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The Call of the Wild and *White Fang*: An Ecocritical Analysis and Interpretation of Jack London's Two Wolf-Novels

ABSTRACT

The last few decades have seen the emergence of a new literary approach in the arts and humanities. Coined ecocriticism, it aims to highlight the relationship between humans and nature as expressed in cultural products and especially in literature. Its development follows a generally growing concern about environmental issues and, subsequently, an increasing interest in the matter. Ecocritics tend to support a monistic view on the human-nature relationship, but they may disagree on the root causes of the current ecological crisis and how best to solve it. In the present project, these different ecocritical positions will be accounted for in detail and, collectively, they will form the theoretical foundation for the analytical part of the project. In response to the threat of a global, ecological disaster, the relationship between humankind and the natural environment has become a popular topic amongst 21st century authors. The objective of this project, however, is to demonstrate that also literature that predates anxiety about global warming, rising sea-levels, and plastic waste can be relevant to the present day environmental debate in the US. I will demonstrate this by carrying out an ecocritical literary analysis of Jack London's two novels, *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* from 1903 and 1906 respectively. The two novels will be analysed together as their plots are very similar, only reversed. In *The Call of the Wild*, the domesticated dog, Buck, leaves civilisation and joins a pack of wolves in the wild; in *White Fang*, a wild wolf becomes a fully domesticated family pet. The larger part of the analysis focuses on the Alaskan wilderness and how London presents the actual landscape, its wildlife and the indigenous population. This is contrasted with descriptions of green, Californian estates with livestock and pets that have all been moulded by human culture. The analysis shows that, once absorbed into civilisation, animals and indigenous people who represent the wilderness quickly lose their freedom and the recognition of their intrinsic values. Buck, who becomes wild however, rediscovers his biological link to nature, ancient instincts awaken and he experiences an overwhelming sense of freedom. The analysis is completed with an examination and comparison of the representation of females in the wilderness and in civilisation respectively. In the wild, the female characters (all animal) are depicted as equals to their male counterparts. The female characters in the world of civilisation however, are weak, immature and inferior. The suggestion is that these qualities have been learnt, and London is therefore not presenting the female sex as inherently inferior but is rather criticising the social constructions in human-controlled environments that mould and encourage woman to adopt certain characteristics. Based on the analysis, I conclude that *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* both present the wilderness and a state of nature as preferable to environments shaped and controlled by human culture. Both Buck and White Fang are shown to have instincts of the wilderness and nature that can

be subdued and lie dormant, but that will not disappear. Although the protagonists are canines, London uses elements of atavism to remind the reader that humans too are biologically linked to the natural environment. The novels are thus examples of ecological fiction that stresses the human connection to and dependency on the natural environment, while also arguing for the inherent worth of everything in the so-called *more-than-human world*.

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INTRODUCTION

The last few centuries have been quite extraordinary for the development of human culture. They have brought significant scientific discoveries and exponential technological development. Over the same period, the human population has not only increased considerably, it has spread geographically at the cost of the natural environment with its wildlife and indigenous people. In North America, gradual expansion across the country meant clearance of the wilderness as the frontier progressed westward. It had to give way to agriculture, property development and industrial growth. Nature was conquered and brought under human control and, at the same time, it conveniently provided a wide range of resources to aid the process. The spread of European civilisation across the US was widely endorsed and regarded as positive progression, and the destructive impact on the natural environment was not deemed important. There were a few voices of concern, though. In 1864, George Marsh published a study entitled *Man in Nature*, in which he presents in considerable detail the ecological consequences of the decline of the North American wilderness. He warns of the permanent imbalance in nature caused by the actions of man, and points out the subsequent necessity of attempting to restore these "disturbed harmonies" (Marsh, 3). Authors such as Henry Thoreau, Ralph Emerson and John Muir likewise wrote about the wilderness, but their publications expressed excitement and a love for nature rather than worry about the impact of human progress. The tone of Marsh' book therefore seems curiously current. Since the end of the 20th century the attitude towards ecology and the natural environment has changed dramatically. Prior to that, environmental protection and climate issues were the focus of a few individuals or interest groups. Greenpeace, for example, perceived to be somewhat radical when they were founded in the 1970s, gained much publicity with their early campaigns against whaling. However, with increasing signs of global warming, pollution and damaging amounts of plastic waste, environmental issues have become common topics in the media and matters of concern to the general public, politicians and businesses alike. The increased interest rests partly on an innate drive for self-preservation and the recognition of the threat imposed on human life from ecological disaster. However, present-day environmentalism is also driven by a growing ecocentric worldview and a realisation that rights extend beyond those of humans. From this perspective, nature holds intrinsic value irrespective of its instrumental value to humans. In the academic world this changing attitude has led to ecology and environmental studies no longer being confined to the sciences. In the arts and humanities ecocriticism has emerged as a new critical approach that attempts to disclose issues connected to the relationship between humans and nature. This will be my approach and objective in the present project.

The last few decades have seen an increasing amount of novels and non-fictitious publications on the human-nature relationship. This is hardly surprising given that literature often reflects tendencies and issues of its time. Recent, acclaimed publications of eco-literature includes Susanna Clarke's *Piranesi* and Diane Cook's *The New Wilderness*, which are both examples of climate fiction or simply *cli-fi*. Other popular titles in the eco-genre are Michael Christie's *Greenwood* and John Ironmonger's *Not Forgetting the Whale*. The latter not only deals with the harmful impact of tourism on delicate marine life, but also with an entirely different aspect of nature in the form of microorganisms, viruses and a deadly pandemic. These titles are just a few examples of eco-literature that has been written with the knowledge of the present environmental crisis and the fear of an impending environmental catastrophe. Such books have been written specifically in response to the current situation, but literature from much earlier historical contexts can also cast valuable light on the present-day climate situation. The objective of this project is to demonstrate just that. By carrying out an ecocritical analysis of Jack London's two novels *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, I will demonstrate their ecological theme and their relevance for the environmental debate in 21st century US.

The theoretical basis of the present project consists of a thorough account of ecocriticism. It is much more than just an analytical approach to highlighting the relationship between humans and nature, and I will explain in detail the differences and similarities of the various factions within ecocriticism that have developed over the last couple of decades. These include environmentalism, deep ecology, ecofeminism, eco-Marxism and social ecology. Understanding their distinctions makes it easier to identify the significance of the ecological points that London's two novels convey. Given its rather imprecise meaning, I will proceed to account for the multifarious definitions of the term *nature*. This will be followed by an explanation of Abram's alternative phrase *the more-than-human world* and its kinship with the complex Heideggerian concept of *thingness*. One specific interpretation or classification of nature, that of *wilderness*, will be elaborated on in a separate section as the larger part of both *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* take place in precisely such an environment. The contextual backdrop of the project consists of a closer look at a number of environmental organisations and movements in the US, but the impact of politics on environmental protection and restoration will also be considered.

Although Jack London's oeuvre has attracted a reasonable degree of attention in academic contexts, his work has mostly been explored with regards to their naturalist aspects and the author's unconcealed belief in the individual being a product of their environment. However, with the rise of ecocriticism and, generally, a greater focus on the natural environment, a number of more recent studies have labelled London's work ecological fiction, but adequate, in-depth analysis to

substantiate this categorisation seems to be lacking. Although London may not have intended to produce what is now known as eco-fiction, his two wolf-novels carry a clear ecological message. In the present project I will do an ecocritical analysis of London's representation of the wilderness with focus on the landscape, its wildlife and human life respectively. I will then contrast this with the author's depiction of green landscapes, livestock and pets in environments that have shaped by human culture. Finally, a brief section will also be allocated to the analysis of London's representation of females, human and animal, in the wilderness and in human environments. I will draw on the theoretical background material and, for contextual purposes, on 19th century American nature writing by Thoreau, Marsh and Muir. I will also refer to relevant sources and data on environmental matters in the broadest sense in the US today.

THEORY

Ecocriticism

The objective of the current project is to carry out an ecocritical analysis of Jack London's two wolf-novels, but first it is necessary to establish exactly what ecocriticism is. Broadly speaking, it is a relatively new analytical approach that aims to bring light to the "interconnections between nature and culture" (Glotfelty, 19). Initially, however, it emerged as a critical approach for the analysis specifically of *literature*. The notion that literature can somehow contribute towards our understanding of the place of humans in nature was put forward by Joseph Meeker in 1974. He argued that only humans create literature and that it consequently reflects what it means to be human. By studying literature about nature, we can therefore gain insight into "human relationships with other species and with the world around us" (Meeker, 3). At the time, Meeker's theory attracted limited interest. In 1990, another literary critic, Glen Love, lamented the fact that nature writing was still not taken seriously in academic circles.

> "Why does nature writing, literature of place, regional writing, poetry of nature, florish now – even as it is ignored or denigrated by most contemporary criticism? […] The most important function of literature today is to redirect human consciousness to a full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world"" (Love, 213).

Concerns about environmental issues had begun to grow in the general public. This explains the popularity of nature writing that Love mentions. In the academic world, however, there were no literary journals solely dedicated to the relationship between humans and nature. Academics with an interest in this field therefore rarely discovered or referenced one another's work and "each [critic] was but a single voice howling in the wilderness" (Glotfelty, 17). This began to change with the foundation of the American organisation ASLE in 1992 (Association for the Study of Literature

and the Environment). It aimed to create a structured framework for the study of literature concerned with issues related to the natural environmental and its impact on humans and nonhumans alike (ASLE.org). ASLE has since then inspired the foundation of similar associations in Europe such as EASLCE and ASLE-UKI, and there are now several academic journals dedicated to the study of literature about nature. With the development of ecocriticism, Meeker's theory from the 1970s suddenly became topical, and his concept is echoed in the purpose of this analytical approach, which is to "evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their usefulness as responses to the environmental crisis" (Glotfelty, 5).

Authors often respond to tendencies or movements that they observe in society, and the last few decades have therefore seen a boom in literature themed around the natural environment. Environmental historian Roderick Nash explains this development as follows, "[t]he civilising process which imperils wild nature […] is precisely that which creates the need for it". Author Lucy Jones elaborates on the popularity of the genre. "As humanity has industrialised, commodified, gentrified and all-but destroyed the natural world – as we have shut ourselves off from it in cars and offices and flats – we have simultaneously found ourselves craving it" (Pollard).

When ecocriticism first began to emerge, critics focused predominantly on representations of nature in Romantic poetry and in narratives about nature and the wilderness (Gerrard, 4). In time, their interest shifted towards the complex exchanges and negotiations that are communicated between nature and culture not only in a much wider selection of genres and text types, but also in other cultural artefacts and processes (Gerrard, 4). Ecocritics also began to explore how geographical region impacted on the representation of nature in literature and cultural products. The vast expanses of wilderness found in North America, for instance, and that have been depicted by nature writers such as Thoreau, Muir and Marsh, are necessarily unequalled in much smaller countries. Depending on the structure of the local landscape, agricultural use of land may further diminish the remnants of so-called wilderness. It is all a matter of scale though, as English writer, academic and literary critic Jeremy Hooker suggests with the term *ditch vision*. In his book of the same title, he argues that wild nature does not require vast spaces and the presence of wild beasts. It exists in a simple ditch, a stretch of wild-growing hedge or a wild meadow. In their own right these too are living eco-systems that require our appreciation and protection (Hooker). Hooker's publication is just one example of present day eco-literature. The genre has become widely popular and as it reflects the attitude towards ecology in the 21st century, these publications are obvious materials for ecocritical studies. However, as will be shown in this project, this does not necessarily make much older literature, such as Jack London's novels about the late 19th century Alaskan wilderness, redundant as a topic in academic, ecocritical discourse.

In contrast to other critical approaches to literature, the focus in ecocriticism is not human society, but the world as an ecosphere or a macrocosmic element (Glotfelty, 19). Ecocriticism is sometimes referred to as *environmental literary criticism* or *green cultural studies*, but semantically *ecocriticism* seems the most appropriate choice. It may seem inconsequential but the distinction between the meaning of 'environ' and 'eco' is not insignificant in the context of green critical analyses:

> "[I]n its connotations, *enviro*- is anthropocentric and dualistic, implying that we humans are at the center, surrounded by everything that is not us, the environment. *Eco*-, in contrast, implies interdependent communities, integrated systems, and strong connections among constituent parts" (Glotfelty, 20).

The "eco" in "ecocriticism" simply communicates that this literary critical approach is less *anthropocentric* and more *ecocentric* than other critical approaches. The focus in literary studies has, in other words, shifted from "*ego*-consciousness" to "*eco*-consciousness" (Love, 208).

One recurrent objection to ecocriticism is its lack of a solid, scientific foundation. Without the appropriate, scientific knowledge, ecocritics cannot attempting to understand or solve ecological issues. Indeed, ecology as a science exceeds the ordinary scope of the arts and humanities, and environmental problems are therefore generally regarded scientific matters rather than objects for literary or other cultural analyses. However, although contributions from eco-critics towards the environmental debate may be of limited *scientific* value, by transgressing the ordinary boundaries of their discipline and developing their own unique kind of "ecological literacy" (Gerrard, 5), literary critics can highlight aspects of the human-environmental relationship that have limited relevance to hard science. Ecocritics are thereby able to approach the environmental debate from an entirely different angle to their colleagues in the sciences. As with other societal problems, whether social, racial or gender related, literature can be utilised to depict, question and bring to debate important or difficult issues. Unsurprisingly, ecocritics generally hold green values, and as a critical approach, ecocriticism thus springs from a sense of commitment to the environmentalist cause. (Ramos, 139). Despite their shared, overall concern with the natural environment and the role of the human species within it, though, ecocritics do not all belong to the same eco-philosophical camp. They all recognise the current unbalanced relationship between mankind and nature, but their views differ with regards to which aspects of this relationship warrant attention, to what degree they require attention, and how stabilise imbalances in the relationship. Different understandings of the environmental crisis basically open up for different ecocritical approaches. As this paper focuses on publications by Jack London that predate eco-literature as a recognised genre by many decades, and since the objective is to explore how London relates to present day ecocriticism and the ecological

debate, the distinctions between the different philosophical camps within ecocriticism require clarification.

Anthropocentric vs. ecocentric positions

Cornucopia

Although paying little heed to preservation of nature and expressing next to no concern about the impact man has on the natural environment, the so-called *Cornucopians* need mentioning here since they too form part of the overall framework that constitutes mankind's ecological consciousness. The cornucopian argument is that, unhindered, science and entrepreneurs in capitalist society will continuously discover or invent solutions to counter pollution or scarcity of natural resources as and when required. When demand for a particular natural resource exceeds the availability, the price will increase, and in an economy-driven society this will naturally lead to development of alternative products or methods that do not rely on the dwindling resource. Viewed from the cornucopian perspective scarcity is therefore an economic rather than an ecological issue that innovation will automatically eliminate. (Gerrard, 16-17). It is worth noting that industries and businesses that seek to preserve their financial interests through the cornucopian argument are under pressure from increasingly environmentally oriented consumers who demand a shift towards greener products. Although the motivation may still be financial rather than moral, such industries now often seek to make their profiles greener. It does not alter the general anthropocentric attitude of the cornucopian position, however. The value of nature and non-human environments is solely based on their usefulness to humans and their impact on human wealth and welfare (Gerrard, 18).

Environmentalism

Over the last few decades, political measures and more focus on environmental issues across the media have created greater general awareness and concern with the state of the natural environment. Part of this rests in the fact that the problem is communicated with a sense of urgency. *Sky News*, for instance, now has a *Daily Climate Show*, where cases about environmental change from around the world are presented. Although the studio interior only forms the backdrop of the various reports, it includes an oversized digital clock that continuously counts down, second by second, the approximately 10 years that are left until we reach the supposedly fateful global temperature increase of 1.5 °C. Such time specification makes the imminence and gravity of the situation rather tangible ("The Daily Climate Show"). A majority of people can therefore now be labelled *environmentalists* in that they recognise global warming and pollution as serious problems that must be addressed. However, although this group buys organic, recycles and favours renewable

energy sources, environmentalists are not willing to embrace radical social change for the sake of environmental protection. Their values remain based on personal ambition and the wish for a good life, conventionally defined. As their commitment to the environmental cause is somewhat selective and without personal sacrifice, this ecological position is sometimes dismissed as "shallow environmentalism" (Gerrard, 18). Nonetheless, given the extent of its reach, politicians, industries and businesses all have to acknowledge the demands for more environmental consideration from this majority. Although ecocritics tend to take a more radical stance in relation to environmental issues, they too are highly aware of the power of the majority. As a result, they will seek to appeal to their environmentalist readers and persuade them towards a more radical perception of the environmental crisis that reflects their own (Gerrard, 20).

