

# American Literature.

## Jack London

Lecture



# BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

- **Jack London**  
(1876 - 1916)
- Category: American Literature

Born: January 12, 1876  
San Francisco, California,  
United States

Died: November 22, 1916  
Santa Rosa, California, United  
States



# *London's Childhood*

- Born in 1876 on the Barbary Coast of San Francisco
- Raised by mother, Flora Wellman, and stepfather, John London
- Childhood marked by poverty & unhappiness



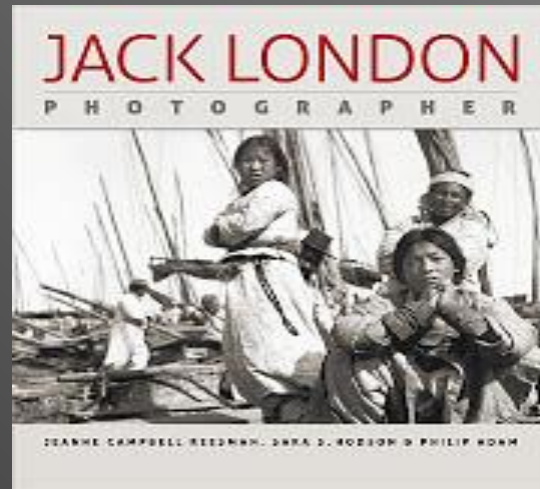
# London at age 8 with dog Rollo

ChildhoodReference  
sites:

[http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/London/  
jack.html](http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/London/jack.html)

<http://www.jacklondon.com/>

- **Became an avid reader at age 10 when an Oakland librarian encouraged him to escape his life of poverty through reading.**
- **Bought his first sailboat at age 12—loved to sail**





# *Youth—Adventure/Responsibility*

- Dropped out of school at age 14 & had series of low-paying jobs:

Seaman                      delivered papers

sweatshop                  worked in cannery

freight train hobo          cleaned local saloon

- Loved to listen to stories about the California Gold Rush of 1849**

# *Forming Ideas/Attitudes*

- **Experiences that shaped London's life and attitudes:**
  - oyster pirate
  - seal hunter in the North Pacific
  - 1894—arrested & jailed in Niagara Falls for vagrancy
  - adopted socialistic views
- **Educated self by reading in public library**
- **Attended University of California at Berkeley**
- **Left school after 1 year to seek his fortune in gold fields**



# *Adventure*

- Traveled to Klondike Gold Rush in 1897
- Spent one winter at Split-Up Island, near the Stewart River
- Did not find gold; had a wealth of **experiences** he would later use to write stories and books
- Returned home to support himself and his family by publishing his writing



- **Bess Maddern—London's first wife**

- **Becky and Joan London—London's daughters**

<http://sps.berkeley.edu/London/Images/>



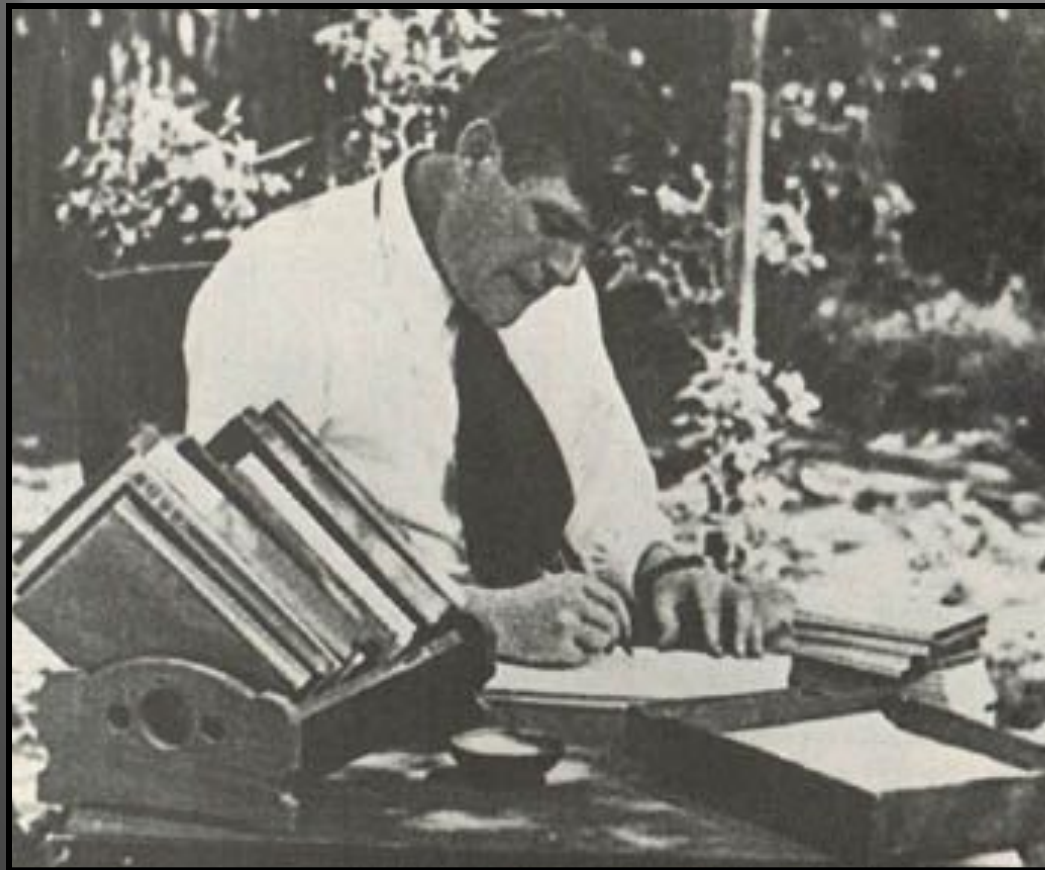
Charmian London  
Jack London's second wife

