

Discuss naturalism
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Chad Mead April 5, 2013 ENGL-227 World Fiction Discuss Naturalism and the Importance of the Dog to Understand the Theme. The author of this short story is none other than Jack London. One of the most influential novelists of his age, Jack London was the author who wrote "Call of the Wild" and "White Fang". Both books were excellent and even share some similarities with the story, "To Build a Fire", which is the story we are going to discuss. "To Build a Fire" is a story of a man fighting the harsh weather of the Yukon with only his dog, where he is ultimately defeated by it.

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This story has a strong Naturalistic presence in it, and shows it primarily through the means of the man's dog. Through this style of writing, we begin to understand that this story is about survival in the wilderness using one's instinct rather than sheer will. Naturalism is a type of writing style that is direct, no sugarcoated words, and shows us the harsh realities of daily life. Jack London used naturalism, the most realistic literary movement, to show how violent and uncaring nature really is, and how no matter what you do nature will always be there. This is where the dog comes in as naturalism's main contributor.

The first time the dog is introduced in this story, it was described as submissive yet questionable, in regards to the man's unwonted actions towards not building a fire or not finding shelter from the cold. The reason the author gives us as to why the dog is questionable is because "the brute had its instinct." (Jack London 655). Just from that one line the author gave, it showed that the dog and the man would have two contrasting roles to play

in his story. The dog embodies pure instinct, who only wants to survive the harsh, cold weather by lying next to a fire or in a shelter.

The man, adversely, shows us willpower because he does not wish to build a fire or find a shelter, but only seeks to push through the cold weather to get to his camp and "The Boys". This shows us the beginning of the differentiation between instinct and will, and it only gets stronger from then on. The second appearance of the dog is when the man stops for the first time to build a fire and eat his lunch. When the man finished eating and smoking his pipe, he started along the trail back to his camp again, with the dog, leaving the fire behind. As soon as this happens the dog is mentioned in a long dialogue about how it earns to return towards the fire, and how the man did not know what real cold was. The line that really identifies with naturalism was that, "The dog knew cold; all its ancestry knew, and it had inherited the knowledge" (658). Through the dog's environment and instinct, it knew what to do to survive a climate that it had known its entire life, and then some. The man, however, was described as the polar opposite of the dog, as "the man who did not know cold and possibly all the generations of his ancestry had been ignorant of cold" (658). This distinction between the two is now very evident, which brings up the turning point in the story.

The last appearance of the dog with the man is when the man is at the point of freezing to death, because he had dropped into water and did not succeed in building a fire. The man starts up a plan to kill the dog and use its entrails to warm himself up. This is the part of the story where it truly becomes

survival of the fittest, because the man is on the verge of death so he starts to depend more on his instinct to survive rather than his willpower. The man decided to carry out his plan and began calling to the dog, however, in the man's voice, there was fear.

As soon as we read that the man is so afraid that it can be heard in his voice, the dog recognizes it immediately. "Something was the matter, and its suspicious nature sensed danger-it knew not what danger, somewhere, somehow, in its brain arose an apprehension of the man" (662). Throughout the whole story, the dog follows the man, even if sometimes it did not wish to. With one sudden change in the man's behavior, the dog instinctively knows that something is amiss. The man also realizes that the dog is scared of him because of his new attitude, so he tries his best to remain calm and calls for the dog once more.

This time the man tricked the dog, however it was already too late for the man to rely on his instinct rather than his will; he could no longer clutch anything with his frost-bitten fingers to try and kill the dog with. In the end, through the naturalistic story telling of the famous author Jack London, we can ascertain that when it comes to survival in the wilderness, it is best to survive on instinct rather than ones willpower. Mother Nature will not accept the will of fools who are not afraid of, or do not respect her power.