Deep ecology

There are four variants of environmentalism that are more progressive and which are the eco-philosophical positions mainly taken by ecocritics and environmental activists. The first of these is *deep ecology* which is a common ecological stance amongst academics, green activists and members of a number of environmental organisations such as *Earth First!* and *Friends of the Earth* (Gerrard, 20). Whereas shallow environmentalism regards humans as separate from nature and seeks to protect the natural environment essentially for the sake of human welfare and survival, deep ecologists advocate a monistic approach based on the notion of *inherent worth*, i.e. that nature and non-human lifeforms have value in themselves irrespective of their value to human interests. In order to respect this value, deep ecologist and philosopher, Arne Naess, proposes that ecology should not be restricted to the field of science. He argues that questions from the social sciences, for instance, are equally vital to the environmental debate so we can evaluate the present social constructions and how they impact on non-human elements in the eco-system. "We ask which society, which education, which form of religion, is best for all life on the planet as a whole, and then we ask further what we need to do to make the necessary changes" (Naess, 161). Naess thus proposes an expansion of our traditionally restricted understanding of ecology as a science, to a view on ecology that includes aspects such as ethics, rules and practices. He coins this expanded perception *ecosophy* ('sophia' meaning 'wisdom' in Greek) (Naess, 161). In this regards, ecology becomes a wisdom that considers matters from a much greater perspective.

One might argue that the seeming lack of a hierarchy in relation to the value of different lifeforms makes deep ecology somewhat ineffective and pointless. "If value resides everywhere, it resides nowhere, and it ceases to be a basis for making distinctions and decisions" (Gerrard, 22). Moreover, as deep ecologists view a considerable, but gradual reduction of the human population a necessity in

order to avoid environmental doom, they have often been accused of *misanthropy* (Gerrard, 22). However, if all lifeforms have equal value, the counter-argument would of course be that human population control is no different to any other type of environmental management. Nonetheless, although deep ecology is based on ecocentrism, some of its advocates allow exceptions. Admittedly Naess states that "Richness of kinds of living beings has value in itself", but he then adds that "Humans have no right to reduce this richness *except to satisfy vital human needs* [my emphasis]" (Naess, 161). Although this leans towards the anthropocentric stance that deep ecologists generally criticise shallow environmentalists for having, the fact that there is room for flexibility may sway otherwise less radical environmentalists to re-evaluate their position. There is, however, also scope for selective interpretation, as it remains unclear what exactly "vital human needs" encompass. This may, for instance, justify attempts to eliminate viruses that are harmful to humans, but it may be more difficult to rationalise if the perceived adversary happens to be a sentient mammal.

Ecofeminism

Another radical ecological position is that held by the so-called *ecofeminists*. In line with the deep ecologists, they regard the widespread anthropocentric dualist belief that humankind is distinguished from and superior to nature as the root cause of ecological problems. However, ecofeminists equally blame an *androcentric* attitude and persistent gender polarity in society. In other words, they believe the perceived inferiority and subsequent oppression of nature to be mirrored in the relationship between men and women. Ecofeminism thus equals the plight of nature with that of women, which suggests that feminists and ecologists essentially fight the same cause (Gerrard, 23). This shared link of domination, where oppression and denigration of women is comparable to the destruction of nature, is evidenced by the fact that, traditionally, women have been associated with nature (mother nature), passivity, emotions and submissiveness, whereas men have been connected in mind with culture, rationality, competitiveness and dominance (Gerrard, 23; Plumwood, 50). Moreover, the lesser physical strength of females has often been misinterpreted and misused as evidence of equally inferior cognitive abilities and mental strength.

Ecofeminists will nonetheless argue that the cause of oppression, whether of women or the natural world, is not the mere existence of differences.

> "[T]he underlying model of mastery shared by [anthropocentric and androcentric] oppression is based upon *alienated* differentiation and denied dependency: In the dominant Euro-American culture, humans are not only distinguished from nature, but opposed to it in ways that make humans radically alienated from and superior to it. This polarisation, or 'hyperseparation', often involves a denial of the real relationship of the superior term to the inferior" (Gerrard, 25).

The essence of both deep ecology and ecofeminism is therefore not the question of whether or not differences exist between humans and nature, or between men and women. There *are* differences, but the lack of identification with 'the other' is utilised to justify domination and oppression. According to ecofeminist Val Plumwood, the solution is to be found in recognition of both differences *and* similarities in the human/nature and man/woman relationship as this automatically undermines the legitimacy of anthropocentrism as well as androcentrism (Gerrard, 26). Preservation or even celebration of otherness is, in fact, a central element in ecofeminist thinking where biodiversity and a healthy balanced ecosystem are not only wanted for the non-human world, but also for the human world in relation to race, gender, age and social background. "Biological simplification, i.e., the wiping out of whole species, corresponds to reducing human diversity into faceless workers, or to the homogenization of taste and culture through mass consumer markets. […] We need a decentralized global movement that is founded on common interests yet celebrates diversity and opposes all forms of domination and violence. Potentially, ecofeminism is such a movement" (King, 20).

Plumwood's suggestion that we can eliminate anthropocentrism and androcentrism by focusing not only on dissimilarities, but also commonalities, is repudiated by more radical ecofeminists as this would also invalidate their own belief in the existence of an inherent, biological link between the female gender and nature, celebrated for instance through goddess worship. The problem is, that this implies a reversal of roles in which the female gender (as opposed to the male one) is perceived to possess superior qualities. This does not sit comfortably with neither Plumwood nor present day feminism which rather leans towards the notion that gender is a social construct, and that only the physiological aspects of the body really distinguish male from female. Gender identity in terms of *behaviour*, however, is a "performative accomplishment" or "cultural interpretation or sign" (Butler, 520). Beauvoir supports this view. She explains that being a woman (or a man) is a historical idea that the individual automatically feels compelled to comply with (Beauvoir, 68). Although, some radical ecofeminists believe that 'feminine' behaviour or way of thinking is based on innate qualities specifically linked to the biological, female sex (Gerrard, 24), on the whole, ecofeminists support the feminist notion that gender is culturally determined.

Eco-Marxism and social ecology

Culture and social structures are also at the centre of *eco-Marxism* and *social ecology*. These two positions share the view of ecofeminism that environmental issues are not caused by anthropocentrism alone, but likewise by humans dominating and exploiting other human beings

(Gerrard, 27-28). Although ecofeminism aims to attract attention particularly to the oppression of women, they recognise the fact that other groups in society are also being misused and capitalised on. This was clearly communicated in Ynestra King's call for greater human diversity, mentioned above. The overall objective of both eco-Marxism, social ecology and eco-feminism can thus be summed up as "a reharmonization of nature and humanity through a reharmonization of human with human" (Bookchin, 11).

Whereas social ecologists and eco-Marxists thus share important common denominators with eco-feminists, they disagree with deep ecologists on a couple of important points. As both the eco-Marxist and the social ecological philosophy are rooted in social political theory, they criticise deep ecologists for focussing solely on anthropocentrism and the man/nature dichotomy. This, they argue, creates a warped image of the human species being a uniform entity and it does not take into account economic and social differences and inequalities. In addition, eco-Marxists and social ecologists view the ecocentric monism of the deep ecologists as false because even though humans are a biological product, the species has evolved to an extent where its society and products can no longer be deemed 'natural'. As a means of explaining the persistent divide, eco-Marxists and social ecologists point to Marx' society-nature dialectic and his subsequent concepts of "first nature" and "second nature". The former represents the natural environment from which mankind initially emerged, whereas the latter describes all aspects and products of the highly complex society that is the habitat of humankind today and that continues to be undergoing a constant "natural" evolution (Gerrard, 29). The questions is, of course, to what extent "first nature" still exists. Even in a 19th century context, Marx expressed his doubts:

> "Animals and plants, which we are accustomed to consider products of nature, are, in their present form, not only products of, say, last year's labour, but the results of a gradual transformation, continued through many generations, under man's superintendence, and by means of his labour. […] The nature that preceded human history…today no longer exists anywhere…" (Pepper, 108).

This concern has only grown, and it has been an important factor in the emergence of the environmental movement, in the identification of the so-called Anthropocene era and in the development of ecocriticism. The increased interest in environmental issues that is accompanied by an uneasy feeling of urgency gives pertinence to the study of literature, such as that of Jack London. By exploring and reflecting on representations of the relationship between humankind and the natural world, we can gain insight into the link between Marx' first and second nature. This, in turn, can help us understand in which direction second nature is evolving and how we fit into this process.

Although eco-Marxists and social ecologists contrast politically with the cornucopians, they share the view that natural resources need not become scarce. Advanced technologies and innovative thinking will automatically open new avenues and create alternative demands whereby scarcity is avoided. Contrary to the cornucopians, however, eco-Marxism promotes a political structure of society where real demand, rather than ceaseless accumulation of wealth, determines production. This, they argue, will prevent ecological strain and potential shortages of natural resources (Gerrard, 28).

As in Marxism, eco-Marxism sees conflict between capitalist owners of commodities and the workers who are selling their labour for production of goods. The surplus goes to the capitalists, and workers find themselves in an exploitative situation. Inequality can therefore only be eliminated if the hierarchical, class-divided structure of society is altered. Eco-Marxists transfer this notion to environmental misuse too. "Class relations are the source of economic, social and political exploitation, and these, in turn, are what led to ecological exploitation and damage. The true, post-revolutionary, communist society will be classless, and when it is attained […] environmental disruption, economic exploitation, war and patriarchy will all wither away, being no longer necessary" (Pepper, 207-208). Social ecologists may agree that elimination of inequalities in society will impact positively on ecology and solve environmental issues too. However, they argue that the conflict goes beyond that of capitalist and worker, and that *all* power relations must be eradicated (Pepper, 208). This would necessarily mean a complete decentralisation of society in favour of a "nonauthoritarian Commune composed of communes" (Bookchin, 2). Social ecology is therefore also known as *ecoanarchism* (Best, 334).

Despite favouring social structures rooted in different ideologies, eco-Maxism and social ecology are closely related. Their views on ecology are also interwoven with that of eco-feminism as all three positions regard human intraspecies relations to be the cause and also the potential solution to pollution, global warming and other environmental issues. In this manner they differ from deep ecology, which ascribes these issues to the dualism man/nature. Jack London's depiction of the connection between the natural environment and humankind is of interest in different ways to these different ecocritical positions. I will explore this in the analysis. First, however, it is necessary to consider the term, *nature*, as it is often used indiscriminately although the meaning is highly inconsistent and dependent on cultural and historical contexts. As a result of this contextual reliance, I shall also explain the concept of the *Anthropocene*.

Nature and the *Anthropocene* – problematic terminology

Ecocriticism emerged in response to growing concern about humankind's impact on the environment. Perhaps not surprisingly, this coincided with the thesis that we had entered a new, geological era on Earth. This is now widely known as the Anthropocene epoch which is characterised by expansion and domination by humankind to the extent that the impact on the natural environment has become irreversible (Pavid). Whether human interference in biological, chemical and physical systems has indeed become so extensive that the Earth is at the beginning of a new geological epoch has remained a much contested question (Pavid). However, on the 35th International Geological Congress in Cape Town in 2016, the conclusion was drawn that a new geological era had indeed begun (Richter, 7). British ecocritic and professor of literature, Timothy Clark, identifies the year 1950 to be the commencement of the Anthropocene (Clark, 17). Considering that geological periods tend to stretch across millions of years, however, is seems immaterial whether the epoch of man is dated from the mid-20th century or the beginning of the 21st. The actual term, the 'Anthropocene', has also been contested. American environmental historian and professor of sociology, James W. Moore believes the term to be misleading. He argues that 'anthropo' refers to humankind as a collective whole with no differentiation between nations or social groups and that this wrongly implies that we are all equally to blame for the current climate crisis and level of pollution (Moore, 83). Moore's criticism is rooted in eco-Marxism as he argues that, throughout history, a powerful and affluent minority has continuously exploited both nature and the large, underprivileged and powerless section of humankind. "Capitalism was built on excluding most humans from humanity – indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, nearly all women, and even many white-skinned men […] They were regarded as part of nature […] and treated accordingly" (Moore, 79). These people were reduced to resources equal to those of nature, and Moore therefore argues that Capitalism is not an economic system but a way of organising nature (Moore, 80). He concludes that it would be more fitting to describe the new geological era "the Age of Capital" or the "Capitalocene" (Moore, 81). Even though Moore's argument has some weight, the term most commonly applied remains to be the 'Anthropocene'.

The Anthropocene is essentially a manifestation of humankind's excessive exploitation and domination of nature. Nature, however, is a rather imprecise term that can be more or less inclusive depending on context and perspective. Danish philosopher, Hans Fink, has listed a total of seven definitions of 'nature', where the distinctions between the different definitions mostly relate to the presence or impact of humans on the natural environment. Although Fink's classifications suggest an anthropocentric approach, his distinctions are of interest because they show the nebulousness of the term 'nature' and the importance of semantic clarity in discourse about the natural

environment. Without clarity, it would be impossible, for instance, to evaluate the relevance of Jack London's novels for the ecological debate in the US today, as it is necessary first to determine how the depicted animals and humans relate to the insentient natural landscape and whether they too are 'nature'. Fink proposes the following classifications of the concept of 'nature':

a) Untouched
b) Wilderness
c) Rural
d) Everything 'green'
e) The physical
f) The worldly
g) The Cosmos

"Untouched" or unimpacted nature signifies environments without any traces of humankind. Pollution in the form waste products or even small particles are, however, traceable across the globe on even the most inhospitable and inaccessible of locations, in the air, in water, soil and ice (Fink, 2). This is the reality of the Anthropocene era, and "untouched" nature does therefore no longer exist on Earth. The closest we get to unspoilt nature is what Fink calls "wilderness". Although wilderness areas are still impacted by contaminants, they are neither cultivated nor used regularly or systematically by humans, although hunting and fishing may take place at a very low scale (Fink, 2). Wilderness consists of vast, uncultivated areas with primeval forests, mountains, bogland or dessert, and although humans have expanded their presence in Alaska since London wrote *White Fang* and *The Call of the Wild*, there are still extensive areas of so-called wilderness to be found there. Fink's third classification of 'nature' is everything that is not urban. When 'nature' is defined as "rural areas", it includes forests, beaches, agricultural land, meadows as well as golf courses and small villages. With this definition of nature, it is simply everything that geographically lies beyond the reach of everyday, urban life (Fink, 3). Nature and culture almost merge, however, if nature is no longer contrasted with the urban environment, but instead is defined as "everything green" irrespective of the location. Fink's 'green' definition of nature includes gardens, parks, pot plants and pets, but also processed products from organic matter such as wood, leather and wool (Fink, 3).

Whereas the definitions above relate to our surroundings with focus on plant and animal life, Fink explains his "physical" classification of nature as a scientific perspective based on objectivity and natural laws. It includes everything from the smallest of particles to the largest nebulae (including humans) that are all governed by the laws of physics. Neither the subjective not

human thought is, however, included (Fink, 3). Nature can also be understood in a spiritual sense, where an external creative power has designed and constructed the earthly, physical world, consisting of both plants, animals and humans. This worldly kind of nature contrasts with the divine, the eternal and the miraculous (Fink, 3). Finally, nature can be all-inclusive and refer to simply everything within the Cosmos (Fink, 4).

The *more-than-human world* – an alternative definition

For ecocritical use, the problem with Fink's comprehensive list of possible definitions of 'nature' is that some of them include humans and others do not. In some other contexts this may be of little significance, but ecocriticism revolves around the relationship between humans and the natural world, so it is vital that man's inclusion or exclusion is communicated unambiguously. The word 'nature' does in itself provide no clarification, so it is necessary to explicate in each individual case. American ecologist and philosopher, David Abram, attempts to solve this impreciseness by introducing a different way of classifying all that is not human. He refers to this as *the more-than-human world*. Whereas Fink's distinction between different definitions of nature is based on physical matter, Abram's distinction between that which relates to human life and that which does not is based also on perceptions and sensations. He stresses that the human experience and sense of the world is no more important or valid than that of any other lifeform as we are interconnected and interdependent. Human culture, however, has distorted this relationship.

> "[As] our attention has been hypnotized by a host of human-made technologies that only reflect us back to ourselves, it is all too easy for us to forget our carnal inherence in a more-than-human matrix of sensations and sensibilities. Our bodies have formed themselves in delicate reciprocity with the manifold textures, sounds, and shapes of an animate earth—our eyes have evolved in subtle interaction with other eyes, as our ears are attuned by their very structure to the howling of wolves and the honking of geese. To shut ourselves off from these other voices, to continue by our lifestyles to condemn these other sensibilities to the oblivion of extinction, is to rob our own senses of their integrity, and to rob our minds of their coherence. We are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human" (*The Spell*, 23).

