

Civilization and the wild in the call of the wild



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Ed Yong once explained, all domestic dogs evolved from a group of wolves that came into contact with European hunter-gatherers (Yong). As shocking as it is, every domestic canine people own today has originated from wild wolves. Although it's less clear in small dogs who could not ever fend for themselves, every dog has derived from ancestors who lived thousands of years ago.

As dogs discover their wild side and their domestic side begins to fade, difficulties arise and they must adapt to their situation. In *The Call of the Wild*, London explores the many factors that explain what draws animals into nature and uses themes of deciding between civilization or the wild, fighting for survival and remembering ancestors' memories.

Throughout the novel, Buck is at a perpetual battle between his civil and wild sides. He leads two particularly unlike lives which do not go unchallenged throughout the novel. When he is first introduced, Buck is a house pet who enjoys a leisurely life with Judge Miller, while his transition into nature is challenging and extremely arduous. London states that deep in the forest a call was sounding (London 60). Throughout the story Buck is revealed to have an attraction to the wilderness that he has a difficult time resisting. As the days go by, he is continuously tempted to enter the wild. It is clear that Buck has a gradual transformation from a domesticated dog to a wild one (*The Call, Novels*). When the novel ends, Buck becomes totally absorbed into the natural world. (Moss). Buck's temptation to leave civilization and enter the wild does not seem to come to an end.

Buck is forced to accept his longing to be free and accept his current place in civilization. He must accommodate to an entirely new way of life and code of conduct to survive (The Call, Novels). Learning The law of club and fang marks a massive transition in Buck's life. He is forced to realize that those with the greatest physical strength are superior to everyone else. After living an easygoing life, he is has to accept that he stands no chance against a man with a club (London 12). Once he has become aware of his low position in the hierarchy, he begins adapting, and eventually loses his ethical nature. He begins stealing food and finding ways around the rules set in place for him to follow. London illustrates that the completeness of his de-civilization was now evidenced by ability to flee from the defense of a moral consideration and so save his hide (Mann). He then becomes resilient and extremely strong. Buck eventually fights the lead dog Spitz, and he wins the highest position on the team, proving that he is becoming familiarized to his place in a domestic group.

John Thornton is a source of some of the only experiences of a relationship between man and dog in Buck's life, binding him to civilization. Buck feels as though he owes Thornton because he intervenes when he sees Hal beating Buck for refusing to go any further on the trail (The Call, Novels). He appears as an ideal master to the Saint Bernard-Scotch Shepherd mix because of this, as he finally comes to believe in man again (Bolan). For the first time in this novel, Buck has in Thornton a master he can love (Moss). This is proven through the many occasions in which he saves his master's life, once by attacking Black Burton during a barroom brawl, and another time by pulling Thornton out of a series of dangerous rapids (Moss). It is made evident

throughout their relationship that love was Buck's for the first time, because between them there is a love that he had never experienced at Judge Miller's down in the sun-kissed Santa Clara Valley (London 60). Thornton is one of Buck's few experiences of a bond with a man, therefore he remains tied to humanity.

Eventually, Buck feels as though he cannot stay in civilization any longer. After being held captive for so long, Buck is content to finally feel like the leader of the dogs in the wild. He feels satisfied being a part of a pack and to have killed man in the face of the law of club and fang (London 83). This triumph allows him to finally give into his call into the wild and not feel guilty about it. The law of club and fang is a representation of an animal's submission and inferior position to man. This succession makes Buck feel as though man and the claims of man no longer bind him (London 83). Although Buck loves John Thornton and feels an authentic connection with him, he knows that it's time for him to move on and live his life the way it is meant to be lived in the wilderness. Leaving civilization is a decision that Buck was ready for his entire life.

The concept of fighting for survival relates to much of the physical and mental pain Buck deals with throughout the novel. Shortly after Buck is transported from his home, the group of men who hold him captive beat him with a club although he hasn't done anything to deserve it. He thinks to himself that all the pain he had endured was as nothing compared with the exquisite agony of this (London 11). It is expected that he would feel emotionally vulnerable and defeated after being forced to leave a place he had called home for his entire life up to this point. Buck's locational change

from one sign chain to another took place through a figure which marked the limit to the Judge's system of valuation (Pease). Instead of dwelling on the low possibilities of his escape, Buck's survival instincts kick in and he realizes that he needs to survive, although everything is causing him tremendous physical pain. Not only does Buck learn to endure pain at the hands of man, but he correspondingly has to have strength through agony in the wilderness. At one point, Buck learns how to survive the night by digging a hole in the snow and curling into a ball (The Call, Novels). He then finds a method to steal food yet avoid the men who would catch and beat him with a club. These are the lengths that Buck went to as to guarantee his survival in a cruel, cold land where a dog runs all day, sleeps to run the next day, and in between might lose his life in a dog fight (The Call, Novels). It proves challenging to Buck to fight for his life to survive another day.

