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London, Traveling the World

Jack London was born on January 12, 1876. At the time, his family was experiencing many challenges that would interfere with the means of his life. Jack never got to meet his original father, for he abandoned his family without any feeling of remorse. However, his stepfather, John London, played a significant role in raising Jack throughout his childhood and early adulthood. At the moment, Jack had no introduction to writing and literature. However, with the many challenges proposed in his childhood, he was provided with a strong foundation that would soon spark his creativity in the writing world, and influence many of his later works.

One moment in Jack’s life that defined many of his works was the Klondike Gold rush. The Klondike was certainly not for the weak. It had rugged landscapes and unpredictable weather. However, Jack was ready to overcome a challenge. From the start to the end, he was tested every step of the way on his journey. Here, he had searched for a fortune of gold to help him and his family, yet was provided with something much better. Upon embarking on this journey he had learned the many harsh values of nature. These values would soon influence his later works which focused on the concepts of survival and the laws of the wild.

Despite London’s appreciated works, he was a nomadic traveler who always craved adventure and any form of exploration that posed itself. His desire for adventure had exposed him to many different cultures and new environments. The many adventures he took began to take a place in his writing. More and more of his works began to be based on his personal travel experiences. These experiences help add a sense of detail into his writing. London’s books provide a taste of realism and a variety of emotions that captivate the reader. Many would describe his books as genuine and having a strong impact on their view of nature. His works pose as a monument highlighting the challenges of adversity. Through the many challenges regarding his upbringing, many revolutionary experiences in the Klondike, and nomadic adventures, Jack London’s stories such as *White Fang* or *Call of the Wild* are heavily influenced and shape his importance in the writing milieu.

Jack’s biological parents were William Henry Chaney and Flora Wellman. It wasn’t until the summer of 1875 that his mother, Flora discovered that she was pregnant. Unfortunately, William wasn’t ready to be a father. He had not married Flora and had walked out on his family. “Flora… was pregnant. William… announced that he would not marry Flora and that he had no interest in taking care of a baby” (Streissguth 9). From the time being, a wet nurse by the name of Virginia Prentiss had begun to care for her son. Alonzo, Virginia’s husband, had worked for a friendly widower named John London. John had moved to Sanfransisco with his two daughters, and met Flora. He instantly fell in love with her and the two got married during the September of 1876. John London was now Jack London’s stepfather.

Jack’s family was very poor growing up. His family had often struggled many times to make ends meet. They would constantly move houses and had old and worn out furniture. His stepfather had run a grocery store along with raising his own vegetables. Despite owning his own business and having a green thumb, he constantly struggled with managing product costs and how to run his business effectively. These troubles had soon caused him to hand over his business to his colleague and move out to San Mateo County near the bay. Here they would begin to settle down and start a home.

With not much to do growing up, Jack had to find his own forms of entertainment. One of these was reading books and writing. Whenever he had the chance, Jack would write as much as he could. On November 12, 1893, Jack had won his first writing competition. He had written on his experiences whilst on the boat *Sophia Sutherland*. The story was soon named “Story of a Typhoon off the Coast of Japan.” With Jack taking first place, it immediately urged him to write more. As time passed on, he began to write more stories which he would soon send off to different editors in hope of one being published. Besides his passion for writing, Jack also loved the idea of reporting through traveling. He would embark on one of his first major voyages to the Klondike later on in his writing career.

The Klondike was located in Alaska and Canada. It had freezing temperatures, unpredictable weather, and a desolate environment. At the time, Jack was very poor and was in need of money. News of gold in the Klondike had given him hope of a better life. He was ecstatic when he heard many men coming out of the Klondike with riches from gold nuggets. He had immediately set out to leave. However, he was in need of a captain. Fortunately, Jack had been lucky enough to find one. A man by the name of Captain Shepherd was willing to help him on his journey. The two had packed appropriate attire, tents, mining tools, food, and warm layers. On July 25, 1897, Jack and his group had headed off to the Klondike. Not long after, he returned him in August with nothing but a miniature satchel of gold dust. Jack was discouraged and felt that he had failed on his journey. “He arrived home in August, worn and exhausted at the age of twenty-two. His health was nearly ruined, and his pockets were empty. Gold mining had brought Jack nothing more than a small bag of gold dust”(Streissguth 39). At the time he was unaware, yet his journey to the Klondike had given him many stories. Some of which would make him a popular and well known writer around the world. “The trip had given him stories that would make him well known all over the world”(Streissguth 39). Despite not coming home rich, Jack was brought an even better fortune.

Jack returned back home from the Klondike around the summer of 1898. When arriving home, he was determined to make a living and support his family through writing. He had begun to compose stories, magazines, essays, novels, and more on his expedition to the Klondike. His material consisted of suffering throughout the winter in Alaska, hiking the Chilkoot Pass, and his journey two thousand miles down the Yukon River. His new knowledge had heavily influenced future works such as *Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*. Both focusing on the concept of survival in the wilderness.

