

The Killings of Buck, the Dog, in Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*

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Abstract

This study discusses the killings of Buck, the dog, in London's *The Call of the Wild*. Theoretical ideas regarding survival and killing proposed by philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Walter Bagehot are employed. Once a family's best friend, Buck turns out to be a killer. The objectives are to investigate: 1) the reasons behind each killing; 2) the causes driving him to kill; and 3) the results of his killings. It demonstrates that the dog Spitz, wild animals, and the tribal Yeehats are the main victims. The reasons behind killing Spitz are hatred, replacement, and the belief in the law of fang. The reasons to kill wild animals are hunger, independence, and pleasure. Taking revenge is the reason to kill humans. The causes driving him to kill are instinct, the warm taste of blood, and belief in the law of fang. The results of his killings are power and the acceptance of the call of the wild. This paper argues that, in untamed Alaska, Buck uses the law of fang not only for survival but for taking and maintaining power over others.

Keywords: Jack London, *The Call of the Wild*, Buck, killing, the law of fang

Born in San Francisco, California, Jack London (1876-1916) was a writer of adventure and science fiction novels and short stories. Also, London was a social activist. He joined protest marches in 1894 and a socialist party in 1896. In 1897, London became a part of the Klondike Gold Rush in Alaska. Mandy Stovicek reports that "His father, John London, had died while he was away, and London became the sole care-taker for his mother and family. He searched for work, but soon realized that he must plunge himself into writing" (2011, p. 36). In 1898, London sold his first short story "To the Man on the Trail." From that moment onwards, he has been accepted as a noted author. London wrote dozens of short stories such as "The Son of the Wolf" (1900), "To Build a Fire" (1902), and "The Mexican" (1911). His novels include *The Call of the Wild* (1903), *White Fang* (1906), and *Martin Eden* (1909). Of these works, *The Call of the Wild* is categorized as one of the 100 world classics by W. John Campbell (2000) in *The Book of Great Books: A Guide to 100 World Classics*. The novel was first published in 1903 and "sold 10,000 copies on the first day" (Walker, 1972, as cited in Stovicek, 2011, p. 35). Campbell views it as "the work that established him as a best-selling writer in 1903" (2000, p. 104). The story was adapted for film in 2020, directed by Chris Sanders for *20th Century Studios*. Harrison Ford, an American actor, stars as John Thornton, a warm-hearted and caring prospector. Ford's role surely contributed to the film's appeal to world audiences. Ford attracts the audience, but he is eventually overshadowed by Buck, the dog.

The story presents the protagonist Buck's hard life struggling to survive the bad times and become stronger. At the beginning of the narrative, Buck lives happily as a pampered dog

at a judge's large house in the Santa Clara Valley of California. However, Buck is then stolen by the judge's gardener and sold to be a sled dog in Klondike, east of the Alaskan border. There, he encounters unexpected situations and violence leading him to believe in the law of fang practiced by wild dogs. Buck has various owners who force him to pull heavy loaded sleds in traces with a team of dogs. Buck must stay and sleep on the snow-covered ground of the natural Alaskan environment. To become the dog team's leader, he kills Spitz, a fierce dog who had been until then the team leader. At a camp, Buck is beaten nearly to death by a cruel master. Thornton helps him by knocking the master down, after which Buck stays with Thornton. Wandering the wilderness of Alaska, Buck becomes a blood-longing dog. After Thornton and his friends, including his dogs, have been murdered by the Yeehats, a native American tribe, Buck kills several of tribe members. In the end, Buck is called "Ghost Dog" by the Yeehats. In the end, Buck is seen running at the head of a wolf pack into the Alaskan wilderness.

Researchers and reviewers have explored *The Call of the Wild* quite extensively. Raymond Benoit (1968) reports that it epitomizes the American dream of escaping from modern and complex society for a primitive state, as follows:

London used just this pastoral made in *The Call of the Wild*: the myth of Buck, the great dog, is an embodiment of the American dream of escaping from the entangling complexity of modern living back to a state as unencumbered as the sled that Buck pulls. (p. 246)

Several features have been suggested as the necessities for Buck's survival. Donald Pizer (2011) argues that the story "proposes the wisdom of the beast fable that the strong, the shrewd, and the cunning shall prevail when, as is progressively true in this story, life is bestial" (p. 6). In terms of miscegenation, Yvonne Iden Ngwa (2015) studies Buck's mixture of breeds. Ngwa points out that "Buck is midway between several species or races. He is a cross-breed of a St Bernard and a shepherd; is at crossroads between the dog's race and the wolf's race; and is too human to be considered an animal" (p. 200). Buck is a newcomer struggling to survive and to maintain his own species in the Alaskan wilderness. Richard Fusco (1987) suggests that "Buck's metamorphosis is not as complete as a cursory reading might lead one to believe, however. Buck still retains vestiges of social advancement after his eventual leadership of the wolf pack" (p. 76).