<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/London/Images>

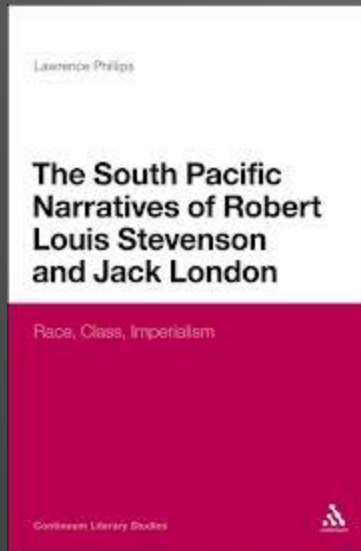
# *London—the Author*

- **Began avidly writing in 1897**
- **He commonly spent 15 hours a day writing**
- **Daily quota of 1000 written words a day**
- **Became recognized as a talented & successful writer**

**Jack London wrote 50 books and  
1,000 articles between 1899 and  
1916.**



**“The greatest story London ever told  
was the story he lived.”**



**Alfred Kazin  
Literary critic**

“By 1916, London was the highest-paid writer in the country and the most widely read American author in the world.”



“His literary works like *The Road*, written in 1907, inspired later writers like John Steinbeck and Jack Kerouac.”

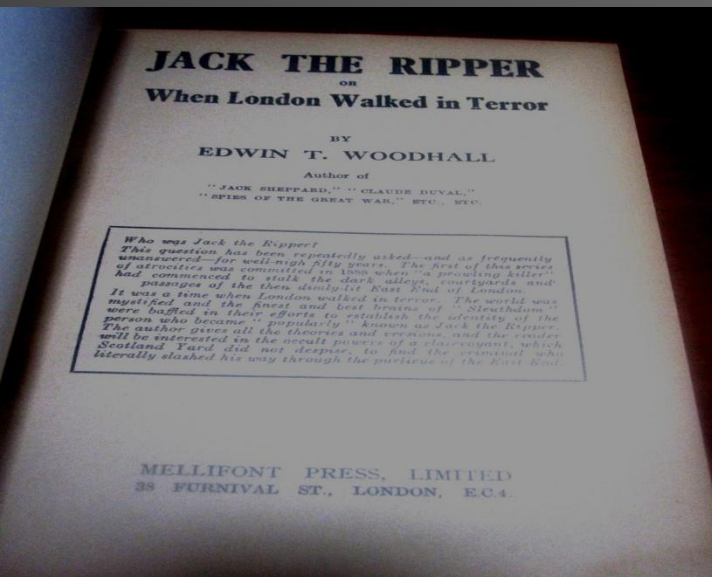
<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/London>



- **Jack London died on November 22, 1916.**
- **A memorial for he and his second wife, Charmian Kittredge, is located at Glen Ellen.**



“One of the reasons  
Jack London’s popularity as an author  
remains  
so high in the world today  
is because his life was as interesting  
as his works.”



[tp://www.geocities.com/NapaValley/7996/](http://www.geocities.com/NapaValley/7996/)

# Thoughts about life..

from  
Jack London  
journals...



