

# A Study of Literary Representations of Environmental Themes in American Naturalism

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## Research Fields

American literature, Naturalism, Environmental humanities, Literary representation of animals

## Keywords

Nature, Animals, Animal stories, Jack London

## ● Research Outline

### A Transpacific Interpretation of Animal Representations in Jack London's Literary Works

My field of research belongs to Environmental Humanities. I have analyzed/critiqued American literary works (Humanities) by focusing on animals (Environmental/Ecological POV). In particular, I have researched animal stories by Jack London (1876-1916). Concentrating on dog-protagonists, I have created new interpretations which no one had ever offered. Thus far, I have revealed that his works implicitly produce ambiguities about "Human-Animal" boundaries. I regard this finding as a non-western or a transpacific notion. I think that this interpretation is ecological knowledge of humanities which we should require now. I have been working on my research to re-evaluate Jack London from an ecological perspective.

Summaries of three major publications of mine are below:

1. The purpose of the first paper is to attain the following two goals. The first goal is to create a new value for Jack London's short story "Bâtard" (1902) by comparing it to his novel *The Call of the Wild* (1903); in order to consider them as companion stories. The second goal is to show a new interpretation of *The Call of the Wild*, as a companion story to "Bâtard." Regarding them as companion stories, I can make a new assumption of *The Call of the Wild*. That is, this novel may tell us a story in which, replacing Leclère, Buck shows how the ability of sensitive perception are gained. I focus the two senses, a sense of hearing and sight, because every animal shapes their perception from senses. Through doing this, the assumption can be solved. I conclude that "Bâtard" and *The Call of the Wild* display perception of humans and animals equally and the two stories gives us the ambiguities of the "human-animal" borders.

2. The purpose of the second paper is to reveal the uniqueness of "Bâtard" through comparing this story with *The Call of the Wild*. In detail, this shows an uncommon description of the protagonist Bâtard as a dog.

As I have already shown the relationship between the two stories, "Bâtard" and *The Call of the Wild* have a one point in common. However, "Bâtard" has something unique, which *The Call of the Wild* does not have, and that is the frequent appearance of the word "grin." In the short story, "grin" appears six times, but only four times in the novel. The word appears once in three pages in "Bâtard" while in *The Call of the Wild*, once in 25 pages. When I focused on the word "grin" and reread the narratives, the usage of it in "Bâtard" is clearly distinct from that in *The Call of the Wild*. Half of the time, it is used for animals in the short story while in the novel it is all used for human characters. Every "grin" is a synonym for "smile" in *The Call of the Wild*, but that is not the case with "Bâtard." In the short story, the word seems to mean "to draw back the lips and display the teeth" when it is applied to animals. Through rereading "Bâtard" in this way, I claim that Bâtard is an animal which may have a "laugh," the expression only human beings have. This can be London's original application of Darwinism. I conclude that London offers a human expression to an animal and makes ambiguities about "human-animal" boundaries.

3. The purpose of the third paper is to reveal London's explicit perspective on animals through rereading *The Call of the Wild*. I take note of the word "read," as the first sentence of this novel includes: "Buck did not read the newspapers, or he would have known that trouble was brewing..." However, several critics have discussed this sentence recently. Jonathan Auerback poses a question on it, wondering why London began this novel with "Buck did not read" instead of "Buck could not read." He thinks the sentence suggests that the dog protagonist does not read because of his unwillingness rather than inability. In other words, London does not deny the dog's reading competence in *The Call of the Wild*. This uniqueness of an animal reading may be ascribed to London's Darwinian perspective on animals. In his essay, London explains that animals will be able to gain literacy if they continue to evolve in considerably long years. Through not showing the dog's reading ability, *The Call of the Wild* implicitly displays London's original perspective on animals. I claim that this finding tells us that London suggests that literacy cannot mark the boundary between humans and animals.