Call of the Wild || Essay Kolin Krewinkel

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Dramatic environment and life changes can force one to adapt to cling to life. In The Call of the Wild, author Jack London tells the story of a dog used to the life of sunny California, thrust into the harsh world of the Alaskan tundra. In The Call of the Wild, Buck is forced into a new life, which causes him to lose his morals, toughen physically, and finally detach from society and become *wild*.

To begin with, Buck loses his morals, in his desperation for commonplace necessities such as food. For example, desperate for food, Buck “…watched and learned. When he saw Pike, one of the new dogs, a clever malingerer and thief, slyly steal a slice of bacon when Perrault’s back was turned, he duplicated the performance the following day, getting away with the whole chunk.” (37) Previously, in Buck’s old life, he’d have never done such a heinous crime as steal food, for he had led the life of pampering and false title. Now, bearing tough conditions, he had been forced to adapt and do what’s necessary — steal food. In addition, Buck, taking out his hatred and killing Spitz, “stood and looked on, the successful champion, the dominant primordial beast who had made his and found it good.” (67) At Judge Miller’s place, Buck was a civilized and obedient dog. Now, due to the harsh and bitter environment he’s been subjected to, Buck is a savage killer, capable of eliminating those whom he views as his enemies.

In addition, Buck has been physically honed and sharpened to the highest degree. An example of this sharpening is Buck feet, modeling to the trail life, “Later his feet grew hard to the trail, and the worn-out footgear thrown away.” From his relatively large and, by trail standards, out of shape-self, Buck had polished his physical attributes to become ready for the trail. Now, the accouterments provided by his masters were unnecessary and he was warming to the harsh life of a sled dog. Next, Buck became master of nature, “…he pulled the great moose down.” Using newly found strength, Buck realized his potential and attacked a great beast. Transformed from a dull and ignorant dog, Buck had become the fastest and strongest of the creatures. As a result of Buck’s new, harsh, and intense environment, he’s been transformed from stale and false dog to sharpened, honed, and perfected dog, returned to his wolf roots.

Finally, Buck disconnects from civilization and returns to his natural roots. For example, Buck eventually, “They saw him marching out of camp…At once he became a thing of the wild, stealing along softly, cat-footed…” (157) Buck, previously, did not want to participate in sledding. As a civilized dog, he only did it because he was forced to; but now, he was drawn to it. In addition, at the end of the novel, Buck develops, “patience of the wild—dogged, tireless, persistent as life itself.” Buck, now at John Thorton’s camp, is persistently drawn to the wild, where he behaves like a wild wolf with his new skill-set. After John’s death, there is no other lock to society for Buck; the call of the wild overwhelms him and he becomes part of it. As a result of the introduction to a new environment, Buck is transformed from civilized and superficial to hard working, tireless, and wild.

The now transformed dog, Buck, has given up his morals, strengthened himself physically, and removed been removed from civilization. As a result, Buck radically transforms as a result of the people and terrain around him. He learns his roots and core values, and through the course of the novel, changes dramatically. In doing this, London demonstrates the strength and power of one’s environment and how it can transfigure someone into something completely new.