The more-than-human world thus refers to everything that is not human, including the experience and understanding of the world of these other lifeforms. But Abram's theory goes beyond living beings and it is important that we do not forget the "voices" of these other elements in nature such as mountains, wind or any plant however seemingly insignificant. In this

aspect there are certain parallels between Abram's notion of the more-than-human world and Heidegger's theory of *thingness* and perhaps for this reason, the German philosopher has occasionally been referenced in ecocritical contexts.

Heidegger's concept of *Thingness* in ecocritical context

Heidegger's theory is one of considerable complexity, but it is worth exploring as it proposes an interesting link between humans and their surroundings. According to Heidegger, the state of "existing" differs from actually "being". The latter requires interaction with humankind. In order for plants and animals to "be" or "show up", they therefore have to be registered by human consciousness and acted upon. Heidegger calls the space that facilitates this process between humans and their surroundings the "clearing". When humans enable the "being" or "thingness" of something, they in turn are "properly realised" (Gerrard, 31). Heidegger thus suggests a reciprocal relationship between the human frame of mind and the way in which materials, plants and animals "are". Although such a bond is also at the core of ecocritical thought, Heidegger's theory of thingness is of particular relevance to ecocriticism, because he suggests that human culture based on science and technology limits the manner in which things can "be" and what "thingness" they can express. Human knowledge is built on reason and expanded through experimentation, and this prescribes the means of expression, the identity or thingness of elements in the natural environment. "An experiment in the modern sense always first sets up a hypothetical framework. We set up the conditions and procedures in advance; only within them is nature allowed to answer, and it can say only yes or no. It must respond within our framework" (Gendlin, 271). Trees, stones, wolves, rivers or any other element in nature is thereby prevented from expressing their true thingness, which necessarily also means that humans block their own prospect of becoming properly realised. Although Gerrard finds the Heideggerian theory rather useless and wants to spare his fellow ecocritics "the disproportionate and unrewarding effort of reading Heidegger" ("Heidegger Nazism", 269), the notion of thingness should not be disregarded. Heidegger's depiction of humankind as a dominant force that is unwilling to allow elements in their surroundings to just "be" and express their true "thingness" finds resonance with several ecocritics. As indicated above with Abram's theory of the more-that-human world although he explains it in more accessible terms. Whereas Heidegger introduces the abstract concept of "thingness", Abram simply speaks of "other voices" and "other sensibilities" that we must not disregard. Nevertheless, his message remains very close to that of Heidegger (*The Spell*, 23). The same idea is found with other ecocritics too: "Nature *is* silent in our culture in the sense that the status of being a speaking subject is jealously guarded as an exclusively human prerogative" (Manes, 15). However, although human language

is unequalled in its complexity, Heidegger, Abrams and Manes all agree that humans have a duty to let things or elements in nature express themselves in their own special way, and that we are obliged to take notice. Abram sums up this sentiment in his brief assertion: "Are we humans unique? Sure we are. But so is everyone else around here" ("On Being Human").

It is evident from the above that 'nature' is a term of considerable ambiguity and Abram's 'more-than-human world' seems to be a suitable alternative. What is more, semantically the term is more current and in tune with the present day view on especially animals, but perhaps also plants. They do not merely exist, but confirm and express their existence with their individual voices. It would therefore be appropriate to favour Abram's term when the topic is the distinction between culture and nature - the human world in contrast to the more-than-human world. In the two Jack London novels which form basis for the analysis in this paper the two worlds, the human and the more-than-human one, culture and nature, often intersect and clash. Just as often, however, they merge. Animals are anthropomorphised, humans are zoomorphised, and neither state is necessarily static as the characters develop. This will be explored in detail in the analysis where I will apply both Abram's term, the 'more-than-human world', and Fink's more or less inclusive definitions of 'nature' as well as other seemingly synonymous turns of phrase. In each case I will, however, take great care to ensure that the meaning is clear from the context.

What is wilderness?

One aspect of the 'more-than-human world' that is particularly important both in relation to Jack London's novels but also in American ecocriticism is that of the *wilderness*. Fink's definition was one of uncultivated land that is not used regularly or systematically by humans, and the American organisation, The *National Geographic Society*, which dates back to 1881, proposes a similar meaning. "Wilderness areas usually lack roads, buildings, and other artificial structures. They provide a natural environment for plant and animal species, and allow scientists to study healthy ecosystems." However, they then add that although "very few places on Earth are complete, or pristine, wilderness, [a] wilderness can be reclaimed or restored, and the way a wilderness is managed can change at any time" (*National Geographic*). The idea of wilderness being *managed* may seem incongruous, but it depends on how this statement is interpreted. For example, the *Wild Foundation*, which is based in Colorado, mentions as a prerequisite for an area to be categorised as wilderness that it *must* be legally protected, which, paradoxically, could be regarded as an act of management or intervention (*Wild Foundation*). It is worth noting

that whereas some definitions of wilderness imply a dualism between humans and nature, other suggest a more monistic view. Fink, for instance, seems to consider the meaning of wilderness from the perspective of white, civilised society, where wilderness is a distant location that may be visited on rare occasions in the form of for example eco-tourism (Fink). In comparison, the *Wild Foundation* applies a broader perspective as it regards particular types of indigenous communities as part of the wilderness.

> [E]vidence of minor human impact, or indications of historical human activity does not disqualify an area from being considered wilderness. Nor must a wilderness area be free of human habitation: many indigenous populations live in wild areas around the world, often playing a key role in keeping wilderness intact and free of development. […] Indigenous use does not matter, so long as the relationship [with wild nature] is predicated on a *fundamental respect* for – and appreciation of – wild nature [my emphasis] (*Wild Foundation*).

The statement by the *Wild Foundation* specifies that human use of wilderness areas must reflect "fundamental respect". This means that human presence must not impact negatively on the biodiversity of plant or wildlife, nor must it encroach on or destroy the natural habitat of the latter. So far animals have only been mentioned in passing, as they are simply regarded an integral part of the more-than-human world. In *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, however, the reader is presented with both wild and domesticated animals. This distinction is relevant in relation to ecocriticism, because ecology generally focuses on animals in the wild, whereas pets and livestock have been absorbed into human culture where they hold a different status from animals in the wild. This differentiation is reflected in the human understanding of animal welfare where the rights of domesticated animals revolve around the safety and contentment of animals within environments provided by humans, whereas the protection of wildlife largely means preservation of natural habitats where animals can live and thrive without human interference (Gerrard, 140). In the analysis below, the focus is on representations of nature in London's two wolf novels. However, as has been established, this is more than just the landscape itself. It includes both animals and, at times, even humans, and both will therefore be elaborated on in the analysis. As the project takes an ecocritical approach and aims to disclose London's depiction of the relationship between humans and the more-than-human world, animals and humans in the *wilderness* will be given particular attention.

Changing perceptions of the wilderness

Humankind's relationship with the wilderness is far from stable and it has proven changeful through history along with cultural currents and expansion. As Gerrard points out, the concept of wilderness is of relatively recent human history as it would have been meaningless to even conceptualise when wilderness was all that existed. Only when environments that were shaped and managed by humans began to develop, such as agricultural areas and, later, urban environments, did wilderness as a term gain meaning. With the development of human culture and the environments that sprang from this, the wilderness necessarily had to give way. Many advocates of wilderness preservation today therefore regard the transition of our early ancestors from hunter-gatherers to farmers as a defining point in human history, marking it "a 'fall' from a primal ecological grace" (Gerrard, 60). It is impossible to know exactly how Palaeolithic man regarded his surroundings, but the earliest documents of Western Eurasian civilisation present the wilderness as a threatening force (Gerrard, 61).

Later, in Judaic scriptures, the wilderness is presented with some ambivalence. On the one hand, it is a place of tests and temptations from both Satan and God. In the dessert Satan thus tempts Jesus to test God and reject his faith (Matthew 4:1-11), and in isolation on a mountain God tests the loyalty of Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22:1-14). On the other hand, the dessert is also a place of refuge, for instance in the Exodus when Moses leads the Israelites into the wilderness to escape Egyptian oppression (Exodus 2:1-15). The connotation that the wilderness is a place of both trial and danger as well as freedom and redemption is found in other religious and spiritual beliefs too. The wilderness may be the setting for specific initiation rituals where strength, endurance and courage are tested, but it can also be a retreat that offers calmness and greater personal insight.

If cultivation of the land was the first fateful step towards humankind's alienation from the wilderness, then the second crucial step was the start of the scientific revolution. Rational thought and the reduction of the universe to individual parts that all worked according to set and explainable laws delivered the "decisive blow to the organic universe of our ancestors" (Gerrard, 61). In addition to scientific discoveries, geographical expansion impacted on the view of the wilderness. It should be conquered, tamed or eliminated since the enlightened human being was independent from nature. Rather than battling with the forces of nature, in the mid-17th century Descartes proposes that "by knowing the force and action by fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens, and all the other bodies that surround us, […] we might apply them […] to all the uses to which they are adapted, and thus render ourselves the lords and possessors of

nature. And this is a result to be desired" (Descartes, 24). Once humankind understands the forces of nature and can apply them as desired by Descartes, the wilderness seems less of a threat. It not only becomes controllable, it is also reduced to a soulless resource that can be utilised for production. The demand for such resources increased considerably in the wake of technological advancement and with rising capitalism (Gerrard, 62). Late 18th century a contrasting and more holistic view on nature and the wilderness emerged in the form of Romanticism (Sørensen, 301-302). A teleological view of nature became prevalent, and wilderness no longer needed conquering. Instead, the natural environment was regarded a living and soulful organism that together with humankind constituted a universal whole (Sørensen, 303). Romanticism was thus a reaction to a culture rooted in rational thought and to an increasing urban and industrial society with no appreciation of the wonders and the *sublime* in the more-than-human world. The sublime characterises an emotion and inner experience of the transcendence and vastness of a wild natural setting. For the Romantics this meant a feeling of awe and trepidation caused partly by heart-stirring beauty but even more so by the overwhelming and frightening power of nature. For that reason the wilderness was not perceived a suitable place for women to explore, and feminist critics have subsequently suggested that the sublime, "admired for its vastness and overwhelming power", is gendered and generally associated with masculinity. In comparison, beauty, which represents "smallness, softness and delicacy", is denigrated and linked with femininity (Gerrard, 64). Even as Romanticism gave way to Naturalism and Realism, wilderness enthusiasts such as Henry Thoreau, John Muir and Ralph Waldo Emerson, who all gained fame for their powerful descriptions of the American wilderness, exemplify the feminist point of criticism. What is more, these explorers of the wilderness were all white males.

In a paper revolving around representations of nature in Jack London's novels, it may seem irrelevant to speak of the European relationship with the wilderness and the more-than-human world during the Renaissance and the Romantic era. However, over the centuries exploration and colonisation of, for instance, the New World really took off, and the Europeans who settled on the other side of the Atlantic, brought with them whatever cultural currents dominated their native countries and had shaped their consciousness, including their view on nature and the wilderness. Settlers would find a much vaster wilderness in America than they had known in Europe, and especially life on the frontier required resilience. In order to cultivate newly claimed land, establish towns and build infrastructure, the wilderness had to be brought under control. By the mid-19th century, however, European Romanticism had influenced American art and literature and brought attention to the sublime in the American wilderness (Wolf). Often

regarded as a branch of Romanticism, the Transcendentalist movement also emerged. It advocated individualistic thinking and self-discovery through alternative lifestyles. Emerson is generally regarded the originator of American Transcendentalism, but the life choices and writings of Thoreau and Muir suggest that they too held the values of this movement. At the core of Transcendentalism was also the belief that the wilderness was a "pathway to intense, spiritual experiences" (Wolf). "Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me" (Emerson,13). A similar heightened emotional state produced by the sublimity of the wild can be found with the other writers, listed above, too. During his travels to Alaska, Muir experiences great exhilaration after admiring the view from the Glenora Peak. "The setting sun fired the clouds. All the world seemed new-born. Every thing, even the commonest, was seen in new light […]. The plant people seemed glad, as if rejoicing with me, the little ones as well as the trees, while every feature of the peak […] seemed to know the depth of my joy" (Muir, 80). Muir's holistic worldview and his recognition of plants, trees and mountains having individual "voices" exemplify Abram's theory of the more-than-human-world and his plea for people to open their ears and eyes to means of expression other than human ones. This is indeed what the Transcendentalists did. Roaming through woodland, Emerson takes great delight in the "occult relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. *They nod to me, and I to them* [my emphasis]" (Emerson, 13). The transcendentalists were thus open and receptive to the expressions of the wilderness, which in turn provided its human audience with intense, spiritual experiences.

Unlike Thoreau, Muir, Emerson and Marsh, Jack London has neither been classified a romanticist nor a transcendentalist. Rather, he belonged to the movement of Naturalism which influenced art and literature in the late 19th and early 20th century. Drawing from Renaissance belief in science and rationalism, Naturalist authors attempted to apply "scientific principles of objectivity and detachment to [their] study of human beings"(Campbell). Darwin's theory of biological evolution was another important source of inspiration for Naturalist authors, and much of their literature, including London's *Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, depicts how characters are essentially products of their surroundings. It is this connection between man and his environment that can make Naturalist novels, such as London's, relevant in eco-critical context more than a century later. Admittedly, there are significant differences. Naturalists explore the impact of the cultural, social and natural environment on the individual, whereas ecocritics focus on the natural environment and regard the relationship between this and

humankind as reciprocative. Nevertheless, the meaning of literature is not static as it is partly determined by the reader-response (Bennett and Royle, 12-13). The meaning of a work can thus alter depending on the cultural, historical and personal contexts in which it is consumed. London's early 20th century novels may therefore be interpreted differently by a 21st century ecocritical reader, than they did by London's contemporaries. They may likewise come to convey meanings that were not originally intended by the author.

Jack London differs on many levels from writers such as Thoreau, Muir and Emerson. Whereas London wrote Naturalist novels and short-stories, the others produced Romantic, non-fictitious books, journals and diaries of their personal experiences of the American wilderness. Yet, for a number of reasons, the American Romantic nature writers are part of the reason why London is relevant to the present day ecological debate. *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* are admittedly both scientifically experimentative in their exploration of how the environment shapes the individual, but despite these Naturalistic traits, the novels also contain extensive descriptions of sublime natural settings that have clearly sprung from the literary tradition established by Romantic, Transcendental nature writers such as Emerson and Thoreau. *The Norton Anthology* confirms this. It describes *The Call of the Wild* as a "profoundly naturalistic novel and an *intensely romantic fable*" with "a powerful current of *myth and romance* [my emphases]" (Reesman, 912, 9). Professor of American literature and curator of the Jack London Museum in Louisiana, Earle Labor, likewise brings attention to this contradiction in London's novels, which he interprets as "the creative tension between the logical and the scientific on the one hand and the irrational and mystical on the other" (Labor, 5). It is thus clear that London drew inspiration from the American Romantic movement and incorporated elements from it into his novels. However, nature writers such as Thoreau, Muir and others are not only important to the present project because of the inspiration Jack London drew from them. The wilderness they encountered and described in powerful terms is precisely the kind of nature that the Sierra Club and other US conservation societies aim to protect and preserve. If ecocritics want their research to reach beyond theorisation in the academic world and for it to lead to action in practical terms, collaboration with major environmental organisations would be a potential way to achieve this.

CONTEXT

<u>The Sierra Club and other key organisations driving environmentalism in the US</u>

The Sierra Club was founded in 1892 by John Muir and a small group of fellow Californians, initially with the objective "to explore, enjoy, and render accessible the mountain regions of the

Pacific Coast" (Slotten), while ensuring preservation of the wilderness of the Sierra Nevada. Following World War II, the organisation expanded its mission to include the rest of the US and membership numbers increased rapidly. It has been involved in the establishment of several national parks, including the North Cascades and the Redwood National Park in California. The organisation also lobbied for the *Wilderness Act* in 1964. In the late 1960s, the Sierra Club campaigned for plans and projects within the US Forest Service to become available to the public and for the opinions of the latter to be heard and taken into account. This was achieved and it is still part of the Forest Service policy today. Information on individual projects is easily found and accessed online so locals can engage in and express their views on individual cases ("Alaska Roadless Rulemaking").

