

# Lassie Come-Home Short Guide

## Lassie Come-Home by Eric Knight

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



# Contents

<a href="#">Lassie Come-Home Short Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Overview.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">About the Author.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Setting.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Social Sensitivity.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Literary Qualities.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Themes and Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Topics for Discussion.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Ideas for Reports and Papers.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">For Further Reference.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Related Titles/Adaptations.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Copyright Information.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>

## Overview

A Yorkshire, England, family is forced to sell their beloved collie, Lassie, to pay their bills during a time of economic crisis and unemployment. The son is especially devastated to lose his companion who devotedly met him each afternoon when he came home from school. Lassie's new owner, a wealthy duke, takes her to Scotland. However, she escapes and travels approximately one thousand miles south to return home.

Her journey requires her to traverse challenging natural obstacles such as rivers and snow drifts. Lassie encounters both helpful and harmful humans and animals and suffers injuries. Her determination, perseverance, and loyalty results in a reunion which foreshadows better times for Lassie and her chosen masters.

## About the Author

Born on April 10, 1897, in Menston in Yorkshire, England, Eric Mowbray Knight was the third of four sons born to Frederic Harrison and Marion Hilda (Creasser) Knight.

Harrison and Knight both were Quakers.

His father was a rich diamond merchant who took his family on exotic foreign trips.

When Knight was two years old, his father, who had left his family to move to South Africa, was killed during the Boer War.

Because Frederick Knight had depleted the family's financial resources, Marion Knight moved to St. Petersburg, Russia, to work as a governess for the royal family, and Eric and his brothers remained in Yorkshire but were separated to stay with different relatives.

After living at several places, Eric Knight settled in with his temperamental uncle, who was a carter (a cart driver), and studied at the Bewerly School in Yorkshire where he became familiar with working-class concerns, speech patterns, and behaviors that he would later chronicle in his books, particularly *Lassie Come-Home*. Knight reminisced that this period was one of the happiest times of his life. By 1905, Marion Knight relocated to the United States. Eric Knight, however, stayed in England. His uncle died when Knight was twelve, but Knight remained in Yorkshire where he worked in mills and a glassblowing factory.

Here Knight participated in a labor strike, and developed an affinity for working people.

In 1912, his mother asked him to join her in America. Homesick for Yorkshire, Knight did not feel close to his mother or brothers, who seemed more like strangers than family. Knight was employed as a copy boy for the Philadelphia Press. He attended several schools including the Cambridge, Massachusetts, Latin School before enrolling at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts School, New York's National Academy of Design (receiving its Elliot Silver Medal for drawing), the Art Student's League, and the Beaux Arts Institute. Despite his talent, Knight was more interested in industry than art, although he carved wooden dogs and oil painted, including a self portrait.

When World War I began, Knight traveled to Toronto, Canada, to enlist at the rank of private in Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, serving as a signaler in France. He married Dorothy Noyes Hall in 1917. The couple had three daughters.

Knight's older brothers, Fred and Ed, joined the United States Army and died in France on the same day in June 1918. His younger brother Noel had previously died in England as a child. After the war, Knight attempted to resume his art career in the United States but realized that he was color blind. He worked as a cartoonist and secured employment as a journalist at newspapers, including the *Bronx Home News* and the



Philadelphia Sun and Public Ledger. As a drama critic and columnist for the Philadelphia Public Ledger, Knight began submitting articles that were printed in Liberty magazine when his newspaper editor could not use some of his pieces. Knight also served with the peacetime United States Army as a reserve captain and traveled to Europe and Central America.

He married his second wife, Jere Brylawski, also a writer, after he divorced his first wife in 1932. Knight wrote short stories and the autobiographical novel, *Invitation to Life* (1934). Because the Philadelphia Ledger closed in 1934, Knight became a scriptwriter for Fox and Paramount studios in Hollywood.

Liberty magazine printed one of Knight's brief fictional pieces in 1935. Knight's literary career benefited from noted poet e. e.

cummings's encouragement to submit fiction to Story magazine. Knight's work appeared in the 1936 O. Henry Memorial Collection of prize stories. Ernest Hemingway also promoted Knight's literary endeavors.

Knight's work appeared in *Colliers*, *Cosmopolitan*, and the *New Yorker*.

Unhappy with his Hollywood work, Knight left by 1935 to work on an alfalfa farm and write. He visited Yorkshire, and his awareness of the English farmers' struggles to endure distressing economic hardships resulted in magazine articles in the *Saturday Evening Post* and novels. Knight's fiction focused on Yorkshire characters and their concerns and struggles with issues such as unemployment, malnutrition, and hazardous working conditions. Influenced by American democracy, he portrayed lower-class working people with artistic sensibilities, a stubborn nature, and an awareness of social inequities while promoting reform with his words.

Critics praised Knight for the realism, empathy, and humor in his books, including his second novel *Song on Your Bugles* (1937), *Now Pray We For Our Country* (published in 1940 and titled *The Happy Land in the United States*), and *This Above All* (1941), in which the hero, a soldier, questions his patriotic feelings. This latter novel was made into a motion picture and is lauded as Knight's best work. Knight's writings revealed his unhappiness with bleak socioeconomic conditions and unjust bureaucracies, which he thought seemed more complacent than concerned about social problems and unwilling to improve circumstances. Knight's Sam Small, known as "the Flying Yorkshireman," was featured in two tall tale collections. He also wrote a novel parodying Hollywood, *You Play the Black and the Red Comes Up* (1938), using the pseudonym Richard Hallas. Knight penned pamphlets and radio broadcasts. On his farm, Knight raised collies and often took his favorite dog Toots to book signings and impressed people with her command of tricks based on hand signals. He named a canine character in *Lassie Come-Home* after Toots.



Knight was best known for *Lassie Come Home* (1940) which was first printed as a December 17, 1938, *Saturday Evening Post* short story with illustrations drawn by Knight. Inspired by the return of Toots after she had disappeared, Knight's story emphasized that the devoted bond between a dog and a boy persevered despite social and physical obstacles. An editor at the John C. Winston Publishing Company urged Knight to expand his magazine piece to write a children's book based on the story.