The theme *survival in the wild* draws attention to the novel. The word *survival* means the state of continuing to live or exist in certain circumstances such as a hostile environment. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), a German philosopher, states that "the species needs itself as species, as something which, precisely by virtue of its hardness, its uniformity, and simplicity of structure, can in general prevail and make itself permanent in constant struggle with its neighbors, or with rebellious or rebellion-threatening vassals" (2014, p. 151). This is simplified by Roy Jackson who stated that "He believed the most important question should not be what is true or not but the extent to which a belief supports life and maintains a species" (Nietzsche, 2003, as cited in Jackson, 2010, p. 56). As the word *he* in Jackson's statements refers to Nietzsche, Jackson agrees with him that the true moral of an individual depends on the ability to exist. The idea is also consistent with the theory of evolution proposed by Charles Darwin, a renowned British scientist. According to Darwin, "This preservation of favorable individual differences and variations, and the destruction of those which are injurious, I have called Natural Selection, or the Survival of the Fittest" (2009, p. 77).

Darwin's theory of evolution has had a great influence on literary studies. In the case of *The Call of the Wild*, Campbell (2000) explains the term *social Darwinism* as "In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this was called "social Darwinism," and *The Call of the Wild* is a good example of Darwin's influence on Jack London" (p. 107). Roman Bartosch (2010) also suggests that "Buck's strategy of survival relies on adaptation, and the implications of this will surely have been obvious to the contemporary readers' eye, possibly trained in or at least familiar with Darwinist thought" (p. 89).

According to the ideas and the research findings, this study views Buck's killing as a tool for his survival. The word *kill* means to make a person or animal die or to take someone's life. This act is conducted in a way that is intended. When killing occurs, some humans or animals either kill or are killed. In *Physics and Politics*, Walter Bagehot (2017) posits that "If A kills B before B kills A, then A survives, and the human race is a race of A's" (p. 91). In *The Myth of Sisyphus: And Other Essays*, Albert Camus mentions Nietzsche's idea about killing stating that "as for Nietzsche, to kill God is to become god oneself" (Nietzsche, 1978, as cited in Camus, 1991, p. 108). According to Nietzsche and Bagehot, taking life relates to taking power. Killing is used by a killer to take the power of someone who is killed. Under these definitions, this study defines the word *killing* as an action made by a killer to take someone's life. A killing takes place when the killer wants to maintain his or her existence, and moreover, to replace the someone who has just been murdered. As killing is displayed in the novel primarily by the dog Buck, this study aims to observe Buck's killings and propose reasons leading him to kill. Also, it points out the causes supporting the murders and subsequent outcomes. Thus, the following three main aspects of Buck's killings are considered: 1) the reasons behind each killing; 2) the causes driving him to kill; and 3) the results of his killings.

The data are derived from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source is London's *The Call of the Wild*, the version published in Kindle, a series of e-readers, designed by Amazon.com. The portrayals of the protagonist Buck and other dogs, especially Curly and Spitz were considered. The characterizations of Buck and human masters such as Thornton and Francois as well as the tribal Yeehats were gathered. The descriptions of events involving Buck were focused on. Various studies, reviews, and books relevant to the three objectives were considered as useful secondary sources. The 2020 film *The Call of the Wild* was also viewed as another useful source because it illuminates the lives of the characters. Some aspects of survival proposed by world theorists such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Walter Bagehot, and Charles Darwin were considered while the acts of killing in other literary studies were gathered. Then, the narration of the events involving Buck's killing were extracted for in-depth study. The analysis was carried out. The reasons leading Buck to commit such murder, the causes driving him to kill, and the effects of these kills were presented. Some arguments were posited, followed by the discussion, the conclusion, and the recommendations for further studies.

The study finds that Buck kills a Spitzbergen dog, named Spitz. This dog is the leader of the sled dog team to which Buck belongs. Spitz is sly and deceitful; he is strong and experienced. They have attacked each other before Spitz is killed:

Every animal was motionless as though turned to stone. Only Spitz quivered and bristled as he staggered back and forth, snarling with horrible menace, as though to frighten off impending death. Then Buck sprang in and out; but while he was in, shoulder had at last squarely met shoulder. The dark circle became a dot on the moon-flooded snow as Spitz disappeared. (London, 2021, pp. 39-40)

The dogs are characterized as motionless like rock signify a sense of impending death. No one tries to help, or in fact, no one can help. This characterization implies that there is no chance for other dogs to do anything or participate in this situation. The only action they can take at the time is to stand and watch silently. If they had moved, the situation might have changed. However, the stillness of others means Spitz attacks alone. From the portrayal of Bucks' shoulders squarely meeting Spitz's it can be inferred that Buck uses his full physical strength to attack Spitz. Intertwined with his hatred and anger, Buck's power is made full use of to stop Spitz, his mortal enemy.