In 2019, for instance, a proposal to exempt the Alaskan *Tongass National Forest Park* from the 2001 *Roadless Rule* was opened to comments from the public for 60 days. The case is worth considering here because it illustrates clearly the continued battle between capitalists and ecological campaigners and their opposing views on the value of the more-than-human world. The Tongass is the largest national forest and wilderness area in the US and it includes extensive, intact virgin temperate rainforest with a unique biodiversity of high ecological value ("Tongass National Forest"). However, the Roadless Rule was taken up for reconsideration in 2019, because it restricted the construction of new roads in the national park and prevented the undertaking of mining and logging projects. It also hindered an increase in tourism which could otherwise benefit local economy. Although not related specifically to the Tongass case, American poet, John Haines, has criticised the instrumental use of Alaskan wilderness areas. He describes the capitalist attitude as an "everlasting clamour for resource development, amounting almost to a hysteria that the least item on the agenda might be overlooked and the smallest parcel go unclaimed." He adds that "the innocence and enthusiasm of John Muir cannot be maintained in [such an] atmosphere" (Haines, 10). Some local residents in the Tongass area held a similar view and they argued that elimination of the "Roadless Rule" regulation would have the power "to greatly impact our ecosystem health. [L]ogging the Tongass would jeopardize a massive carbon sink. The construction of roads would fragment wildlife habitats and potentially reduce the biodiversity of our old-growth forest" (Guildersleeve). Despite such concern, the Trump administration backed the proposal to allow expansion of the infrastructure within the park. This outcome is perhaps not surprising, given Trump's profile as a businessman and his notorious rejection of global warming as a "hoax" (Guarino). However, the federal government under Democratic president Biden rolled back the decision on Tongass in January 2021 (Resneck; Gallego). This highlights the impact of the political landscape on the natural

environment, but without the backing from the general public, politicians in democratic societies such as the US cannot obtain or stay in power. If enough citizens express their wish for sustainable living, recyclable products, reduction of plastic and protection of the wilderness, politicians are compelled to listen or they will lose the support of the voters. The headline on the cover page of the Sierra Club's website is thus entirely appropriate: "Together, We Are Powerful" (*Sierra Club*). It should nevertheless be noted that in the US, Republican and Democratic voters differ in their attitude towards environmental issues. A survey covering the period from 1994-2016 shows that whereas Democrats are becoming more concerned and attempt to lead as environmentally friendly lifestyles as possible, Republicans actually became less concerned during the same period. In 2016 when asked whether the country should do "whatever it could to protect the environment", 90% of Democrats answered affirmative, compared to only 52% of Republicans. In 1994, 71% of Republicans had answered 'yes' to this question, so a decline to 52% is significant. It is possible that Trump and the hype surrounding his person and controversial politics at the time played a role in this drop, but even if other factors should have caused the decline, the survey clearly shows the impact that politics have on the environment. It therefore matters whether a Republican or a Democratic administration controls US government agencies such as *The Environmental Protection Agency*, *The National Park Service*, *The Forest Service* and *The Fish and Wildlife Service*. Consequently, the dedication and work of organisations such as *The Sierra Club* is important and it does make a difference. Through campaigns, lobbying, book publications and grassroot activities, they educate the population and pressure government to introduce and enforce the protection of the wilderness and the natural environment in general. To a certain extent, this is also the role of eco-critics in the arts and humanities. Their intended audience goes beyond the academic community and they can portray the more-than-human world in terms that are perhaps more accessible than scientific explanations. The Sierra Club has transformed since Muir founded it more than a century ago. Today it is not only the most powerful environmental organisation in the US, it has expanded its reach and gone global. With more than 1.4 million members, its mission is now to "protect the wild places of the earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems, and resources; and to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment" (Slotten). Despite their expansion, the Sierra Club has not forgotten Muir's original purpose of its foundation. In their vision, under the heading of "Our Wild America", the organisation clearly states their continued interest in the American wilderness. However, as shown in the example from the Alaskan *Tongass National Forest Park*, capitalist enterprises and a demand for resources will continue to threaten

wilderness areas in the US. It is therefore with a degree of mournfulness that Haines travels Alaska in the footsteps of Muir only to realise that culture has imposed on nature.

> "To read Muir's descriptions of the Southeast Alaska coast as it was [in the late 19th century], to recognize the places he stopped at and explored, and to sense the changes that have come to them, is for me a not entirely charming experience. In these drenched forests and cold, rich waters, we encounter for a last time the original abundance of life, a plenty of bird and fish, of tree life and animal variety. And we learn that we are looking at, and listening to, a world vanished in less than a hundred years" (Haines, 8).

The Sierra Club is merely one of numerous foundations and organisations who work tirelessly and often at a charitable basis to strengthen the rights of the more-than-human world in the US. Smaller organisations tend to focus on a particular aspect, such as reduction of air pollution, plastic consumption or food waste, or the protection of a specific area of wilderness or wildlife. Some also focus on education. The *Henry David Thoreau Foundation*, for instance, which was only established in the late 1990s, is a scholarship programme that aims to encourage and educate the next generation of American environmental leaders (*Henry David Thoreau Foundation*). However, as the name of the foundation indicates, the objective goes beyond supporting young talent in their pursuit of a degree in environmental studies. It aims for the individual student to develop a Thoreauvian appreciation of the more-than-human world.

A few of the larger and well-established environmental organisations and societies need mentioning here too, because together with the Sierra Club, they continue to shape and promote a particular view and understanding of the American natural environment. *Friends of the Earth*, for instance, was founded in 1969 by former executive director for the *Sierra Club* (*Friends of the Earth*). The organisation initially focused on the US, but it soon branched out to other parts of the world too. Another influential organisation, which has become increasingly outspoken about environmental issues, is the *National Geographic Society*, which was founded in Washington in 1888 (*National Geographic*). Admittedly, its interests span across various subjects such as archaeology, history, science, world culture as well as the natural environment, but it provides important facts and information that help educate the public on ecology. It is available via different media, but it is probably best known for its magazine publication, *National Geographic*, in which jargon is scarce and scientific matters are presented in layman terms. Although founded only 4 years ago in the UK, *Extinction Rebellion*, or *XR*, has rapidly spread and gained immense publicity and popularity globally. In line with the objectives of the original UK movement, the US branch "declare[s] non-violent rebellion against the US government for its

criminal inaction on the ecological crisis". XR recognises a link between environmental issues and discrimination against certain groups, and the organisation therefore supports, for instance, the Black-Lives-Matter movement as well (*Extinction*). Other organisations that are equally dedicated to improving the climate and the natural environment are *Earth Justice*, *American Forests* and *Conservation International*, and many others could additionally be highlighted. Moreover, the long list of established environmental organisations is constantly extended with new societies at grassroot level springing up, advocating environmental protection and conservation. It is this task that ecocritics wish to contribute towards by analysing and interpreting literary works that illustrate the relationship between humans and the more-than-human world. The purpose of these analyses is to inform, educate and create debate beyond the academic world. Whereas Thoreau and Muir have often been used in ecocritical studies, Jack London has been paid less attention. The analysis below, however, will reveal his relevance for the different positions that comprise ecocriticism and for the current environmental debate in the US.

LITERARY REVIEW

The interest in Jack London has been directed at both his oeuvre and the individual behind the author-persona. Several biographies are available on Jack London of which a majority are of recent date. *Jack London: An American Original* (2002) by American author Rebecca Steffoff is relatively concise. It mainly focuses on London's life, whereas his individual works are treated superficially. Editor Jay Williams' London-biography stands in sharp contrast to this. His *Author Under Sail: The Imagination of Jack London* (2014/ 2021), is a two-volume, meticulous study of both London and his work. Another comprehensive biography, *Jack London: An American Life*, was published in 2013 by Professor of American Literature and curator of the Jack London Museum in Louisiana, Earle Labor. A slightly different approach is found in the book *Jack London's Racial Lives* (2009). Written by professor of English at the University of Texas, Jeanne Campbell Reesman, the biography places particular focus on the issue of race in the author's life and in his writings. In addition to exploring the topic of race in a number of essays and letters, Reesman also analyses London's novel *Martin Eden*, in which he allegedly combines fiction with autobiographical elements.

London's oeuvre is extensive and it has attracted considerable attention from literary critics. For the current project, the most relevant secondary literature consists, of course, of studies of *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* and specifically those that explore their ecological aspects.

However, despite their volume, the majority of sources on London's work have as their focus London's place in American Naturalism. Amongst more recent publications are nevertheless also critical studies on Jack London's connection to ecology. Even when such sources do not explore specifically the two wolf-novels, they can still offer important input on London in ecocritical context. One example is American professor of English, Daniel Spoth's article *Atavism, Elementalism, and the Water / Culture Wars*. Spoth's analysis of atavism in London's short-story *A Relic of the Pliocene* is of interest to the present project partly because atavism recurs throughout *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, partly because Spoth draws an entirely different conclusion on the effect of atavism on the ecological message in London's work than the present project does. His thus perceives London to be a "shield and justification for exploitation of natural resources" (Spoth, 28). Bert Bender's article *Darwin and Ecology in the Novels of Jack London* depicts the author more favourably. Bender, who is professor of American literature, analyses three novels by London which he classifies as "London's three farming novels" (Bender, 108). With reference to Darwinian evolutionary theory, Bender concludes that although *Burning Daylight*, *The Valley of the Moon* and *The Little Lady of the Big House* all reflect an early 20th century perception of evolution and ecology, they emphasise the ways in which humans threaten the environment and the necessity of humans to adapt and identify new, sustainable ways of living (Bender, 131). Australian professor of American literature, John Bruni's book, *The Making of Popular Science and Evolution in Early 20th Century US-Literature and Culture*, also needs mentioning. It includes analysis of both *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* in which Bruni considers the significance of the wilderness for the American national identity. The relevance of London's representations of nature and the wilderness for the present-day environmental situation in the US has thus far not been adequately addressed in ecocritical studies.

ANALYSIS

The Call of the Wild and *White Fang*

Two novels – one plot

Jack London's two novels *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1906) are often analysed together as they revolve around similar characters who partake in plots that are almost identical, only reversed. What is more, the author himself intended the later novel to constitute a "companion" to *The Call of the Wild* (Stefoff, 72). In the present paper the two novels will therefore be analysed together. Author E.M. Forster has proposed that a *plot* is an expression of "causality" (Forster, 87) where one event leads to another, which again causes something else to

happen and so on. With a plot, the reader is not simply presented with different events arranged in their time-sequence; it requires causes and effects that explain the development of the story. When London is able to reverse the order of events in *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* respectively, the causes and effects he depicts must necessarily be interchangeable. These often consist of a meeting between nature and the wilderness on the one hand and nurture, culture and urban society on the other. Critics of London's novels generally interpret his novels as expressions of determinism and the manner in which the environment shapes the individual. However, if the plots and therefore also the causality presented in *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* are reversible, the link between the environment and individual must necessarily be a two-way connection. By analysing London's representations of the more-than-human world and the human world and not least the meeting between the two, I will show that these two novels do, in fact, depict a close, interdependent relationship between humankind and the more-than-human world. I will also explain how the depiction of this relationship bears relevance to present day ecocritical discourse and ecological issues in the US. But first a short summary of *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*.

Brief summary of the two novels

The Call of the Wild is set in the late 19th century and the opening chapter is set on Judge Miller's large estate where nature is controlled and the domesticated and pampered dog, Buck, leads a comfortable existence. However, the gold rush in Alaska and the Yukon has made large, strong dogs a valuable commodity, and the estate gardener sells Buck in secret. The dog is transported north on the train and ends up in Alaska. He is sold on several times to different owners who beat him and teach him the so-called primitive law of the club. Together with several other canine characters, Buck works as a sled dog, initially transporting mail over long distances, and later pulling a sledge for the party of a cruel and ignorant gold-hunter, named Hall. He is unfamiliar with the climate and the conditions of the vast Alaskan wilderness, but he blames the dogs for his own failings and beat them in frustration when they are too exhausted to continue. During one such occurrence, another man, John Thornton, claims and rescues Buck. Although Thornton warns Hal of treacherous conditions, the party of the latter continues their journey. Shortly after they all go through the thin ice of a lake and perish. Buck remains with Thornton, who treats him with kindness, and they develop a close bond. Despite a sincere sense of gratitude, fondness and loyalty towards his rescuer, Buck is drawn by the wilderness and he pairs up with a wolf. In the meantime, Thornton is attacked and killed by a group of native

Americans and when Buck returns to discover this, the dog mourns the loss of his human friend. For the first time in his life, Buck has no ties to the human world and he returns to the wilderness to join a pack of wolves and is said to *become* a wolf.

White Fang commences in the Alaskan wilderness where a pack of hungry wolves stalk two men and their sled dogs for several days. The wolves kill and devour the dogs one by one, and one of the men falls prey to the pack too. The subsequent chapters follow a she-wolf from the pack as she gives birth to a litter of cubs, of which only one survives. This male cub later receives the name White Fang. Initially, life in the wilderness, which is governed by the Darwinian notion of the survival of the fittest, is described in all its rawness. Pain, hunger, death are all part of everyday life. The wolf cub and its mother then join a camp of native Americans and it perspires that the she-wolf is biologically half dog. She is sold to cover a dept, and the cub initially flees into the wilderness. However, he misses human company and returns voluntarily to his human master. The latter appreciates the qualities of White Fang, but he shows no kindness and beats the young wolf when he disobeys. Like his mother, White Fang is eventually sold on because his Native American master has been introduced to and succumb to alcohol. The wolf's new owner is a sadistic, white man who enjoys beating and tormenting the animal who subsequently develops a deep hatred for the world. Here London shows clearly his belief in the environment shaping the individual. White Fang is used in illegal dog fights and remains undefeated for a long time until he is faced with a bulldog. The dog almost kills him, but White Fang is rescued by Weedon Scott who, against all advice from his assistant, Matt, is determined to tame the wolf. He succeeds through kindness, and even brings White Fang back to his father, Judge Scott's, large estate in California where the wolf gradually learns the rules of civilisation and becomes entirely domesticated. The transformation is so complete that the wolf instincts and the hatred he developed from the beatings by his previous masters, are fully extinguished.

The trouble with animal characters

The Call of the Wild and *White Fang* depict the experiences of the canine protagonists, Buck and White Fang respectively, and perhaps for that reason, the novels are generally classified as children's books. However, neither story was initially targeted at children. One might even question the suitability of the original, unabridged versions of the books for younger readers, given the degree of violence they contain. Before being released in book form in 1903, *The Call of the Wild* was published as a serial in one of the most popular newspapers in America at the time, *The Saturday Evening Post* (Stefoff, 72). In a similar fashion, *White Fang* was first printed in

The Outing Magazine in 1906 (Stefoff, 89). The intension of London was to show a wild animal developing and becoming tame in a civilised setting, and reverse ("The Other Animals"). Wolves and dogs seemed an obvious choice as the two species are genetically closely related. Today's domestic dogs are simply descendants from wolves that during Palaeolithic times scavenged in human camps and gradually formed a bond with people (Thomas, 13). The family connection between wolf and dog therefore makes the development of one to the other in London's novels seem plausible. What is more, both species are popular with humans. Dogs are loved for the companionship and loyalty they offer, and wolves hold a fascination for humans who associate them with strength and perseverance. In American culture the wolf has come to symbolise the "spirit of the wilderness" (Dewey and Smith). It figures in numerous myths, and products with wolf images are highly popular. For some national parks and reserves in the US, *wolf ecotourism* has even become a trend and a major source of revenue (Dewey and Smith).

The appeal of the canine protagonists in *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* is therefore not surprising, but non-human characters do inevitably present authors with certain challenges. E.M. Forster has suggested that protagonists are generally human simply because this allows the reader to relate to the psychology of the character and the world depicted. This argument obviously also holds for the author, who shapes his characters around his assumptions about other people and about himself (Forster, 55). Since authors are always human, the representation of any non-human character will necessarily get distorted by the author's human and cultural identity. As a result, animals are often *disneyfied*, which essentially means that they are depicted visually with the neotenic features of a human infant's large head and large eyes. The result is that animals are "denigrated as 'childish', thereby associating a dispassionate, even alienated perspective with maturity" (Gerrard, 141-142). From an ecological point-of-view this is clearly not desirable, as it renders animals inferior. It also creates a human culture in which animals with attractive physical appearances, large eyes and soft fur, are favoured over species with less appeal to humans (Gerrard, 142). If animals need to be anthropomorphised for humans to be able to relate to them, it becomes difficult for authors to create convincing and successful animal characters. In fiction animals are subsequently typically used symbolically or they are "little men disguised" (Forster, 54). London was indeed accused of producing animal heroes who were simply "men in fur" ("Nature Faker?"). In the so-called *Nature Fakers Controversy* he was one of a handful of American authors who were accused of misrepresenting nature and specifically the characteristics of animals. Naturalist John Burroughs and president Theodore Roosevelt both criticised London for anthropomorphising the animals in his books and writing "sham natural history" (Robisch, 187-188;). Admittedly, large parts of both *The Call of the Wild*

and *White Fang* reflect the perspective of the canine protagonists, and even if, at times, their thoughts seem human, it can be argued that this is the prerogative of authors of fiction. London refuted the label of nature faker and defended his representation of the animals in his novels by stressing his inclusion of comments on the reflective limitations of his canine protagonists.

