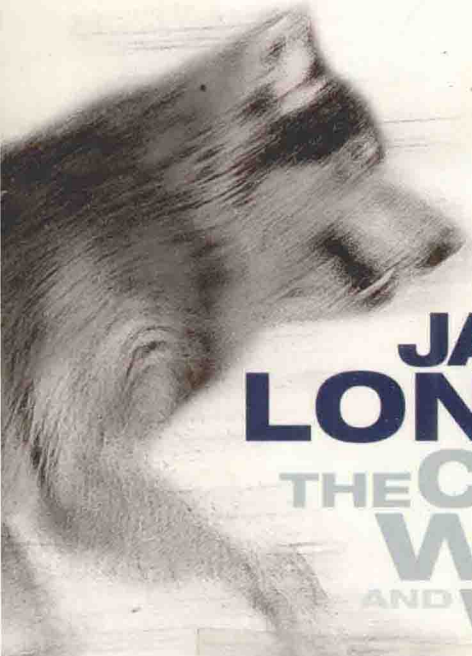


Signet Classics



**JACK
LONDON**
THE **CALL** OF THE
WILD
AND **WHITE
FANG**

WITH A NEW AFTERWORD BY MICHAEL MEYER

THE CALL OF THE WILD

— AND —

WHITE FANG

常州大学图书馆

藏书章

*With an Introduction by
John Seelye
and a New Afterword by
Michael Meyer*



SIGNET CLASSICS

SIGNET CLASSICS

Published by New American Library, a division of
Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street,
New York, New York 10014, USA

Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto,
Ontario M4P 2Y3, Canada (a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)

Penguin Books Ltd., 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Ireland, 25 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2,
Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd.)

Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124,
Australia (a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty. Ltd.)

Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park,
New Delhi - 110 017, India

Penguin Group (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632,
New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd.)

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty.) Ltd., 24 Sturdee Avenue,
Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd., Registered Offices:
80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Published by Signet Classics, an imprint of New American Library,
a division of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

First Signet Classics Printing, November 1991

First Signet Classics Printing (Meyer Afterword), September 2010

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Introduction copyright © John Seelye, 1991

Afterword copyright © Michael Meyer, 2010

All rights reserved



REGISTERED TRADEMARK — MARCA REGISTRADA

Printed in the United States of America

If you purchased this book without a cover you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as "unsold and destroyed" to the publisher and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this "stripped book."

The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

Jack London (1876–1916) spent his youth on the waters of San Francisco Bay. In 1897, when gold was discovered in the Klondike, he obtained a grubstake and spent a freezing, fruitless winter in the Far North; by spring he was ready to return home to write. In 1900, his collection of short stories *The Son of the Wolf* was published. Two more volumes of Yukon short stories, a juvenile novel, and a Klondike novel followed in rapid succession. Then came his bestselling novel *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and the beginning of the years that were to bring him wealth and worldwide popularity. The eternal traveler, London served as a correspondent in Japan and Mexico and sailed his own ketch to the Solomon Islands before his death.

John Seelye is a leading American studies scholar and graduate research professor of American literature at the University of Florida at Gainesville. He is the author of a number of books, including *The True Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Prophetic Waters: The River in Early American Life*.

Michael Meyer is a professor of English at the University of Connecticut. Among his books, *Several More Lives to Live: Thoreau's Political Reputation in America* was awarded the Ralph Henry Gabriel Prize by the American Studies Association. In addition to *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*, his edited volumes include *Frederick Douglass: The Narrative and Selected Writings*.

Introduction

Jack London is one of the roughest of American literature, perhaps the toughest of the lot. There is some question as to the extent to which he came honestly by his harsh view of life, of nature and society. In his early attempts at self-fashioning, whether in his autobiographical fiction, correspondence, or interviews, London was always careful to place himself in worst-case scenarios. We now know that the childhood hardships he claimed to have suffered were mitigated by the relative comforts of lower middle-class life, and his dull routine of delivering morning and evening newspapers as a schoolboy somehow left plenty of time for an omnivorous diet of literature borrowed from public libraries. But there is little doubt that Jack had an early and lengthy introduction to adversity, and that his later exaggerations reveal the extent to which he suffered. Born (in 1876) an illegitimate child, he was given his stepfather's name and soon became hostage to his improvident—if hopefully entrepreneurial—life.