Knight realized that many English farmers had been forced to sell their dogs because of economic hardships and developed his original plot based on this premise. He added passages he had deleted to shorten his story for magazine publication and elaborated upon Lassie's saga. Knight described his work as a "neat job of bread-and-butter workmanship" that "was written about Toots, after a lonesome walk back of the hills." Although Knight eagerly created art for this book, the publisher asked Marguerite Kirmse to illustrate it. He dedicated *Lassie Come-Home* to veterinarian Henry Jarrett, who was the first person to import collies to the United States from England.

The Junior Literary Guild and Book-of-the-Month Club featured this book which quickly became popular internationally, being translated in at least twenty-five languages. Some countries, such as Poland, incorporated *Lassie Come-Home* into educational curricula. *Lassie Come-Home* received the Pacific Northwest Library Association Young Readers' Choice Award in 1943.

Knight sold the novel's movie rights to MGM for \$10,000 in 1941. The studio consulted him about casting suggestions which were incorporated. Knight met the dog playing Lassie on the movie set and was promised one of his puppies (a male dog was chosen to star because females had less luxurious coats and were more prone to be disobedient). The Technicolor film, *Lassie Come Home*, was named one of the National Board of Review Ten Best Films of 1943 and was nominated for an Oscar for color cinematography. Successful at the box office, the movie enjoyed both critical and public acclaim, and audiences demanded more Lassie stories. In 1944, a B-17 flown by the U.S. Eighth Air Force in England was named *Lassie Come-Home*.

The novel has inspired at least eight movies and six television series in addition to merchandise and other related items.

Several generations of collies have portrayed Lassie. Knight's character popularized the collie breed, and collies are often referred to as Lassie dogs. Designated a classic children's book, *Lassie Come-Home* has remained consistently in print, and more than one million copies have been sold.

When World War II began, Knight went to England to help make informational films.

In 1942, he was commissioned to the rank of captain, then later promoted to major, by the U. S. Army's Film Unit of the Special Services Division during World War II. He devoted his writing talents to the war effort, stating that he would only return to penning fiction after peace was achieved. In North Africa, he wrote about and filmed battles for the "Why We Fight" series with Frank Capra.



While flying to Cairo, Egypt, for film production, Knight died on January 15, 1943, in an airplane crash near the Dutch Guiana (Surinam) coast. An investigation was never pursued even though authorities speculated that the flight had carried military intelligence documents and possibly material relevant to the Casablanca Conference. They also admitted they had been warned that a bomb might be aboard. Coded material being sent to British General Sir Harold Alexander was found at the crash site.

Knight, the highest ranking military officer aboard, was posthumously presented the U.S. Legion of Merit and buried with other crash victims at the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis, Missouri.

He had been naturalized as an United States citizen just prior to his death. An opening frame of the movie, *Lassie Came Home*, dedicated the film to Knight.

# Setting

Lassie Come-Home begins and concludes at Greenall Bridge, a coal mining community in Yorkshire, England, where "of all places in the world it is here that the dog is really king." Residents revere dogs, and even the poorest people can have dogs that were raised well, groomed, and well-trained.

During the "poor times," many Yorkshire dogs are sold when necessary to make money. Located in England's largest county, Greenall Bridge is in a "bleak part of northern England" where "wind and the cold rains sweep over the flat moorlands, making the dogs rich-coated and as sturdy as the people who live there." Only one road extends to the village from the valley, and residents pursue a "life of courage and family." Faces and clothes are covered with black coal dust, and plain food is served at meals.

In Greenall Bridge, Lassie is a village favorite and considered the best collie that "had ever been bred" there. Lassie only becomes an outcast when she is removed from her native setting. People can set their clocks by Lassie traveling through the community to meet her young master, Joe Carraclough, by the school gate daily at four o'clock. (The school gate foreshadows the gate at the Duke of Rudling's Scottish estate through which Lassie achieves her escape.) Shops are located on High Street. A lane diverts from the street and winds up a hill to a gate and garden path that leads to the Carraclough's "stoutly built cottage" which represents the strength of that family. Inside, the kitchen provides nourishment and a fireplace produces warmth for humans resting in chairs and Lassie sleeping on a rug. Stairs lead up to sleeping chambers. Both the Carraclough and Fadden (the Faddens rescue Lassie after she collapsed in a ditch near their farm home) homes present readers with a sense of familiarity.

The interiors and exteriors of buildings and land aid characterization and plot development. Without Lassie, life in the cottage is tense as Joe's parents argue behind closed doors about money. Joe laments the lack of his favorite foods, roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. A vase on the mantle contains pennies that Mrs. Carraclough refers to as her "insurance," and she insists they be used to buy foods to cure Lassie. In the cottage on the Duke's Greenall Bridge estate, the Carracloughs find renewed happiness that reminds Joe of "old times." He credits their bliss and contentment with Lassie's return. The cottage has a larger space with more specialized areas such as a scullery (a room where dishes and utensils are cleaned and stored). The plentiful food, as well as Lassie's seven puppies, represent the potential for the Carracloughs to enjoy a future of abundance without fear of deprivation. In this structure, the maturing Joe and his father strengthen their bond while listening to his mother's gleefulness. Joe is pleased to see his parents embrace and quit fighting.

Some settings provoke unpleasant reactions. The school is a frustrating place for Joe, who would rather spend his time playing with Lassie. He is punished for standing up to look for her and not concentrating on his lessons. Sam Carraclough worked for seventeen years in the pit-yard at the Wellington Pit coal mine. Now he frequents the Labor Exchange with other unemployed men to wait for work assignments and





complains that he "walked my feet off for twenty miles round here" looking for a job. In contrast, the moor where Joe hides with Lassie represents a pastoral sanctuary.