> "Time and again, and many times, in my narratives, I wrote, speaking of my dog-heroes: "He did not think these things; he merely did them," etc. And I did this repeatedly, to the clogging of my narrative and in violation of my artistic canons; and I did it in order to hammer into the average human understanding that these dog-heroes of mine were not directed by abstract reasoning, but by instinct, sensation, and emotion, and by simple reasoning. Also, I endeavoured to make my stories in line with the facts of evolution; I hewed them to the mark set by scientific research, and awoke, one day, to find myself bundled neck and crop into the camp of the nature-fakers" ("The Other Animals").

Employing animal characters in fiction clearly creates obstacles. They have to be relatable to a human readership, but simultaneously they have to stay true to the traits of their species. In the context of Naturalism, it would be particularly difficult to strike this balance. London evidently believed his depiction to be scientifically defendable. To what extent he achieved this will be explored below, but first I will analyse his representation of the wilderness and habitat of the wild versions of his two protagonists.

The landscape of the wilderness

Although the settings in London's novels vary from late 19th century urban California to transient Alaskan gold-mining towns, Native American communities and not least the vast Alaskan wilderness, the latter is given particular attention. At the opening of *White Fang*, the setting is established, which immediately produces a particular mood.

> "Dark spruce forest frowned on either side the frozen waterway. The trees had been stripped by a recent wind of their white covering of frost, and they seemed to lean towards each other, black and ominous, in the fading light. A vast silence reigned over the land. The land itself was a desolation, lifeless, without movement, so lone and cold that the spirit of it was not even that of sadness. 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. It was the masterful and incommunicable wisdom of eternity *laughing* at the futility of life and the effort of life. It was the Wild, the savage, frozen-hearted Northland Wild [my emphases]" (*White Fang*, 5).

The passage contains many negatively loaded words, which creates a deep sense of unease. Adjectives such as “black”, “ominous”, “lifeless”, “lone”, “cold”, “mirthless”, “savage” and “frozen-hearted” are paired with equally sombre nouns like “desolation”, sadness”, “grimness” and “futility”. The sudden introduction of the noun “laughter” therefore initially seems incongruous. It recurs several times, which stresses its importance, but this does not appease the threatening mood because the laughter is oxymoronically “mirthless” and “more terrible than any sadness”. Moreover, through deployment of a simile, London likens the joyless laughter to “the smile of the sphinx”. This mythical creature is generally associated with wisdom, craftiness and terror, and in both Egyptian and Greek art, representations of the sphinx have been used mostly in funerary contexts (“Sphinx”). What is more, the sphinx is usually depicted with an enigmatic expression that makes it impossible to determine its intentions. In the passage above, the sphinx imagery only adds to the sense of doom. London then reveals the source of the underlying laughter to be that of eternity “laughing at the futility of life”, which reminds us that death is inevitable for all lifeforms including humans. What makes the laughter particularly effective in this passage, is the way in which it personifies eternity. This suggests that there is a presence or a power in the otherwise desolate landscape that takes pleasure in observing the futile battle for survival. The overall effect of this opening passage is a feeling of foreboding and even horror, and it is an entirely different presentation of the Alaskan wilderness than the one experienced by Muir. Whereas London’s conifers “lean towards each other, black and ominous”, Muir’s trees lean like “gray-bearded old patriarchs bowing low and chanting in passionate worship” (Muir, 19). Although Muir’s description relates to a stormy night spent in the woods, it lacks the gloom and threatening feeling that characterise London’s wilderness. In the latter, there may be a hint of a dispiriting laughter, but apart from this, there is only silence. In comparison, when Muir is roaming through the forest, “[t]he glad, rejoicing storm in glorious voice was singing through the woods” (Muir, 18). It is so overwhelming that Muir has to stop and “join the trees in their hymns” (Muir, 19). The contrast between the two descriptions is striking, and yet, they share a sense of sublimity. The application of figurative language adds a poetic tone to both representations of the wilderness, and although the exhilarated and rhapsodic mood displayed by Muir is entirely absent from London’s description, there is a similar degree of awe and command of respect for the natural setting. What is more, the sublime is not only a sensation caused by beauty. “The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of *horror* [my emphasis]” (Burke,

95). Although London's novels are generally classified as Naturalist literature, there are still elements of the romantic, the mystical and the sublime in them.

This mixture of awe-inspiring beauty and horror may have been the attraction of the hostile environment for the deceased man in the opening chapter of *White Fang*. Despite the apparent bleakness of the setting, a lone couple of men with a dogsled are transporting a body in a coffin across the wintry wilderness for a long-distance funeral. Such a journey poses dangers and it is straining both physically and emotionally. The colloquial language of the two men suggests that they are relatively uneducated, and running the dogsled is their means of subsistence. The conditions are harsh, and they are subsequently unappreciative of the sublimity of their natural surroundings. It transpires that the life-situation of the dead man had been entirely different to that of the two toiling sledgers who therefore cannot comprehend why the deceased would have wanted to come to Alaska in the first place. Pointing to the coffin, one of the men exclaims: "But we ain't got people an' money an' all the rest, like him. […] What gets me is what a chap like this, that's a lord or something in his own country, and that's never had to bother about grub nor blankets, why he comes a-buttin' round the God-forsaken ends of the earth – that's what I can't exactly see" (*White Fang*, 9). As the dead gentleman appears to have gone to Alaska for reasons other than necessity, he may simply have pursued the same emotional connection to the wilderness that also attracted Thoreau, Emerson, Marsh and Muir.

At no point in *White Fang* or *The Call of the Wild* is the tone similarly rapturous to that of the Romantic and Transcendental nature writers, but London's wilderness does include both benign and pleasant aspects too. One day early in the spring, one of the older wolves, a male referred to as One Eye, feels the first promise of spring.

> "[T]he April sun was blazing across the snow. When he dozed, upon his ears would steal the faint whispers of hidden trickles of running water. […] The sun had come back, and all the awakening Northland was calling to him. Life was stirring. The feel of spring was in the air, the feel of growing life under the snow, of sap ascending in the trees, of bud bursting the shackles of the frost (*White Fang*, 40).

The underlying sense of threat in the opening passage of the novel has dissolved. Twice the reader is told that the sun is shining, which immediately impacts on and lifts the mood. The noun "life" is also repeated, which draws attention to the word and suggests growth and continuance. By means of personification, London even implies that the landscape itself is alive. The trickling water from melting snow is "whispering" and the Northland is "awakening" and "calling". Other uses of figurative language add an almost lyrical flow to the description. The wordings "**sa**p **asc**ending" and "**bu**d **bu**rsting", for instance, contain both assonance and consonance.

Moreover, the cheerful passage concludes with a metaphor that signifies freedom. The aforementioned "bud" is not "bursting in itself, but is bursting "the *shackles* of the frost" [my emphasis].

The two descriptions of the wilderness stand in sharp contrast to one another, but in each case a particular mood is created through, for instance, careful application of figurative language. The tone is poetic in both passages and when read together, it becomes clear that the threat depicted at the opening of *White Fang* is not the wilderness itself but the challenging conditions that arise during winter. Before definitively drawing this conclusion, though, it is necessary first to examine the narrative perspective in the two excerpted passages and then to consider its impact on the two different portrayals of the wilderness.

Both *White Fang* and *The Call of the Wild* are written from third-person narrative perspectives, but the point-of-view varies from omniscience to perspectives that are temporarily limited to particular characters. With regards to narrative perspective, the passage, in which spring has arrived, is relatively straight forward. The wilderness is described as perceived by One Eye. *He* listens to the trickling water, and *he* is the one the Northland is calling out to. Over a couple of pages, the reader follows this old male wolf as he wakes in his cave, registers the activities of spring outside and finally ventures out to go hunting. Even though there is still snow on the ground, the wilderness poses no threat to the wolf. In fact, springtime means more prey and the mood of the wolf is subsequently reflected in a positive description of the wilderness. In comparison, the point-of-view of the gloomy, opening passage of *White Fang* is less transparent. It is told by an undramatized, third-person, omniscient narrator, who should not be confused with Jack London, the real person. At best, the undramatised narrator can be equalled with the implied author, but even then, "most authors are distant from even the most knowing narrator in that they presumably know how "everything turns out in the end" (Booth, 156). Nevertheless, the third-person narrator of the gloomy excerpt appears to be very knowing. "[S]ilence reigned over the land" and "[i]t was the masterful and incommunicable wisdom of eternity" (*White Fang*, 5). The conditions of the Alaskan wilderness are depicted as if viewed from a perspective with no spatial or temporal limitations, but having established the characteristics of the hostile landscape, the following paragraph informs us that "there *was* life, abroad in the land and defiant" (*White Fang*, 5). Two men travelling with a dogsled are then introduced. Their names are revealed to be Henry and Bill, and the use of direct speech further narrows the distance between the reader and the two characters. A pack of hungry wolves soon start to stalk them, but the perspective remains that of the two humans. In an attempt to keep the wolves at bay, the men build a fire. "[Bill] pointed toward the wall of darkness that pressed about them from

every side. There was no suggestion of form in the utter blackness; only could be seen a pair of eyes gleaming like live coals. Henry indicated with his head a second pair, and a third. A circle of the gleaming eyes had drawn about their camp" (*White Fang*, 9).

As established above, the blithesome depiction of the wilderness in the spring reflects the point-of-view of One Eye, the wolf. The picture of the wilderness as threatening and dangerous, at the opening of the novel, however, reflects a human perspective; partly that of Henry and Bill, partly that of the third person narrator, whom we have to assume is human too. It is true that the wintry wilderness challenges both humans *and* wolves. Prey is scarce and the wolves are terribly undernourished, but as these animals are part of nature and the wilderness, death is a matter-of-fact occurrence and simply part of the existence. The hint of laughter and the unease described in the opening passage is therefore rather a reflection of humankind's refusal to accept this fact. "[M]ost ferociously and terribly of all does the Wild harry and crush into submission man – man, who is the most restless of life, ever in revolt against the dictum that all movement must in the end come to the cessation of movement" (*White Fang*, 6). As discussed above, through most of humankind's history, the wilderness has been associated with danger, simply because it was beyond human control and therefore posed a threat. However, technological advancement and scientific knowledge have enabled management and domination of the wilderness, so it has transformed from an environment that humans fought to conquer to one that requires our protection. In this manner Descartes' 17th century declaration has come true as humankind is now to a large extent "the lords and possessors of nature" (Descartes, 24). When Harry and Bill find themselves surrounded by wolves in *White Fang*, the sense of doom which is felt in the opening passage rests on the fact that the two men are out of ammunition. The development of weaponry has enable humans to fend off any potential predator in the animal kingdom, but as Harry and Bill discover, without armament and in a state of nature, the balance has shifted. Consequently, Bill falls prey to the wolves, and Harry is only recued because another party of men with riffles arrive.

The differing perceptions of the wilderness depending on whether the point-of-view is that of man or that of wolf is significant. They suggest that man and wolf view the wild, natural landscape differently. Harry and Bill regard the wilderness as an environment from which they are detached and separate. The wild is, in other words, an adversary in a dualistic human/nature world. The "vast silence" (*White Fang*, 5) that governs the landscape therefore not only serves the literary purpose of creating the feeling of a lurking threat, with reference to Heidegger and Abram, it also suggests that the two men are deaf to the voices and expressions of the natural elements all around them. However, as the two sledgers have no ammunition left, their position

in the more-than-human world is suddenly not that different from that of their distant Palaeolithic ancestors. They are no longer (to use Abram's words) "hypnotized by a host of human-made technologies" and their ears are again "attuned by their very structure to the howling of wolves […]" (*The Spell*, 23) Admittedly, Bill refuses to acknowledge the gravity of the situation and, still "hypnotised" by the belief in human superiority, he runs into the darkness with a rifle and their three remaining cartridges. This is not enough to fend off the wolves, though, and he is killed by the pack. Realising this, Harry becomes aware of his own biology and his interconnectedness with the more-than-human world.

> "[H]e discovered an appreciation of his own body which he had never felt before. He watched his moving muscles and was interested in the cunning mechanism of his fingers. […] Then he would cast a glance of fear at the wolf-circle drawn expectantly about him, and like a blow the realization would strike him that this wonderful body of his, this living flesh, was no more than so much meat, a quest of ravenous animals, to be torn and slashed by their hungry fangs, to be sustenance to them *as the moose and the rabbit had often been sustenance to him* [my emphasis]" (White Fang, 25).

Rather than being overwhelmed by disbelief and failing to accept the situation, the last line of the quotation demonstrates Harry's realisation that humankind is no more unique than any other species ("On Being Human"). Thoreau expresses the same view in his publication *Walden*. "No human being will wantonly murder any creature, which holds its life by the same tenure as he does. The hare in its extremity cries like a child. I warn you, mothers, that my sympathies do not always make the usual phil-*anthropic* distinctions" (Thoreau, 204). Both London and Thoreau seem to suggest that once in the wilderness, humans are reminded of their biological link to these surroundings and the distance between animals and humans subsequently decreases.

<u>Wolves, dogs and other animals in the wilderness</u>

A number of animal species, such as lynxes, squirrels, ptarmigans, weasels, even mosquitoes, are found in Jack London's wilderness, but at the centre of the plot are the wolves and wild dogs. Inspired by Darwinism and science, London aimed to convey the animals in the wild without anthropomorphising them. "I have been guilty of writing two animal-stories—two books about dogs. The writing of these two stories, on my part, was in truth a protest against the "humanizing" of animals" ("The Other Animals"). When depicting the thought processes of the animals in the narratives, London therefore carefully explains how they differ from those of humans.

> "Had the cub thought in man-fashion, he might have epitomized life as a voracious appetite, and the world as a place wherein ranged a multitude of appetites, pursuing and being pursued, hunting and being hunted, eating and being eaten, a chaos of gluttony and slaughter, ruled over by chance, merciless, planless, endless. But the cub did not think in man-fashion. He did not look at things with wide vision. […] The law was: EAT OR BE EATEN. He did not formulate the law in clear, set terms and moralize about it. He did not even think the law; he merely lived the law without thinking about it at all" (*White Fang*, 63-64).

The wilderness is depicted as a place of "voracious appetite" and "gluttony", but neither is a sign of greediness. They are linked to the innate instinct to stay alive. With the capitalisation of the law of nature, "EAT OR BE EATEN", London brings to the foreground the Darwinian theory of evolution through survival of the fittest. As a carnivorous creature, the wolf cub has to kill to feed, and he does therefore not "moralize about it". If he had, he would in fact be thinking in "man-fashion", as morals are a cultural construction of humankind. Experiments suggest that higher animals have a sense of fairness, but this does not inhibit selfish tendencies or the survival instinct that is provided by nature. Morality requires the ability to make ethical distinctions and then to act in accordance with these. This is only really seen in animals who have been taught rules by humans. The animal does therefore not necessarily *feel* wrongness or shame, but is acting in accordance with the rules because of learnt behaviour (Hauser, 309-314). London even suggests that moral thinking would be disadvantageous in nature. In *The Call of the Wild* when Buck learns the reality of life in the wilderness, he begins to steal food from the other sledge dogs to ensure his own survival. This marks "the decay of going to pieces of his moral nature, a vain thing and a handicap in the ruthless struggle for existence […]. [W]hoso took such things into account was a fool, and in so far as he observed them, he would fail to prosper" (*The Call*, 27-28). As morality is based on human ethics, the killing of animals by other animals in the wilderness can be deemed neither wrong nor cruel. As London shows, there is no evil intent on behalf of for instance the predatory wolves. The purpose of killing is simply to feed and survive and, to a greater extent, to form part of evolution in the ecological system. Death is therefore the inevitable outcome of life, and the demise of a number of different characters (animal and human) is presented succinctly and without sentiment. This is seen, for instance, when the cub ventures into the wilderness on his own for the first time and encounters a female weasel. Defending her young, the weasel almost finishes the cub, but his mother arrives in the last moment and kills the mustelid. "Then, between them, mother and cub, they ate the blood-drinker, and after that went back to the cave and slept" (*White Fang*, 59). From a human perspective, this is hardly the sleep of the righteous, but as morality is non-existent in the

wilderness, London is simply demonstrating the law of nature and he makes no distinction between animals and humans in this regard. In The *Call of the Wild*, when the inexperienced party of prospectors go through the ice and die, there is no sentiment. The episode is observed by Buck and Thornton.

