White Fang Study Guide

White Fang by Jack London

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.

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Introduction

When *White Fang* was published in 1906, Jack London was the most widely read writer in the United States and was also popular in Europe, thanks to his second novel, *The Call of the Wild* (1903). (London had become, as well, the first millionaire American author.) The two novels are related in that while *The Call of the Wild* tells the story of a dog who becomes wild and leads a wolf pack, *White Fang* is the life story of a wolf who comes, after many hardships dealt him by both man and nature, to live a dog's life with a loving master. Both novels, along with scores of London's short stories, are set in the land the author called simply "The North"□the Yukon Territory to which he once traveled as a gold prospector.

Though not considered the literary equal of *The Call of the Wild*, *White Fang* was an immediate commercial success and continues to be popular a century after its initial publication. In its unblinking portrayals of nature's unforgiving harshness, of humankind's capacity for both shocking brutality and unconditional love, and of the struggle for survival that is common to all life, *White Fang* is classic London.

Overview

Jack London intended White Fang to be an optimistic sequel to his more famous book, The Call of the Wild. White Fang shows the power of human kindness to transform a savage beast into a devoted pet. White Fang offers more than an animal story about the taming of a wild wolf-dog, named White Fang. It attempts to show how the dramatic changes in White Fang's character are produced by the changes in his social and natural environment. The book explores sociological questions about human behavior—what causes individuals to act either savagely or civilly?

In White Fang, London shows that civilization is as potent a force as nature in shaping individual behavior. The theme that environment determines character, prominent in much of London's fiction, applies here to humans as well as to animals.

The Call of the Wild has been described as a fable of an animal who survives through strength and cunning. White Fang is more of a parable that portrays the strength of love to transform animosity into peace and harmony. White Fang's progression from hunting to barbaric servitude to domestic tranquility reflects London's understanding of Darwin and promotes an optimistic view of human civilization. White Fang provides an exciting series of conflicts, between wild beasts struggling for survival, between humans struggling for mastery of White Fang, and between two sides of White Fang's inner nature.

Author Biography

Jack London was born January 12, 1876, in San Francisco, California. His mother, Flora Wellman, was not married. It is generally believed that an astrologer named William Chaney was London's father. The year Jack was born, his mother married a widower named John London, who adopted Jack and moved the family to nearby Oakland.

Shunning formal education, London worked from a young age, first in a cannery and then as an oysterman in the San Francisco Bay. It was during his first sea voyage, in 1893, that London began writing. The following year, he traveled across the United States, a hobo journey that he wrote about in *Jack London on the Road* (1907).

In 1895, London finished high school in Oakland and then spent one semester at the University of California. During this time, he became interested in both literature and socialism. He was a member of the socialist party for the rest of his life.

London's next journey was as a gold prospector to the Yukon Territory during the Klondike gold rush, a trip he would also write about later. Failing to find gold, London went back to California and decided to make his living as a writer. His first published story was "To the Man on the Trail," (1899) published in *Overland Monthly* magazine. London's newspaper articles on politics earned him the nickname "Boy Socialist from Oakland." In 1900, London married Bessie Maddern and published his first collection of short stories, *Son of the Wolf*.

London's first novel was *A Daughter of the Snows* (1902). His second, *The Call of the Wild* (1903), made him famous around the world. The following year, his divorce added to his celebrity. He and his first wife had two daughters during their brief marriage.

London married Charmian Kittredge in 1905, the year before *White Fang* was published. The two made their home on a ranch in Glen Ellen, California. London continued to write both nonfiction and fiction, was in demand as a lecturer, and enjoyed sailing and working on the ranch.

In 1913, London published *John Barleycorn*, the story of his alcoholism, which became a bestseller. By 1915, London's health was in decline. He died November 22, 1916, in Glen Ellen, of an overdose of morphine. The drug had been prescribed for a gastrointestinal problem, and it is not known whether the overdose was an accident or a suicide.

About the Author

Jack London was born in San Francisco, California, on January 12, 1876. Raised in poverty, he educated himself through reading; .he especially enjoyed the stories of Washington Irving and Rudyard Kipling. London spent his teen-age years sailing to Japan aboard a sealing schooner, tramping across the country as a hobo, and working at various odd jobs. London later drew upon these early adventures for such books as The Cruise of the Dazzler (1902) and The Sea-Wolf (1904).

When he was twenty, London enrolled in the University of California at Berkeley. He had just begun to read Charles Darwin's Origin of Species and Karl Marx's Communist Manifesto. The ideas of Darwin and Marx profoundly influenced London's thinking and writing. The following year, 1897, London left California for the Klondike gold rush.

He did not "strike it rich" there, but he did bring back many experiences and tales of the North which were to bring him success as a writer. Before he was twenty-five, London had published his first novel, The Son of the Wolf: Tales of the Far North (1900), as well as numerous magazine stories.

Jack London died mysteriously on November 22, 1916, in Santa Rosa, California. Although he was only forty years old, he had already written fiftynine books, including novels, short stories, sociological studies, essays, plays, and an autobiography. By his own admission, much of his writing was "hack work"; but his stories from the Klondike continue to make him one of America's most popular authors. Many of his books have been made into movies, including several different film versions of The Call of the Wild.

Plot Summary

Part 1The Wild. 1: The Trail of Meat

Two men, Henry and Bill, are hiking through a spruce forest in the far North. It is deep winter. Snow covers the ground. The temperature is far below zero, and it is light only for a few hours each day. With the men is a team of six sled dogs. On the sled, along with equipment and supplies, is a coffin that holds the body of a man called Lord Alfred. Henry and Bill are taking the body to Fort McGurry. They constantly hear wolves howling, and they know that the nearly starved wolves are tracking them in hopes of killing them for food.

After the men make camp for the night, Bill feeds the dogs. He later tells Henry that seven dogs, not six, came to be fed. The men realize that one was a somewhat tame wolf. That night, one of their dogs disappears, lured away and eaten by the wolves.

2: The She-Wolf

The next morning, the men set off with the five remaining dogs. That evening, the tame wolf again comes to eat, but Bill sees her and drives her off. The following morning, another dog is missing. As the men camp the next evening, the wolves come closer. The men wish they could shoot at them to scare them away, but they have only three cartridges left. They decide that the tame wolf must actually be a dog. Bill tries to secure the dogs so that they cannot leave the camp, but that night a third dog disappears. Bill begins to be extremely anxious, convinced that the wolves will eventually kill all the dogs and then him and Henry. The She-Wolf, as the tame one is called, appears on the trail in daylight, and that night the wolf pack crowds closer than before to the camp.

3: The Hunger Cry

That night, no dogs are lost. But the next day, the sled overturns in an accident. While the men work to right the sled, the tame wolf lures one of the dogs away. Bill, unable to leave the dog to its fate, sets off with the gun to try to save it. Henry hears Bill fire all three shots and then hears sounds that tell him that the wolf pack has killed both the dog and Bill. After helping the two remaining dogs pull the sled briefly, Henry makes camp and a large fire. The wolves threaten him all night, and he is unable to sleep.