Yorkshire children "knew every inch of the moorland, and a twist in a path spoke to them as surely of their whereabouts as a street sign on a corner does to a city dweller."

Villagers go to the moor's rocky island to ponder their troubles because caves assured privacy and isolation for contemplation.

Lassie suffers confinement in the dogcatcher's van with a "grilled door," and the iron gates at the pound are restrictive. She darts through corridors at the pound and evades pursuers in the courtroom, jumping through a window to resume her journey.

Rowlie is robbed at Apden Woods, where Lassie acts in a primal way to avenge crimes committed against the peddler and his dog.

At the crossroads Lassie, agitated by her separation from Joe, chooses to continue southward and not accompany Rowlie to his home at Twelve Corners where she would be promised peace and solitude.

The Duke of Rudling's Yorkshire estate is located one mile from the village. His kennels are "full of fine dogs." Lassie's pen is constructed of a "stout mesh-wire" fence six feet high. She has enough room to pace in circles. She tears part of the wire to wriggle out on her first escape. After the kennel man strengthens the cage with thicker wire and wooden stakes, the undeterred Lassie manages to leap and climb her way to freedom. Because Lassie continues to escape, the angry Duke of Rudling orders that she be transferred to his kennels located at the northern tip of Scotland's Highlands.

The Duke's estate consists of a "frowning stone house" and land overlooking the sea in the direction of the Shetland Islands where tiny animals learn to adapt to the harshness of that remote northern climate.

Situated at a high altitude, the estate exists mostly in darkness with short periods of sunlight—symbolizing Lassie's despair and the Duke's disregard of other people's feelings. The distance to Greenall Bridge is so great that the Carracloughs, with no means to travel, seem vanished from Lassie's world.

At this estate, Lassie has a private pen with a run. Although she is well fed, groomed, and trained, Lassie is confined by chains.

She never forgets when it is four o'clock, and seizes opportunities to flee. Her "homing sense" directs her to head south where "Home was a cottage where she lay on the rug before the fire, where there was warmth and where voices and hands caressed her."

The southward trek from the Highlands to Yorkshire covers 400 miles by roads but probably totals more than twice that by a traveler who "must circle and quest at obstacles, wander and err, backtrack and sidetrack till it found a way."



Rugged terrain fills the area between northern Scotland to Yorkshire. Lassie traverses moors, mountains, lochs, and rivers.

She finds shelter in caves from thunderstorms and shelter under gorse to rest and temporarily heal. The narrator describes the wild, lonely, wooded mountains and "heatherland" of the Scottish Highlands.

He says "lochs are a fearful barrier" and can only be crossed by watercraft, necessitating Lassie to walk many additional miles around them. As she moves south to the Lowlands, Lassie crosses "rolling land where the shepherds watch their flocks" and firths, or river mouths (where the tide meets the river current). She passes through industrial cities and ancient towns.

Swimming the Tweed River, the natural boundary of Scotland and England, almost kills Lassie. On the southern bank, Lassie collapses on her. Her eyes are "glazed" and "flies buzzed about her, but she did not lift her head to snap at them." Her stillness contrasts with the noises of mooing cows, barking farm dogs, "whispering" trees, hunting otters, and splashing trout, Lassie can hear birds, including an owl "scream."

The suspense of Lassie's physical and emotional paralysis is relieved when she resumes movement at dawn to traverse farmland and flatlands to reach her beloved Yorkshire moors which guide her home.

# Social Sensitivity

Lassie Come-Home respectfully depicts impoverished people coping with economic hardships, specifically the worldwide depressions of the 1930s. The novel focuses on how the members of one family react to and cope with poverty. Morality is emphasized, especially practicing honesty and helpfulness. Lying, cheating, and stealing are discouraged because doing the right thing is expected. Through such behavior, even the weakest people are empowered and strengthened to prevail over adversity. Thrift and work are rewarded with social approval although the financial benefits are usually minimal. Joe offers to eat less when he is told how expensive it is to feed a dog. Sam tries to lessen his family's guilt when he says he has quit smoking his pipe to im263 prove his health and does not mention the cost of tobacco. Intelligence and wisdom surpass class and wealth as desirable traits to empathize with others and improve society.

Lassie represents a sentimental desire to promote traditional values such as family, loyalty, manners, and faithfulness. Lassie's heroism establishes a model of devotion, trustworthiness, and steadfastness. The Carraclooughs and Lassie are the stereotypical salt-of-the-earth characters who lack money and connections to achieve power. Instead, they rely on their dignity and resourcefulness to survive daily and work toward larger goals of securing more desirable employment and to reunite with beloved ones.

What is most value to them is a good family name.

Elitism plagues Great Britain when Lassie initiates her journey. The way people treat her indicates how members of some social classes disregard people they perceive as less important than they are, or dismiss them for having undesirable flaws which are usually non-existent. Sam Carracloough's dilemma stresses the social woes of unemployment and the limitations of welfare.

The characters retain their pride and selfrespect no matter how unpleasant their circumstances become.

Animal abuse is a social theme in Knight's book. Human attitudes towards animals vary from great respect to derision to apathy. The Carraclooughs, the villagers, Priscilla, and several characters who befriend Lassie represent humanitarian treatment.

Hynes is the epitome of someone who delights in being sadistic to animals, hinting of his antisocial nature. The issue of animals serving as pets versus being appropriated for other roles such as breeding stock, show dogs, or service animals, and moral dilemmas regarding these roles posed by animal rights activists, is suggested but not explored. Above all else, Knight stresses that dogs are humans' best friends.

# Literary Qualities

Knight uses the literary technique of an omniscient narrator to tell Lassie's adventures. This approach is the most effective way to present the viewpoints of all characters, including Lassie, without resorting to sentimental or unrealistic portrayals. An anthropomorphic Lassie would have made the novel seem silly and lessened its impact on readers. By showing Lassie's behavior and reactions to stimuli during her journey without assigning unrealistic motivations or emotions to her, Knight creates an authentic canine characterization. He does not minimize the struggles Lassie engages in or the physical toil she endures, and sometimes scenes are graphic. His depiction of humans is equally believable because of the mannerisms, facial expressions, and his explanation of underlying emotions that drive the public actions that are attributed to them. Cruelties and despair are convincingly depicted.