The reason behind this killing is that Buck hates Spitz. The feeling is clearly presented when his friend, Curly, a good-natured Newfoundland, was killed by a pack of wild huskies. The tragic death of Curly comes as a complete shock to Buck: "The scene often came back to Buck to trouble him in his sleep. So that was the way. No fair play. Once down, that was the end of you. Well, he would see to it that he never went down" (London, 2021, p. 16). Feeling anxious even in his sleep means that Buck deeply feels the pain of bereavement and cannot forget the event. Death of a close friend generally brings about sadness and depression. Particularly, an unnatural death such as being murdered results in much pain and grief. As a result, it is usual to feel grief. Unlike Buck, Spitz runs out his tongue and laughs at seeing the death: "Spitz ran out his tongue and laughed again, and from that moment Buck hated him with a bitter and deathless hatred" (London, 2021, p. 16). Although Curly and Spitz are not close, Curly is a member of the sled dog team, led by him. Instead of showing sadness or staying calm, Spitz laughs at Curly's death. These acts signal that Spitz did not care about Curly or what happened to her. Even worse, he finds this tragic passing funny. From that moment onwards, Buck is deeply affected by Spitz's hard-hearted and cruel acts, and he feels very angry and hates Spitz.

The belief in the law of fang is also a reason behind killing Spitz. The feeling of "no fair play" emerging in Buck's thoughts reflects his belief in the law presented and practiced by the wild huskies. The huskies use their fangs to kill Curly, who is weaker. The description *he would see to it that he never went down* implies that Buck understands and obeys the law and that he must practice it so that he does not lose his own life. His enemies or victims must go down instead. At that moment, Spitz is his only mortal enemy. For Buck, it is the right time to practice the law on him. Spitz must be killed by his fangs because he hates him with a bitter and deathless hatred. Most of all, he will kill him because Buck has a very strong sense of practicing the law of fang. According to Nietzsche, Buck can make himself preeminent in struggle with Spitz. In this sense, one of the reasons to kill Spitz is that he does not want to be the one who dies. This is also consistent with the idea of Bagehot as he states that "If A kills B before B kills A, then A survives" (2017, p. 91). In the story, Buck can kill Spitz while Spitz is trying to kill Buck. It is obvious that Buck survives.

Another reason behind this killing is the need to replace Spitz. After he has killed Spitz, Buck fully intends to be a leader of the team:

Buck trotted up to the place Spitz would have occupied as leader; but Francois, not noticing him, brought Sol-leks to the coveted position. In his judgement, Sol-leks was the best lead-dog left. Buck sprang upon Sol-leks in a fury, driving him back and standing in his place. (London, 2021, p. 41)

From the word *coveted* it can be inferred that Buck has a very strong desire to take the position. Moreover, the words *in a fury* imply that Buck deprives Sol-leks with his full effort

and attention so that the permission to become a new leader is given. Buck informs Francois, a human master, that only he deserves to replace Spitz. If he had not taken these actions, no one would have realized this. However, Francois gives the position to Sol-leks, an experienced sled dog, not Buck. Finally, Francois realizes that Buck prefers to lead the team. This makes it clear that what Nietzsche says is right as he says that “to kill God is to become god oneself” (Nietzsche, 1978, as cited in Camus, 1991, p. 107). People give much importance or respect to God, so, in this text, God can refer to the leader of the sled dog team, the position taken by Buck, the killer. On a higher level, this shows that Buck can completely control the situation. While the action of killing Spitz indicates a great anger towards him, the action of depriving Sol-leks of the team leader position reflects Buck’s real passion for order and control. A leader is the one who directs or controls others in the team. As a result, the attempts he has made to grasp the position mean that Buck understands the power of this duty and really needs it. According to this study, this kill takes place when Buck wants to replace the leader who has just been murdered.