The next morning, Henry rigs a way to pull the coffin up into a tree so that the wolves cannot get it. Then he and the two dogs set off. Henry makes camp early and spends the night fighting off the hungry wolves with burning sticks. The next night, the wolves take the two remaining dogs, and Henry has to jump briefly into the fire to escape them. Just as an exhausted Henry is resigned to death, a group of men arrives with dogs and sleds. They drive away the wolves and ask where Lord Alfred is. Henry tells them that he is dead, his coffin in a tree for safety, before falling into a deep sleep as the men put him on a sled to take him to the fort.

Part 2—Born of the Wild. 1: The Battle of the Fangs

The novel follows the movement of the desperately hungry wolf pack after it leaves Henry. After running all day and night, the pack finds and kills a large moose—plenty of food for the forty wolves. The pack rests and then gradually splits into smaller and smaller groups. The She-Wolf, who had run at the head of the large pack, is left with three males. The oldest of the three, called One-Eye, kills the other two in a fight and becomes the She-Wolf's mate. They hunt together and learn to steal rabbits from snares set around an Indian camp.

2: The Lair

It is April. The She-Wolf finds a lair and has five cubs. The male hunts for himself and brings food to his mate.

3: The Gray Cub

Four of the cubs are reddish like their mother. One, the fiercest, is a gray male, like his father. After some weeks, One-Eye is unable to find food, and the She-Wolf can no longer provide milk for the cubs. Four of them die, but the gray cub survives until One-Eye brings food again. Then, One-Eye is killed by a lynx. The She-Wolf, who has resumed hunting while her cub stays in the lair, finds One-Eye's remains. She also finds the lynx's lair, where she knows that there are kittens.

4: The Wall of the World

One day, the cub's instinctive fear of leaving the lair is overcome by curiosity. The cub tumbles down the slope just outside the cave's entrance. Exploring, he finds a nest of small ptarmigan chicks and eats them. When the ptarmigan hen returns, he fights with her until she drives him away by pecking his nose. He finds a stream and is swept up in it but quickly begins to swim. Finally, he is attacked by a weasel and escapes death only because his mother hears the struggle and rescues him.

5: The Law of Meat

The cub begins to leave the lair daily and remembers all the lessons of his first outing. Then, for a time, neither the cub nor the She-Wolf finds food. In desperation, the She-Wolf raids the lynx's den, eating all but one kitten and taking it to her cub. Soon after, the lynx comes to the wolves' lair, and there is a terrible fight. The She-Wolf kills the lynx, but she is badly hurt, and the cub is wounded. Both recover, however. The cub begins to hunt with his mother and learns the law of meat: "EAT OR BE EATEN." The cub greatly enjoys hunting and eating, and also their rewards, the feeling of a full stomach and a nap in the sun.

Part 3—The Gods of the Wild. 1: The Makers of Fire

One day, the cub goes to the stream to drink and sees five Indians—the first humans he has seen. The men see the cub. One of them approaches the cub, whose instinctual awe of humans prevents him from running away. But when the man tries to pick him up, the cub bites. The man hits him, and the cub cries out, bringing the She-Wolf to his rescue.

One of the Indians, Gray Beaver, recognizes the She-Wolf as the former pet of his now-dead brother. He calls her Kiche and says that she is the offspring of a dog and a wolf and that she ran away to find food during a famine. Kiche lets Gray Beaver pet her, and Gray Beaver declares that Kiche is now his. He names the cub White Fang. Gray Beaver ties up Kiche, and White Fang stays close to her.

Soon, about forty more Indians and many dogs carrying packs arrive. Some of the dogs attack Kiche and White Fang, but the Indians rescue them. When the Indians move to another camp, a child keeps Kiche on a lead, and White Fang follows.

2: The Bondage

A puppy called Lip-Lip, larger and more used to fighting than White Fang, becomes his nemesis. Eventually, Gray Beaver knows that Kiche has become too tame to run away, so she is no longer tied. However, soon Gray Beaver gives Kiche to Three Eagles, who is leaving the rest of the group. White Fang swims after the canoe that is taking his mother away, and Gray Beaver comes after him and beats him severely. That night, when White Fang cries for his mother and wakes Gray Beaver, the man beats him even harder. White Fang longs to return to the wild, and he stays in camp only because he hopes his mother will return. Gray Beaver never pets White Fang but does not beat him as long as he obeys, and Gray Beaver also protects the pup from aggressive dogs and makes sure that he gets food. White Fang quickly learns that obedience prevents beatings.

3: The Outcast

Lip-Lip and other young dogs continually gang up on White Fang, possibly because they sense that he is three-quarters wolf. This makes White Fang mean and a good fighter. One day, he kills a dog. The tribe wants to kill White Fang, but Gray Beaver will not allow it. White Fang becomes an outcast; the other dogs will not allow him to be part of the pack, and the humans revile him.

4: The Trail of the Gods

In the fall, the Indians break camp. White Fang understands that they are leaving and that his mother will not return to him now. He hides in the woods until the Indians are gone, planning to return to the wild and ignoring Gray Beaver's calls. After a night alone, however, he longs for the companionship and food provided by humans. He runs for forty hours without stopping, following the Indians' trail. Exhausted, White Fang crawls to Gray Beaver, sure that he will be beaten. Instead, Gray Beaver gives him food and keeps the other dogs from taking it away. On this night, White Fang becomes tame.

5: The Covenant

It is December, and White Fang is eight months old. Gray Beaver, his wife, Kloo-Kooch, and his son, Mit-sah, take a trip. Gray Beaver drives a sled pulled by adult dogs, and Mit-sah has a small one pulled by White Fang and other pups, including Lip-Lip. White Fang remains solitary and fierce. His law is "to oppress the weak and obey the strong." White Fang feels no affection for Gray Beaver, and Gray Beaver shows none toward White Fang, but the two are companions who benefit each other.

6: The Famine

The following April, White Fang is one year old, and he returns with Gray Beaver and his family to the village. Now White Fang, because of his wolf heritage, is bigger and stronger than the young dogs that once bullied him. One day, White Fang meets Kiche in the village. He bounds toward her happily, but she does not remember him. She has a new litter, and she attacks White Fang, fearing that he may hurt her cubs. White Fang is confused but accepts the rebuff and withdraws.

When White Fang is three years old, a famine comes, and he leaves the tribe to hunt for food in the wild. He meets Kiche again, who has gone back to the lair where White Fang was born to give birth again. Because of the famine, once again only one of her cubs is alive. Soon after this, White Fang meets the famished Lip-Lip and kills him. Then he finds Gray Beaver's people, who have moved their village and now have plenty of food. Gray Beaver is not at his tent, but Kloo-Kooch welcomes White Fang happily.