> "Dog and man watched [the sled] crawling over the ice. Suddenly, they saw its backend drop down, as into a rut, and the geepol, with Hall clinging to it, jerk into the air. […] Then the whole section of ice gave way and dogs and humans disappeared. A yawning hole was all that was to be seen. The bottom had dropped out of the trail. John Thornton and Buck looked at each other" (*The Call*, 78-79).

The occurrence is then given no more attention. Similarly to the incident with the weasel, the fatal accident is described as the matter-of-fact result of weakness. In the latter case, this weakness is the ignorance of the implicated individuals. The detached tone used in these episodes may or may not have been a conscious narrative decision on London's behalf, but it accentuates the conditions and the law that govern the wilderness.

As shown above, London intended to depict his animals as realistically as possible. Having killed his first prey, White Fang the cub therefore feels exhilarated, but he does not reflect on this sensation. Instead the narrative voice explains and comments on the cub's behaviour.

> "He was realizing his own meaning in the world; he was doing that for which he was made – killing meat and battling to kill it. He was justifying his existence, than which life can do no greater; for life achieves its summit when it does to the uttermost that which it was equipped to do" (*White Fang*, 56).

In an attempt to stay true to science, London's animals are therefore neither cute nor disneyfied. In terms of physical appearance, many of them have scars or disfigurements sustained during clashes with rivals and prey, and their behaviour is neither childish nor particularly endearing. They are simply wild animals killing or getting killed. However, as has already been mentioned, London's two dog novels are contradictory at many levels, and despite the author's claim to observe science, Buck and White Fang are both occasionally anthropomorphised. The most obvious example is White Fang learning to laugh with his master in a "good-natured, bantering way" (*White Fang*, 172). Previously human laughter has only made him angry, but as a sign of his transformation into a fully domesticated and civilised animal, White Fang develops a sense of humour that he even expresses in a human fashion.

> "At first [White Fang] was dignified, and the master laughed the harder. Then he tried to be more dignified, and the master laughed harder than before. In the end, the master laughed him out of his dignity. His jaws slightly parted, his lips

> lifted a little, and a quizzical expression that was more love than humour came into his eyes. He had learned to laugh" (*White Fang*, 172).

Atavism as a link to distant ancestors

London also deviates from conventional science in another way. He modifies the meaning of the concept of biological *atavism*, which formed part of Darwin's theory of evolution. Biological atavism is essentially a genetic reversion or regression to an ancestral or earlier evolutionary type. Darwin proposed that "with mankind some of the worst dispositions, which occasionally without any assignable cause, make their appearance in families, may perhaps be reversions to a savage state from which we are removed by many generations" (Bergman, 32). Although atavism is now largely associated with *genetic* reappearances of ancestral traits, Darwin's idea that it could also affect the mental state of an individual is picked up by London, but the author takes the theory one step further and makes it an almost spiritual phenomenon and a conscious memory. There are multiple examples in the two novels of Buck, White Fang and some of the other canine characters experiencing a connection with distant ancestors. This is demonstrated for instance when a pack of dogs encounter the wolf, White Fang, and instantly fear him.

> "Not alone with their own eyes did they see the wolfish creature in the clear light of day, standing before them. They saw him with the eyes of their ancestors, and by their inherited memory they knew White Fang for the wolf, and they remembered the ancient feud" (*White Fang*, 112).

The most obvious example of Londonian modification of atavism is found in the very title of the first of the two dog novels, *The Call of the Wild*. The "call" that eventually causes Buck to return to the wilderness to join a pack of wolves is more than just an instinct that has lain dormant during his upbringing in the human world. The evolutionary link between wolf and dog is rather depicted as an actual memory that stretches across time.

> "The domesticated generations fell from him. In vague ways *he remembered back to the youth of the breed*, to the time the wild dogs ranged in packs through the primeval forest and killed their meat as they ran it down […] And when, on the still cold nights, he pointed his nose at a star and howled long and wolflike, it was his ancestors, dead and dust, pointing nose at star and howling down through the centuries and through him [my emphasis]" (*The Call*, 29).

Initially, Buck attempts to resist the pull of the wilderness, but when his human companion, Thornton, is killed by a group of Native Americans, the dog gives in to the call. He mourns the

loss of Thornton, but he also feels released from human control. “The last tie was broken. Man and the claims of man no longer bound him” (*The Call*, 116).

> “Buck was wildly glad. He knew he was at last answering the call, running by the side of his wood brother toward the place from where the call surely came. *Old memories were coming upon him fast*, and he was stirring to them as of old he stirred to the realities of which they were the shadows. He had done this thing before, somewhere in *that other and dimly remembered world*, and he was doing it again, now, running free in the open, the unpacked earth underfoot, the wide sky overhead [my emphases]” (*The Call*, 105-106).

Buck has basically returned to the type of existence that his distant canine ancestors enjoyed. London himself kept dogs as pets, but his description of Buck’s sense of exhilaration presents almost an animal liberationist point-of-view. Buck is not only “wildly glad”, the passage implies that his previously domesticated self, although safe and content, was unfulfilled at a subconscious level. The sense of freedom he now experiences in the wild is accentuated by the fact that he is “running free in the open, the unpacked earth underfoot, the wide sky overhead”. There are no constraints; he can “run” and he can do so “freely”. What is more, the landscape is “open” and above him the sky is “wide”, so his freedom is truly limitless. As has been pointed out, London was not a “pure” Naturalist, and the above passage and London’s use of atavism in general exemplify the “powerful current of myth and romance” that has been said to underlie *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* (*The Norton Anthology*, 9).

London has been classified as an author of “ecological fiction [that] does not necessarily foreground its ecological concerns, but contains and reveals these concerns nonetheless” (Robisch, 188, 177). His descriptions of the landscape and the animals in the wilderness are powerful, and although the law of nature is presented as unforgiving and unsentimental, there is no evil intent. In nature survival or death are matter-of-fact occurrences. London’s interpretation of atavism is arguably not in line with scientific research, but his modification of the theory of atavism enables him to overcome the obstacle of time in relation to evolution. Measured against the duration of a standard human life, evolution is an extremely slow process. As we cannot experience the phenomenon as it unfolds, it is easy to forget the dynamic quality of life, of different species, and their link to the wilderness. By bestowing the dogs and wolves with a memory that extends across many generations and reaches back to the lives of distant ancestors, the reader is reminded that domesticated animals are not naturally a part of human culture. They have been moulded into filling particular roles in human society. Through atavism, however, London creates a link to ancient times, and the reader is reminded that, domesticated

or not, animals are inherently part of nature. "[Buck] was older than the days he had seen and the breaths he had drawn. He linked the past with the present, and the eternity behind him throbbed through him in a mighty rhythm to which he swayed as the tide and seasons swayed" (*The Call*, 85).

What makes London especially interesting in an ecocritical context, however, is his extension of this view to include humans as well. In *The Call of the Wild*, Buck not only remembers his canine ancestors. His memory includes that of primeval man whom he sometimes sees when he stares into the flames of the fire. This man is a creature with mattered hair, a slightly bent, hairy body and he is armed with a stick with a heavy stone attached to it (*The Call*, 54-56). The more Buck reconnects with the wilderness, the more vivid the memory of this man becomes.

> "[T]hey walked by the beach of a sea, where the hairy man gathered shell-fish and ate them as he gathered […] Through the forest they crept noiselessly, Buck at the hairy man's heels; and they were alert and vigilant, the pair of them, ears twitching and moving and nostrils quivering, for the man heard and smelled as keenly as Buck. The hairy man could spring up into the trees […] in fact he seemed as much at home among the trees as on the ground; and Buck had memories of nights of vigil spent beneath trees wherein the hairy man roosted, holding on tightly as he slept. And closely akin to the visions of the hairy man was the call still sounding in the depths of the forest. It filled him with a great unrest and strange desires" (*The Call*, 102-103).

Buck's memory of early man reminds the reader that just like the dogs and wolves, humans too are biologically connected to nature and the wilderness. Thoreau too alludes to this evolutionary link in *Walden*. When a small groundhog crosses his path in the forest, he feels "a strange thrill of savage delight, and [is] strongly tempted to seize and devour him raw" (Thoreau, 202). Reflecting on the experience, Thoreau realises that in addition to a civilised and spiritual self, he also has "an instinct toward […] a primitive rank and savage one" (Thoreau, 202). Bender suggests that it is exactly by examining this *human* animal founded in Darwinian ecological thought that London's writings become a response to the ecological crisis (Bender, 109).

Contrary to Bender, Daniel Spoth criticises London for telling "the tallest of […] tall tales" and for endorsing exploitation of natural resources (Spoth, 36, 28). His indictment is based on London's short-story *The Relic of the Pliocene*, which was published in 1901. It is worth mentioning here because London uses atavism to much the same effect in the short-story as in both of the wolf-novels. At the opening of *The Relic of the Pliocene*, a stranger suddenly arrives in the camp of a first-person narrator deep in the Alaskan wilderness. The stranger owns a pair of unusual skin boots which he claims have been made from the hide of the last mammoth in the

world, which he himself killed. The hunt supposedly lasted so long that eventually his clothes were sheer rags. Armed with just a simple hand-axe, he presents an image of himself that is not similar to that of early man. The stranger further explains that "it was a hunt as might have happened in the youth of the world when cavemen rounded up the kill with hand-axe of stone" (*A Relic*). This blurs the exact time of the incident. The stranger explains that he wanted to kill the mammoth partly to revenge his dog whom the enormous pre-historic creature had trampled to death, partly for food. Spoth reads the story literally and views the hunt as an expression of perceived human superiority and arrogance (Spoth, 36). He bases this on the fact that the stranger overpowers the mammoth with just an axe and by outwitting it. Although Spoth points to the atavistic elements in the short-story, he fails to recognise how they serve to overcome the element of time and tie the present to the past. The "relic" of the Pliocene consists literally of the boots of mammoth skin. However, the stranger who has appeared out of nowhere and who addresses his listener as "a young man who has travelled little", seems to be somehow linked to a distant past as well. He uses "archaic vernacular" (*A Relic*), has moved across time to confront the last mammoth of the Pliocene age and is back in the narrator's present to tell his story. Just like the pre-historic man that Buck sees in the flames of the fire in *The Call of the Wild*, the stranger who kills the mammoth reminds the reader of the biological roots of humankind and its close link to the natural world. This is confirmed at the end of *A Relic of the Pliocene* when the stranger declares that the chief virtue of the boots "lies in that they will never wear out" (*A Relic*). This statement is essential to understanding the purpose of London's use of atavism, because the boots essentially represent the past and the foundation of what has become the present. They are a permanent link to the past equivalent to the wolf-instinct that lies dormant but has not been wiped out in Buck. Metaphorically neither the mammoth boots nor the instincts of the wild in the dog can therefore be obliterated.

At the outset of *The Call of the Wild*, Buck is unaware of a void in his existence. "Since his puppyhood, he had lived the life of a sated aristocrat; he had a fine pride in himself, was ever a trifle egotistical, as country gentlemen sometimes become because of their insular situation" (*The Call*, 7). Not until he finds himself in the wilderness is he able to hear the call and find true freedom. The excerpt above suggests that this is applicable to humans too. We may have evolved and created complex societies with entirely different laws and value systems than those found in the wilderness, but just like the pampered domesticated version of Buch finds freedom in the wilderness, London asks us to remember our connection to nature too. The "call" that stirs dormant instincts in Buck and that even evokes memories of the existence of his distant ancestors is the same voice of the natural world that Abram believes has been drowned out by

human civilisation. “To shut ourselves off from these other voices […] is to rob our own senses of their integrity” (*The Spell*, 22). The “call” is therefore perhaps also just another description of the overwhelming experience of the sublime that Thoreau, Muir and other nature writers attempt to translate into words. Buck’s intense sensation in the wilderness is an instinctual call, whereas the same experience in humans is typically interpreted as appreciation of aesthetics.

Yet, London does not see an unsurpassable gap between humans and animals. Both title and content of his article, *The Other Animals* from 1908, suggest as much. The title implies that the article is about animals *other* than humans. The article is essentially a counterattack on John Burroughs and Roosevelt for labelling London a “nature faker”. Their dismissal of him is allegedly based on the belief that any animal below a human is an automaton whose actions are mechanical or mere reflexes (*The Other Animals*). London disagrees and he uses the article to disclose the faults in especially Burroughs’ line of argument. He then concludes with a sardonic attack on Burroughs’ character.

> “To [Mr. Burroughs], despite his well-exploited and patronizing devotion to them, the lower animals are disgustingly low. To him, *affinity and kinship with the other animals* is a repugnant thing. He will have none of it. He is too glorious a personality not to have between him and the other animals a *vast an impassable gulf*. The cause of Mr. Burroughs’s mediaeval view of the other animals is to be found, not in his knowledge of those other animals, but in the suggestion of his self-exalted ego. In short, Mr. Burroughs’s *homocentric* theory has been developed out of his *homocentric* ego” [my emphases] (*The Other Animals*).

London’s dislike for Burroughs and the worldview he represents is palpable, and in attacking him, London indirectly declares himself to be the exact opposite. In contrast to Burroughs, he thus recognises a human “affinity and kinship with the other animals” and he sees no “impassable gulf” between the two. By repeating and thereby stressing the “homocentric” position of Burroughs and dismissing it as an expression of his ego, London communicates his own objection to anthropocentrism. The link between humans and animals is shown, for instance, in the memory that Buck has of early man in *The Call of the Wild*. The characteristics of this early human resemble those of an animal as he is described as being hairy, agile and climbing trees effortlessly. In the narrative present London then proceeds to depict the fully evolved human being that still resides, however, in the wilderness. Unlike the incoming gold-hunters, the indigenous American population are part of the wilderness, and also here London shows an affinity between humans, animals and the landscape.

Indigenous peoples in the wilderness

The definitions of the wilderness presented above, did not stipulate total absence of human life. The *Wild Foundation*, for instance, stated that "Indigenous use does not matter, so long as the relationship [with wild nature] is predicated on a fundamental respect for – and appreciation of – wild nature (*Wild Foundation*). When exploring London's representation of humans in the Alaskan wilderness, the focus will therefore not be on those who have left civilisation for instrumental use of the wilderness, prosperity from natural resources or the business opportunities that follow such enterprises. The focus will instead be on the indigenous population whose lifestyle and culture have developed within the wilderness setting. In *White Fang*, the native American characters live in temporary camps that are easily moved and that cause no lasting natural damage. They hunt what is required in order to stay alive, and during periods with limited game, only the stronger individuals survive, whereas the old and the weak starve to death (*White Fang*, 102). These native Americans are also the first humans that White Fang encounters.

> "The cub had never seen man, yet the instinct concerning man was his. In dim ways he recognised in *man the animal* that had fought itself to primacy over *the other animals* of the Wild [my emphases]" (*White Fang*, 65). Just like in his written response to Burroughs' criticism, London's reference to "man the animal" versus "the other animals" in his novel once again stresses humankind's biological link to other species. Such allusions to Darwin's theory of evolution are plentiful in both *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*. In the latter, the wolf protagonist thus thinks of the two-legged creatures as "man-animals", and the members of the native American tribe that White Fang reluctantly yields to, carry animal names such as "Gray Beaver", "Salmon Tongue" and "Three Eagles" (*White Fang*, 67).

Although White Fang settles with humans voluntarily, the chapter in which he does so is titled *Bondage*, which suggests a relationship of inequality and founded on human mastery. The young wolf becomes the property of Gray Beaver, whose character in many ways reflects the characteristics of the wilderness itself. As argued above, nature is neither evil nor cruel. Life and death are matter-of-fact events in a continuous cycle rooted in "the law" that the fittest survives (*White Fang*, 63). In the human family unit that White Fang is absorbed into, Gray Beaver sets the rules, which in many ways resemble the matter-of-fact law of nature. As argued above, nature is not intentionally cruel, and the same can be said about Gray Beaver. He does administer physical beatings to both White Fang and the dogs in the camp regularly, but these punishments are delivered only when someone breaks the rules. From an animal rights perspective, the actions of Gray Beaver are both violent and inexcusable, but White Fang

respects Gray Beaver's judgement and experiences a sense of fairness in the objective and unemotional approach of the man. This is exemplified, for instance, when a pack of dogs attack White Fang, and Gray Beaver intervenes and beats them back with a club. "Although there was no reason in [White Fang's] brain for a clear conception of so abstract a thing as justice, nevertheless, in his own way, he felt the justice of the man-animals" (*White Fang*, 69). For this reason he also accepts the rough treatment that he himself is subjected to at times, and in a detached, unemotional manner, a bond of mutual acceptance and respect slowly forms between the wolf and the native American.