Buck kills not only the bitter enemy but other animals. Apart from Spitz, Buck’s victims consist mainly of small wild animals such as birds, rabbits, chipmunks, fish, and beavers:

He could take a ptarmigan from its nest, kill a rabbit as it slept, and snap in mid air the little chipmunks fleeing a second too late for the trees. Fish, in open pools, were not too quick for him; nor were beaver. (London, 2021, p. 92)

The reasons to kill the small wild animals are hunger, independence, and pleasure. These small animals contribute significantly to Buck’s diet. Without a human master, Buck becomes a beast who hunts to consume. Feeling hungry, he kills. In wilderness, the portrayals of Buck’s killings affirm Darwin’s concepts of evolution that the stronger ones remain alive while the weaker ones die. In Buck’s case, other animals die and become his prey. Various kills taking place also indicate the capacity to hunt different animals in different habitats. On the other hand, as he eats the flesh of wild animals rather than any food fed by humans, these kills reflect that Buck can live in the primordial state without depending on the help of humans. From that moment onwards, killing is a skill Buck readily masters. Killing animals is not just hunting to eat but also a real enjoyment. When hunting and eating what he kills to survive becomes a habit, Buck kills every single day. These kills reflect Buck’s deep thirst for killing while developing his killing skills. Furthermore, it can be interpreted that Buck presents his desire to stay away from humans and to become a real wild beast.

Later, Buck is challenged by a large and heavy moose: “Three hundredweight; he had lived a long, strong life, full of attacks and struggles, and at the end he faced death at the teeth of a creature whose head did not reach beyond his great knuckled knees” (London, 2021, p. 94). The moose is two times Buck’s size. If the moose’s size is compared to Buck’s, Buck does not seem very large. However, Buck is described as larger than dogs in general: “He was not so large, —he weighed only one hundred and forty pounds” (London, 2021, p. 4). This description is shown in the first scene. One hundred and forty pounds is approximately 63 kilograms. Although he is characterized with the words *not so large*, Buck weighs the same as some fully-grown men. It is uncommon for a dog to be of this weight. As a result, this implies that Buck is prepared by his size to attack large animals such as moose. Moreover, the moose is portrayed not only to have a great deal of physical power but also to have the ability to attack. For Buck, because he is well prepared, he is not too small to kill the moose.

Subsequently, he kills moose: “He could not follow, for before his nose leaped the merciless fanged terror that would not let him go” (London, 2021, p. 94). The merciless fanged terror is Buck and he successfully kills the moose. While a wolf pack tackle large prey together, Buck stalks and attacks the prey alone. Buck is characterized as being a merciless predator who can make the moose feel extreme fear before being killed. This shows that, after little time alone in the forest, Buck’s skill in hunting and killing becomes fully developed. Fangs are used repeatedly as lethal weapons to kill and to confirm the full use of the law of fang.

As with the killing of the small wild animals, the reasons behind killing the moose are to prove his ability to stay independently without human masters as well as showing how he feels about killing animals. Having killed the moose, Buck does not kill smaller animals any longer. He continues stalking moose within the forest: “Buck did not attempt to stay him, but loped easily at his heels, satisfied with the way the game was played, lying down when the moose stood still, attacking him fiercely when he strove to eat or drink” (London, 2021, p. 94). Buck moves close by and is perfectly silent. He attacks when the moose tries to eat or drink. These actions reflect how his strategies have developed through the killings. The strategies are so well-developed that he can attack the larger animals such as moose while they remain unaware of the danger. Moreover, the phrase *satisfied with the way the game was played* means that he is pleased when the killing occurs. He feels that it is a game he plays that ends in the way he wants. It can be said that he does not kill because of hatred or the need for power. Also, he does not merely hunt the moose for food. Buck kills because he enjoys killing. At this moment, he becomes a wild beast, living and killing alone in a wild environment. From his enjoyment of killing, it can also be interpreted that he becomes a bloodthirsty beast because he sometimes kills not to consume. Through this enjoyment, he can better develop his skill at taking the life of larger animals.

From that moment onwards, Buck switches to hunting purely moose. He kills and consumed more moose. He hunts effectively, and moreover, he is always around them: “At last, at the end of the fourth day, he pulled the great moose down. For a day and a night he remained by the kill, eating and sleeping, turn and turn about” (London, 2021, p. 95). Predators usually predate animals smaller than themselves. If they hunt larger animals, they do so in a hunting group. However, chooses fully grown adult moose as prey. The ability to bring the great moose down means that Buck’s attack is powerful. He is tireless in his pursuit of the prey. Buck masters large kills. Most of all, Buck has tasted the warm blood of several animals ranging from dogs to moose. The taste of blood combined with the success of killing leads Buck to lose his fear of the danger posed by wild animals. On the contrary, he views their appearance as not only a potential source of food but takes pleasure in the taking of life.