Figurative language creates appearances, landscapes, and situations with imagery and colors that come alive for readers.

Lassie's "urge to travel south burned in her like a fever." Joe has a "hearty-red" face, and Priscilla's is "blue-white." Perhaps most poignant are the descriptions of Lassie's injuries and periods of inactivity when she seems almost comatose and near death.

Her temporary paralysis builds tension.

Lassie unsuccessfully licks at a "thorn festered" in her paw. Straining to stand up, Lassie hops because one hind leg "did not work." Stiff and sore, "For days she lay, coiled and hidden away, her eyes bright but unmoving." Lassie's legs are muddy and fur matted with burrs. Her journey suggests the imagery of battles, with references to World War I events and the armistice.

Lassie refuses to surrender and disarms a canine combatant when "she merely placed a forepaw stiffly over his body" to pin him "Instead of taking an easy victory and driving at his throat."

Descriptions of snowdrifts and other seasonal changes to plants and animals provides readers a sense of time passing as Lassie travels south. Time imagery is frequently used, such as the "impulse" Lassie experiences being compared to "when an alarm clock rings to disturb, but dimly."

Lassie is often described as "gliding like a ghost," suggesting her borderline existence.

Toots playing dead foreshadows her own demise. Knight includes details such as references to specific foods, and normal activities like shopping and attending school, to make his story familiar to readers and more accessible. He incorporates elements of humor and romance to enhance the drama, realism, and excitement of his adventure tale.



The names Knight selects convey possible meanings. Rowlie could represent how he spends so much of his life rolling in his wagon to earn money. Dally Fadden dallies because she has ample time to think about her life and perform her few chores. The Duke of Rudling's moniker suggests that he is rude and a ruler over the people and animals where he lives. Snickers hints of someone not to be taken seriously and who provokes laughter. The name Lassie is given, Your Majesty by Rowlie and Herself by Dally, indicate that those people valued Lassie by identifying her.

Because of his Yorkshire childhood, Knight gives voice to speech patterns and accents that are true to the people and places in *Lassie Come-Home*. Dialect reveals more than geographical influence. A Yorkshire man asks Joe, "Eigh, lad. Wheer'd tha find thy dog again?" Knight carefully differentiates between the broad accent this man uses and how Joe replies to him with the "pure English" taught in schools. That type of English is usually relegated to formal usage. In Yorkshire, Knight says that talking to people in the accents they speak is considered polite. The Duke, choosing to address Yorkshire villagers in their preferred accent, reveals that he respects them even if his message sometimes seems derogatory.

When he offers Sam the position of kennel man, however, he reverts to formal usage during a professional transaction. Some dialect is used to cast characters negatively such as Hynes' Cockney whining to Lassie, "I'll see ye eat if I 'ave to push it down yer throat," in which his "I's sound like Hi's."

Hynes's "clipped Cockney accent always seemed to irritate the local people, whose speech was broad-vowelled and slow." As he watches Lassie circumvent the loch, Mr. McBane's Scottish accent has empathetic overtones: "Puir thing—it's got a long road to gang."



## Themes and Characters

Determination and endurance are major themes in *Lassie Come-Home*. Twelve-year-old Joe Carraclough and his collie, Lassie, are the main characters, and undergo a metamorphosis as the result of Lassie's journey. Joe is a "sturdy, pleasant-faced boy" with brown eyes, who dotes on his collie and aspires to be as "fine a dog-man as his father." The family's identity is tied to dogs and place as Mrs. Carraclough notes to Joe, "Tha wouldn't be a Carraclough—nor a Yorkshireman—if tha didn't know more about tykes [dogs] than breaking eggs with a stick." Joe represents optimism, confidence, and hope. He longs for a miracle to return Lassie to him.

Joe, intuitive like his collie, senses something is wrong when Lassie is not waiting for him at school one day as she routinely does. Joe is devastated by the sale of Lassie to the Duke of Rudling and declares that he never wants another dog. He stubbornly protests and pleads, trying to convince his parents to buy Lassie back and seems unwilling to accept the family's impoverished status. When Lassie does escape from the Duke's nearby kennel and returns to Joe, he is ecstatic then frustrated when his father insists that they must return Lassie. Joe challenges his father, outspokenly questioning why he chose money over a dog which loves them. Heartbroken, he tells Lassie not to ever Come-Home again in an effort to dissuade her from escaping. When Lassie arrives from Scotland, Joe assertively stands up to the Duke. He bargains with his mother to protect Lassie from the Duke, saying that someday he will earn money to care for his parents and says that he asks for her help for Lassie's sake, not his, because Lassie had decided to return to the Carracloughs.

Joe's parents, Samuel Carraclough and his wife (who is never named, perhaps indicating her primarily subordinate role) are ordinary members of the working class.

They try to protect Joe from the stresses of their economic woes, never talking about difficulties in front of him. Like most of their neighbors, they are "rough, stubborn people, used to living a rough, hard life" and routinely "covered up their feelings."

Stoic and not saying much, none of the Carracloughs can easily express their emotions for each other the way they are affectionate toward Lassie. Appropriately, Sam is a collier, or coal miner, an occupational term which is similar to his other avocation, collies. The word collier also means the ship which carries a crew and symbolizes how Sam carries most of the burdens in his family. He tells Joe "what can't be helped in this life must be endured, Joe lad. So bide it like a man, and let's never say another word about it as long as we live." Sam reveals attitudes toward women at that time when he asks Joe not to upset his mother.

Sam says that "They have to stay home, women do, and manage as best they can.

And what they haven't got—well, they've got to spend time in wishing for." He advises Joe to tolerate his mother's "hot words" and be patient with her. This father-son



interaction shows how Joe begins to shift his emotions to his parents in Lassie's absence.