Part 4The Superior Gods. 1: The Enemy and His Kind

When White Fang is almost five years old, Gray Beaver takes him on a long trip to Fort Yukon. It is 1898, the time of the gold rush. Gray Beaver spends months trading at the fort. White Fang spends his time attacking and killing dogs that arrive on the steamboat that brings prospectors from the south. Some of the local men find it entertaining to watch these fights.

2: The Mad God

The fort's cook, a cruel man called Beauty Smith, loves to watch White Fang attack and kill the dogs from the steamboat. Beauty uses whisky to beguile a reluctant Gray Beaver into selling White Fang to him.

3: The Reign of Hate

Beauty Smith keeps White Fang chained up and teases him cruelly to make him as mean as possible. He does this both because he enjoys it and because he is preparing to use White Fang in staged dogfights, a favorite form of gambling and entertainment at the fort. White Fang kills every dog set against him—sometimes two at a time—but is sometimes wounded. Beauty Smith even forces White Fang to fight wild wolves and a lynx, which Indians trap for this purpose. White Fang's reputation for ferocity grows to the extent that Beauty Smith travels around with him in a cage, and people pay money just to watch Beauty enrage White Fang by poking him with sticks.

4: The Clinging Death

Finally, White Fang is forced to fight a bulldog. It is too short for White Fang to attack in his normal way. Eventually, the bulldog manages to lock its jaws into White Fang's neck and refuses to let go, working to chew through to White Fang's throat and kill him. After long minutes of flailing and trying to dislodge the bulldog, called Cherokee, White Fang is on the verge of death. Beauty Smith is furious that he is about to lose money, so he enters the cage and savagely kicks White Fang.

Suddenly, two men arrive. One of them rushes into the cage and attacks Beauty Smith, hitting him so hard that he does not get up and screaming that all the men watching the dogfight are beasts. The two newcomers then try for several minutes before finally prying the bulldog's jaws from White Fang's neck. White Fang, his eyes glazed, is very close to death. Weedon Scott, the man who attacked Beauty Smith, gives Beauty one hundred and fifty dollars and says that he is buying White Fang. Beauty protests, but Scott threatens him and leaves with White Fang. Scott is a gold mining expert from California, and the man with him is Matt, his dog musher.

5: The Indomitable

Back at their cabin two weeks later, Weedon Scott and Matt have White Fang, who has somehow survived, on a chain. Matt tells Scott that White Fang is at least part dog and has been trained to pull a sled. They hope to rehabilitate White Fang, but when they unchain him, he immediately kills one of their dogs and bites both men. With deep regret, the men are about to shoot White Fang, feeling they have no choice. But White Fang's knowing fear of the gun and his quick dodge when he sees it convinces them that the wolf is smart enough to be rehabilitated.

6: The Love-Master

White Fang knows that the dog-killing and the man-biting that he has just done are serious crimes, and he expects to be savagely beaten but is beyond caring or running away. He is confused when Scott repeatedly comes outside the cabin, talks gently to him, and gives him meat. Eventually, White Fang takes meat from Scott's hand. When Scott first pets him, White Fang is sure that the man is going to hurt him. In time, though, White Fang comes to trust Scott and Matt. Scott becomes his master, and White Fang desires to please him, so he never attacks the sled dogs and in fact soon becomes the lead dog.

Part 5□The Tame. 1: The Long Trail

The time comes for Weedon Scott to return to California. He feels that he cannot take White Fang and plans to leave him with Matt, but White Fang cries pitifully. The men lock White Fang in the cabin as they leave for the steamboat, but when they arrive, they find White Fang on the boat's deck, bleeding from having crashed through the cabin's window. Scott takes White Fang home to California.

2: The Southland

Weedon Scott lives on a large country estate in the Santa Clara Valley with his extended family. As soon as White Fang arrives there, the family and their dogs, including a sheepdog named Collie, begin adjusting to him□and vice versa.

3: The God's Domain

Besides Weedon, the other residents of the estate are his father, Judge Scott (a retired judge), and his mother; his sisters, Beth and Mary; his wife, Alice; and his children, Weedon, four, and Maud, six.

4: The Call of Kind

White Fang lives a good life on the estate and comes to love Weedon Scott so much that he allows the man to wrestle and play with him. When his master is horseback riding and breaks his leg, White Fang runs home and alerts the family. After this, even the servants, who have been unable to overcome their fear and distrust of White Fang, accept him warmly. In the fall, Collie lures White Fang into the woods to mate.

5: The Sleeping Wolf

A murderer who was sentenced by Judge Scott, and who has threatened to kill the judge for revenge, escapes from prison and disappears. Weedon's wife, without letting anyone else know, begins to let White Fang into the house each night to sleep by the front door. When the convict, Jim Hall, sneaks into the house one night, White Fang attacks and kills him, but Hall shoots White Fang several times. The household awakes, and Judge Scott calls not a veterinarian but his own doctor for White Fang. The doctor works on White Fang for an hour and a half and says that his chances for survival are miniscule.

Out of love and gratitude, Judge Scott goes so far as to call a doctor from San Francisco, and the women of the house take care of White Fang as if he were their child. White Fang, wrapped in casts and bandages, lies immobilized for weeks and dreams of his past□many bad dreams, and some good ones of the wild□as he slowly regains life.

Finally, the day arrives to remove the last cast. With great effort, White Fang is able to walk a little, venturing out to the lawn and, after a rest, on to the stable entrance, where Collie is with her puppies. The puppies frolic and climb on White Fang, full of curiosity, and the old wolf rests.

Characters

Bill

Bill, along with Henry, appears in Part One of the novel. Bill and Henry are taking the body of Lord Alfred to Fort McGurry. When the two men are threatened by hungry wolves that kill some of their sled dogs, Bill becomes increasingly anxious and convinced that the wolves will eventually kill them. When the wolves lure one of the dogs away during the daytime, Bill rashly follows with the gun to try to save the dog even though it is extremely dangerous and almost certainly futile. The wolves kill both the dog and Bill.

Collie

Collie is a sheepdog who lives at Weedon Scott's estate in California. When White Fang first arrives there, she badgers him mercilessly, following her instinctual enmity against wolves. White Fang does not harm her, even when she attacks him, partly because he understands that Scott values her and partly because it is against his nature as a wolf to harm a female of his own kind (or, in this case, of a closely related kind).

After time has passed, though, Collie leads White Fang into the woods to mate with her. In the novel's last scene, when White Fang has finally recovered from his gunshot wounds enough to hobble outside, he sees Collie with their puppies and allows the puppies to clamber over him as he rests.

Dick

Dick is a deerhound and a pet of the Scott family. When White Fang first arrives at the Scott estate, Dick chases him, which White Fang, because of his experiences, interprets as a deadly attack. The only thing that prevents White Fang from killing Dick is Collie's intervention.

