**Biography of Jack London**

**Jack London (1876-1916), iconic American author wrote *Call of the Wild* (1903);**

Buck did not read the newspapers, or he would have known that trouble was brewing, not alone for himself, but for every tide-water dog, strong of muscle and with warm, long hair, from Puget Sound to San Diego. Because men, groping in the Arctic darkness, had found a yellow metal, and because steamship and transportation companies were booming the find, thousands of men were rushing into the Northland. These men wanted dogs, and the dogs they wanted were heavy dogs, with strong muscles by which to toil, and furry coats to protect them from the frost.--Ch. 1

With Buck the dog as protagonist, London exposes the fine line between civility and the violence of nature, and the at-times harsh and cruel world created by men in their greed for fame and fortune. Cleverly portraying the animals' point of view *White Fang* (1906) follows similar themes. As the two most popular novels of London's based on his own life experiences in the Yukon, they have inspired numerous authors' works, and adaptations for television and film. During his short lifetime of forty years, London developed great passions for sailing, travelling, ranching, and the wilderness, and his works encompass the myriad interests he embraced to the full.

John "Jack" Griffith Chaney was born on 12 January 1876 in San Francisco, California to Flora Wellman (1843-1922) and astrologer William Henry Chaney (1821-1903). Virginia "Jenny" Prentiss (1832-1922), an ex-slave was Jack's wet nurse and would prove to have a great and positive influence on her young charge's life. After Chaney left Flora (they had never married) she wed John London (1828-1897) in 1876. Jack was given his last name and he now had two step-sisters Eliza and Ida. The Londons lived in various places in the Bay area, and while young Jack attended school, there was also pressure on him to help contribute to the family income. At the age of ten he was selling newspapers and learning some hard lessons in life;

I was born in the working-class. Early I discovered enthusiasm, ambition, and ideals; and to satisfy these became the problem of my child-life. My environment was crude and rough and raw. I had no outlook, but an uplook rather. My place in society was at the bottom. Here life offered nothing but sordidness and wretchedness, both of the flesh and the spirit; for here flesh and spirit were alike starved and tormented.--"What Life Means To Me" from *Revolution and Other Essays* (1910)

London worked many jobs of menial and unskilled labour at places such as a cannery and a jute mill, and also worked as a window-washer, watchman, and longshoreman. But the drudgery of these occupations did not dampen his enterprising spirit or intellectual enthusiasm for reading and writing. While living in Oakland he discovered the public library and immersed himself in literature. Having taught himself to sail at a very early age, in the 1890s, with money borrowed from Prentiss, London bought the sloop *Razzle Dazzle* and worked as an "oyster pirate" in the Bay.

"Alas for visions! When I was sixteen I had already earned the title of "prince." But this title was given me by a gang of cut-throats and thieves, by whom I was called "The Prince of the Oyster Pirates." (*ibid*.)

After Londons' own sloop was pirated, stripped of her ropes and anchors, he decided he had had enough of capitalist enterprise and in 1894 set out to experience the life of a tramp *"....begging my way from door to door, wandering over the United States and sweating bloody sweats in slums and prisons." (ibid.)* Nothing could have given him greater insight into the human condition and the class system of haves and have-nots. Upon returning to California and realising that he wanted a better life for himself than merely toiling away physically, London decided to become a *"brain merchant"* and set about in the *"frantic pursuit of knowledge."* In 1895 he attended Oakland High School and later the University of California at Berkeley but had to leave before finishing the year due to lack of funds and the need to support himself financially.

While London had already been writing for some time, his first story being "Typhoon Off The Coast Of Japan" (1893) which he wrote after a stint on the sloop *Sophia Sutherland* off the coasts of Siberia and Japan, he earnestly put pen to paper now and embarked on what would be his successful career as writer of essays, short stories, news items, and novels. In 1896 he joined the Socialist Labour Party.