Above all else, Sam is an honest, dutiful, simple man and has a good reputation among his peers and members of higher social classes. His words and actions are straightforward and consistent with "no devious exceptions and evasions concerning life and its codes." He believes in performing work well and devotes his energy to securing food, clothing, and shelter for his family. Even when he knows he will not be compensated, he laboriously grooms Lassie for her return to the Duke of Rudling's kennels because he sincerely cares about her well-being. Later, he causes Lassie to appear disheveled in an effort to keep her.

After the mine closes, Sam devotes his time to finding employment so he does not have to rely on the dole (share of food or money handed out) for sustenance. A proud man, he refuses to sell Lassie as long as possible until economic conditions are too overwhelming. His decision to sell her is the catalyst for Lassie's journey and the transformation of the Carracloough's future.

Recognizing the scarcity of work in the depressed economy, Joe's father is concerned that Lassie's escapes might jeopardize Hynes's (the Duke's kennel man and dog trainer) employment. Although he is committed to being honorable and considers the "spoken word is a binding contract, and once it is given, no real dog-man will attempt to go back on it," Sam allows the Duke to use semantics to assure Lassie a home with the Carraclooughs. By cleverly disguising Lassie, Sam revealed his competence as a dog handler which helped him get the kennel job with the Duke. Commenting that he had tried to buy Lassie for five years, the Duke stated "I had to buy the man to get her" and admitted that is a good bargain.

Mrs. Carracloough is stern, practical, and brooks no nonsense. She brusquely tells Joe when he is bemoaning Lassie's departure that "there's no use crying about it." Always busy with chores, her duties foreshadow Dally Fadden nursing Lassie and Lassie caring for her puppies. Mrs. Carracloough cooks food for Lassie, using linseed to make her coat glossy. Although his mother often scolds Joe, he is not upset, realizing that she truly loves him, often says the opposite of what she means, and is hiding her own sad feelings. Mrs. Carracloough's mood can suddenly shift from expressing irritation at Joe to then acting tenderly toward him to comfort and reassure him. Her statements emphasize how the family is faring, chiding "Now be careful, young man! Sugar costs money!"

The roles of Joe's parents reverse after Lassie's final return, affecting male-female dynamics within the family. While nursing the collie after her final return, Joe's mother insists that the family spend money on brandy and eggs which she spoons into Lassie's mouth determined to heal the dog.

Like Dally Fadden, she sits up watching Lassie. Her anger inhibits Sam's resistance to return Lassie to the Duke based on the fact that he had already spent the money that he received for her sale. Mrs. Carracloough negotiates with the Duke regarding her



husband's employment and the family residing in the cottage on his estate. Happy with his revitalized life, Sam refers to his wife as the "bonniest woman."

Lassie is the best dog in the community and considered priceless because of Sam Carracloough's insistence that she is not for sale. People admire Lassie and the Carracloough family's reluctance to sell her, indicating that they are determined to maintain personal and civic integrity as symbolized by Lassie. People usually equate dogs with potential sources of money, a consistent concern because the poor worry about paying for coal, food, and shoes for their children. Lassie does not care about money or that she has financial value and escapes from what she feels are unbearable conditions without any concern for the Duke's lost investment.

A tricolor collie, Lassie's fur is "black, white, and golden-sable." The narrator informs readers that collies' purpose is to "work with man" and understand basic commands and signals. Lassie personifies patience and commitment and has a big heart, being affectionate and kind to the Carraclooughs. She is well trained and obedient until her survival requires that she abandon her domesticated ways, hinting of the Carraclooughs also adjusting their behavior to cope with demanding times.

Lassie's innate sense of time alerts readers to her keen instincts which will guide her home from her exile in Scotland. Almost everyone in the village sets their time by Lassie, and she has routinely been meeting Joe at school since she "was a bright, harumscarum yearling." Lassie's consistency, predictability, and trustworthiness represent the themes of loyalty and devotion.

Both Lassie and the Carraclooughs are prized as exemplifying quality because of how they act and respect themselves and others. Before her journey, Lassie "always moved daintily" which sharply contrasts with her weakened, lame movement during and immediately after her travels. Her resumption of vigor and mobility symbolizes the Carraclooughs' redemption within their family and community. Lassie pines for Joe while she is separated from him and faithfully refuses to give up on being reunited with him. She sacrifices comforts at the Duke's kennel and resiliently perseveres on her journey in solitude to return to Joe and bravely and resourcefully faces hazards. Over approximately a one year period, Lassie relies on her internal compass for sense of direction. She is grazed by a bullet on her flank and her muscles permanently stiffen, but Lassie does not let such infirmities prevent her from participating in life.

Lassie is depicted as being more noble than local aristocracy. The Duke of Rudling is gruff and seemingly unyielding. A self-described "hardhearted Yorkshire realist," he can be ostentatious and scary, especially when he shakes his cane and yells. The Duke is accustomed to getting anything he desires but has been frustrated by Sam Carracloough's refusal to sell Lassie for several years. Appearances and social prestige are important to the Duke who plans an elaborate show career for Lassie during which he hopes to win major prizes to enhance his reputation in the world of dog sports. The Duke's deafness represents his inability to understand people's opinions and perceptions. He often does not comprehend what is important to his granddaughter, such as studying languages, and belittles her efforts.





Although the Duke seems like an unsympathetic character throughout most of the novel, he displays compassion and awareness of others' desires and needs when he feigns not to recognize Lassie due to Sam's efforts to disguise her. He permits the Carraclooughs to keep her and hires Sam as his kennelman, providing the family a secure home and salary. The Duke sees Lassie's scarred paws which symbolize that she chose the Carraclooughs and willingly abandoned a leisurely life to be with them.

As evidence of his affinity for villagers and indicative of class divisiveness, the Duke speaks to the people of Greenall Bridge in the "broadest tones of Yorkshire dialect" something members of the Duke's family would have deplored. When telling his granddaughter about "coping" to improve a dog, the Duke asserts "I am a Yorkshireman, too."