Jim Hall

Jim Hall is a murderer who was convicted in Judge Scott's court and who has vowed to take revenge on the old judge. When Hall escapes from prison, he goes to the Scotts' estate to take his revenge but is attacked and killed by White Fang. However, Hall manages to shoot White Fang several times, wounding him gravely.

Henry

Henry is Bill's companion on the trip to Fort McGurry with Lord Alfred's body. While Bill becomes unhinged by the threatening wolves, Henry remains calm and manages to survive until unexpected help arrives.

Kiche

Kiche is called the She-Wolf in the first part of the novel, when she is living in the wild with other wolves. Readers learn her name later when she rejoins the Indians with whom she had previously lived.

In Part One, Kiche is with the wolf pack that threatens Henry and Bill. She is somewhat tame and enters the camp to try to get food when Bill feeds the dogs. It is also Kiche who lures the dogs away from the camp at night so that the other wolves can kill and eat them.

After the pack is driven away from Henry and finally finds food, Kiche mates with an old wolf named One-Eye. All of her cubs except one die in a famine, and the one survivor is a gray male who will become known as White Fang. One day Kiche hears White Fang's cries and runs to rescue him, and she and the Indian Gray Beaver recognize each other. Kiche allows Gray Beaver to pet her and to tie her up until she has again become tame enough to stay with the Indians willingly.

Kiche is the offspring of a dog and a wolf, a mating arranged by Gray Beaver's now-dead brother, and therefore White Fang is one-quarter dog.

Kloo-Kooch

Kloo-Kooch is Gray Beaver's wife. She provides perhaps the only moment of affection that White Fang experiences among the Indians, when White Fang returns to the Indians after a famine and receives a warm welcome from her.

Lip-Lip

Lip-Lip is a puppy who lives with the Indians and who was born in the same year as White Fang. He is a bully and constantly picks fights with White Fang, which is the first step in White Fang's becoming a mean and solitary animal.

Matt

Matt is Weedon Scott's musher, who helps Scott rescue White Fang from the bulldog and then rehabilitate him. It is Matt who recognizes that White Fang is part dog and has been trained to pull a sled.

Mit-sah

Mit-sah is Gray Beaver's son. When White Fang is still a puppy, he helps pull Mit-sah's child-size sled when the family goes on a trip.

One-Eye

One-Eye is an old but smart male wolf who wins the right to mate with Kiche by killing his two rivals. White Fang is the sole surviving cub from this litter.

Salmon Tongue

Salmon Tongue is one of the Indians who is with Gray Beaver when they discover White Fang and Kiche.

Alice Scott

Alice is Weedon's wife. When she hears that Jim Hall has escaped from prison, she begins to let White Fang into the house each night after the rest of the family has gone to bed. This precaution saves the family's lives.

Beth Scott

Beth is one of Weedon's two sisters, who lives at the estate with the rest of the extended family. She lovingly helps care for White Fang after he saves the family from Jim Hall.

Judge Scott

Judge Scott is Weedon's father, a retired judge who lives at the estate with the rest of the extended family. He is hesitant to trust White Fang but willing to admit that he was wrong when White Fang proves himself. When White Fang saves the family from Jim Hall, the judge is so grateful that he calls the best doctors, rather than veterinarians, to care for White Fang.

Mary Scott

Mary is one of Weedon's two sisters, who lives at the estate with the rest of the extended family. She lovingly helps care for White Fang after he saves the family from Jim Hall.

Maud Scott

Weedon Scott's six-year-old daughter. White Fang understands how precious the children are to his master, and he learns to enjoy their petting.

Weedon Scott

Weedon Scott is a mining expert from California who comes to the Yukon for a short time. He comes upon the scene of the dogfight at which White Fang is about to be killed by a bulldog and is at the same time being brutally kicked by Beauty Smith. After rescuing White Fang, Scott asks his musher, Matt, how much an animal in White Fang's condition is worth. He then pays Beauty Smith the money and takes White Fang against Smith's wishes.

Scott rehabilitates White Fang through consistent gentleness, kindness, and affection, even though White Fang bites him the first time he has an opportunity. When he must correct White Fang, he does so with words, not blows, except on one or two occasions when the situation is extremely serious. White Fang becomes so attached to Scott that he crashes through a window to avoid being left behind when Scott returns to California. Scott relents and takes White Fang home with him, and he is rewarded when White Fang saves the family from a murderer.

Weedon Scott Jr.

Weedon is the elder Scott's four-year-old son.

She-Wolf

See Kiche

Beauty Smith

The cook at Fort Yukon, Beauty Smith is an ugly, cruel man. He goes to great lengths to persuade Gray Beaver to sell White Fang to him and then abuses White Fang to make him as fierce as possible. Beauty's goal is to win money by entering White Fang in dogfights, which he continues to do until Weedon Scott intervenes.

Three Eagles

Three Eagles is one of the Indians who is with Gray Beaver when they discover White Fang and Kiche. A short time later, Gray Beaver gives Kiche to Three Eagles, who takes her with him on a long trip.

Weedon Scott's Mother

Her name is not mentioned, but she lives with the rest of the extended family at the estate.

Setting

This story begins in the wilderness of the Yukon, in a harsh environment that seems hostile to all life. Through violent extremes of climate—through snowstorms and sub-zero temperatures— animals and human s struggle ruthlessly for dominance, because dominance ensures survival. Born into this harsh world, White Fang fights to survive among fierce wild animals. He is captured by Native Americans, beaten, sold to various masters, and eventually shipped to a California ranch where he learns to coexist with humans.

Social Concerns

Whereas The Call of the Wild is a mythic tale in which archetypal concerns predominate, its companion piece White Fang is a sociological fable in which London more directly presents his thoughts regarding the deterministic effects of heredity and environment.

The Call of the Wild celebrates Buck's triumphant return to the primitive state, but White Fang consciously reverses the process, tracing the development of love and trust for man in the later novel's canine protagonist. Thus, London uses White Fang to emphasize that environmental factors can civilize as well as brutalize. His novel presents the melioristic notion that, like dogs and wolves, men and society can improve.

Social Sensitivity

London often freely adapted ideas from Friedrich Nietzsche, Charles Darwin, and Karl Marx to his own ends. In part 4 of White Fang, for example, London suggests that "compared with the Indians he had known," the white men were "a race of superior gods." Throughout, London insists upon the godlike quality of all humans in the eyes of White Fang.

London's attitude concerning Native Americans and white men, and especially his ideas about natural and social superiority, should be confronted directly. His depiction of Native Americans is much more of a Victorian stereotype than an actual view of contemporary Eskimos.

London's environmental determinism permeates this story. While his Darwinian assumptions may not be shared by all readers, his dramatization of those concepts in White Fang should provoke thoughtful discussion. The questions raised by this book may be controversial. How much does environment determine character? Does civilization really improve life? How "human" is White Fang? Should White Fang's transformation be seen as a gain or as a loss?