<http://www.geocities.com/NapaValley/7996>

<http://www.parks.sonoma.net/JLStory.html>

<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/London/>

***"Not one ignoble  
thought or act  
is demanded  
of any or all  
men and women  
than to make fair  
the world."***

***The call is for service,  
and such is the  
wholesomeness of it.  
He who serves all  
best serves himself.”  
Jack London***

## – Jack London's "Credo"

- "I would rather be ashes than dust!  
I would rather that my spark should burn  
out in a brilliant blaze  
than it should be stifled by dry rot.  
I would rather be a superb meteor,  
every atom of me in magnificent glow,  
than a sleepy and permanent planet.  
The proper function of man is to live,  
not to exist.  
I shall not waste my days in trying to  
prolong them.  
I shall use my time"



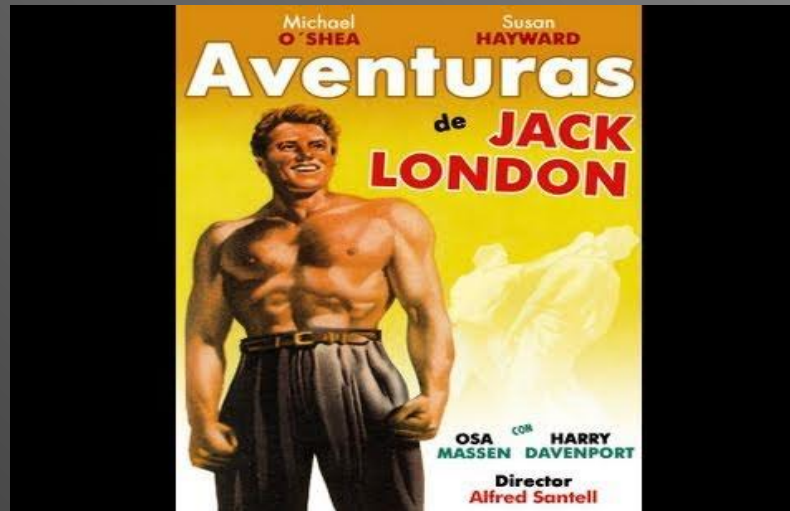
*Jack London*

—Photograph by Genthe

**“No writer, unless it were Mark Twain, ever had a more romantic life than Jack London.”**

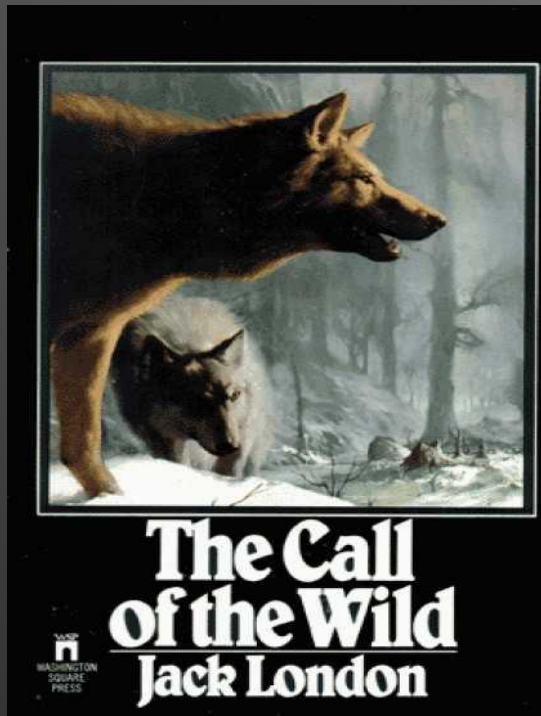
**Ernest J. Hopkins**

**<http://www.parks.sonoma.net/JLStory.html>**



London was described “as a “born teller of tales who wrote as he lived—in a hurry.”