> "The months went by, binding stronger and stronger the covenant between dog and man. This was the ancient covenant that the first wolf that came in from the Wild entered into with man. […] The terms were simple. For the possession of a flesh-and-blood god, he exchanged his own liberty. Food and fire, protection and companionship, were some to the things he received from the god. In return, he guarded the god's property, defended his body, worked for him, and obeyed him. The possession of a god implies service. White Fang's was a service of duty and awe, but not of love" (*White Fang*, 97).

White Fang is now no longer a wild wolf, and he is subsequently referred to as a "dog". As such, he has begun the process of domestication. Despite the wonder and awe that he experiences when watching the people go about their business in the camp, using tools and making fire, White Fang comes to realise that there are much stronger and more powerful people in the world. When Gray Beaver hears of the gold rush, he travels to the temporary towns of the prospectors in order to trade with them. He brings White Fang, who senses that his master is a mere "child-god among these white-skinned ones" (*White Fang*, 110).

Viewed from a 21st century perspective, the representation of the native American characters in London's two wolf-novels is far from politically correct. Gray Beaver is not only an inferior "child-god"; he is a "savage god" who rules "savagely", and this is accentuated when his primacy is likewise described as "savage" (*White Fang*, 94-95). London elaborates on his choice of phrase by explaining that the native American administers justice with "a club" and "the pain of a blow", and that he rewards good behaviour "not by kindness, but by *withholding* a blow [my emphasis]" (*White Fang*, 95). Gray Beaver is thus not shaped on Rousseau's image of the *noble savage*, whose existence in harmony with nature bestows indigenous people with a gracious and almost childish innocence. Rousseau goes on to claim that shielded from the values of civilisation, "it is neither the development of the understanding, nor the curb of the law, but the calmness of their passions and their ignorance of vice that hinders [noble savages] from doing ill" (Rousseau, 22). Although this portrayal of indigenous tribal people in general gained popularity after Rousseau, it was rarely

applied to native Americans. Thus, in 19th century American fiction negative representations of so-called savage Native American characters far outweighed positive ones, and the "good Indian" was typically depicted as an exception to the rule, who had learned and embraced the ways of white Europeans, and who subsequently served to form a dramatic antithesis to the many "bad Indians" (Ellingson, 194).

The idea of the "good" and the "bad" native Americans was not only found in fiction, however. In Muir's account of his travels to Alaska in the 1880s, some white inhabitants of a small village warns the traveller "that the Indians [are] at bad lot, not to be trusted" (Muir, 16). Defying the warning, Muir soon enjoys the company of the local indigenous community. However, despite taking delight in their hospitality, his depiction of them is patronising of today's standards. It does, however, reflect the sentiment at the time of writing. Through the use of both similes and metaphors, Muir communicates his perceived connection between native American culture and nature. They are "laughing and chattering in natural animal enjoyment", "singing and humming like heavy-laden bees" and the children stand "around the fire staring like half-frightened wild animals" (Muir, 26-27, 107). In addition to this, Muir also accentuates his sense of cultural superiority by including a statement by Chief Shakes in which the tribal leader pays homage to white, European culture. "In everything the ways of the white man seem to be better than ours. Compared with the white man we are only blind children, knowing not how best to live either here or in the country we go to after we die" (Muir, 166).

In *White Fang*, the natives are much less amiable and subservient, which may be because they are experienced mostly from the perspective of the wolf. Gray Beaver is neither a reflection of the noble savage, nor an exclusively "good" or "bad Indian", and although London describes Gray Beaver's person and actions as "savage", the native American eventually falls victim to exploitation and deception by white people. Initially, Gray Beaver has prospered and accumulated considerable wealth from trading within the white community of prospectors. However, when he refuses to sell White Fang for dog-fighting, the interested party introduces him to alcohol and ensures that he becomes addicted to the liquid. This individual, nicknamed Beauty, not only causes the financial and physical ruin of Gray Beaver, in the end he takes White Fang as payment for alcohol and that way gains what he wanted all along. In contrast to Gray Beaver, Beauty takes great pleasure in beating the wolf. "Beauty Smith enjoyed the task. He delighted in it. He gloated over his victim, and his eyes flamed dully, as he swung the whip or club and listened to White Fang's cries of pain" (White Fang, 118). The other white men in the small town likewise enjoy the suffering when White Fang is made to participate in dog-fights. In this way, London draws a visible line between nature and culture, or the existence in the wilderness and that in so-called civilised society. Where nature is matter-of-fact

and is based on the law of “EAT OR BE EATEN”, civilisation is founded on other, more complex values, and whether you survive or succumb, prosper or fail, is not necessarily determined by physical superiority. What is more, whereas it can be argued that a sense of fairness and justice and the contrasts to these may be found in nature, in civilised society morality and therefore also cruelty and altruism are also components of life.

The exploitation of Gray Beaver and the subsequent instrumental use of White Fang reflect both the ecofeminist and the eco-Marxist position. If both Gray Beaver and the wolf represent the wilderness, then the exploitation of them must necessarily mean exploitation and annihilation of their natural selves and of the more-than-human world. In *White Fang* both of these characters are overpowered by and absorbed into white culture. Whereas Gray Beaver held a respected position in his tribe, he becomes a powerless drunk in civilised society. Exploitative behaviour and the lack of respect from the white men that Gray Beaver trades with simply becomes his downfall. Similarly, White Fang is taunted and abused and almost dies for the sheer entertainment of the prospectors. Even when white, heroic character, Weedon Scott, eventually saves White Fang and provides him with kindness and love, the wolf has to adapt to civilisation, which means that he has to suppress his instincts of the wild. The fate that meets the two representatives of nature, White Fang and Gray Beaver, is therefore, at a small scale, a reduction of the wilderness.

The issue of exploitation and prejudice against indigenous Americans is perhaps even more contentious than that of other ethnic minorities in the US. One of the major problems is that part of the history of natives Americans is tied up with the history of European expansion across the continent. Life on the frontier was testing and it required extreme resilience, endurance and enterprise. The wilderness had to be conquered and controlled and this included the native population. Frontier life and the values it required, hard work and self-reliance, are an important part of the white American cultural heritage and the evolution of white identity in the US (Reid, 6). It has been romanticised in both literature and films, and with a few exceptions, the primary interest has been the expanding white civilisation. From such a perspective, an opposing and hostile native population would automatically turn into the antagonist that, justifiably, could be killed or forcibly moved into reservations to give way to white civilisation (Ellingson, 195). In the latter half of the 20th century increasing demands for civil rights for minorities in America included those of Native Americans. However, similarly to black Americans, Hispanics, Latinos and other ethnic minority groups who continue to experience prejudice, bigotry and even enmity in the US (to the extent that it has given rise to the *Black Lives Matter* movement), rather than abating, the discrimination against native Americans is considerable and it has only grown under the presidency of Donald Trump (Reid). Part of this is rooted in the former president’s personal grievance with and jealousy of native

Americans. In the 1980s and 90s Trump invested in several large casino projects that failed, whereas similar, rival enterprises run by native Americans thrived. Trump's bias in this matter was signalled symbolically when a painting of early 19th century American president, Andrew Jackson, was hung in a prominent spot in the Oval Office only days after the commencement of the Trump administration (Reid, 4). Jackson overtly expressed his view on the native population as an obstacle to white expansion, and in 1830, he addressed Congress by asking rhetorically "[W]hat good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic?" (Jackson, 1). Subsequently, he signed the *Indian Removal Act*, which resulted in forced removal of people, confiscation of land and the death of many in the process. The purpose was not only to clear the way for the physical expansion of civilisation, but also "to separate the Indians from immediate contact with settlements of whites" (Jackson, 1). In the latter half of the 20th century this historical episode was finally labelled genocide, and yet Trump hailed Jackson as a president with a "great history" (Reid, 3-4). Whereas there is considerable focus in the media on discrimination against black Americans, the inequality experienced by the native American population receives less attention. Although Trump only held office one term, his casual application of damaging rhetoric, for instance when he referred to Elizabeth Warren as "Pocahontas", will continue to affect native Americans negatively for years to come (Reid, 8). "Trump and the United States are part of a wider trans-American movement (contemporaneous and historical) which has consistently ignored, overruled, relocated, disenfranchised, intimidated and marginalised Indigenous peoples. [C]enturies-old colonialist processes continue to unfold" (Reid, 139). These issues are highly relevant for ecocriticism and especially so for ecofeminists and eco-Marxists for whom exploitation of people is intertwined with the destruction of the natural environment. There is certainly indication of a link between oppression of particular groups of humans and elimination of the more-than-human world. Jack London's depiction of Gray Beaver as an integral part of the wilderness that is exploited and destroyed by white culture, is mirrored in Andrew Jackson's insistence that "forests" and "savages" must give way to the expansion of civilisation.

Representations of nature in Jack London's human world

The Call of the Wild and *White Fang* are predominantly set in the wilderness or in small communities on the edge of the wilderness, but the two novels also contain descriptions of nature that is under full human management and that has been moulded to reflect human culture and values. The family home that Buck spends his puppyhood in and the home that White Fang eventually ends up in are almost identical. They both consist of large, affluent Californian country

estates in Santa Clara Valley owned by a Judge Miller and a Judge Scott respectively. In this regard, London has not been particularly imaginative, but the close similarity also helps tie the two novels together.

> "The house was approached by gravelled driveways which wound about through wide-spread lawns and the der the interlacing boughs of tall poplars. […] There were great stables, where a dozen grooms and boys held forth, rows of vine-clad servants' cottages, an endless and *orderly* array of outhouses, long grape arbours, green pastures, orchards, and berry patches. [Buck] carried the judge's grandsons on his back, or rolled them in the grass, and guarded their footsteps through wild adventures down to the fountain in the stable yard, and even beyond, where the paddocks were, and the berry patches" (*The Call*, 5-6).

This idyllic setting is a sharp contrast to the wilderness. It has been landscaped and although trees and plants are growing there, all vegetation is entirely managed and has been allotted specific places in an orderly fashion (Bruni, 63). It is therefore not only the "array of outhouses" that is "orderly", but the entire setup. Even water is not left to run freely, but is confined to a fountain that determines its flow. It is a safe and predictable environment where a walk to the stable yard or "*even* beyond" to the paddocks and the berry patches with the two human children becomes a "wild adventure". The definition of nature on Judge Miller's property is what Fink classifies as "everything green". It includes the extensive grounds with their trees, bushes, potted plants, wildlife, livestock and pets. Nature and culture are closely entwined. Being born a domestic dog, Buck has been moulded into life in civilisation in the same way as the landscape around the property. Plants, trees and animals grow, thrive and are well-maintained, but their existence is entirely controlled by humans and, with reference to Abram's theory, their individual voices have been entirely silenced. It is only when Buck is removed from this restricted environment and human mastery altogether that his instincts awaken and he hears the "call".

In a reverse development, the wild wolf, White Fang, becomes domesticated and finds security with Judge Scot's family. "He no longer lived in a hostile environment. Danger and hurt and death did not lurk everywhere about him" (*White Fang*, 172), but he has to learn the rules of human civilisation and they require of him that he changes his otherwise instinctual behaviour.

> "Life was complex in the Santa Clara Valley after the simplicities of the Northland. And the chief thing demanded by these intricacies of civilization was control [and] restraint. [They] demanded of him instant and endless adjustments and correspondences, and compelled him, almost always, to suppress his natural impulses" (*White Fang*, 168).

Despite the presence of death and danger in Alaska, life in the Northland was based on "simplicities". The law was restricted to "EAT OR BE EATEN" and all behaviour was instinctually shaped around this one decree. In California White Fang has to learn the much more complex laws of civilisation. He can only chase and kill certain wild animals but never livestock or pets, and he cannot roam freely on the property of others. Despite learning quickly and flourishing, there remains about him a "suggestion of lurking ferocity, as though the Wild still lingered in him and the wolf in him merely slept" (*White Fang*, 171). The "call" of the wilderness with its promise of a natural existence has become dormant, but it is still there.

Evolution or devolution for London's canine protagonists?

Considering the two novels in unison, the personal developments and changes of situation for Buck and White Fang basically go full circle. Buck is a family pet in California that becomes wild and joins a pack of wolves in Alaska, and White Fang is a wild, Alaskan wolf that is absorbed into human civilisation and becomes the tame pet dog of a Californian family. In an ecological context, this inevitably raises the question whether one of the depicted developmental processes is more favourable than the other. Certainly, they can also be interpreted as depicting progression and regression, or evolution and devolution respectively, but the question remains which is which. London himself favoured the second novel in the pair, *White Fang* (Stefoff, 89), but this does not mean that the author found White Fang's domestication a happier outcome and a better fate than the one that befalls Buck in the wild. London's preference may simply rests on the fact that *White Fang* was a reworking of *The Call of the Wild*, which he felt allowed him to make the already popular novel even better. It is also possible that the author could identify with the closeness between the character, Weedon Scott, and the domesticated wolf since London too was devoted to the canine companions in his own life (*The Other Animals*). With reference to White Fang, professor John Bruni claims that "London is committed to a narrative of animal domestication that echoes the taming of the wild frontier, a process that transform nature into a resource" (Bruni, 61-62). However, when close-reading the two novels and especially when comparing the outcome for the two canine protagonists, London does not seem to press for taming of animals instrumental use of the wilderness. Only Buck finds true contentment. At the end of *The Call of the Wild*, he reconnects with the wilderness and runs freely under the open sky. Buck may have reverted to the lifestyle of his ancestors, but London presents this development as positive in the sense that the dog is stronger, more content and is no longer dependent on humans. Paradoxically, by returning to an earlier more natural state of existence, Buck thus evolves or progresses from an ecological and environmental

perspective. London, in other words, portrays evolution as a naturally regressive force (Bruni, 64) White Fang, on the other hand, ends up leading a sheltered existence in the care of a loving family, but he has to suppress his natural instincts and give up his wild wolf identity in return. This dulls his natural senses and makes him weaker ecologically as he relies on the care and protection of humans. With reference to this, Bruni points out that "this process, love between companion species (human and dog) is depicted as both a natural and unnatural act" (Bruni, 71-72). From such a perspective*, The Call of the Wild* reflects the more positive development, whereas the wolf-protagonist in *White Fan*g regresses to a state of human dependency and domination. Rousseau's description of the difference between natural and social existence seems applicable to White Fang's development too.

> Although, in this state [civil society], he deprives himself of some advantages which he got from nature, he gains in return others so great, […] his feelings so ennobled, and his whole soul so uplifted, that, did not the abuses of this new condition often degrade him below that which he left, he would be bound to bless continually the happy moment which took him from it for ever" (*The Social Contract*, 9).

The developments that the two canines go through in *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* take these animals from one extreme state to another. At the outset of *The Call of the Wild* Buck is fully domesticated and plays carefully with the children in the household, but despite his sheltered upbringing, he develops into a wolf-like creature that is both wilder and more fierce than the real wolves.

> "The Yeehats are afraid of the Ghost Dog, for it has cunning greater than they, stealing from their camps in fierce winters, robbing their traps, slaying their dogs, and defying their bravest hunters. Nay, the tale grows worse. […] Hunters there have been whom their tribesmen found with throats slashed cruelly open and with wolf prints about them in the snow greater than the prints of any wolf. […] It is a great, gloriously coated wolf, like, and yet unlike, all other wolves. [H]e 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" (*The Call*, 118-119).

It is an extreme transformation. Buck is now described as a "wolf" and as the leader of his pack. He "slays" dogs and "slashes cruelly open" the throats of the hunters from the Yeehat tribe. He is also said to be singing a "song of the younger world", which essentially means from a time before human civilisation when the distant canine ancestors of Buck shared their lives in the wilderness with the primitive man-animal of Buck's atavistic visions.

White Fang's development is the exact opposite. From the outset, he is stronger and more resilient than his siblings, and he is "a fierce little cub" that has "bred true to the straight wolf-stock" (*White Fang*, 46-47). Leaving the wilderness and the mastery of Gray Beaver, the wolf is moulded by Beauty Smith into "a more ferocious thing than had been intended by Nature" and he becomes "the enemy of all things, and more ferocious than ever" (*White Fang*, 120, 122). Despite spending considerable time in this abusing environment, once rescued by Weedon Scott and brought to California, White Fang adapts to an extent that seems implausible given his past life. He is even allowed around the children in the family although "all his life he had disliked children. He hated and feared their hands" (*White Fang*, 164). Nevertheless, "he yielded to the master's children with an ill but honest grace, and endured their fooling as one would endure a painful operation. When he could no longer endure, he would get up and stalk determinedly away from them. But after a time, he grew even to like the children. Still he was not demonstrative. He would not go up to them" (*White Fang*, 164).