Forced to drop out of school at the end of eighth grade (not an unusual necessity at the time), London spent a period of drudgery in a fish cannery, then found escape of sorts as an “oyster pirate,” using a small sloop to raid the beds of San Francisco Bay, an experience he next put to good use working for the “fish patrol,” enforcing the very laws he had been breaking. London then embarked on a seven-month voyage aboard a sealer, where he acquired a taste for the seafaring life that never left him. This stint was followed in turn by a spell ashore as a coal shoveler in a powerhouse, leaving London with a bellyful of old-fashioned capitalist exploitation. Inspired by the outrage

he felt, he joined "Coxey's Army," a loosely organized mob of unemployed men moving across the country toward Washington, D.C. to protest economic conditions. London spent the next period of his life on the road as a hobo, riding the rails with other tramps and battling railroad cops to keep from being tossed off speeding freight trains. But Jack stopped well short of the march on Washington. Instead, he headed north, enjoying the freedom of life in the outdoors and relishing the pleasurable anarchy of living by his wits, until a side trip to Niagara Falls resulted in a grim honeymoon, a month in prison on a vagrancy charge.

It was while London was behind bars that he had a lasting vision of life at the bottom of the societal pyramid—the depths he found were very deep indeed—which would sustain his later fiction. Informed by his reading of Karl Marx, London's "socialism" nonetheless was definitely idiosyncratic, and because it was also influenced by Nietzsche's notion of the superman, it was closer in some of its elements to what we call "fascism." Following his release from prison, London entered high school, convinced that escape from exploitation was only possible if one had an education, and after a brief period of impatient schooling, he spent a semester as a special student at the University of California. But he remained an autodidact, whose reading followed self-determined lines, much as his membership in the Socialist party during this same time did not bring him in alignment with the accepted ideology. Still, though it was hardly capable of sustaining a program of social action, London's tangled code (indebted as much to Kipling as to Karl Marx) provided the basis for his early and greatest fiction. He believed in a societal struggle with a Darwinian basis, in which men, like animals, were engaged in an eternal and often bloody contest, and that it was only the fit—mentally and physically—who won the battle, and that the best of these would become leaders. Would, in short, lead the pack.

Enter London's dogs. There was a great deal of nature writing coming out of the United States at the turn of the century, much of it associated with the few remaining wilderness areas demarcated by the closing frontier mapped by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893. In California, John Muir was writing his Thoreau-inspired accounts of life in

the Sierra; Mary Austin wrote about her days spent in the marginal zones of the California desert; Ernest Thompson Seton, a Canadian, wrote biographies of wild animals, including a renegade grizzly bear; Theodore Roosevelt wrote about hunting big game in the Far West and Africa; but perhaps most exemplary of all were the animal stories written by Rudyard Kipling, a British writer who drew upon his experience in India to frame tales about Mowgli, a boy raised by wolves, whose teachers were other wild animals that communicated their thoughts in articulate language. Kipling was as popular in America as in England, and he provided for Jack London (among other things) a fabulist basis for his Darwinian-inspired animal tales. Though Kipling himself was otherwise motivated, his anthropomorphic jungle creatures bore out the Darwinian thesis that it is difficult to draw a clean line between humankind and their animal counterparts. Man, after all, is but a more sophisticated brute, an advanced form of ape.

Darwin and his popularizer, Herbert Spencer, were influential also on Naturalism, a literary mode espoused by contemporaries of Jack London, like his fellow Californian, Frank Norris, who portrayed men and women caught in a fierce struggle to gain ascendancy over each other in an unending contest of wills. Norris's stories were set against a harsh world indifferent to human welfare—whether urban slums or wilderness—a Nature well beyond Emerson's fence, a place where any notion of a caring benevolent God was absent. It is a world where the words "brute" and "beast" are commonly used, more often than not applied to men, who seem more brutal than their animal counterparts. It is therefore fitting that London's most popular and perhaps his greatest novel is *Call of the Wild* (1903), a parable of survival which indiscriminately mingles the worlds of men and animals, using the dogsled team as a metaphor of life. And in *White Fang* (1906), a sequel of sorts to *Call of the Wild*, London drew an even clearer diagram of the essential kinship between men and beasts.