Apart from the dog Spitz and various wild animals, Buck also kills humans. The humans he kills are the members of an native tribe known as Yeehats. Buck kills them after they kill Thornton, Thornton’s friends, and his dogs:

He sprang at the foremost man (it was the chief of the Yeehats), ripping the throat wide open till the rent jugular spouted a fountain of blood. He did not pause to worry the victim, but ripped in passing, with the next bound tearing wide the throat of a second man. (London, 2021, p. 97)

When Buck springs at the chief, a quick and terrible killing is depicted. The capacity to directly bite the man’s throat reflects the effective use of the killing skill. He has no chance. He cannot escape or fight with him but stands still as a victim. After the chief has been killed,

the next to be killed also have no chance to fight back. That is, they are killed by Buck in the blink of an eye.

After some Yeehats are killed, the rest escape: “They scattered far and wide over the country, and it was not till a week later that the last of the survivors gathered together in a lower valley and counted their losses” (London, 2021, p. 97). The description uses the phrase *scatter far and wide over the country* to show that the tribe moved quickly in different directions. The chief’s corpse being left behind is an important clue reflecting how they fled in terror as the corpse needed to be taken for burial. It is not until a week later that the corpse is retrieved. This means that they waited until their fear decreased sufficiently to return. Buck—the newcomer—comes as a greatest shock to their lives even though they have weapons and are expert at using them, as demonstrated by the fact that they use weapons to kill Thornton and others. However, with Buck, their weapons are useless. Their only choice is to escape. If they cannot flee, they die. For more interpretation, Buck’s choice of killing the chief first reflects his presentiment to kill the most powerful one before moving on to others. This results not only in arousing great fear among the Yeehats but also raises Buck’s confidence in his ability to kill the rest. From that moment onwards, killing the chief of the Yeehats marks Buck’s status as the most powerful killer of the forests.

Buck kills the wild humans is to take revenge. However, he kills the Yeehats as punishment because they killed his much-loved master, Thornton. The Yeehats kill Thornton, so they must in turn be killed.

In addition to the reasons to kill, the study demonstrates the causes driving Buck to kill. The first reason is instinct. An instinct is a natural tendency to behave in a certain way. It also means a natural ability to know or understand something without learning. For Buck, he pits himself against the hostile world through his primitive instincts. First, Buck believes that the law of fang is essential. While he struggles to survive in the wild, he sees the killing skill as essential. Later, Buck kills various animals ranging from small to the large. The ability to kill is his first survival test, showing his capacity to survive in the wild. Finally, Buck chooses to live without humans. Although Thornton waits for him at the camp, Buck stays away. This is seen when Buck leaves the camp and heads towards the wild: “but they did not see the instant and terrible transformation which took place as soon as he was within the secrecy of the forest. He no longer marched. At once he became a thing of the wild” (London, 2021, p. 106). The transformation implies that Buck’s behavior in the camp is different from when he is in the wild. It can be inferred that Buck behaves like a pet in the camp. Heading towards the wilderness, he transforms to be a thing of the wild. Buck keeps away from humans. It can be said that Buck, a bloodthirsty wild animal, is aware that he must live in the forests independently, without owing his survival to humans.

Enjoying warm blood is also a cause driving him to become a killer. Warm-blooded animals have a high body temperature. In one scene, laying into wild huskies, Buck senses warm blood: “Buck got a frothing adversary by the throat, and was sprayed with blood when his teeth sank through the jugular. The warm taste of it in his mouth goaded him to greater fierceness” (London, 2021, p. 27). Buck is provoked to attack more violently because of the taste of the warm blood. The verb *goad* reflects the power of the taste of blood that encourages him to keep on attacking and biting the huskies to make them bleed, not for food, but pleasure.

Buck shows this sense again: “Guided by that instinct which came from the old hunting days of the primordial world, Buck proceeded to cut the bull out from the herd” (London, 2021,

p. 92). Buck becomes used to taste of the blood of the wild huskies. However, when Buck is attacked by them, he is forced to fight; and the taste of blood is not the goal. However, when attacking the moose, he kills them intentionally. In general, carnivores depend solely on animal flesh. Although the warm taste of the moose's blood is not portrayed visibly with words in this scene, it can be assumed that Buck tastes it. Enjoying warm blood is a natural behavior or primitive instinct Buck continually demonstrates. A combination of experience and natural instincts as well as the need for food all contribute to Buck becoming a bloodthirsty animal. He continues killing and eating moose as well as remaining in the forests. Therefore, while instinct is a root cause of his killing, enjoying the taste of warm blood is also a cause.

