Approaching Ecological Ethics in *The Call of the Wild*

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This paper, by virtue of a close reading, examines the essential relationship between man and nature, man and animals revealed in *The Call of the Wild*, further establishing the equal status of nature and establishing the ecological ethics of harmony between man and nature. Man should shift from paying attention to the value of nature to the natural ontology and realize the leap from the natural value theory to the natural essence theory. It also prompts us to slow down in the rush of modern life, to listen to the whispers of the heart and the call of nature.

*Keywords*: Jack London, *The Call of the Wild*, survival, equality, the ecological ethics

**Introduction**

Ecological ethics refers to a series of ethical norms in which man deals with the ecological environment of themselves and their surroundings, such as animals, environment, and nature. Man’s natural ecological activities reflect the relationship between man and nature, which also contains the relationship between men, conveying specific ethical philosophy and values.

This study mainly discusses the ecological ethics in *The Call of the Wild*, which is composed of man’s destruction of nature, abuse of natural resources, immoderate development of large tracts of land resources, as well as abuse and mutilation of animals. Meanwhile, we attribute these roots to the side effects of modern civilization, mainly from the perspective of the relationship between man and nature, man and animals, man as well as animals. Man assumingly regards himself above the nature and attempts to conquer nature. However, the fact is that man and animals are not supposed to be in a relationship of dominating and being dominated, as they each displays their own strengths in their respective fields. The relationship between men bears the competition and cooperation among gold diggers; at the same time there also exists gender inequality. The law of the jungle between animals, or the survival of the fittest teaches animals to defeat their companions to gain their rights to survive. However, the true relationship between companions should be in perfect sympathy with each other, live and die together, and seek common development. It is firmly convinced that this paper will provide the chance for man to have a profound self-reflection of building up a harmonious relationship between man and nature.

**The Struggle Between Man and Nature**

Years have witnessed the rapid development of civilization, and man has indeed had the possibility of mastering his own destiny and becoming his own master. Wang Wei-qiong (2010, p. 362) illustrates that human civilization is at the expense of the harmony and balance of nature. In *The Call of the Wild*, Buck has...
succeeded in adapting himself to the life of sled dogs in the human world, but the changes of the surroundings and human factors have caused the wildness in him to break out again and again. Bao Xin-xin (2012, p. 32) demonstrates that Buck’s long and mournful howling is also a song of love between man and nature, which embodies the ancient man-dog connections, the really harmonious relationship that will go on forever. In the face of natural power, man demonstrates his fearlessness, that is: What does it take to overcome the great difficulties in the chase of money? However, the natural power is so irreversible that human beings can do nothing but accept the punishment conducted by nature.

Mankind is not the master of nature, so we are not supposed to attempt to possess and dominate nature, but it does not mean to devalue people, but to put man in the right position. Although man cannot become master of nature, man can fully take control of his own destiny and become his own master through struggle. Consequently, the struggle between man and nature has been existing for centuries, and man has not achieved the balance point yet.

The Relationship Between Animals and Man

Thornton knows how to get along with the dogs in his team, so his team is united and efficient, and Buck feels warmth and love for the first time after being betrayed and sold in Thornton’s team. Before meeting his last owner, John Thornton, Buck, tortured, is dying. Fortunately, he is rescued by John Thornton. Since then, he has been living with Thornton, who has evoked the almost fanatical love for and from Buck.

In The Call of the Wild, Hal, who regards himself as a noble creature superior to the sled dog, whips to “tune” the sled dogs invariably. The dogs in his team all live a miserable life, some of whom die, and some freeze to death. Worse still, Hal even picks up the axe to kill the gentle Billy. Hal does not regard the dogs in the team as his comrades-in-arms, but tames the dogs with a ruler’s attitude, and eventually the team are scattered and refuse to move on.

Liu Xiang-rong and Li Pei-chao (1997, p. 56) hold that man can limit his development and avoid harming others, but they should never pursue the policy of “killing the killing”. Instead, they should take appropriate technical measures to protect them in a way that is harmless to humanity while resisting their negative effects.

