoner of his own consciousness, he was very like the "masters of society" whom he describes as "the unburied dead" (84). For London, "the animal world provided a way out of the positivistic, mechanical, biological way of seeing. The animal world was a repository of humanistic values in a dehumanized society" (Hedrick 90). The reversion to instinctual characteristics was a way for London to find rationality in "the natural order" that he could no longer apprehend in society (90).

In "Congested Mails': Buck and Jack's 'Call,'" Jonathan Auerbach argues that Buck is a "mail carrier" for London's understandings of human existence. Auerbach continues this analogy with, "Since Buck is part of Jack's plot, since London in the act of narrating is himself working *for* Buck, we are able to see glimpses of a larger project informing the labor of narration. That idea or ambition is writing itself" (60). For London, the act of writing is itself a form of transcendence that requires much work and ambition. As Auerbach argues, London's work is only meaningful if its end result is a recognized form of self-expression. These ideas can also be applied in various other ways to a variety of London's characters' development, whether we are considering

Wolf, Hump, or animals; the toil of life is only meaningful if it creates a correct expression of internal ambitions. For London, society often exploits workers, who cannot accomplish much being independent of society. Toil by these people is necessary in order for great developments in art, society, science and understanding to take place. London describes the development of this idea in his essay, "What Life Means to Me":

> I was not afraid of work. I loved hard work. I would pitch in and work harder than ever and eventually become a pillar of society. And just then, as luck would have it, I found an employer that was of the same mind. I was willing to work, and he was more than willing that I should work. I thought I was learning a trade. In reality, I had displaced two men. I thought he was making an electrician out of me; as a matter of fact, he was making fifty dollars per month out of me. The two men I had displaced had received forty dollars each per month; I was doing the work of both for thirty dollars per month. This employer nearly worked me to death. A man may love oysters, but too many oysters will disincline him toward that particular diet. And so with me. Too much work sickened me. (89-90).

While society does not bear the entire burden or responsibility, neither does the natural world since when ambition is left unchecked it becomes meaningless.

London shows us animals and human beings for the extreme behavior of which they are capable. In London's works, those who experience loss end up longing for a simpler existence in which right and wrong are clearly defined. London does not describe a complete reversion to a "natural state," as he is often misread; instead he depicts the constant striving to balance action-less contemplation with instinctual action. As a result of writing in a post-Darwinian world, London portrays humans as

animals with their own developed instincts for survival. For London, this instinctual knowledge transcends the ages of human civilization and should never be completely abandoned. In a very real and meaningful sense, London's malevolent characters and violent animals converge, twin representations of the violence and existential struggle at the heart of life.

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