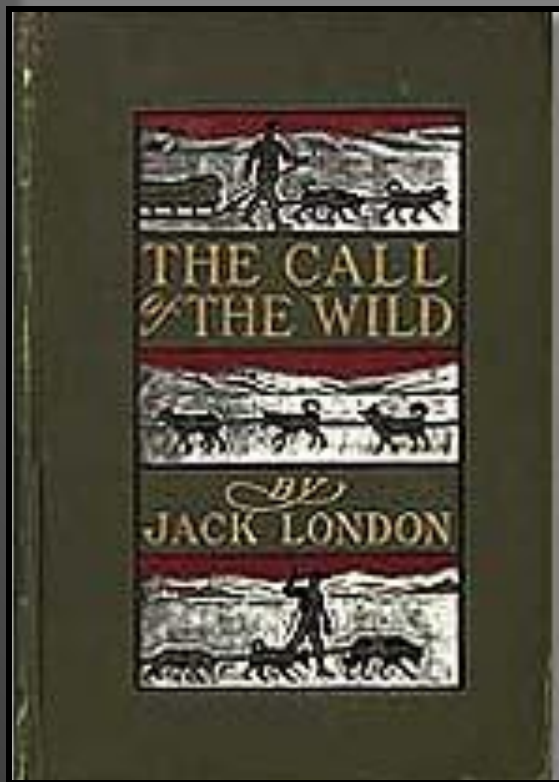
Howard Lachtman





*“The fact that his gift for writing was ever realized came to be used as an example of someone achieving “The American Dream.”*”

# Call of the Wild



<http://www.homestead.com/wolf29/wolves.html>





**Title:** *The Call of the Wild*

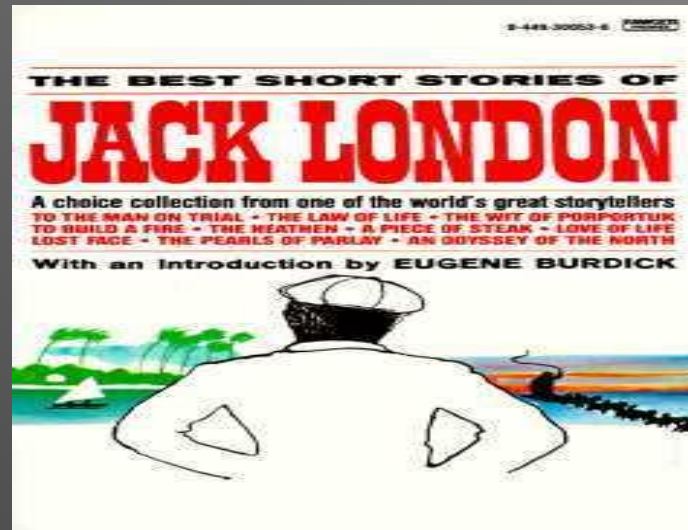
**Genre:** Realistic Fiction

**Setting:** Late 1800's,  
Klondike gold rush

**“In his story the Klondike became ‘not only a real country, but a territory of the mind’ where his characters lived or died because of what they had in them.**

**(Lachtman, 1984)**

He was paid three cents per word for the story, which he had shortened by 5,000 words.



“*The Call of the Wild* is the greatest dog story ever written and is at the same time a study of one of the most curious and profound motives that play hide-and-seek in the human soul.”

Carl Sandburg

From the time *The Call of the Wild* caught the imagination of the world in 1903, until his death by a stroke and heart attack in 1916,



**his 51 books, hundreds of short stories,  
essays and other writings had more  
newspaper coverage than any other writer.**





**“I have everything to  
make me glad I am alive.  
I am filled with dreams  
and mysteries.”**

**Jack London**

<http://www.parks.sonoma.net/JLPark.html>

# LIFE STORIES

- 3/23/1913
- Jack London's Cash Flow

On this day in 1913 Jack London wrote a letter to six famous writers of the day -- a list which included Winston Churchill, George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells -- to ask them what rates they were paid for their "stuff." London was a prolific, best-selling author but he was on the decline and in need of \$100,000 a year to keep his projects, his philanthropy, and his personality going.



# LIFE STORIES

- 7/25/1897
- Jack London to the Top, and Over

When Jack London returned to Oakland from the Klondike he had \$4.50 in gold dust in his pocket, and the memories, stories and journals that would, within five years, springboard him into literary history. Within fifteen years, he would be the highest-paid and best-known writer in the world; within twenty, whether intentionally by burn-out or accidentally by drug overdose, he would be dead.



# Jack London State Historic Park



- "The grapes on a score of rolling hills are red with autumn flame. Across Sonoma Mountain wisps of sea fog are stealing. The afternoon sun smoulders in the drowsy sky. I have everything to make me glad I am alive. I am filled with dreams and mysteries. I am all sun and air and sparkle. I am vitalized, organic."