The changes that both Buck and White Fang undergo seem exaggerated and unlikely, but they serve to remind the reader of an undeniable link between nature and culture. The transformation in the two canines seems to exceed what is possible in just one generation of dog or wolf. In the case of White Fang, he comes to illustrate the entire history of the domestication of the wild wolf from Palaeolithic times to present day, but in the cause of a single wolf-life. Buck, in turn, makes an equally evolutionary journey in which he escapes the grasp of human culture and civilisation. The transformation is no less extraordinary than that of White Fang as Buck does not just become a feral or wild dog. He evolves into a "gloriously coated *wolf* [my emphasis]" (*The Call*, 119). London may have intended to adhere to science in his representation of animals and the natural world in his novels, but he manipulates the temporal aspect and with considerable effect. He speeds up evolution and presents the reader with a graspable image of the full process. This is coupled with the numerous examples of atavism, which further blurs the obstacle of time. Along with White Fang and Buck, the reader gets the impression of cutting across time from the present to the past where the distant ancestors of both canines and humans seem almost tangible and not so distant after all. In the context of ecocriticism, this gives rise to thoughts about the future, the distant future of the Earth and the immense responsibility that rests on the human species in that respect.

Already in 1864 Marsh penned his concern about the permanent impact humans have on the more-than-human world and on the Earth's ecosystems.

> "[M]an is everywhere a disturbing agent. Wherever he plants his foot, the harmonies of nature are turned to discords. The proportions and accommodations which ensured the stability of existing arrangements are overthrown. […] The earth was not in its natural condition, adapted to the use of man, but only to the sustenance of wild animals and wild vegetation. […] [T]he

> destructive agency of man becomes more and more energetic and unsparing as he advances in civilization, until the impoverishment, with which his exhaustion of the natural resources of the soil is threatening him, at last awakens him to the necessity of preserving what is left" (Marsh, 37-41).

More than 150 years later, humans in the US and the rest of the world have begun to awaken to the reality of the Anthropocene. The emergence of ecocriticism is just one reflection of this change in outlook. Its role is predominantly one of communication, and together with the literature and other cultural artifacts that they analyse, ecocritics aim to create awareness, change attitudes and help alleviate the pressures from human culture on the natural environment. *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* are examples of eco-fiction that can help ecocritics achieve this, irrespective of the position of the latter within the ongoing environmental debate. The two novels do not reflect a view on the environmental situation that can be described as purely deep ecological, ecofeminist or eco-Marxist. Rather, there are elements in the books that are relevant to all these stances. With indirect references to Darwin's theory of evolution and by means of atavism, London conveys the biological connection between humans and the more-than-human world. He traverses extensive spans of time and connects the distant past with the present. He shows how the deep instinct of the wild remains present in both Buck and White Fang, and this necessarily also suggests that the instincts of early man have not been extinguished in present-day humans either. In fact, London opens *The Call of the Wild* with a brief poem that expresses the central, ecological theme of both wolf-novels and the deep connection between not only animals and their natural habitat but also humans and the more-than-human world.

> "Old longings nomadic leap,
> Chafing at custom's chain;
> Again from its brumal sleep
> Wakens the ferine strain" (*The Call*, 5).

By quoting these few line from John Myers O'Hara's poem *Atavism*, London suggests that culture and civilisation constitute shackles that prevent living beings in the human world from accessing their true, original selves. However there is hope for both humans and animals in the civilised world that they may reconnect with their natural selves as deep within the individual there are dormant elements from an earlier existence in the wild. These, O'Hara says, create "longings" that are slowly working on bursting the "chain". Portrays evolution as a naturally regressive force. At the end of *The Call of the Wild*, Buck exemplifies this process. He is no longer bound to civilisation or humans, and his development is therefore depicted more favourably than White Fang's. Buck hears and responds

to “the call” and discovers true freedom, whereas White Fang has to suppress his wild instincts in order to accommodate to civilised living.

The Call of the Wild and *White Fang* both convey ecological awareness and appreciation, and the more-than-human world is depicted as having inherent worth, much in line with the positions of deep ecology, ecofeminism, eco-Marxism and social ecology. Although the representation of Gray Beaver is both caricatural and derogatory of today’s standards, the exploitation of the Native American by white incomers is clearly depicted as human domination and abuse of other humans. Ecofeminism and social ecology regard such inequality to be the root cause of environmental destruction, and London seems to express a similar view. Bert Bender agrees. London explores the “key evolutionary - and therefore ecological - questions of [his] day” of which one was the evolution of race (Bender, 109). Although many of the ecological issues and relationships that troubled London at the beginning of the 20th century have become redundant or been overshadowed by different environmental problems, his depiction of exploitation is still relevant to the present-day ecological debate (Bender, 109). This is demonstrated in *White Fang* where both Gray Beaver and the wolf protagonist are associated with the wilderness. The natural aspects of their identities are, however, eliminated when they get caught up in civilisation. Although in very different ways, they both end up in inferior positions under the domination of white culture.

Female animals and humans in the wilderness and in civilisation

With regards to ecofeminism, there is one more aspect of London’s two wolf-novels that needs analysing. It concerns the representation of females in the wilderness and in civilisation respectively. This point is not added as a mere afterthought here at the end. I have purposely chosen to treat it separately because the point of interest lies in the *comparison* of the females in the two opposing environments. It would therefore be ineffective to incorporate the female aspect in the analysis above, where the two environments are analysed individually.

The Call of the Wild and *White Fang* are dominated by male characters. This is also the case with those of London’s short-stories that are set in the Alaskan wilderness (or at sea), and it is hardly surprising since the work of prospectors and seafarers at the turn of the 20th century was both physically demanding and extremely taxing. Acceptable social conduct also differed for men and women, and independent ventures in the wilderness were perceived unsuitable behaviour for women. This subsequently created male-dominated environments. Consequently, ”London has often been identified with masculinity, individualism, and virile fiction” (Stasz, 847). It is an aspect of

London's writings that has often been highlighted. In his ecocritical study of *White Fang*, John Bruni dedicates an entire chapter to the analysis of the wilderness as representing white, masculine dominance and as a symbol of the national narrative of frontier-life and progress. In comparison, civilisation in the safe setting of California represents weakness and the female (Bruni, 61-62). I wish to approach the aspect of gender differently. I will not view it not as a metaphor or reflection of 19th American national consciousness, but from a 21st century perspective, simply consider the depiction of specifically females in the wilderness and in civilisation respectively. My choice is based on the fact that there is no great variation in the male characters from one environment to the other. The female characters, however, display very different traits.

Although a vast majority of the characters in London's two wolf-novels are male, the books are not entirely devoid of female characters. The mother of White Fang, for instance, plays a central role in the early part of the novel where she provides the title for one of the chapters, *The She-Wolf*. She is exceptionally clever and crafty, and holds the respect of the other wolves in her pack. She is the driving force in the gradual elimination of Bill and Henry's sled dogs and eventually also of Bill, and her gender reveals nothing of the "smallness, softness and delicacy" that has traditionally been associated with femininity (Gerrard, 64).

> "[The she-wolf] looked at [Henry and Bill] in a strangely wistful way, after the manner of a dog; but in its wistfulness there was none of the dog affection. It was wistfulness bred of hunger, as cruel as its own fangs, as merciless as the frost itself. […] She had snarled as she sprang away, baring her white fangs to the roots, all her wistfulness vanishing, being replaced by a carnivorous malignity that made [Henry] shudder" (*White Fang*, 18, 25-26).

Although the she-wolf looks at the two men in a "wistful" manner, it is not a sign of weakness but of hunger. "He was the food, and the sight of him excited in her the gustatory sensations. Her mouth opened, the saliva drooled forth" (*White Fang*, 25). In the excerpt above, adjectives such as "cruel", "merciless" and "carnivorous" coupled with the nouns "fangs" and "malignity" complete the picture of a female creature that is neither small, soft nor delicate. Later when she raids some traps set out by Native Americans, her male companion, One Eye, is frightened of the human-made contraptions. "[He] shank down to the snow and crouched, snarling threats at this thing of fear he did not understand. But the she-wolf coolly thrust past him. She poised for a moment, then sprang for the dancing rabbit" (*White Fang*, 37). The she-wolf is not only confident, she is self-reliant. Eventually, One Eye is killed by another female animal-character that shows no mercy or softness either. His opponent is a lynx with hungry kittens, and having defeated One Eye, the lynx drags the wolf carcass back to her lair to feed to her young (*White Fang*, 49). As a cub, White Fang also nearly gets

obliterated by a female creature. He encounters a weasel and soon realises that although she is physically small, she is "so savage! He was yet to learn that for size and weight the weasel was the most ferocious, vindictive, and terrible of all the killers of the Wild" (*White Fang*, 59). In the wilderness in a state of nature, London presents males and females as individuals with strengths and weaknesses irrespective of their gender, but there *are* differences. The she-wolf, for instance, is the one who lures the male sled dogs away from the safety of the campfire so the pack can kill and eat them, and she achieves this by utilising her sex. In the day-to-day existence in the wilderness, however, neither gender is depicted as specifically dominant or exploitative of the other.

The representation of females in the world of civilisation differs entirely. After White Fang has become domesticated, he prevents an aggrieved convict from harming Judge Scott, but the wolf itself gets dangerously injured during the attack. The judge's personal physician is called who declares that the animal is unlikely to survive. Judge Scott then suggests that they employ a trained nurse to care for White Fang, but this is "indignantly clamoured down by the *girls*, who themselves undertook the task [my emphasis]" (*White Fang*, 181). These are not children, but young women, but the reference to them as "girls" signifies their inferior position within the family unit. The term also insinuates immaturity or childishness, which only seems confirmed when the women time and again exclaim in a chorus "The Blessed Wolf!" This is combined with "[h]and-clapping and pleased cries" (*White Fang*, 182-183). In contrast to the strength of the female animals in the wilderness, the female humans in the novel thus exhibit the more traditional, female characteristics described above. This does not mean that they are naturally inferior or weak, but rather that the women depicted have been encouraged and shaped by social conventions to develop gentle, caring and nurturing dispositions.

A similar example is found in *The Call of the Wild*. The inexperienced sledge-party who eventually goes through the ice of a thawing lake includes a woman named Mercedes.

> "It was her custom to be helpless. […] She no longer considered the dogs, and because she was sore and tired, she persisted in riding on the sled. She was pretty and soft, but she weighed one hundred and twenty pounds – a lusty last straw to the load dragged by the weak and starving animals. […] On one occasion [Charles and Hal] took her off the sled by main strength. She let her legs go limp like a spoiled child, and sat down on the trail" (*The Call*, 72).

This excerpt displays inequality and exploitative relationships at different levels. Mercedes has allegedly been accustomed to being treated "chivalrously" (*The Call*, 71-72), and although one might perceive this to be civilised behaviour, it has made her weak. She has no resilience, she is self-serving and when prompted to display some degree of self-discipline and strength, she goes limp "like a

spoiled child". She has been accustomed to a comfortable life in civilisation, but this has inadvertently made her dependent and inferior. London makes clear, though, that this is learnt behaviour and a role that Mercedes has been moulded into. Her powerlessness is not an innate aspect of her sex, but a characteristic that she has developed from habit. "It was her *custom* to be helpless [my emphasis]". Although Mercedes is rather insufferable, from an ecofeminist perspective, she is still a victim of social oppression, and her inferiority is the result of androcentric social structures. This is mirrored in the relationship between humans and nature, as the sled dogs are pushed and beaten as a result of their inability to cope with the added load. Initially Mercedes pities the dogs and seek to protect them, but she has insufficient inner strength and is also too weak in her relationship with her two male travel companions to carry it through. This particular passage thus conveys an ecofeminist view that oppression based on gender "also sanctions the oppression of nature in general and of nonhuman animals in particular" (Regan, 21).

The female characters in London's two wolf-novels are scarce and the plots revolve predominantly around tough, masculine male characters. As argued above, this is partly due to the environments of the storylines and a reflection of social conventions and gender roles at the turn of the 20th century. Prospectors were male, and in the case of Mercedes above, she is only in the Alaskan wilderness at the will of her husband and brother who make up the rest of the small party. The sparsity of female characters is therefore not an expression of their inadequacy. As demonstrated in both *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, London bestows his female *animal* characters, the she-wolf, the lynx and the weasel, with a toughness and cunning that equal those of their male counterparts. It can therefore be argued that the denigrating picture of the *human* females in the novels is not a belittlement of the female sex but rather a criticism of the social constructions that create women like Mercedes and the young women in Judge Scott's household.

CONCLUSION

The last few decades of the 20th century began to see a change of attitude towards environmental issues. The realisation of the potentially irreversible effects of human activity on the natural world led to growing membership numbers in environmental organisations such as the Sierra Club and the National Geographic Society. New organisations were also founded, including Greenpeace who attracted much attention with their anti-whaling campaigns in the 1970s and 80s. Worries about global warming, pollution, loss of large forest areas and increasing amounts of plastic waste gradually began to spread amongst the wider population. In the academic world, this led to the development of ecocriticism, which aims to bring attention to the relationship between humankind

and the natural environment, or what can be termed the *more-than-human world*. In my project, this critical analytical approach and the different factions that have developed in the field of environmentalism formed the theoretical basis for an ecocritical analysis of Jack London's early 20th century novels, *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang.* London's two wolf-novels have already received much academic attention, but existing critical analyses mostly revolve around Naturalist elements in his work as well as his depiction of power structures through application of white, masculine, male characters. With the spread of ecocriticism as an analytical approach, a number of recent studies also explore London in an ecological context, but these are rarely supported by in-depth analysis of the novels. One exception is John Bruni's chapter on *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* in which he interprets nature metaphorically as an expression of 19th century imperialism and white, male domination. My project has taken a somewhat different approach as the aim has rather been to analyse, compare and contrast nature and culture, or the wilderness and so-called controlled nature. My objective was to approach this from a 21st century perspective and to consider its relevance for the current climate crisis. I approached this, by analysing landscapes, animals and humans in the wilderness and then in areas of nature that are dominated and shaped my humans. The contrast was shown to be stark. Most importantly though, when reading the two wolf-novels together, the developments of the protagonists, Buck and White Fang, are not only reverse, London suggests that although there is safety and comfort in the civilised world of humans, social constructions detaches the individual from its true, natural self. At the end of the two novels, White Fang therefore has to subdue his wolf instincts whereas in the Alaskan wilderness Buck reconnects with his long-term dormant biological self. Abram's theory of the more-than-human world claims that there are "voices" within the natural environment that are not being heard or considered by the human world. This is exemplified, literally, in London's two novels. From his newfound position in civilisation, White Fang has become almost entirely quiet. He does not howl and he only barks once as a means of attracting attention and help when his master has had an accident. Metaphorically, White Fang has lost his voice of the wild. At the end of *The Call for the Wild*, Buck on the other hand "his great throat a-bellow […] sings a song of the younger world" (*The Call*, 119). Finding himself in the wilderness, nature has not only become audible to him in that he detects "the call"; he himself has also been given a voice and he no longer barks, but howls "the song of the pack" (*The Call*, 119). The development that each of the two canines go through seems unrealistic for a single lifetime. They develop from a state of extreme wildness to complete domestication and vice versa. The result is very effective, however. The two novels come to resemble a snapshot of the entire evolutionary process of domestication (and reserve). The sensation of time is thereby manipulated; the reader not only gains access to the distant past, but is also encouraged to contemplate the effects of

present-day human actions on the distant future of humans, the more-than-human world and the Earth itself.

With growing concern for the state of the natural world, authors have increasingly turned their craft to the genre of eco-literature or cli-fi. For the present project, I could therefore have chosen from numerous titles of recent publication. Such books are, after all, produced in response to the current ecological crisis, which make them both current and relevant sources for ecocritical analysis. However given their age, there is a certain degree of cultural distance between London's writings and the present-day reader that can ease the understanding of the current climate crisis and act as a reminder that we can alter the course. This rests in the fact that London's two novels convey a close link between humans and the more-than-human world, as well as the past and the present. As Buck becomes receptive to the call of the wild, early man awakens in Buck's memory. Through atavism the reader travels across time with Buck and observes the distant human ancestor. The encounter reminds the reader of the biological origin and evolution of the human species. At the same time however, the 21st century reader is also made aware of the dynamic quality of human culture and this too is important to the environmental debate. Instances of political incorrectness stand out. The so-called savage, the immature image of the female human, and the white, masculine, male hero are all archaic representations. However, that is only the case because attitudes have changed and so the reader is reminded that culture and social norms are constructs that humankind determines. Unlike the law of the wild, which is unchangeable and based on the code of "eat or be eaten", the laws and norms of human culture are constantly evolving. The current human activities and structures in society that result in pollution and, potentially, irreparable damage to the natural environment can therefore be changed. Humankind just has to decide to do so.

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