Another cause driving Buck to kill is the strong belief in the law of fang. The law of fang is the wild law Buck learns and believes in. The law of fang signifies serious injuries or deaths of the weak as well as survival of the strong. The law becomes the root cause of Buck's killings, not just a contributing factor. In the case of the Yeehats, the belief in this law influences Buck not to be afraid when he returns to the camp and finds many Yeehats. Buck does not escape but decides to attack. These men use deadly weapons, yet Buck kills some and terrifies the rest. The law of fang leads Buck to believe that if he had not killed the Yeehats, he would have been killed. The killing was not only due to revenge but also because of the belief in the law. According to the law, Buck makes full use of his fangs to kill not only Spitz, the mortal enemy, and large animals, but also the Yeehats.

Even though the law of fang is useful for survival in the wild, Buck learns it through great sadness caused by the death of his friend Curly, one of the sled dogs. The law is enforced and practiced by the pack of wild huskies. The serious effects of the law are seen when the huskies attack and kill Curly, who is innocent and not strong enough to fight them. Curly presents her lack of the capacity to understand the true instinct of these wild dogs who use their fangs to defend their territory. According to the law of fang, Curly deserves to be attacked and killed because the territory he encroaches upon is controlled by the huskies. While the death of Curly troubles Buck, he realizes there is no fair play in this hostile world: "The scene often came back to Buck to trouble him in his sleep. So that was the way. No fair play. Once down, that was the end of you" (London, 2021, p. 16). The phrase *that was the way* implies that Buck accepts the use of the law of fang and understands that Curly had to be killed. The words *no fair play* also reflect that there are no rules indicating what is allowed and what is not. Buck realizes that the law must prevail if he wants to live in the wild.

The law of fang is a tool for survival in the wild. The law is repeatedly portrayed in this sense throughout the story. For example, the law is characterized as being without mercy or fear as noted by Buck:

Mercy did not exist in the primordial life. It was misunderstood for fear, and such misunderstandings made for death. Kill or be killed, eat or be eaten, was the law; and this mandate, down out of the depths of Time, he obeyed. (London, 2021, p. 71)

Buck realizes that if he wants to survive, there is no place for mercy. Buck views that mercy must not be shown. Even more, it never existed. Also, fear results in death. When mercy is defined as fear, it reduces the chances of survival. The binary oppositions between these actions: kill or be killed and eat or be eaten indicate that killing, but not mercy, is crucial to survival. Because killers use fangs, mercilessness and fangs are connected. As a result, the law of fang is a belief made full use by those with fangs. The growing understanding of this

increasingly urges Buck to keep practicing the law. The understanding also marks a turning point in his development as a carnivore.

The law of fang is a sound basis not only for survival but for becoming a master. Buck knows that he will be mastered if he does not master others: “He must master or be mastered; while to show mercy was a weakness” (London, 2021, p. 71). According to the narration, mercy reflects weakness. As a result, it can be defined as a lack of power. As a master has power, the master is portrayed without mercy. If the master kills, the victim is killed brutally. In the wild environment, there are no rules or laws. Certain laws such as the law of club and the law of fang are used to represent the power of the master. Through the law of fang, masters possess two things in common: savagery and fangs. It can be said that the law of fang is not only helpful for every creature to survive but very significant for any master who wishes to gain and maintain power. In Buck’s case, he uses the law of fang for survival and for becoming a killer. On the one hand, the portrayals of the killing Spitz, the small animals, and the moose convey the message that Buck is not only physically fit but also mentally strong enough to kill. On the other hand, the kills reflect his brutality which is an essential feature of a wild master. His strong desire to master others is revealed first when he kills Spitz and replaces him as leader of the sled dogs. Throughout the story, Buck presents his brutality again and again until he becomes an experienced predator. In the case of the tribe, Buck succeeds in killing them because he has trained himself to do so. He can replace them in their territory. This is consistent with the definition defined by this study. The killings take place when Buck wants to replace the Yeehats.

This study observes that the result of Buck’s killings is power. According to the findings, Buck not only believes and accepts the law of fang but intentionally uses it to dominate others. Since a leader directs or controls a group, Buck shows serious attempts to seize the position. Whenever he decides to kill, Buck becomes a new leader and controls the others. Here are the clues demonstrating that Buck’s true need is to become a master.

Buck kills Spitz first. As the leader of the sled dog team, Spitz is in authority controlling all dogs. Spitz is described as a fierce and cunning dog while Buck is characterized in positive ways such as being capable of adaptation: “It marked his adaptability, his capacity to adjust himself to changing conditions” (London, 2021, p. 22). According to Darwin, adaptability helps living beings to survive or causes them to be selected by nature. Buck possesses this important feature. He can change himself to be suitable for a new situation. According to the narration, Spitz is characterized as a villain. When the two dogs meet, the sharp contrast results in them becoming deadly enemies. A deadly enemy must be killed, and the villain deserves to die. Spitz is killed by Buck. While the killing symbolizes Buck’s achievement to adjust himself to be able to kill, it delineates Spitz from Buck, as well as getting rid of him.