Both these novels have their origins in a short story called "Bâtard," London's first attempt at fiction about dogs, published in 1902. Like so much of his best-known writing, "Bâtard" is based on London's experiences in the Yukon, where he spent the winter of 1897, a sojourn on the

Klondike undertaken in the hope of finding gold, but which resulted chiefly (and spectacularly) in his discovery of the materials which would sustain the vision obtained from his month in jail. The dog for whom the story is named owes his very existence to the conditions of the Yukon frontier, having been sired by a wolf on a husky. Bâtard falls into the hands of a cruel master, himself a "half-breed," named "Black LeClère," a French-Canadian who brutalizes the already ferocious wolf-dog, until, with an Ambrose Bierce-like final twist of irony, the animal revenges himself on his sadistic master. This early story more closely parallels *White Fang* than *Call of the Wild*, but the brutal vision is consistent, for in all three works London blurs the line between animals and men: Bâtard and his master are cut from the same pelt, indeed the extreme ferocity of the dog is the Canadian's creation. It is a witness to the supremacy of nurture over nature, but testifies also to the brute nature that dictates the kind of nurturing the wolf-dog receives. We are all animals under the skin.

In *Call of the Wild*, London starts with a domestic animal, a dog who has been pampered by his wealthy master, but is then stolen from his California home and terribly mistreated in order to be trained to pull a sled during the Klondike gold craze. Because of his superior qualities, Buck becomes the lead sled-dog, a position he keeps by vanquishing all potential rivals for the job and which he would rather die than relinquish. His superiority, however, does not make his lot any easier, and is shadowed by the certainty that he will, one day, be replaced by a younger dog and be killed in the process. But Buck is eventually rescued by John Thornton, an understanding master, and he once again experiences love and kindness, which he returns. But when Thornton is killed by Indians, Buck abandons civilization—much like his near-namesake, Huck—for a wilderness life. In *White Fang*, intended as a counterpart to *Call of the Wild*, London reversed the pattern: starting with the adventures of a wild animal—half-dog, half-wolf—he repeated the pattern of "Bâtard," but in the end redeemed the dog-hero, by means of another John Thornton character, Weedon Scott, who offers White Fang a life very similar to the one Buck left behind in California.

Despite the happy ending, the story of White Fang is

hardly upbeat. Like "Bâtard," much of the book is concerned with the brutal treatment the wolf-dog receives from men, starting with the hard-handed (if fair-minded) training by his first master, an Indian, who breaks him to sled-work. Like Buck, White Fang is a superior animal, who soon becomes a lead dog, but because of his mixed heritage, he is something of an Ishmael among dogs, against whom all teeth are bared. The white man who buys him from the Indian—a veritable monster carbon-copied from "Black LeClère," but so deformed he is nicknamed "Beauty"—takes advantage of White Fang's persecution, and turns it to his profit by training him to be a fighting dog, treating him savagely so as to create a raging brute. Like Buck, White Fang is rescued by a benevolent master, who brings him around by gentle, humane treatment. As a reward for this kindness, White Fang saves his "love-master" and his master's wife from an escaped convict in a struggle that nearly kills him. But White Fang recovers and lives happily ever after, last seen as a proud father amongst his puppies—doubly domesticated.

Now, happy endings are not typical of London's stories. At best, as in *Call of the Wild*, his conclusions are inevitable, warranted by a sequence of circumstances with no pattern save increasing grimness. Why, then, did London give this particular novel such a positive ending? The same question may be asked of the initial episode in the book, a prelude to the unrelenting brutality of the Yukon wilderness that has a final (and surprising) hair-breadth rescue. To what can we ascribe this kinder, gentler Jack London? The answer is not particularly difficult to find. In 1900, London had married Elizabeth Maddern, a schematic union founded on Darwinian notions of biological fitness that resulted in two daughters and little love. In 1903 the couple separated. He had already met and fallen in love with Charmian Kittredge, who, following Jack's divorce in 1905, became his "love-mate" for the decade or so he had left of life. From that point on, London's life and much of his fiction centered on and derived, albeit very imaginatively, from his marriage with Charmian. For a time, at least, he seems to have felt redeemed, reinvigorated by love, producing a cycle of California novels inspired by his idealized marriage. It is to this new order of fiction that *White Fang* most properly belongs.