It is quite fair to say that I became a Socialist in a fashion somewhat similar to the way in which the Teutonic pagans became Christians--it was hammered into me. Not only was I not looking for Socialism at the time of my conversion, but I was fighting it. I was very young and callow, did not know much of anything, and though I had never even heard of a school called "Individualism," I sang the paean of the strong with all my heart.--from his essay "How I Became A Socialist" (1905)

*The Iron Heel* (1908) also reflects his socialist views. In 1897 London was among the first hordes to leave for the Klondike during the Gold Rush. It was a perilous time; he found no gold and suffered scurvy, living out the winter in his now-famous Klondike cabin. It was there that he wrote the ominous "To Build A Fire"; he also gained invaluable experience for future writings. And they were now appearing in such magazines as the *Overland Monthly* and *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Back in Oakland, London met Anna Strunsky (1879-1968) who would become a life-long friend, and with whom he would co-author *The Kempton-Wace Letters* (1903). On 7 April 1900 London married Bess Maddern (1876-1947) with whom he would have two daughters: Joan (1901-1971) and Bess (1902-1992). They divorced in 1904. The same year he was married, London's first book was published, *The Son of the Wolf* (1900). It was followed by *The God of His Fathers* (1901), *A Daughter of the Snows* (1902), *The Children of the Frost* (1902), and *The Cruise of the Dazzler* (1902). While living in the East End of London, England he wrote *The People of the Abyss* (1903).

London served several stints as journalist; during the Russo-Japanese war in 1904 London was war correspondent for the *San Francisco Examiner*, for *Collier's* in 1906 reported on the earthquake in San Francisco, and 1914 travelled to Mexico to report on the revolution. While he had travelled much in his life, London was also looking to put down roots. He loved horseback riding and life on the ranch that he knew so well from his childhood. In 1905 he purchased land in Glen Ellen in the Sonoma County Valley of California which would eventually be part of his fourteen-hundred acre "Beauty Ranch". His sister Eliza would become his ranch superintendent. *The Faith of Men* (1904) was followed by *The Sea Wolf* (1904) which inspired the first feature-length film to be produced in the United States.

On 19 November 1905 London married Charmian Kittredge (1871-1955) with whom he would have a daughter, Joy, who died in infancy. London continued his prodigious output of novels and stories; *The Game* (1905) was followed by *War of the Classes* (1905), *Tales of the Fish-Patrol* (1905), *Moon Face and Other Stories* (1906), *Scorn of Women* (1906), *Before Adam* (1907), *Love of Life and Other Stories* (1907), and *The Road* (1907).

London had been planning his next trip for some time, and on his schooner *Snark* left for Hawaii in 1907. He and Charmian travelled to the Marquesas Islands, Tahiti, Samoa, Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Australia. Back home in 1909, London continued to add to his ranch, buying land and starting construction of "Wolf House" (which was destroyed by fire in 1913). His semi-autobiographical *Martin Eden* was published in 1909. Numerous works followed including *Lost Face* (1910), *Revolution and Other Essays* (1910), *Burning Daylight* (1910), *Theft: A Play in Four Acts*(1910), *When God Laughs and Other Stories*(1911), *Adventure* (1911), *The Cruise of the Snark*(1911), and *South Sea Tales* (1911). It was in 1912 that the Londons set sail again on the *Dirigo* bound for Cape Horn. The same year *The Strength of the Strong* (1914) and *The Mutiny of the Elsinore* (1914) were published, Jack and Charmian made their last trip to Hawaii. At the age of forty, Jack London died at his ranch cottage on 22 November 1916. Charmian continued to live at the ranch, and devoted herself to its preservation. She managed Jacks' estate including the publication of several more of his works, and wrote several of her own books including *The Book of Jack London* (1921). Her ashes are buried with Jacks' at the ranch, part of which is now the Jack London State Historical Park.

But he is not always alone. When the long winter nights come on and the wolves follow their meat into the lower valleys, he may be seen running at the head of the pack through the pale moonlight or glimmering borealis, leaping gigantic above his fellows, his great throat a-bellow as he sings a song of the younger world, which is the song of the pack.--Ch. 7, *Call of the Wild*

Other works by Jack London include;

*The House of Pride and Other Tales of Hawaii*(1912),

*Smoke Bellew* (1912),

*A Son of the Son* (1912),

*The Night-Born and Other Stories* (1913),

*The Abysmal Brute* (1913),

*John Barleycorn* (1913),

*The Valley of the Moon* (1913),

*The Scarlet Plague* (1915),

*The Star Rover* (1915),

*The Acorn Planter: A California Forest Play* (1916),

*The Little Lady of the Big House* (1916), and

*The Turtles of Tasman* (1916).

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