



# Jack London

1876-1916

# Jack London

- an American author who wrote *The Call of the Wild* and other books. A pioneer in the then-burgeoning world of commercial magazine fiction, he was one of the first Americans to make a lucrative career exclusively from writing.



# More Pics



# Jack London

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# Life

- (1)name: John Ariffith London; born in San Francisco
- (2)lived in the lowest part of society in his youth
- (3)decided to change his life by intellectual effort
- (4)his works were rejected many times
- (5)at last succeeded and became a millionaire
- (6)fame and upper class life made him feel boring; committed suicide

# Works

- *The Call of the Wild* (story of a dog)
- *White Fang* (story of a wolf)
- *The Sea Wolf*
- *Martin Eden* (autobiographical) (Arthur Morse, Ruth Morse) (disillusionment and broken American Dream)

# More about his Works

- His major works include *The People of the Abyss*(1903), *The Sea Wolf*(1904), *White Fang*(1906), *The Iron Heel*(1908), *Martin Eden*(1909), *The Valley of the Moon*(1912), *The Star Rover*(1915) and *The Little of the Big House*(1916).  
“*The Sea Wolf* portrays the protagonist’s growth from a lover of an art to a self-sufficient seaman, revealing the savagery of human nature when faced with the natural force. *Martin Eden* tells how the protagonist changes from a toiler to a best-selling author. When he fails to resolve the inner conflict between his desire for marriage and his resistance to compromise in a class-oppressed society, he finally drowns himself. London once told Upton Sinclair that he wrote this novel as “an attack on individualism.”

# Analysis

- (1) Social Darwinism, Nietzschean superman, socialist doctrines of Marx
- (2) Naturalism mingled with Romanticism
- (3) Limitations: formless, clumsy yet vigorous style; stiff and stereotyped characters and dialogues



# *Martin Eden*

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# Plot summary

- Living in San Francisco at the dawn of the 20th century, Martin Eden struggles to rise far above his destitute circumstances through an intense and passionate pursuit of self-education in order to achieve a coveted place among the literary elite. The main driving force behind Martin Eden's efforts is his love for Ruth Morse. Because Eden is a sailor from a working class background, and the Morses are a bourgeois family, a union between them would be impossible until he reaches their level of wealth and perceived cultural, intellectual refinement.
- Just before the literary establishment discovers Eden's talents as a writer and lavishes him with the fame and fortune that he had incessantly promised Ruth (for the last two years) would come, she loses her patience and rejects him in a wistful letter: "if only you had settled down...and attempted to make something of yourself." When the publishers and the bourgeois - the very ones who shunned him - are finally at his feet, Martin has already begrudged them and become jaded by unrequited toil and love. Instead of enjoying his success, Eden retreats into a quiet indifference, only interrupted to mentally rail against the genteelness of bourgeois society or to donate his new wealth to working class friends and family.
- The novel ends with Martin Eden committing suicide by drowning, a detail which undoubtedly contributed to what researcher Clarice Stasz calls the 'biographical myth' that Jack London's own death was a suicide.
- Joan London noted that "ignoring its tragic ending," the book is often regarded as "a 'success' story...which inspired not only a whole generation of young writers but other different fields who, without aid or encouragement, attained their objectives through great struggle."

# Main characters

- Martin Eden
- Ruth Morse
- Lizzie Connolly
- Joe Dawson
- Russ Brissenden

# Martin Eden

- A former sailor from a working class background who falls in love with a young bourgeois woman and decides to educate himself at becoming a writer, so he can win her hand in marriage.

# Ruth Morse

- The young bourgeois woman attending university who captivates Eden while tutoring him in English. Though she is initially both attracted and repelled by his working class background, she eventually decides that she loves him. The two become engaged but not without condition: they cannot marry until her parents approve of his financial and social status

# Lizzie Connolly

- The cannery worker who is rejected by Eden, who is already in love with Ruth. In Eden's mind, Lizzie's rough hands mark her out as inferior to Ruth. Despite this, Lizzie remains devoted to Eden. He feels an attachment to her because she loves him for who he is, and not for the fame or money (unlike Ruth). Lizzie loved him from the beginning before he was rich and famous and trying to better himself.

# Joe Dawson

- Eden's boss at the laundry, who wins Eden over with his cheeriness and capacity for work, but lacks any ambition for self-improvement.

# Russ Brissenden

- Eden's sickly writer counterpart, who encourages Eden to give up writing and return to the sea before city life swallows him up. A committed socialist, he introduces Eden to a group of amateur philosophers he calls the 'real dirt'. Brissenden's final work - 'Ephemera' - causes a literary sensation when Eden breaks his word and publishes it upon the writer's death.



# Major themes

- Social Class
- Machinery
- Individualism Versus Socialism

# Social Class

- Social class - and Eden's perceptions of it - is a very important theme in the novel. Eden is a sailor from a working class background, who feels uncomfortable but inspired when he first meets the bourgeois Morse family. Spurred on by his love for Ruth Morse, he embarks on a program of self-education, with the aim of becoming a renowned writer and winning Ruth's hand in marriage. As his education progresses, Eden finds himself increasingly distanced from his working class background and surroundings. Notably, he is repelled by the hands of Lizzie Connolly, who works in a cannery. Eventually, when Eden finds that his education has far surpassed that of the bourgeoisie he looked up to, he finds himself more isolated than ever. Paul Berman observes that Eden's inability to reconcile his "past and present" versions- "a wealthy Martin of the present who is civilized and clean, and a proletarian Martin of the past who is a fistfighting barbarian" - causes his descent into a delirious ambivalence.

# Machinery

- Aside from the machines that toughened Lizzie Connolly's hands, Jack London conjures-up a series of allusions to the workings of machinery in the novel. Machinery eats up people, vitality and creativity. To Eden, the magazine editors operated a machine which sent out seemingly endless rejection slips. When Eden works in a laundry with Joe, he works with machines but feels himself to be a cog in a larger machine. Similarly, Eden's Blickensdorfer typewriter gradually becomes an extension of his body. When he finally achieves literary success, Eden sets up his friends with machinery of their own, and Lizzie tells him "Something's wrong with your think-machine."

# Individualism Versus Socialism

- Although Jack London was a socialist, he invested the semi-autobiographical character of Martin Eden with a strong dose of individualism. Eden comes from a working class background, but he seeks self-improvement, rather than an improvement for his class as a whole. Quoting Friedrich Nietzsche and Herbert Spencer, he rejects the 'slave morality' of socialism, even at socialist meetings. However, London was keen to stress that it was this individualism that eventually led to Eden's suicide. He described the novel as a parable of a man who had to die "not because of his lack of faith in God, but because of his lack of faith in men."

# Background

- When Jack London wrote *Martin Eden* at age 33, he had already achieved international acclaim with *The Call of the Wild*, *The Sea-Wolf* and *White Fang*. However, London quickly became disillusioned with his fame and set sail through the South Pacific on a self-designed ketch called the *Snark*. On the grueling two-year voyage - as he struggled with tiredness and bowel diseases - he wrote *Martin Eden*, filling its pages with his frustrations, adolescent gangfights and struggles for artistic recognition. The character of Ruth Morse was modelled on Mabel Applegarth - the first love of London's life.