There is a large element of autobiography in much of what London wrote, whether explicit, in a novel like *Martin Eden* (1909), or implicit, as in *White Fang*. For in the wolf-dog's mixed heritage we can read an equivalency to London's illegitimacy, and in *White Fang*'s brutalization by society we find an allegory of London's self-conceived and exaggerated, youthful struggle to prevail. London conceived of himself as a "lone wolf," cultivated "Wolf" as a nickname, and called his luxurious ranch house in Sonoma "Wolf House." It was an identity that suited his imagined identity as a "blond beast," and Charmian quickly became his "wolf-mate." Of course, it is not a woman who rescues *White Fang*, but a man, a situation in keeping with the story's excessively male emphasis on physical violence. The redeeming woman chiefly figures in the literature of sentimentality, and though, as we shall see, *White Fang* has its sentimental moments, they operate within a masculine frame of reference. Nonetheless, *White Fang*, like *Call of the Wild*, belongs to the same class of books as Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* and the stories about mistreated animals inspired by "The Uncle Tom's Cabin of the Horse," as Sewell's novel was subtitled when it was first published in 1877. Like Stowe's abolitionist classic, it is a literature dominated by the reformatory presence of women.

Black Beauty was written to promote the purposes of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Great Britain, but it soon carried its mission and message to America, where it inspired a number of imitations, including Mark Twain's "A Dog's Tale," which appeared the year that *Call of the Wild* was published, and a companion piece, "A Horse's Tale," published the same year as *White Fang*. But perhaps the best-known imitation of Sewell's novel was *Beautiful Joe* (1894) by Margaret Marshall Saunders, a Canadian writer of American descent who submitted her story to a contest sponsored by the Humane Society of Boston. Clearly, Saunders's *Beautiful Joe* was a book intended to do good. In the words of Hezekiah Butterworth, a writer for children who supplied an introduction, the novel, "met one of the needs of our progressive system of education," which was to "demand the influence that shall *teach* the reader *how* to live in sympathy with the animal world." Which was not quite what Jack London attempted to do in his three

dog stories, but it does come close—if for entirely different purposes. Moreover, where London's tales were fiction, Saunders's book (in her own words) was a "true story," yet the plot lines were impressively similar. Saunders's story is about a mongrel who "belonged during the first part of his life to a cruel master. . . . He was rescued . . . and is now living in a happy home with pleasant surroundings, and enjoys a wide local celebrity." Again, this sounds a lot like the plot of *White Fang*, but these similarities are overwhelmed by matters of emphasis. *Beautiful Joe* is a late example of domestic fiction, set in a world of benevolent women, gentle and caring men, considerate children. *White Fang* is not. There is no doubt but that London was familiar with the *Black Beauty* genre: as Earle Labor tells us, in describing *Call of the Wild* to his publisher, London announced that "it is an animal story, [but] utterly different in subject and treatment from the rest of the animal stories which have been so successful; and yet it seems popular enough for the *Saturday Evening Post*, for they snapped it up right away." (Labor: 71) The similarities between *Call of the Wild* and (most particularly) *White Fang* and stories of the *Beautiful Joe* variety suggest that London was writing *against* that kind of fiction, not necessarily to discredit it, for London also was outraged by gratuitous cruelty to animals, but to put forward a world in which benevolence is a very feeble flame flickering in a wilderness of darkness. And, like the flame in his most famous story, "To Build a Fire," it is more often than not, as in *Call of the Wild*, snuffed out by a chance wilderness event.

Well, to *what* end were London's stories written, then? Why did he forsake the sentimental tradition of the popular animal story? *Call of the Wild* supplies a key, certainly. In that story, humankind is pretty much dismissed as either unredeemably brutal or fatally inept. Men either act in the spirit of the wilderness or they are given death sentences, nor does being wise to the woods guarantee survival. John Thornton, Buck's last and loving master, is an experienced woodsman, but he is done in by Indians, shot full of arrows, leaving Buck to turn his shaggy back on mankind and retreat to the wilderness. It is, finally, animals who are most in tune with the wild. Men, especially civilized men, are more often than not destroyed by it. Moreover, nature seems its

most vindictive in the zones where civilization has made inroads. That is London's tragic arena, a place where violence has an insane, purposeless dimension. It is here, I think, that we can find a key to his fiction in general and to *White Fang* in particular.