Priscilla, the Duke's twelve-year-old granddaughter, who is a "very self-contained and composed young lady," seemingly contrasts with Joe but also has a lot in common with him, particularly her respect for animals. Privileged and pretty, with long blond hair, Priscilla is refined and sophisticated, attending school in Switzerland. Despite her affluence, "Joe felt sorry for her. She did not look nice and plump and solid-boned as the little girls of the village did." Joe views Priscilla as an enemy because her grandfather has taken away his dog and does not realize that he should be grateful to Priscilla for proactively not closing a gate as ordered so that Lassie can escape and return to Joe. Priscilla intuitively understands the connection between Lassie and Joe and quietly does not support her grandfather's plans for Lassie, taking effective action when she has an opportunity.

Themes of kindness and cruelty are juxtaposed in minor characters. Lassie's antagonist, Hynes, the Duke's kennel man and dog trainer, loathes Lassie and the Yorkshire world she represents. Originally from London, Hynes has a Cockney accent and dismisses everything in the rural setting as unimportant and potentially immoral. He accuses the Carraclooughs of training Lassie to escape and return home on purpose so that they can sell her multiple times to make greater profits. Hynes is abusive to Lassie, roughly handling her, and does not seem to enjoy working with any dogs. His lack of respect for animals is in direct contrast to the Carraclooughs and Priscilla.

Other characters who are detrimental to Lassie are the dog-catcher Donnell, sheep herders who shoot at her, rock-throwing boys, and anonymous people who fear that Lassie might be rabid because she is a stray and disregard her as unimportant. The robbers, Snickers and Buckles, ambush Rowlie, Lassie's traveling salesman friend, and at first, she leaves the scene but then she returns to bolster Rowlie's defense of his property and life. These negative characters emphasize Lassie's instincts to mistrust people as she becomes wilder.

Supporters include Ethelda, who had owned a collie named Bonnie, who tries to intervene by adopting Lassie when she is captured by the dog-catcher. Daniel and Dally Fadden, an elderly couple, restore Lassie's health, while she lifts their spirits.



Thinking of how her son Dannie had died in World War I, Dally comments, "It was the living that took bravery." Dally spoons milk into Lassie's mouth and claims her for a while. Lassie's illness at their home foreshadows her collapse when she returns to Yorkshire. The Faddens realize that Lassie has an internal sense of time alerting her every afternoon and that she is yearning to leave, and they release her. Rowlie, a peddler with eyes, lips, and facial features resembling buttons, sells pottery and pans from his wagon, gently encourages Lassie to be his traveling companion but also is willing to say goodbye, recognizing that something is drawing her southward. These characters remind Lassie that people can be kind. Ian Cawper, the largest and gentlest man in Greenall Bridge, carries the worn, emaciated Lassie triumphantly home when she completes her journey, somewhat like a mythical warrior presenting a wounded hero to the safekeeping of the gods.

Animals are essential to plot development and represent themes of wild versus civilized, and nature versus home. Used to having her food provided and not being responsible for securing nutrients, Lassie is both preyed upon and a predator, first seizing a bloodied rabbit from a weasel then relying on her sense to hunt for rabbits to keep from starving. Lassie cautiously rejects handouts because the Carraclooughs had put red pepper in meat to teach her to avoid "poisoned meat that some madman has thrown" to her. Dogs are both her enemies and friends. The sheepherders' collies fight Lassie, while Rowlie's dog Toots, a small white mixed breed, accompanies her in performances to please customers.

Toots's death motivates a furious Lassie to attack the robbers even though she had never acted viciously toward humans before. She struggles between two forces, ancestral and civilized, before succumbing to instinct. The trials and perils Lassie encounters on her lonely pilgrimage to Yorkshire test her intelligence and courage and sometimes cause despair and self-doubt. Lassie survives being hurt and hungry, emphasizing the vulnerability and renewed optimism of all the major characters.



## Topics for Discussion

1. Why are Lassie and the Carracloough family so devoted to each other? How do each of those characters benefit from the other characters' love? In what ways do they treat each other the same, and how do they treat each other differently? How does Lassie connect the three Carraclooughs as a family?
2. Compare and contrast the Duke of Rudling, his granddaughter Priscilla, and the kennel man Hynes with the Carraclooughs. Do you think Knight selected those characters' names to suggest socioeconomic and personality traits such as rudeness? What do these characterizations reveal about class in Great Britain?
3. Discuss the Carraclooughs' strategies to persevere despite lean and discouraging times. How do their efforts parallel Lassie's journey?
4. How do the dog characters resemble human characters? Does Knight describe animals and humans with any physical attributes which are clues to their inherent goodness or unsavoriness?
5. Are any scenes unnecessary for Lassie to complete her trip successfully? If so, why do you think Knight includes those sections?
6. Which characters are most helpful to Lassie in her endeavors to achieve her goal? Who hinders her the most? Is human ambivalence detrimental or useful?
7. Who acts morally toward Lassie and why? Should Priscilla have disobeyed her grandfather and Hynes by not closing the gate?
8. What does each natural obstacle represent symbolically? How does the weather indicate the passage of time?
9. Discuss the meaning of ownership. Who truly owns Lassie? Who is her master?
10. Why are time and direction essential to this novel?
11. Does the story seem too sentimental and old-fashioned for modern readers, or does the novel's style contribute to its appeal and continuing status as a classic? Why is this novel universally embraced by varying cultures?
12. Do the author's interpretations of animals' motivations and perceptions seem authentic, or do they reveal human judgments? Compare the meanings and applications of logic and instinct.
13. Why is it important for the major dog character to be female? How would a male dog have been depicted differently? Compare how male and female characters are represented in this novel and their expression of traits such as nurturing and empathy. Do male characters ever display feminine qualities?



14. What is the significance of each character's work, whether domestic, school, retired, or unemployed, to his or her identity? Do the characters rely too much on routines?
15. Discuss the role of food and injury to plot development and characterization.



# Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Locate a true story about a lost animal that traveled a great distance to find its home or family, and write a fictional short story using *Lassie Come-Home* as an example to develop characters, settings, and plots.
  2. Research possible scientific reasons that enable animals to track people and places and navigate across unfamiliar territory. Also, locate information about rabies and how animals and people were treated if exposed to that disease in the 1930s. What other diseases and parasites, such as distemper and ticks, posed a threat to Lassie and other dogs at that time. How did veterinarians combat those infections and pests?
  3. Compare Lassie's adventure with that of working animals such as homing pigeons or messenger dogs, which routinely move between places to perform military tasks during wars or similar strategic service.
  4. Read both contemporary and historical accounts of the 1930s depression in Great Britain and the United States as sources for a report. What common conditions did people encounter? How did their situations and reactions differ?
  5. Write several journal entries from Lassie's point of view to describe various events as she perceives them on her journey.
  6. For a special newspaper edition, prepare a report announcing Lassie's safe return. Write two brief editorials, one pro and one con, commenting about Lassie's journey and the issue of stray dogs. For a follow-up edition, write letters from characters in the book telling about their time with Lassie or remarking on loose dogs and the risks of diseases, bites, and assaults on other animals.
  7. Research the role of dogs in popular culture. How are dogs depicted in television programs and films? How are they appropriated to advertise merchandise and to serve as military and athletic mascots? Do dogs usually represent positive qualities? When are they used to symbolize negative qualities?
  8. Write a report about how people abuse dogs, such as operating puppy mills, staging dog fights, and stimulating dogs to become overly aggressive. What laws punish such behavior? How can people prevent such abuse?
  9. How has commercialized dog breeding and showing changed in Great Britain and the United States since the 1930s?
- Using American Kennel Club resources, make a chart showing the most popular breeds of dogs in each decade from the 1930s through 2000. When were collies one of the most popular breeds? Did any collies win major dog shows or obedience competition prizes?



10. Compare Knight's 1938 Saturday Evening Post short story with his 1940 novel, and write a report about how he alters and retains elements of his original story. How would you revise the story differently?

11. Write an epilogue chapter to Lassie Come Home set five years after Lassie returns home. Include Lassie and the Carraclouchs and any other characters you consider significant to their future.

12. Use a compass to draw a circle on a map that shows distances one thousand miles from where you live. Using regional geographical and tourism sources, describe what a trip between your home and a point one thousand miles away would be like. If you were Lassie, how would you cross natural obstacles such as rivers and mountains?

What dangers might you encounter, such as extreme weather, congested interstates, or indigenous wild animals?

What native plants and animals might you consume as food? Where do you think you would seek shelter?

## For Further Reference

Buell, Ellen Lewis. Review of *Lassie Come-Home*. *New York Times Book Review* (July 7, 1940): 10. Buell praises the book for not being over-sentimental or for "humanizing a dog's desire and instincts." Knight's characterizations are praised.

Collins, Ace. *Lassie, A Dog's Life: The First Fifty Years*. New York: Penguin Books, 1993. A history of Lassie as a popular culture icon. Provides biographical information about Knight and how his Yorkshire childhood and enthusiasm for collies inspired him to write *Lassie Come Home*. Tells about the many adaptations and merchandise produced as part of the Lassie phenomenon.

"Knight, Eric (Mowbray)." In *Something about the Author*, vol. 18. Detroit: Gale, 1980. Comprehensive biographical sketch of Knight which includes his comments about aspects of his life and writing career. Provides a complete list of his books.

Review of *Lassie Come-Home*. *Horn Book*, vol. 16 (September 1940): 345. This review praises the character Lassie, saying her instinct to return "unerringly back to the home and duty that called" a "wonderful power to contemplate" and concludes that Lassie's journey "is movingly, yet realistically, described."

Rotha, Paul, ed. *Portrait of a Flying Yorkshireman: Letters from Eric Knight in the United States to Paul Rotha in England*.

London: Chapman & Hall, 1952. Excellent source of autobiographical details about Knight's childhood and inspirations for his writing. Reveals his disdain for hierarchical social and political systems that dismiss and do not help impoverished people.

## Related Titles/Adaptations

Since its original publication, *Lassie Come Home* has been anthologized in numerous collections of dog stories and issued in a variety of abridgments, adaptations, and English and foreign editions, some of which incorporate changes in the text the author had planned prior to his death. The *Saturday Evening Post* reprinted the original magazine story in March 1989. Rosemary Wells created a picture book retelling of the story, illustrated by Susan Jeffers, which includes a map of Great Britain showing Lassie's journey. Literary critic Leonard S. Marcus of *Parenting* magazine named Wells's adaptation as one of the best children's books in 1995, and *Publishers Weekly* praised that book too. Wells produced a chapter book edition in 2000. Audio versions of *Lassie* include a reading by David McCallum for Caedmon Records in 1973 and Sheila Black's recording for Highbridge Company in 1994.

*Lassie Come-Home* inspired numerous products, especially media adaptations such as movies and television programs. *Lassie*-related comic books and coloring books have been popular since the novel's publication in addition to a variety of collectibles including toy dogs. Film adaptations of *Lassie Come-Home* include *Lassie Come-Home* (1943), *Son of Lassie* (1945), *The Sun Comes Up* (1949), and *Gypsy Colt* (1954). The movie which shares the same title as the book does not deviate much from the basic plot and characters involved in *Lassie*'s sale, escape, and reunion. The movie ends with *Lassie* greeting Joe at school and did not include the closing scenes in which *Lassie* is mothering her puppies and the Carraclouchs are content in their new home and lifestyle. The movie's sequels elaborated on possibilities and themes suggested in Knight's novel.

A "*Lassie*" television series which premiered in 1954 aired for seventeen years, winning Emmys for best children's program. The television show differs from the movie by having *Lassie* routinely rescue humans and other animals from predicaments. A *Lassie* cartoon show and radio program were also broadcasted. The musical, *The Magic of Lassie*, was staged in 1978.