Techniques

In White Fang London's purpose was more clearly didactic, and because his environmental determinism was in the front of his mind as he wrote this companion piece to The Call of the Wild, the novel is written in a more straightforward, naturalistic manner than the visionary tale of Buck's mythical metamorphosis. To this extent, White Fang exemplifies London's belief that matter should take precedence over form. This didacticism results in some strained dialogue, and characters that exist as types or symbols rather than individuals.

To represent the point of view of White Fang, London uses an extremely simplified prose; short declarative sentences and a restricted vocabulary that seem almost childish at times. This plain style, however, effectively approximates White Fang's perspective, and it helps to communicate the difficulty of his transition from wild to civilized.

Thematic Overview

London called White Fang the "complete antithesis" of The Call of the Wild, but although his canine protagonist moves from wild to civilized, White Fang again demonstrates its author's belief in the power of heredity and environment. He describes heredity as "a life-stuff . . . capable of being moulded into many forms" by the "thumb of environment." Whereas Buck had learned the law of "club and fang," Weedon Scott's compassion awakens in White Fang "potencies that had languished and well-nigh perished," specifically the ability to love.

Thus, London argues that kindness can be as powerful a modifying force as violence. White Fang's final confrontation with the escaped criminal Jim Hall, which pits a wolf shaped by affection into a loyal defender of his master against a man twisted by societal pressures into a killer, emphasizes London's belief that environmental factors are the primary determinant of morality.

In The Call of the Wild London described the Yukon as a primitive, animating landscape in which men could strip themselves of unessentials and come to terms with the core of their being, but in White Fang, the "vast silence" of the Yukon is the enemy of life: "Life is an offense to it, for life is movement; and the Wild aims always to destroy movement." Devoid of all human feeling, it is a "desolation . . . so lone and cold that the spirit of it was not even sadness." It is a place predicated upon death, a terrible force against which the actions of men and dogs seem inconsequential. Through his description of place in White Fang London expresses the "masterful and incommunicable wisdom of eternity laughing at the futility of life and the effort of men."

Themes

Nature versus Nurture

The overarching theme of the novel is that heredity and environment each contribute to White Fang's fate. London comes down on the side of nurture as being the more powerful force. White Fang's nature is malleable, and he adjusts to whatever conditions his environment presents in order to survive. Under the abuse of Beauty Smith, White Fang becomes a killer seething with hate; under the loving hand of Weedon Scott, he becomes a gentle pet.

While this theme is woven throughout the novel, it is stated explicitly in these lines:

White Fang grew stronger, heavier, and more compact, while his character was developing along the lines laid down by his heredity and his environment. His heredity was a life-stuff that may be likened to clay. It possessed many possibilities, was capable of being moulded into many different forms. Environment served to model the clay, to give it a particular form. Thus, had White Fang never come in to the fires of man, the Wild would have moulded him into a true wolf. But the gods had given him a different environment, and he was moulded into a dog that was rather wolfish, but that was a dog and not a wolf.

Survival of the Fittest

The novel portrays two worlds, the world of nature and the world of humans. In both these worlds, all life is subject to the law of the survival of the fittest. Famine is well known to both humans and animals, and when it comes, the weak, the sick, and the old die. When the Indians have no food to give the dogs, the dogs return to the wild and try to stay alive until the famine passes. If they succeed, and if they find their old masters again, they often return to human society. But when hardship comes, it is every man, woman, child, dog, wolf, and pup for himself or herself. Relationships are based on mutual benefit, not on affection.

In the last section of the novel, White Fang enters a kind of paradise where the law of survival of the fittest has been superseded by the law of love. Weeden Scott rescues him at the moment when the law says he should die, and from that moment on White Fang lives in a radically different kind of world. The world of love, however, is one that most creatures never experience and one that White Fang reaches only after much extreme suffering□only because a kind man happens to come along at just the right moment, only because he was born with enough intelligence to be rehabilitated, and, above all, only because he has been tough enough to survive until that moment.

Style

Omniscient Narrator

The narrator of *White Fang* is omniscient, which is a challenging choice for a writer and a fascinating one for a reader when the main characters are animals. Repeatedly, the narrator confidently describes the thoughts and feelings of dogs and wolves and explains how they experience the world. The best extended example of this comes when White Fang, as a small cub, leaves the lair for the first time. He has thought of the cave entrance as a strange wall that his parents have the power to walk through. Then one day his curiosity outstrips his fear, and he approaches "the wall of the world." The narration of his first outing begins:

Now the gray cub had lived all his days on a level floor. He had never experienced the hurt of a fall. He did not know what a fall was. So he stepped boldly out upon the air. His hind legs still rested on the cave-lip, so he fell forward head downward. The earth struck him a harsh blow on the nose that made him yelp. Then he began rolling down the slope, over and over. He was in a panic of terror. The unknown had caught him at last. It had gripped savagely hold of him.

The narrator goes on to describe in great detail how White Fang learns to distinguish what is alive from what is not alive, how he learns to interpret what his eyes are telling him about how far away things are, what he experiences when he steps into a stream and the current grabs him, and so on. There is no way for readers to know how accurate these descriptions are, but it is clear that they are based on long, close observation of canines, and they succeed in making the novel's animals complex and compelling characters.

Figurative Language

London makes frequent use of several kinds of figurative language. The novel's first sentence contains an example of personification: "Dark spruce forest frowned on either side the frozen waterway."

There was a hint in it of laughter, but of a laughter more terrible than any sadness□a laughter that was mirthless as the smile of the Sphinx, a laughter cold as the frost and partaking of the grimness of infallibility.

Such figurative language enriches the descriptions throughout the novel and makes the faraway landscape and the special terrors of the North more real to readers by relating them to more familiar, universal realities.

One figure of speech that is especially prominent in the novel is antonomasia, in which the name of an office or role is substituted for a person's actual name. A common example of the technique is the use of "the Bard" to refer to Shakespeare. In *White*

Fang, when the narrator speaks of men as they are viewed by dogs and wolves, he calls them "the gods." London writes several times that canines see humans in roughly the same way that humans see their gods. He even establishes a hierarchy of gods, making the claim that canines recognize white men as "superior gods" compared to Indians. This recognition is said to be based on the canines' comprehension that the white men in the story have more power than the Indians.

Historical Context

Naturalism

Jack London, along with Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris, and others, is considered one of the premier writers of the naturalist style of American literature. Naturalism emerged in France in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and held sway in the United States between about 1900 and 1918, when World War I ended. It developed out of scientific ideas that were popular at the time, especially Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Naturalist writers were interested in the closely related idea of determinism, which holds that the fate of an individual human or animal is determined by the interplay of heredity (nature) and the environment (nurture) in his or her life. These writers often created everyday characters and then subjected them to extreme circumstances to show how innate traits and life circumstances combined to create their destinies. In Crane's classic naturalist novel *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), the extreme circumstances are provided by war. In *White Fang* and other fiction by London, they are provided by the harsh conditions of life in the far North. Several times in *White Fang*, London points out to readers that if a certain circumstance had been altered in a small way□for example, if the Indians who first tamed White Fang had camped across the river the night he ran to rejoin them, as they had first planned to□the wolf's fate would have been completely different.