Having the ability to kill as an essential feature of adaptability in certain environments. Buck presents an unusual feature: the feature of a master. After he kills Spitz, Buck proceeds to reach a higher level by signifying that he deserves to be the new leader. To do so, when Francois gives the position to Sol-leks, Buck drives him back. Buck does it to show that length of service and experience do not count. This also reflects that Buck not only needs the position but also cannot wait his turn. He kills Spitz, so he should replace him. Usurping the authority of the position signifies that he needs to control others. It can be said that killing Spitz marks his adaptability. Meanwhile, it marks his new status from being a survivor to becoming a new leader. The law of fang reaches its peak when Buck gains power over the dog team by practicing the law of fang he believes in.

Buck keeps on killing, but the victims are wild animals, so they are not protected by human masters. In other words, unlike killing Spitz, these kills are committed beyond the sphere of humans. Hunger, not hatred, is the reason to kill. Every day, Buck kills wild animals and consumes them. First, he hunts small animals such as rabbits, birds, and fish. Later, he kills the larger animals such as moose. The moose are hunted for food as are small animals; however, they are two times Buck's size. After he has killed the first moose, Buck continues hunting them rather than small animals as a challenge to himself.

Killing the moose leads this study to suggest that hunger is not the only reason to kill. Buck kills the large animals to prove his domination. The moose killing spree reflect his intention to kill not only to practice the law of fang but to test his killing ability. It can be said that Buck feels wild and free to bring the law of fang into full play through killing the moose. It can be also said that he takes the lead in hunting after a short while in the new environments. The kills turn Buck into the most powerful predator of the forest which, at that moment, is a testing ground not only for his survival but also for his dominance. Without the control of humans, the native animals and their natural habitat are dominated by Buck, the newcomer, and the new settler-to-be of the land.

In addition to the wild animals, Buck also takes power over wild humans. After kills the chief of the Yeehats, the tribe is afraid of him. Buck is named a Ghost Dog:

But more remarkable than this, the Yeehats tell of a Ghost Dog that runs at the head of the pack. They are afraid of this Ghost Dog, for it has cunning greater than they, stealing from their camps in fierce winters, robbing their traps, slaying their dogs. (London, 2021, p. 100)

A ghost is a spirit. It also refers to the spirit of the dead people that haunt places. From the given name of Ghost Dog it can be interpreted that Buck will remain and haunt the tribe for years to come although he is not a real spirit. The name also implies that no one in the wild doubts Buck's remarkable ability to kill. In the remote land, it is very rare for wild humans to die from dog attacks. As the name implies, the Ghost Dog is the most powerful killer, despite not being a lion or leopard which are typically associated as man-eaters. From this point, Buck freely hunts in the Yeehats' territory. Unlike in the killing of Spitz, Buck cannot directly replace the killed chief. Nonetheless, Buck is found running at the head of a wolf pack. This indicates that Buck becomes the leader of the pack. It can be said that Buck can live his life as a leader in the territory which is inhabited not only by other wild animals but also by the wild humans.

Buck also gains personal benefits from killing. The kills benefit Buck in his survival as a non-native animal in new environments. Becoming independent of humans, he kills to prevent hunger. His killing capacity reaches its peak when he uses it to gain dominance over humans. The killing skill plays a crucial role in the wild. A killer who wishes to become a leader must employ this skill. Power is the result. Most importantly, killings must be used continually to maintain power. In hostile environments, the law of fang is necessary for not only the establishment but also the maintenance of domination.

Despite having a strong belief in the need to take life and enjoying his power over others in the wild, Buck used to have an easy life under the protection provided by kind-hearted humans:

He plunged into the swimming tank or went hunting with the Judge's sons; he escorted Mollie and Alice, the Judge's daughters, on long twilight or early morning rambles; on wintry nights he lay at the Judge's feet before the roaring library fire; he carried the Judge's grandsons on his back. (London, 2021, p. 4)

In the sheltered world of California, Buck possessed qualities such as being a loyal companion and assistant. He accompanies both children and adults. He is reliable and is accepted as a human friend. His actions reflect that life in the family is easy such as playing with a ball, going hunting with a boy, escorting girls, carrying a boy, and so on. He walks, runs, jumps, and lies when doing these actions. He does not have to understand or think beforehand. He does not possess a great deal of physical strength. Most importantly, he has a close friendship with the family and everything he does with them is done with happiness.