Once again, White Fang, like his prototype, Bâtard, is part-dog, part-wolf, a mixture that precipitates his persecution and connotes a fatal meeting of civilization and the wild. In the nineteenth century, it was widely thought that humans who were, like Black LeClère, half-Indian, half-white, or mixed blood, were particularly ferocious and inclined toward criminal violence. In *White Fang*, London gave the old myth a new twist, for his dog hero gains a large measure of superiority from his miscegenetic origins, but they sentence him nonetheless to an intolerable existence once he has been taken into the world of men. Until he is finally rescued, White Fang is presented as a victim of the intermixture of civilization and wildness that produced him. That is why he leads a violent life, one of brutality from which he is rescued only to excel in heroic acts of bloody courage. Beauty Smith, the man who brutalizes him, and the convict, Jim Hall, who nearly kills him, are also products of civilization's discontents, the one reviled by men for his ugliness, the other a man who has been brutalized beyond humanity by injustice and cruel treatment by civilization. He is White Fang's human equivalent, and we draw satisfaction from his fate.

Neither can we, I think, draw much solace from White Fang's happy destiny fathering puppies on a California ranch. Like that last-minute rescue that ends the opening episode of the novel, it seems unwarranted by what has gone before. Notably, the summary of the plot in the *Oxford Companion to American Literature* tells us that "White Fang dies while saving the Scott home," a mistake very much in keeping with London's fiction in general, the terms of which do not warrant rescues. For how can we expect anything but death and disaster in a wilderness as it is described in the opening paragraph, in which the very scenery seems to laugh at "the futility of life and the effort of life"?

Like his fellow naturalists, Stephen Crane and Frank Norris, London is an expressionist in prose, a writer who

uses the wilderness as a stage set for exaggerated effects—a scene stripped of all excess furniture in order to foreground the action. Fights are his specialty, and that he invented the boxing novel is not surprising, for his notion of the use of landscape approximates the boxing ring. He is very good at rendering the tearing of flesh and snap of broken bones. Often his fights take place in the snow, which is quickly spattered with blood. Teeth flash and tear; eyes gleam hotly; howls are heard from the cowardly and vanquished. Whips crack and clubs thump. Men scream and yell. But, once again, this isn't "nature." This is what happens when men go out into nature, bringing with them their civilization, which is clearly inadequate to the occasion.

We now need to ask what it was that brought civilized men out into London's wilderness. What, to use the language of the Puritans, was their errand? Not surprisingly, they went there for money. Much of what happens to London's dog heroes happens because people want to make some money with them. Buck is stolen and sold to men who set up dog teams . . . for money. White Fang is trained to fight . . . for money. And behind all this is the lure of gold, the ultimate symbol of wealth. There are photographs of men heading for the Klondike, forming into a mile-long line that winds up through a mountain pass, men who carry huge packs of supplies, symbolic of expectations as they set out in quest of gold. That is their errand in the wilderness, gold being wealth in its most abstract and most tangible form.

By the turn of the century, in large part because of the great California gold rush of 1849, the adventure literature in America and elsewhere was gold obsessed. Both of Twain's stories for (and about) boys turn on the power of gold: Tom Sawyer nearly dies for the sake of gold treasure, a fate which Injun Joe doesn't escape, and in *Huckleberry Finn*, the two con-men, the self-styled Duke and Dauphin, do terrible things for the sake of Peter Wilks's gold. R. L. Stevenson, following Twain's lead in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, centered the adventure in *Treasure Island* about the hunt for Captain Flint's gold. Gold is a powerful lure, not just for the value it holds, but because of its warm glow, its sheer presence. It figures largely in Frank Norris's story of McTeague, a California dentist whose of-

fice sign is a huge gold tooth and whose wife is obsessed by gold in the form of coins, which she rolls around in, naked. Clearly, America lost a very specific symbol when it went off the gold standard. Paper money just doesn't have the same resonance.