London's naturalist fiction is especially interesting because many of his works feature animals as characters. This allows London to examine nature both in its wild state, untouched by human civilization and complications, and as it is affected by human intervention. In fact, *White Fang* portrays wolves both in the wild and relating to a range of different human cultures and temperaments, showing how each one affects the wolves. This, along with the novel's objective, detailed style, makes it an exemplar of naturalism.

Conservation

When *White Fang* was published, conservation of the wilderness was much on Americans' minds. Theodore Roosevelt, the most conservation-minded president the United States has ever had, was in the White House. He expanded the United States's national forests by more than 150 million acres. Roosevelt's friend John Muir, the founder of the Sierra Club and the United States's most famous conservationist, was publishing books about his visits to America's wild places and at the same time working for their protection. After centuries of expansion from the East Coast to the Pacific, Americans were for the first time realizing that although their nation was vast, its wilderness and resources were not unlimited and needed to be conserved and protected.

In addition, as more Americans moved to cities and as life became increasingly industrialized, the idea of the wilderness became more captivating. Americans and Europeans alike loved to read stories of adventures in wild places, and this undoubtedly contributed greatly to the popularity of London's fiction.

Critical Overview

The most noteworthy fact about criticism of *White Fang*and of London's work in general is the lack of it. In his day, London was considered a popular, not a literary, author. More recently, his novels have most often been classified as young-adult literature. As a result, literary publications and scholars have had little interest in London and his work. In addition, London's works featuring animals as main characters have received even less attention than others. *The Call of the Wild* has garnered some interest for the sheer power of its hold on the reading public and because it is the premier novel of its kind. *White Fang*, as a later and lesser novel, has largely been ignored.

Critic Maxwell Geismar does mention *White Fang* in his *Rebels and Ancestors: The American Novel, 1890—1915* but judges it inferior to *The Call of the Wild* because of what he views as a sentimental ending:

It was only when White Fang was rescued from these extremes of cruelty and terror, to become "the blessed wolf" of a gracious California estate in the Southland, a perfect pet of an aristocratic gentry, that London succumbed to the sentiment which spoiled another beautiful little parable of the instinctual life.

Mary Allen, in her *Animals in American Literature*, seems to agree:

What the author intends as the virtue of adaptation comes across instead as the case of a character who sells out, at least so it seems to the American reader. The case for civilization is apparently viewed differently in Europe, however, where *White Fang* outsells *The Call of the Wild*.

A comment in *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, published in multiple volumes during and shortly after London's life, sums up the literary establishment's view of London. In an entry on London's contemporary Richard Harding Davis, the editors declare that Davis "had what Jack London lacked utterly, literary traditions, poise, a certain patrician touch, and an innate love of the romantic." Clearly, the establishment was not ready to embrace London's style, which Allen calls "a realism that revolutionized popular fiction in the 1900s."

As if the disdain of literary critics were not enough, London even suffered a complaint from the White House. According to Allen, after reading *White Fang*, President Theodore Roosevelt, an outdoorsman and adventurer himself, claimed that an incident in which a lynx kills a wolf was a "gross falsifying of nature's records." London insisted on the authenticity of his account.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Norvell is an independent educational writer who specializes in English and literature. In this essay, Norvell discusses character development in the novel's human characters.

The wolf is the hero of *White Fang*, and although his interactions with humans are an important part of his story, even in those interactions the animals remain at center stage. The humans are there to help Jack London demonstrate how the wolf's temperament and destiny are shaped by all the individuals and elements that enter into his sphere of existence. In this respect, the novel's human characters are equivalent to the rest of the supporting cast, from the pack of puppies who mark White Fang as an outcast to the harsh wilderness that challenges him throughout much of his life. Because the role of humans in the novel is peripheral and because London creates several human characters to show the full range of humanity's possible impacts on White Fang, it would not be surprising if each one were drawn very cursorily in two dimensions. If these characters had been stereotypes, many readers, attention riveted on White Fang by the author's design, would not have noticed. Those alert readers who did notice would no doubt have excused the lapse, as they excuse similar lapses in a thousand other engaging stories. After all, even great artists give less attention to the figures in the backgrounds of complex paintings than they do to the central figures. And, if *White Fang*'s human characters had been stereotypes, it would have given critics who denied London the title of literary author something to sink their teeth into.

But, significantly (and with one exception), these characters are not two-dimensional or entirely predictable or stereotypical. Even though they are developed only as fully as their respective roles in the story demand, they are made complex and lifelike through small details and unexpected actions. Each human character is, indeed, a type who represents a broad slice of humanity. But each is also an individual who says and does things that strike the reader as being out of character, which is exactly what makes people—real people and fictional ones—authentic and memorable.

The first characters, human or animal, to appear in *White Fang* are Bill and Henry, who are trekking through a frozen forest with the mission of delivering the body of the mysterious Lord Alfred to Fort McCurry. Their distinct personalities soon emerge and predict their fates.

The hungry wolf pack is trailing Bill and Henry in the hope of making a meal of them. That much is acknowledged by both men. Bill is a talker and a worrier who expects the worst from the start. Henry is a stoic who speaks only to try to calm Bill and who seems to have no expectations at all. Whatever Henry actually thinks of their prospects, he keeps it to himself. He does not deny the facts—they are being hunted by a pack of forty famished wolves, and they have only three cartridges left for their shotgun—but he also does not allow them to touch his emotions. If he experiences fear, he refuses to give it any quarter or any expression. He knows that his best tool for survival is his mind, and he focuses all his energy there. He thinks, and then he does according to his thoughts. He thinks about when they should make camp in the evening and when they should set out in the morning, and he thinks about what would and would not be a good use of those three precious cartridges. Even when his own situation seems hopeless, he thinks about how to save Lord Alfred's noble corpse from the wolves. He has been charged with getting it to civilization, and his mind is on his mission, whether he lives to complete it himself or not. He is as detached and dispassionate as the spruce trees and the howling wind and the howling wolves. He devotes all his physical and mental resources to surviving and fulfilling his role for as long as he can, and when death seems certain, he does not whimper but accepts this as another fact. He understands all along the difference between what he can control and what he cannot; he controls what he can and ignores what he cannot. And in the end, his rationality and determination and focus keep him alive just long enough for unexpected help to arrive. Henry survives.

Bill does not. As the wolves devour their dogs one by one and come ever closer to the men, Bill's mind becomes increasingly disordered. He lets fear destroy his ability to think clearly, and he is impatient. He cannot bear the suspense of not knowing whether he and Henry will survive. And when the She-Wolf lures one of their dogs to its inevitable death in broad daylight, Bill cannot bear to stand by and listen as the dog loses a desperate struggle for its life. He cannot accept life as it is, cannot put his survival above his feelings, and so he ignores Henry's warning, follows the doomed dog into the woods, fires all three remaining cartridges at the wolves, and is killed and eaten along with the dog.