In the Alaskan wilderness, Buck is shaped by his beliefs. The identity of a wild beast is developed under the concept of the law of fang which refers to the beliefs and the practice under the sphere of brutality: "The blood-longing became stronger than ever before. He was a killer, a thing that preyed, living on the things that lived, unaided, alone, by virtue of his own strength and prowess" (London, 2021, p. 90). His characteristics and actions in California present sharp contrasts to his features presented in Alaska. In untamed Alaska, the description shows that he constantly needs to taste blood. Buck becomes stronger while the need for tasting blood as well as the practice of killing are closely intertwined. His strengthening body signifies he has been shaped into a real killer, meaning he is capable of killing anyone. The repeatedly used word *prowess* indicates that Buck has great skill at killing. On the other hand, others who do not possess this skill at the same high level are killed when encountering him. As a result, he can taste blood anytime and anywhere in the forests.

Another result of his killings is that Buck accepts the call of the wild. The concept of the laws Buck believes leads him to transform, or in other words, metamorphose from a gentle and kind dog into a killer. He decides to leave humans and starts his new life with wild wolves. In terms of a literary genre, Buck is the strongest and smartest, so he becomes a new hero of the wild. Other animals are weaker than him, so they must be killed or controlled by him. The tribesmen are villains, so it is reasonable for him to kill some and terrify the rest. It seems the wild is the place where Buck belongs.

This study notes that Buck feels free and wild in nature. It also affirms that Buck is a newcomer who calls Alaska home. This is consistent with earlier research such as the work of Benoit (1968), who stated that the American dream is of escaping from modern and complex society and its concomitant chaotic conditions to a primordial area. Moreover, the study states that a dream of becoming a leader is initially fulfilled when he becomes leader of the sled dog team. Eventually, Buck completely enjoys his power not only over the small and large animals in their own territories but also over humans in their native land. The study also agrees with Campbell (2000) and Bartosch (2010) that Buck's survival reflects Darwin's theory of evolution which highlights adaptation to the environment as a key for survival. According to Pizer (2011), this theory agrees with what he proposes to explain Buck's features such as strength, shrewdness, and cunning which lead Buck to be suitable for life in the natural environment and continue to live.

This study argues that the chance to be selected naturally is not the only reason for Buck's survival. Buck intentionally enforces the law of fang to fulfil his ultimate dream—power. On the one hand, he kills Spitz because of hatred. On the other hand, he revolts against

Spitz's authority. This is seen when Buck refuses to accept Sol-leks, another strong dog who has spent more time in the team than himself. The energetic act to deprive Sol-leks of the position signifies that Buck accepts only himself as the new leader. It is the power over the dog team that mainly drives him to revolt against Spitz. This is consistent with Nietzsche's notion of metaphysical crime that "to kill God is to become god oneself" (Nietzsche, 1978, as cited in Camus, 1991, p. 108). While killing marks his higher status among the dogs, it reflects a profound sense. In terms of social change, it is consistent with a statement of Pham Xanh (2008), a Vietnamese political author, who affirms that "Ideologists all agree that the ultimate goal of every revolution is power" (p. 143). Then, when the Yeehats are killed and forced to flee, Buck gains power again. This is shown when Buck, running at the head of the wolf pack, terrifies the tribe. Power over the humans means that Buck has the most power in that habitat. In other words, Buck controls the land, not humans. This is also consistent with Bagehot (2017) who points out that "If A kills B before B kills A, then A survives, and the human race is a race of A's" (p. 91). This study agrees with Bagehot as it defines *killing* as the action of taking another's life and takes place when the killer wants to maintain his existence and replace the killed one. Buck kills the Yeehats before they kill him, thus Buck survives. The land is thus dominated by Buck and his kind.

The study concludes that London's portrayal of Buck symbolizes strength and violence, the key factors for survival in the primordial world. These characteristics lead him to accept the call of the wild and he is trapped in brutality. The novel confirms the law of the survival of the fittest through the law of fang which is learned and enforced by Buck. Buck kills Spitz, the leader of the sled dog team. The need to replace Spitz reflects his greed for power. Buck hunts small animals for food. Later, he hunts moose. Buck tests his killing ability through these kills to prepare himself for the killings to come. Buck kills the tribal Yeehats to take revenge. The story ends when Buck becomes leader of a wolf pack and lives his life in the wild. The main reason for killing is that Buck uses the law of fang to take power. All the kills reflect the methodical steps of killing which have been developed significantly. When subjective and active conditions are ripe, Buck kills humans. When the belief in the law of fang intertwines with lofty qualities such as intellect and strength as well as being well prepared, the law causes Buck to reach his prime goal, power. Therefore, the law of fang is a solid tool enforced by Buck to eliminate deadly enemies, to take power over others, and to maintain his domination.

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