There is a limit that under no circumstances should mankind go beyond, which may cause the extinction of biological species. Human behavior should not cause the extinction of biological species on the basis of the fact that human behavior has led to the extinction of a large number of biological species and the bad situation may continue in a vicious circle. Accordingly, man is supposed to live in harmony with those animals.

Competitive and Unequal Relationship Between People

People in The Call of the Wild have been redefined. In the context of the gold rush, the people in the book can be divided into three groups. The first group includes Francois and Perot, whose relationship is partnership. In the context of the gold rush, many gold diggers regard Alaska as a holy place. Selected as the messenger whose main responsibility is to transmit news all around the world, Perot is originally an adventurer fearless of any harsh environment, taking no risk into consideration. Francois is a driver whose driving tool is a sled that can gallop in the snow, knowing how to treat the sled dogs in an appropriate way and how to excavate the actual value of the sled dogs. The second group is the family group, Charles, Mercedes, and Hal, whose images are vividly demonstrated in the book. Charles is a very common middle-aged man, and his weak gaze is an external manifestation of him. Hal is a young man with a pistol and a hunting knife, bullets hanging on his
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body. Mercedes is always paying attention to or expressing her opposition to others, always finding faults with others. It seems that evaluating others is an indispensable part of her life. In the icy environment, the three do not reflect the civilization and quality of man, but the ugly face of man. The last group is John, who does not have too many demands from the environment, nature, and others. He fears nothing. In the vast and dangerous wilderness, John only carries his guns and a packet of salt, and thus enters a vast and desolate place. With passion for freedom and wilderness, he always maintains ample energy with an objective attitude, daring to accept all challenges from nature. What the character John reflects is the courage and personal value of the struggle for survival in the environment.

These three groups of people have different life situations and characteristics. The authors do not put them in the normal environment of human society, but in nature. In the long process, a stronger tie is built up between men when confronted with a severe situation. Men have no choice but to cooperate with each other to deal with the great difficulties in the period of opposing nature. However, some existing unequal relationships have long been existing blocking man from unity from time to time when handling problems. In essence, team spirit plays an indispensable role in the process of self-realization.

The Law of Survival Between Animals

Buck was well-protected in the ivory tower before stepping into the cruel human society. However, after his being sold out, he has come to know the cruelty in the human world. It is vividly shown in the novel that Buck has no choice but to abandon his pride in the process of picking up his born nature because of the brutal reality. During that time, all the companions that Buck has met with in the long process should also be an assignable cause of Buck’s transformation. Although Spitz and Buck have been resenting each other for a long time, Buck chooses to forbear in an effort to provoke disputes with a calm and unpredictable look. He does not show any urgency, and he avoids all actions that can sneak Spitz. Although Spitz might also realize that Buck is a dangerous opponent, he continues to challenge and test Buck’s bottom line in an attempt to eradicate the thorn in his side. Not until the last fight break out do they end their competitive relationship.

Conclusion

The highlight of natural rights in ecological ethics is aimed at constraining and guiding human behavior, so that man can understand what to do in nature and what not to do. As a member of nature, man has no right to possess and dominate nature. However, since modern times, his desire has grown and expanded to possess and dominate nature. To break this desire for rights, we must set about breaking away the illusion that man is the master of nature. In essence, never is nature created by man. If we hold the view that man is the master of nature, there’s no need for man to obey the will and laws of nature, but the other way round. Logically speaking, since man is not the master of nature, nature cannot be regarded as a private property possessed and dominated by man.

Although men have no right to possess and dominate nature, they have the right to take advantage of nature, that is, to inhabit nature and use the value of nature to satisfy their own needs. However, the use of nature is not a privilege of mankind, but a right shared by all creatures. To uphold the right of mankind to take advantage of nature, it is necessary to preserve the right of nature to make use of man. To maintain the use of nature for man, it is necessary to preserve the biodiversity of nature. It is necessary to recognize and respect the laws of biology according to the law of ecology. As is mentioned above, as moral subjects, the rights and
obligations of man are unified. It embodies the humanity’s concern and responsibility for the future and fate of all life forms and the consistency of the concern and responsibility for their future and destiny. Bear in mind: What humans do to nature is what they do to themselves.

References