Henry, of course, represents all individuals, human and animal, who have mastered the law of the survival of the fittest. He accepts that life is a struggle and that eventually he is bound to lose. He understands that his only choice is to struggle as intelligently and determinedly as he can and to surrender himself to fate at the appointed time. Henry lives by his wits, and Bill lives, and dies, by his emotions, which are as worthless and as impotent as Lord Alfred's noble title is in the wilderness.

But even as they play their parts in this two-man drama with universal applications, Henry and Bill are a couple of regular guys in a tight spot. They sit on the coffin lid to eat their meals, because it is a better seat than the ground. Bill rashly vows that if his latest effort to protect the dogs from the wolves fails, he will not allow himself a cup of coffee in the morning. When he insists, with equal rashness, on keeping that vow and denying himself the one warming pleasure in what could be his last day on Earth, Henry gently tries to make him drink the coffee. Henry knows that Bill's growing irrationality lessens his own chance of survival, but he accepts this just as he accepts the wolves, without complaint and without ill feeling. He tries to comfort Bill, to calm him, to prevent his final, suicidal mission; and when he fails, he thinks about what to do with Lord Alfred and how to help the dogs pull the sled, and he moves on.

As Henry and Bill are counterparts in the first part of the novel, Beauty Smith and Weedon Scott are counterparts in the last part. Beauty and Weedon represent the worst and the best in humanity, but they, too, are just a couple of guys. Beauty's behavior is evil and inexcusable, but London forces readers to see him as a human being nonetheless by describing the physical ugliness and deformity that earned him not only the nickname Beauty but also a life as an outcast who has often been the victim of the kind of abuse he heaps on White Fang. There is no redemption for Beauty in the novel and no suggestion that readers should pity him. Yet the parallels between Beauty and White Fang cannot be ignored. White Fang is rehabilitated by love, which suggests that Beauty might be, too, given the opportunity. Beauty is three-dimensional because behind the length and breadth of his evil lies the same potential that lies within all creatures: the potential to be improved by improved circumstances. This is not, today, an inventive way to add depth to a character, but it was much fresher at the time it was written, and it is still credible.

Weedon Scott is, in London's term, "the love-master" to Beauty Smith's "mad god." The unique element of Scott's character is selflessness, the sacrifice of his own best interest for that of another. Henry was kind to Bill in spite of the fact that Bill's weakness threatened Henry's survival. But Henry had no choice, because he had no escape from Bill. Bill was a part of his environment that he had to accept, along with the wolves and the cold. Scott represents a greater good because he chooses to make White Fang his responsibility, and he chooses knowing that he is taking on a killer. After rushing into the middle of a dogfight□putting himself in danger not only from the dogs but from a furious Beauty Smith□and struggling to save White Fang, Scott then pays a small fortune for a wolf who is nearly dead. There is nothing in it for him. Two weeks later, the moment Scott unchains a recovering White Fang, the wolf kills one of his sled dogs and bites both Scott and his musher, Matt. Instead of anger, Scott feels deep regret at the thought of shooting White Fang as a hopeless case; he seizes on White Fang's next action, a knowing dodge when he sees the gun raised, as a reason to believe that the wolf is intelligent enough to be redeemed after all. In coming days, Scott is willing to risk being attacked again to win White Fang's trust.

And yet, there is this: After Scott has taken White Fang back home to California, he sometimes takes him into town, where a trio of dogs harass White Fang mercilessly. White Fang has learned not to attack dogs, and so he soaks up their abuse for Scott's sake□until one day Weedon Scott, the icon of unconditional love, addresses this injustice, not by speaking to the dogs' owners or by taking some other civilized measure, but by giving White Fang permission to kill the dogs. White Fang does so with dispatch, and of course the townspeople henceforth make sure that their dogs do not bother him. Scott's solution is as effective as it is shocking to readers who thought they knew him. This makes Scott very much like people we have all known, people whom we think we know completely, who one day suddenly do something that makes us recoil and shrug our shoulders and add a question mark to what we have written in our hearts about them. Even people who make unconditional love a habit are not perfect.

There is one more human who is White Fang's master, the Indian Gray Beaver, and he is the one whom London fails to elevate above stereotype. Although he is not cruel, he is portrayed as being incapable of showing affection toward White Fang. The relationship between the two is strictly pragmatic: Gray Beaver provides food and protection and does not beat White Fang as long as he obeys; White Fang helps pull Gray Beaver's son's sled and guards his family and his property. The two have made a covenant, to use London's word, but after five years Gray Beaver breaks the covenant, and it is whiskey that makes him do it. He at first refuses to sell White Fang to Beauty

Smith, but Beauty Smith, the least of all white men, finds it easy to manipulate Gray Beaver. He at first gives him whiskey and then sells him whiskey until the considerable amount that Gray Beaver has earned by trading at the fort is gone. By that time, Gray Beaver is addicted to alcohol and, drunk and broke, finally turns White Fang over to Beauty Smith in return for still more whiskey. He beats White Fang severely when the wolf tries to escape Beauty's tortures and return to him, and he leaves the fort, and the story, to return, ruined and shamed, to his village. Gray Beaver is a stock character, lacking individuality and vitality. London's portrayal of White Fang's Indian master is a distracting weakness in an otherwise strong supporting cast.

Source: Candyce Norvell, Critical Essay on *White Fang*, in *Novels for Students*, Gale, 2004.

Adaptations

White Fang has been adapted to film at least eleven times in seven countries: the United States, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Australia. Among the most widely available versions are *White Fang*, made in the United States and released in 1991, directed by Randal Kleiser and starring Klaus Maria Brandauer and Ethan Hawke; and *White Fang II: Myth of the White Wolf*, another American film released in 1994, directed by Ken Olin and starring Scott Bairstow and Alfred Molina.

There are at least two audio adaptations of *White Fang*. An unabridged version on cassette, read by William Hootkins, was released by Penguin Books Limited in 1998. An abridged version, read by the late actor John Ritter, was released by New Millennium Audio in 2002.

Topics for Further Study

White Fang tells the life story of the title character, but London chose a somewhat unexpected starting point and ending point for his story: The entire first section of the novel centers on the life of White Fang's mother before White Fang is born, and the story ends before White Fang dies. Discuss what reasons London might have had for these decisions and whether you think they are effective or not.

In parts of western Canada and Alaska, dogsleds are still an important method of transportation. Do research to learn where dogsleds are still in use and what the lives of the dogs and the people who use them are like.

The rights of animals□both domesticated and wild□and what constitutes acceptable treatment of them is an issue that is often debated today. The legal status of animals is changing as some lawmakers, attorneys, and activists push for increased protection of animals from human abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Discuss the issue of animal rights and humane treatment as it relates to the novel. Should laws protect animals from abuse such as that suffered by White Fang? If so, how should people who break these laws be punished? Should laws prohibit people from owning wild animals?