While Buck's torment is not a pleasant instance, suffering is an important effect in Buck's development as a character. At one point, Buck's team of dogs is sold to a man who owns the Salt-Water mail from Dawson. Because of the gold rush, the mail load the team of dogs are required to pull increases at a high rate and they are pushed to their breaking point (The Call, Novels). Though Buck and the team struggle, they proceed on their route. One of Buck's teammates struggles and eventually has to be put to death because of his lack of strength and his sickness. This dog goes through suffering and ends up working himself to death, unwilling to be carried when he becomes ill (The Call, Novels). All of the other dogs must continue on the trek. Buck's perseverance throughout the suffering enforced onto him demonstrates that what doesn't kill him is benefiting him in the long run.

As Buck transforms into an uninhabited animal, he discovers within himself memories that belonged to his ancestors. The memories that Buck realizes he has have been dormant for generations (The Call, Novels). There is an almost theoretical component of Buck's nature that allows him to survive in conditions he has not ever been placed in before. Because of his ancestors, Buck had potent memories of his hereditary that gave things he had not ever seen before a seeming familiarity; the instincts (which were but the memories of his ancestors become habits) which had lapsed in later days, and still later, in him, quickened and became alive again (London 41). As Buck continues having visions of mankind thousands of years previously, he desires to be a part of the world in which his descendants inhabited. His dreams of the past not only give him insight into the past, but they show him how to behave and survive as well. Buck's ancestors' instincts prove to benefit him as he lives as an independent dog.

The basic instinct growing inside of Buck is his willingness and temptation to kill because of his ancestral memory. At first, Buck does not realize this instinct is even present in his mind. His desire to victimize others grows rapidly, as he goes from beginning with small game and, eventually, killing man (TavernierCourbin). This instinct is one of many that Buck has felt moving forward in his memory. For Buck, killing is more familiar and he craves it as he was ranging at the head of the pack, running the wild thing down, the living meat, to kill with his own teeth and wash his muzzle to the eyes in warm blood (London 33). When Spitz kills a snowshoe rabbit, it's death triggers a desire to hunt and kill inside of Buck. This is the point at which Buck challenges Spitz to a fight to the death, which Buck wins largely

because of knowledge of ancestral fighting techniques that became his instantly (TavernierCourbin). As the two dogs circled about, snarling, ears laid back, keenly watchful for the advantage, the scene came to Buck with a sense of familiarity (London 34). Buck begins remembering even features of the night, and the thrill that comes with a fight. After killing Spitz, he realized that he enjoyed that kill as well. Buck's willingness to kill has become a major component in his life.

Another instinct Buck craves because of Ancestral memory is leadership. Originally, Spitz is the leader of the team. He is a good leader, but eventually Buck craves his position. Because of dogs' natural instinct to be a leader, it was inevitable that the clash for leadership should come (London 30). Buck wants to lead the team for his sense of pride, and because he is under the influence of his desire to kill. Buck openly threatened the other's leadership (London 30). Once Buck is confident enough to fight Spitz, he challenges him and kills him. This marks the start of his succession as a dominant primordial beast who had made his kill and found it good (London 36). After killing Spitz, he is the official leader of the team of dogs for winning. Buck's want for leadership and the kill was clearly a derivative of his ancestral memory. After Buck has established his strength because of his hereditary memories, he reverts to instinctual patterns of behavior and his relationship with John Thornton becomes somewhat aged.

After being in the fight, Buck cannot return to his old self, for he has yearned only too well the lessons of the wild (TavernierCourbin). He now knows that after a fight one must not back down, especially from one started by oneself, and that going easy on the competition will be perceived to the opponent as

weakness. Because of ancestral memory, Buck has gained knowledge from the depths of time, and this type of knowledge cannot be ridded of once Buck accepts it in his mind. The memories of Buck's ancestors become a part of who he is, and his conscious self, including his behavior. He draws on his ancestral memory to show him how to behave (*The Call, Novels*). Although it may not have appeared this way, John Thornton's relationship with Buck could have been a potential way for Buck to return to civilization. In turn, they are only an intermission in Buck's evolution. Buck's craving for leadership and dominance is a main factor in his reasoning for leaving civilization.

Although many dogs will permanently remain house pets, many grow and realize their uncontainable side. Buck undergoes a transformation throughout the novel from a domestic dog into an eventually independent animal of nature. Problems in his life arise, and he must learn how to deal with them. In *The Call of the Wild*, one is reminded of a once domesticated dog's struggles of choosing between civilization or the living freely in the wild, struggling to survive and exercising memories of a dog's ancestors.