Surprisingly, Jack London's stories of the Klondike region seldom involve gold itself, perhaps because he had been unsuccessful in his own search, perhaps because he is more interested in the secondary effects of greed, commerce as filtered through a theoretical sieve. For when London went digging for gold he packed books by Darwin and Spencer along with his flour and bacon, and it was with the aid of the ideological spectacles provided by these mentors that he viewed the materials of his experience. Subsequently, he discovered Nietzsche's theory of the superman, with the result that his vision of life in the Canadian wilderness is intensely politicized, the struggle between labor and capital reduced to its basic, elemental terms. Sled dogs become the exploited, their masters the exploiters—their struggle is an eternal battle not only to survive but to prevail.

Dogs are an ideal vehicle for London's purpose in that we traditionally attribute to them virtues prized by mankind: courage, loyalty, endurance under adversity, forgiveness, even good humor. Dogs moreover have no interest in wealth, and only seek creature comforts—a meal, a warm place, a bed out of the weather—for they, after all, are comfortable creatures. But London tears them from hearth and home, and hurls them into a howling wilderness to serve as subjective agents of his protest against economic exploitation. Where writers like Sewell and Saunders evoked the humanlike qualities of horses and dogs in order to bring about reform, London enlisted them as substitute humans in his ideological dramas, which are not so much protest fictions as massive demonstrations of the injustice found in the human scheme of things, perhaps beyond remedy. Where a Sewell or a Saunders regards love within a New-Testament frame of reference, as an agent of societal regeneration, London regards it as creating a temporary asylum just beyond the struggling, chaotic world outside. And yet his fiction about dogs shares with other animal stories of the late nineteenth century a conscious message about inequality and exploitation.

From *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on, reform fiction used sentimentality to achieve its goals, converting the idle tears of tenderhearted readers to useful tears of anger. And at the center of the sentimental tradition is the idea (and ideal) of family, the integrity of which is as essential to *Black Beauty* as it is to Stowe's great book. Lending animals human characteristics, a version of the pathetic fallacy, is also part of the equation, an extension of Stowe's lengthy proof that Negroes are people too: "Am I Not A Man and Brother?" was a motto of the abolitionist crusade. London was hardly a sentimentalist in the pattern of Sewell: there is no appeal in *Call of the Wild* to our sympathetic emotions, and even the death of Buck's kindly master is rendered objectively, ironically. Buck is never redeemed back into the human family—the essential element of sentimental reform fiction—quite the reverse. But here again is the dividing line between London's first novel about dogs and his second: while not written to reflect reform, it does have considerable emotional impact. True, the feminine element is entirely missing, but when the redeemed wolf-dog breaks through a window in order to join his beloved master, who is about to return to California without him, we are given an equivalent evocation, a celebration of the male bond so important to western American literature.

As such, it is a celebration also of the chivalric impulse, which is the male version of sentimentality. Where sentimental fiction stresses love, chivalric romances sublimate male love as *loyalty*, a major element of the code of honor. It can be noted here, moreover, that London's dogs are hardly victims. They have courage beyond belief, and when their depths are reached by love, they evince a definable nobility, a generous spirit that comes with physical superiority. Much as London's debt to Nietzsche's concept of the superman seems to contradict his self-proclaimed socialism, so there is a deep chivalric streak in his darkly naturalistic fables. Likewise, the men who rescue Buck and White Fang are chivalric in their actions, being advocates of fair play, of doing things in an upright (and strong-handed) manner.

There is a certain wisdom in London's stories, a detectable grace, a definable nobility. He was born, after all, in the nineteenth century, when chivalry was making its last stand. Chivalry as we know died in the First World War, its

banners dripping with mud, shot down as Mark Twain envisioned in his *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* by modern technological advances, the same sort of thing that spelled the doom of the wilderness, too. It could not, would not rise again. Jack London did not die in that war. He couldn't wait. He died an alcoholic from a vision he finally could not endure. No dog was there to save him at the last. But his stories survive him to explain the why and how.

—John Seelye

Contents

Introduction
vii

~~THE CALL OF THE WILD~~
I

~~WHITE FANG~~
83

~~Afterword~~
276

Selected Bibliography
286