Some *Lassie* movies and television episodes have been distributed on videotape and DVD. Cable television assures fans access to *Lassie* media, and a new *Lassie* movie is being filmed for release in the twenty-first century. The book and its film and television portrayals created a dynasty of Hollywood dog stars descended from the original canine actor in the 1943 movie.

Many children's books feature courageous dogs as major characters. Their heroic exploits are often the primary plots of novels. In the early twentieth century, Albert Payson Terhune wrote dog books, popular with both young and adult readers, that often featured collies. Some of his best known works are *Lad: A Dog* (1919), *Heart of a Dog* (1924), and *Real Tales of Real Dogs* (1935). Other canine literary predecessors that share themes and literary elements with *Lassie Come-Home* include Jack London, *Call of the Wild* (1903); John S. Wise, *Diomed: The Life, Travels, and Observations of a Dog* (1905); and Alfred Ollivant, *Bob, Son of Battle* (1914).



Jack Goodman edited *Fireside Book of Dog Stories* (1943), with an introduction by James Thurber, which includes part of *Lassie Come Home*. Many collections of dog stories, most including *Lassie*, have been published such as Florence K. Peterson, editor, *The Big Book of Favorite Dog Stories* (1964).

At the same time that *Lassie Come-Home* was first issued in the *Saturday Evening Post*, a series called *Famous Dog Stories* was popular. Jack O'Brien, *Silver Chief to the Rescue* (1937) and *Return of Silver Chief* (1943) are examples of these stories in which dogs save people, such as transporting the serum needed to combat diphtheria in an isolated settlement. The dog heroes undergo trials to achieve success and are often misunderstood and mistreated like *Lassie*.

Literature about journeys complement *Lassie Come-Home*. Homer's Greek epic, the *Odyssey*, tells of the trials of a journey. In *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), Toto undergoes a trip in order to go home with his human companion, Dorothy. Children's books specifically about dogs on journeys include the Sheila Burnford's classic, *The Incredible Journey* (1961), which follows two lost dogs and a cat as they struggle through the wilderness to find their owners. In Beverly Cleary's *Ribsy* (1964), the title character, the pet of Henry Huggins, experiences adventures when he is lost and seeking his home after escaping from the Huggins's car at the mall and mistaking another car as theirs. Like *Lassie*, *Ribsy* meets people who assist him as he wanders home. Lynn Hall's *Owney the Traveling Dog* (1977) tells about an Albany, New York, postal mascot who becomes famous for traveling on trains and ships transporting mail. *Owney* visits every state and circles the world in 132 days.

Other dog classics which can be compared with *Lassie Come-Home* are Fred Gipson's, *Old Yeller* (1956), William H. Armstrong's, *Sunder* (1969), and MacKinlay Kantor's, *The Voice of Bugle Ann* (1935) and *The Daughter of Bugle Ann* (1953). Numerous children's books representing all age groups and genres have dog protagonists or canines as significant characters. Some of the most popular children's dog stories include Betsy Byars's, *Wanted . . . Mud Blossom* (1993) and *My Dog, My Hero* (2000) and Cynthia Rylant's *Henry and Mudge* chapter books. Two books by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor's, *Shiloh* (1991) and *Shiloh Season* (1996), emphasize the devotion between a boy and his dog like the bond Joe and *Lassie* shared. Lynn Hall has written many dog books for young readers, and *The Soul of the Silver Dog* (1992), in which a blind Bedlington terrier successfully undergoes agility training, could be compared with *Lassie* withstanding physical and emotional challenges to reach her destination.

*Sirius*, the Newfoundland which saves stranded ship passengers in Joan Hiatt Harlow's *A Star in the Storm* (2000), exhibits the loyalty and affection for his family that *Lassie* displays for the Carraclouchs. Kate DiCamillo's, *Because of Winn-Dixie* (2000), shows how important dogs are for enhancing the quality of life for humans. Although written for adults, Terry Kay's *To Dance with the White Dog* (1991) has themes, motifs, and characters that younger readers can relate to *Lassie Come-Home*. Readers might also find commonalities in novels and chapter books based on the PBS series, "*Wishbone*," in which a Jack Russell Terrier is transported to different literary settings in his fantasies

while aiding his human companions in resolving dilemmas in current scenes related to the fictional themes.

Yorkshire and its people and animals are depicted in James Herriott's, *All Creatures Great and Small* (1972) and its sequels, about a veterinarian's practice in that area of England. Regional and period characteristics of people and places similar to those found in *Lassie Come-Home* are presented in *How Green Was My Valley* (1940), a novel which Knight recommended that creators of the film version of his book consult to understand the mind-set and voice of working class people.

Several non-fiction books can supplement *Lassie Come-Home*. John Keane's, *Sherlock Bones: Tracer of Missing Pets* (1979), narrates stories about how lost animals are located and offers tips for successfully finding pets which have disappeared. Heroic dogs are featured in Fairfax Downey's, *Dogs of Destiny* (1951) and Jeanette Sanderson's *Dogs to the Rescue!* (1993). William Putney's *Always Faithful: A Memoir of the Marine Dogs of WW2* (2001) tells about his service as a veterinarian with military dogs, including a collie, in the Pacific theater during the Second World War, which was about the same time *Lassie* underwent her ordeal to reach the Carraclouchs. The courage, loyalty, and resilience of the real dogs featured in these books emphasizes the universal and timeless bond between people and dogs which Knight emphasizes fictionally in *Lassie Come-Home*.



# Copyright Information

## Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Editor

Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design

Amanda Mott

Cover Art is "Pierrot," 1947, by William Baziotès Oil on Canvas, 42 1/8 x 36 Donated by the Alisa Mellon Bruce Fund, ©, 1996 Reproduced with Permission from the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)

ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)

ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature—Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction—19th century—Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3—dc20 96-20771 CIP

Copyright ©, 1996, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing Corp., P.O. Box 830, Osprey, FL 34229-0830

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996