One of London’s most famous work’s *White Fang,* really comes to show how brutal nature can be. This novel demonstrates that one must persevere in the face of adversity and anyone can be changed through the power of love. White Fang was born half wolf and half dog. He was left as the only survivor out of his five other siblings. As he begins to grow older, he realizes the many harsh laws of nature. Everyday White Fang is posed with new challenges. Each of which he must overcome to survive. At one point, White Fang was owned by an Indian named Gray Beaver. Gray Beaver has many other dogs that constantly bully White Fang. A dog named Lip-Lip is especially despicable and on one occasion assaults him. Eventually, White Fang was sold to another abusive owner by the name of Beauty Smith. Beauty is just as bad as Gray beaver, if not worse. Similarly, Beauty physically abuses White Fang. He also makes a profit off of him through dogfighting. Despite these cruel environments, White Fang always manages to brush it off. “No matter how terribly he was beaten, he had always another growl” (London 166). It wasn’t until being beaten up that White Fang was saved by a sympathetic man named Weedon Scott. With his new owner, White Fang will know what true love and care feels like.

Anybody can change through true care and love. Weedon helps shape White Fang’s character and helps put his traumatizing past behind him. Everyday Weedon shows patience, compassion, and affection. His family shows similar attitudes and warmly welcome White Fang into the family. However, White Fang is still scarred from his past and shows forms of aggression. Overtime, Weedon manages to tame him and cease his forms of aggression. White Fang now trusts his new family and can finally leave his old life in the past. He now feels that he has somebody to depend on. “Human kindness was like a sun shining upon him and he flourished like a flower planted in good soil”(London 234). Furthermore, a new door has been opened to White Fang. His new family deeply cares for him and have shown him true care and clemency.

Jack continued to travel the world after writing and publishing many of his works. He would visit many places including England, Korea, Japan, Mexico, South Africa, and Polynesia. Many of these would continue to influence his few later works and would continue to change his perspective on many different aspects of life. Each adventure had brought something different that would introduce Jack to new ideas.

One place in particular had changed Jack’s view on life. When he went to England he saw true poverty and the unfortunate lifestyle of others. He had traveled to the East End which is the most impecunious side of London. “In the East End, Jack saw the underside of life. The People in the East End had no work, no money, and no hope”(London 58). Jack had later mentioned these circumstances in a book titled *The People of the Abyss*. Here he would act as an unfortunate American sailor that had not caught their ship. While staying here he closely replicated the lifestyle of the poor. He would eat in soup kitchens and labor in sweatshops. In the evenings after work, he would mingle around the neighborhoods and sometimes even slumber on benches. He would return to New York, and his journey in England would end on November 4, 1902.

Another major travel that Jack had partook in was heading off to Japan. There was a major war looming between Russia and Japan for control of Korea as well as Manchuria. He left to document the war soon after. In the early months of 1904, Jack had traveled across the vast Pacific Ocean to the city of Yokohama, Japan. In spite of everything, when arriving Jack was met with some devastating news. He was told to stay put in Japan while the war was being fought in Korea. This, however, did not stop him from fulfilling his initial goal. “Jack was determined to get to the fighting, no matter what the expense or danger and no matter what the officials said”(London 63). This had infuriated many and his actions were seen to be unjust. Despite experiencing the war first hand, Jack felt that he had not fully succeeded in his mission. As a result of this, he had called out a poor Japanese waiter that was in an effort to steal. This had soon landed him in prison. Later on, Jack was released from Japan and traveled back to the United States.

One of his last voyages was to Mexico to experience and write on the revolution that was occurring throughout the country. Jack had left in October of 1913 with his wife, Charmian, and his servant, Yoshimatsu Nakata. He had mentioned his thoughts on the revolution in many articles that he wrote. Many of them described how he had no sympathy for the revolution and was an avid supporter of the United States military. These articles had received much backlash and had proved to many that Jack was blinded by success. Instead of rooting for the communities of Mexico that were in poverty, Jack had changed his view to supporting the rich United States. Some said that “he was spoiled by success and had joined the wealthy, privileged class he had once sworn to overthrow”(London 99). These complaints had taken a heavy toll on Jack’s life as a reporter and had caused him to stop traveling and reporting as a whole.

After a long life of writing, reporting, and traveling the world, Jack London had passed away on November 22, 1916 at the young age of forty.

QUOTES FOR *White Fang*:

Pg 166: “No matter how terribly he was beaten, he had always another growl”

Pg 234: “Human kindness was like a sun shining upon him, and he flourished like a flower planted in good soil”

Works Cited

* London, Jack. *White Fang*. Scholastic, 2001.
* Streissguth, Thomas. *Jack London*. Lerner Publishing Group, 2001.