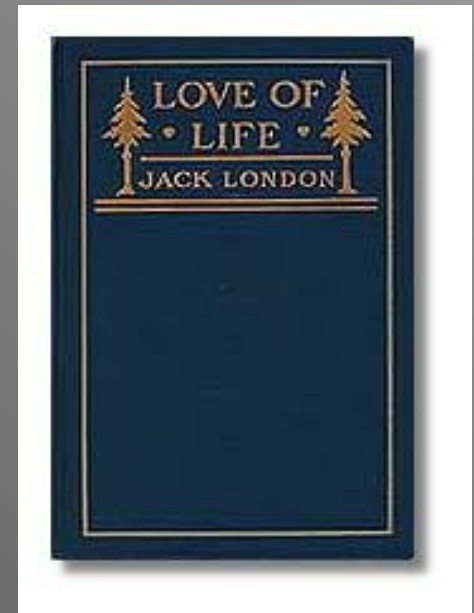
- Jack London

# **Books by Jack London(1)**

- **1900 The Son of the Wolf**
- **1901 The God of His Fathers**
- **1902 Children of the Frost**
- **1902 The Cruise of the Dazzler**
- **1902 A Daughter of the Snows**
- **1903 The Kempton-Wace Letters**
- **1903 The Call of the Wild**
- **1903 The People of the Abyss**
- **1904 The Faith of Men**
- **1904 The Sea Wolf**
- **1905 War of the Classes**
- **1905 The Game**

# Books by Jack London(2)

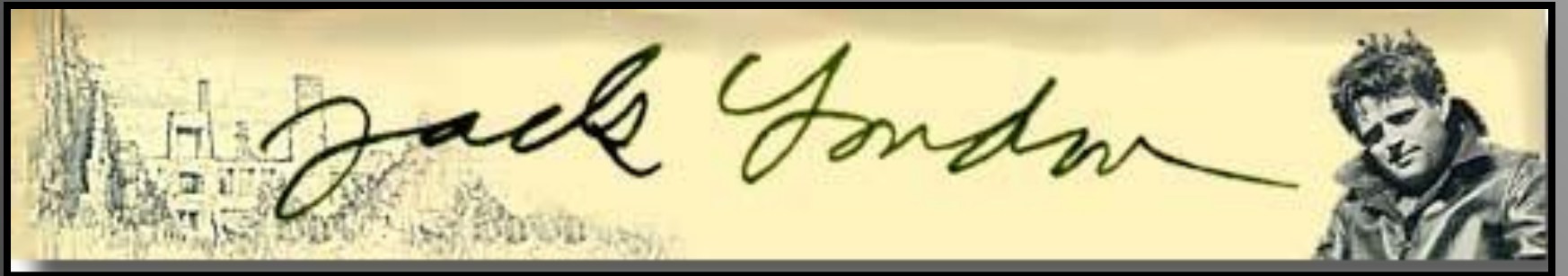
- 1905 Tales of the Fish Patrol
- 1906 Moon-Face and Other Stories
- 1906 White Fang
- 1907 Before Adam
- 1907 Love of Life and Other Stories
- 1908 The Iron Heel
- 1909 Martin Eden
- 1910 Lost Face
- 1910 Revolution and Other Essays
- 1910 Burning Daylight
- 1911 When God Laughs and Other Stories
- 1911 South Sea Tales
- 1912 The House of Pride and Other Stories
- 1912 A Son of the Sun
- 1912 Smoke Bellew



# Books by Jack London(3)



- 1913 **The Night-Born**
- 1913 **The Abysmal Brute**
- 1913 **John Barleycorn**
- 1913 **The Valley of the Moon**
- 1914 **The Strength of the Strong**
- 1914 **The Mutiny of the Elsinore**
- 1915 **The Scarlet Plague**
- 1915 **The Star Rover**
- 1916 **The Little Lady of the Big House**
- 1916 **The Turtles of Tasman**
- 1917 **The Human Drift**
- 1917 **Jerry of the Islands**
- 1917 **Michael Brother of Jerry**
- 1918 **The Red One**
- 1919 **On the Makaloa Mat**
- 1920 **Hearts of Three**
- 1922 **Dutch Courage and Other Stories**





*Jack London sites:*

<http://www.geocities.com/~jacklondons/index.html>

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian/issuesall/issues98/feb98/jack.html>

<http://dcps.dade.k12.fl.us/technology/reading/wild/COW/worksheet.htm>

<http://ofcn.org/cyber.serv/resource/bookshelf/callw10/>

[http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/London/Organizations/jl\\_society.html](http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/London/Organizations/jl_society.html)

<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/London/>