

The Call of the Wild: Jack London's Classic as Social Criticism

By Kevin

"We are all being called back to the wild, back to our senses, and forward to freedom and a new paradise."

The Prophet of Fiction

Buck lived as a spoiled king on the judge's ranch in California, and his unplanned life as a sled dog near the Arctic represents his experience in a lower class, which significantly improved his character. During the story, Buck learns to work hard and fight for status and power, as well as awaken his ancient instincts that were shut down from centuries of domestication.

At the start of the story, Buck had an easy life. He lived in a mansion on a large estate to roam safely. Every day, he had a full stomach and there were no threats to him. The spoiled canine had gotten this luxurious life without work, upon birth, as his father had been a close companion to Judge Miller, the human owner of the estate. The other dogs had no power, and were restrained in kennels or the house, or simply had a weak presence. Amongst the animals, Buck was the king, a mighty beast ruling the realm and going where he pleased. He strutted around with pride, and was an egocentric St. Bernard.

His life was changed by an assistant gardener who struggled with a gambling addiction and could not feed his family. Out of pure desperation, he sold Buck into the dog trade, against his will, and without the proper consent of his owners. As quickly as that, Buck's life of richness ended, and the true journey began. This is symbolic of the middle class overthrowing their king, and his removal from his kingdom was justified, as it was his fault that people struggled to survive and even starved while he lived in luxury and leisure.

Eventually, Buck starts life as a sled dog, in the cold wilderness, and is forced to work for survival. Buck and the others are not fed enough every day, and as a result he quickly learns how to successfully steal. This represents his new status, as he had quickly plunged from the upper class to the lower. Now in a new harsh world, he quickly learns that in the wild, everyone is aggressive, with threats all around him, and it is survival of the fittest. He sees Curly make friendly advances to a fellow dog and get ripped apart. Quickly grasping the idea that it is not a friendly place, Buck realizes he must constantly be on edge and flex his strength to keep enemies at bay. He must work, pulling a sled with some others, and he picks up vital skills to endure the environment around him, skills such as sleeping in the freezing cold. He quickly learns that one's status is earned by their strength and battles, immersing himself in a military hierarchy similar to human society. A personality trait of Buck is his pride, and ambition to be at the top, resulting in him quickly grappling with the current leader, Spitz, in a challenge for leadership.

The Call of the Wild has told the story of a spoiled king being forcefully removed from his position and kicked into the lower class, where he learns to endure the dirty environment. He unburies his wild

instincts, and quickly learns to work as well as rise in a hierarchy that is established and maintained through strength and intimidation. Buck develops from a spoiled brat to a man, going back to the way of his ancestors, and leading a wolf pack. He has answered the call of the wild.