Jack London Essay, Research Paper

Jack London

John (Jack) Griffith London (1876-1916) was born in San Francisco, California. His mother, Flora Wellman, came from a wealthy family. As an infant, Virginia Prentiss, a major mother figure, raised Jack in Jack?s childhood, an ex-slave. She was obligated to care for Jack because Jack?s mother was ill.

In his teenage years, Jack worked very hard jobs ? he served on a fish patrol catching poachers; he pirated oysters on the San Francisco Bay; he sailed the Pacific Ocean on a sealing ship; and he joined Kelly?s Army of Unemployed Working Men. London also traveled around the country, not returning to high school until the age of 19. During these years Jack was often reading the different writings of various authors. He chose to be a writer to escape the life of a factory worker. He often submitted literary works like jokes, stories, and poems to publications, usually with little or no success.

When Jack London turned 21 in 1897, he spent the winter in the Yukon. This provided material and motivation for many of his stories. He started publishing many of these in the ?Overland Monthly? in 1899. Jack London thereafter became known as a highly disciplined writer who produced over fifty volumes of political essays, stories, and novels.

The Call of the Wild brought Jack London lasting fame in 1903. Many of Jack?s short stories deserve to be called classics, even to this day. In 1907 Jack London began a voyage in a small boat across the Pacific Ocean that he would not end until 1909. This voyage was a key in breaking the taboo over leprosy. The journey also gave London material for books he would write on Melanesian and Polynesian cultures. Jack London?s best novel, The Sea Wolf, was based on experiences at sea.

Jack London?s love life was a unique one. London?s first marriage, in 1900, was to Bess Madden. With Bess, Jack had two daughters, Joan, and Bess. Jack co-wrote a book titled ?The Kempton-Wace Letters? with Anna Stronsky. This was based on the belief that mates should be selected for good breeding, not love. To this Bess agreed. After an affair with Charmain Kitteredge who was five years older, London divorced Bess. In 1905 Jack London married this ?Mate Woman? who became a major character in many literary works, and who also joined Jack on many of his excursions.

By 1914, Jack London?s health was failing. In his South Sea voyages it is said that he got malaria, dysentery, pleurisy, yaws, and other diseases. In the next couple of years his health only worsened. Matters were not helped by his refusal to slow down with his writings or his desire for the taste of raw meat.

From this point many stories diverge. One story is that his pain worsened and was alleviated by drugs. One night he overdosed on morphine (accidental?) and was near death in the morning. He died that night. The other story says he got a kidney disease and died of renal failure.

Either way, Jack London died on November 22, 1916 at the age of forty. His writings have been translated into several dozens of languages and are more often read in some countries outside of the United States today than in his home country. Jack London will be missed.