Do research to learn about wolves and wolf-dog hybrids. Find out how accurate and realistic London's portrayal of White Fang was. Could an animal that is three-quarters wolf really become as tame as White Fang did?

Using place names mentioned in the novel as your starting point, do research to learn more about the Native Americans mentioned in the novel. What tribe would they have been part of? What was their culture like? Do they still live in the area today?

The novel is set just before and during the Yukon gold rush of 1898. Learn more about this event. How did it start, how long did it last, and how did it impact the settlement of the area?

Compare and Contrast

Late 1890s—1900s: In 1898, with the discovery of gold along the Klondike River, the Canadian government separates the Yukon district from the Northwest Territories, making it a separate territory. More than thirty thousand prospectors come north to search for gold.

Today: The Yukon remains a territory of Canada. Mining (for lead, zinc, silver, copper, and gold) is its primary industry, followed by tourism. The entire population of the territory is less than the number who came hoping to find gold in the late 1890s, making it one of the least populated regions of North America.

Late 1890s—1900s: Until the gold rush spurs the building of the first railroads in the Yukon, the only ways to travel are on foot, by dogsled, and by canoe. The White Pass and Yukon Railway are constructed to provide transportation for gold prospectors and the settlers who follow them.

Today: The region's railroads have been shut down, replaced by air travel and the Alaska Highway. Some residents of the Yukon still rely on dogsleds as a major form of transportation.

Late 1890s—1900s: Life in the Yukon is extremely harsh, and famines affecting both humans and animals are common. Native Americans and animals alike depend on salmon and game for food, and in years when both are in short supply, only the strong survive. When people do not have food to feed their dogs, the dogs return to the wild and struggle to find enough food to stay alive.

Today: Humans and animals in the Yukon still live in relative isolation and depend heavily on salmon and game. However, air travel and modern communications greatly reduce the threat of famine. In the late 1990s, when salmon and game were scarce and people in the region were unable to feed their sled dogs, word quickly reached the rest of the world. Pet food companies and others donated food, and private couriers flew it to the Yukon free of charge to prevent widespread starvation of sled dogs.

What Do I Read Next?

The Call of the Wild (1903) is London's most well-known novel. It was hugely popular when it was first published and remains a favorite today. It also is considered one of the leading novels of the naturalist period. *The Call of the Wild* has many similarities with *White Fang*. It is the story of a dog who suffers the cruelties and hardships of nature before being adopted by a kind man.

John Barleycorn (1913) is London's painfully straightforward account of his alcoholism, published only a few years before his death. It is the only autobiographical work of substantial length that London wrote, and it includes descriptions of the writer's travels and adventures as well as of his struggles with alcohol.

My First Summer in the Sierra (1911), by John Muir, is the most popular work of the famous conservationist. It is the diary of a summer that Muir had spent in the Sierra Nevada Mountains decades earlier, in 1869. This book and others by Muir were instrumental in bringing American tourists to wilderness areas and in expanding the national park system.

The Red Badge of Courage (1895), by Stephen Crane, tells the story of a young soldier in the Civil War. Crane explores how the soldier's inborn traits and his environment combine to mold his character and his behavior. Like *White Fang*, *The Red Badge of Courage* has a long history as both a literary and a popular success and is considered an important work of American naturalism.

Winterdance: The Fine Madness of Winning the Iditarod (1994), by Gary Paulsen, is the author's account of his 1983 running of the Iditarod, Alaska's famous, grueling dogsled race. Paulsen, who began the 1,150-mile, seventeen-day race by becoming lost, faced many of the same challenges described in London's fiction, including bone-chilling cold, exhaustion, attacks by wild animals, and dogfights.

Topics for Discussion

1. Compare White Fang's life in the wild with his life on Weedon Scott's ranch. Which is better for White Fang? Why?

2. What is "the law of meat" and how does it operate?

3. Why do the humans seem to be "gods" in White Fang's eyes?

4. After White Fang escapes from Gray Beaver, why does he come crawling back?

5. What advantages does White Fang's wolf blood give him over other dogs?

6. London describes the relationship between Gray Beaver and White Fang as a "covenant." What does London imply through his choice of that word?

7. What makes Beauty Smith's treatment of White Fang so much worse than Gray Beaver's? How does it alter White Fang's character?

8. Explain why White Fang responds so cautiously to Weedon Scott's love. What changes must White Fang make to adapt to life in California?

9. What particular challenge does each of these dogs present to White Fang's development: Lip-lip, Cherokee, and Collie?

10. What factors are responsible for Jim Hall's becoming a vicious criminal?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Trace the stages in White Fang's development, noting the chief factors responsible for his change.

2. The Call of the Wild tells the opposite story of White Fang. Buck is a dog who escapes from civilization into the wild. Compare the two stories. Which one is more realistic? Why?

3. After researching the subject of wolves in the arctic, describe how wolves typically interact with humans. Do they ever attack humans? When and why? How easily can a wolf be tamed?

4. Jack London explains that humans brought fire and changed White Fang's environment. In what ways are humans today changing the arctic environment? What impact are these changes having upon the wildlife there? Consult the Reader's Guide for current articles.

5. Write a report on the Klondike gold rush of 1897. Try to show clearly what life would be like among the miners of that time.

Literary Precedents

Because White Fang presents London's environmental determinism so directly, the influence of Herbert Spencer's Social Darwinism is particularly important, but White Fang's domestication also reflects London's boyhood fascination with the novels of Horatio Alger, Jr. Like Alger's heroes, White Fang learns that virtue can lead to the reward of respectability. Like Alger, London clearly portrays the harshness of the world but suggests that melioration is possible.

Further Study

Dutcher, James, Jamie Dutcher, and James Manfull, *Wolves at Our Door: The Extraordinary Story of the Couple Who Lived with Wolves*, Pocket Star, 2002.

James Dutcher and his wife, Jamie, spent six years living in Idaho's Sawtooth Mountains with a wolf pack. The documentary film they made of their experiences, also entitled *Wolves at Our Door*, won an Emmy Award. This book details their experiences with the wolves, who lived in a twenty-acre enclosure with the Dutchers.

Kershaw, Alex, *Jack London: A Life*, Griffin, 1999.

This engaging biography covers all aspects of London's life, including his politics and his love of the wilderness and of adventure as well as his writing.

Lawlor, Mary, *Recalling the Wild: Naturalism and the Closing of the American West*, Rutgers University Press, 2000.

Lawlor discusses the various ways in which Americans have thought of the West throughout their history and examines how the literature of each period both influenced and reflected these ideas. Naturalism is a major focus of the book.

Pizer, Donald, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism: From Howells to London*, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Pizer discusses realism and naturalism as literary movements and then provides more in-depth analysis of ten representative works, including London's *The Call of the Wild*.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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