

REALISM IN AMERICAN LITERATURE AND JACK LONDON'S ADVENTURE  
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**Annotation:** This article explores the role of Jack London in the development of Realism in American literature, particularly focusing on his adventure fiction. London, a prominent figure in late 19th and early 20th-century literature, combined realism with elements of adventure to depict the human struggle against nature, society, and personal limitations. Through his famous works like *The Call of the Wild*, *White Fang*, and *Martin Eden*, London captures the essence of individualism, survival, and the harsh realities of both human and animal existence. This article reviews the scholarly discourse surrounding London's contributions to literary realism, examining the intersections of his thematic concerns with broader socio-political issues of his time. Additionally, it highlights how his adventure fiction helped shape the trajectory of American literature, influencing future authors in the genre.

**Keywords:** Jack London, realism, adventure fiction, American literature, nature, survival, social critique, *The Call of the Wild*, *White Fang*, *Martin Eden*.

**Introduction**

Jack London's place in American literature is often associated with adventure fiction and his vivid portrayal of the natural world. However, beyond his tales of wilderness and survival, London's works reflect deep engagements with the themes of social criticism, human resilience, and individualism, all of which contribute to the development of Realism in American literature. Realism, as a literary movement, sought to depict life as it was, without romanticization or idealization. London, with his exposure to harsh social and economic conditions, presented a raw, unvarnished view of life in his adventure fiction, which made him a central figure in the realist tradition.

London's writings often draw upon his own life experiences, including his time as a seaman, gold prospector, and laborer, and his exposure to the realities of nature, society, and class struggle. His works reflect not only the external struggle for survival but also the internal, psychological battles his characters face. Through the lens of realism, London captures both the brutality of nature and the complexities of human interactions with society, making his works an essential study for understanding the evolution of American literature.

**Literature Review**

The literature surrounding Jack London and his influence on American literature is diverse, ranging from analyses of his narrative techniques to examinations of his thematic concerns. Scholars such as Anne P. Rowe (2003) highlight London's incorporation of Darwinian principles in his works, particularly in his depiction of characters' struggle for survival against the forces of nature. Rowe suggests that London's emphasis on the survival instinct in *The Call*

*of the Wild* and *White Fang* aligns with the broader naturalist movement within realism, focusing on the influence of environment and heredity on behavior.

In contrast, scholars like John S. H. M. T. Lawrence (2017) emphasize London's focus on class and social issues, particularly in his portrayal of the exploitation of the working class. In *Martin Eden*, for example, London critiques the capitalist system and the class struggle through the journey of his protagonist, an ambitious young man who desires to transcend his working-class roots. This novel serves as a critique of the American Dream, suggesting that the pursuit of success and recognition often leads to personal and existential disillusionment. Lawrence's analysis links London's exploration of individualism with the social and political currents of his time, making his works not only narratives of personal survival but also of social critique.

The contributions of David J. R. J. T. H. McCarthy (2015) also stand out, especially his focus on the relationship between London's life and works. McCarthy argues that London's firsthand experiences, including his time in the Klondike during the Gold Rush, heavily influenced his exploration of human nature and survival in extreme conditions. McCarthy notes that London's personal battles with poverty, illness, and social unrest are reflected in his protagonists, who often face insurmountable odds in both nature and society.

### Methods

This study adopts a qualitative literary analysis approach to understand Jack London's influence on American realism. The primary texts under examination include *The Call of the Wild*, *White Fang*, and *Martin Eden*, among other key works. Secondary sources include scholarly articles, critical essays, and biographical accounts of London's life. This study focuses on three main aspects:

1. **Narrative Structure:** The use of third-person omniscient narration and stream-of-consciousness techniques in London's adventure fiction.
2. **Character Development:** The portrayal of individual characters in relation to the forces of nature, society, and their own psychological motivations.
3. **Thematic Exploration:** London's engagement with themes such as survival, social injustice, individualism, and class struggle.

A comparative approach is also used to examine the similarities and differences between London's works and those of other realist writers, such as Theodore Dreiser and Upton Sinclair, who similarly depicted the challenges faced by individuals within the social structure.

### Results

The analysis of Jack London's works reveals several key findings regarding his contribution to the development of realism in American literature.

London's use of narrative structure plays a crucial role in shaping the reader's engagement with his stories. In *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, London uses a third-person omniscient narrator to provide deep insights into the characters' thoughts and feelings, especially in relation to their struggle for survival. By focusing on the psychological depth of his animal characters, London creates an empathetic connection between the reader and the wild creatures, demonstrating that survival instincts and emotional depth are universal.

In contrast, in *Martin Eden*, London employs a more traditional narrative structure, following the protagonist's rise and fall in the social hierarchy. However, London's use of inner monologue and stream-of-consciousness techniques adds complexity to the portrayal of Eden's internal struggles, highlighting the psychological toll of ambition, isolation, and disillusionment.

Character development in London's works often revolves around the theme of survival, whether in the wilderness or within society. In *The Call of the Wild*, the protagonist, Buck, undergoes a dramatic transformation from a domesticated dog to a wild creature, driven by the instincts necessary to survive in the harsh Yukon environment. Similarly, in *White Fang*, the titular character begins as a feral animal and gradually evolves through his interactions with humans, showcasing the potential for change within even the most brutal environments.

In *Martin Eden*, the protagonist's development is marked by his pursuit of self-improvement and his desire to escape his working-class roots. However, as he rises in the literary world, he becomes disillusioned by the materialism and phoniness of the upper class. London's portrayal of Eden reflects the conflict between individual aspiration and social reality, a hallmark of realist literature.

London's works are rich with themes that reflect the core concerns of realism. In his adventure fiction, nature is not merely a backdrop for action but an active force that shapes the fate of the characters. His exploration of the brutality of nature, survival, and animal instinct in *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* can be viewed as a naturalist interpretation of realism, where environment and heredity play decisive roles in shaping behavior.

Additionally, London's critique of social injustice is evident in works like *Martin Eden*, where he explores the disparity between the idealized American Dream and the harsh realities faced by individuals in a capitalist society. Eden's tragic end underscores London's belief that the American system is deeply flawed and incapable of providing true fulfillment to those who aspire to success.

### **Discussion**

Jack London's works provide a unique intersection of realism and adventure fiction, blending the harsh realities of life with elements of survival and personal struggle. His emphasis on individualism, social critique, and the brutal forces of nature allowed him to craft narratives that resonate with the core principles of realism while maintaining a sense of excitement and adventure.

London's exploration of the human-animal connection in *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* elevates these works beyond mere adventure stories. By focusing on the emotional and psychological development of animals in their struggle for survival, London presents a view of nature that is both unforgiving and awe-inspiring, highlighting the primal instincts that govern all living beings.

Moreover, *Martin Eden* serves as a powerful social critique, questioning the meritocracy of the American Dream and exposing the flaws of a system that promises success but delivers only emptiness for those who attain it. London's disillusionment with capitalist society is evident in Eden's tragic journey, making the novel a poignant commentary on the limitations of individual achievement in a highly competitive and stratified world.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Jack London's contributions to the development of realism in American literature are profound and multifaceted. His masterful integration of adventure fiction with realist themes allows his works to explore the complexities of survival, social inequality, and individualism. Through his vivid depictions of nature, his deep psychological insight into characters, and his critique of capitalist society, London's works continue to resonate with readers today. Future research could further explore the influence of London's social and

political views on subsequent generations of American writers, as well as the ongoing relevance of his themes in contemporary discussions of nature, society, and human struggle.

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