

The Call of the Wild. A mythological and Nietzschean reading of Jack London's novel.

La llamada de lo salvaje. Lectura mitológica y nietzscheana de la novela de Jack London.



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Summary.

In these pages we can find a brief reflection on Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*. Novel in which it is possible to read some of the most important ideas of the philosopher/literator/provocateur Friedrich Nietzsche, being, in addition, a story with the category of "myth". Ideas that we have been able to develop in the Faculty of Education Sciences of A Coruña (Spain), in a series of open workshops, without age or degree limitations. Perhaps the need to show how mythical thinking continues to work in our formation, psyche, consciousness, culture. The narration, the explanation of an ontological, moral sense, an order of the world in front of the chaos of nonmeaning. Perhaps the need to vindicate forgotten readings, the classics, the juvenile or adventure novel, diverse forms of myth. We emphasize, as the most important objective, the pedagogical capacity of myth, literature and philosophy.

Keywords: Myth. Jack London. Hermeneutics. Pedagogy. Nietzsche. *The call of the wild*. Superman. Will to power. Übermensch.

Resumen.

En estas páginas podremos encontrar una breve reflexión sobre *La llamada de lo salvaje* de Jack London (*The Call of the Wild*). Novela en la que es posible leer algunas de las ideas más importantes del filósofo/literato/provocador Friedrich Nietzsche, siendo, además, un relato con categoría de "mito". Ideas que hemos podido desarrollar en la Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación de A Coruña (España), en una

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serie de talleres abiertos, sin limitaciones de edad o titulación. Quizá la necesidad de mostrar como el pensamiento mítico sigue trabajando en nuestra formación, psique, conciencia, cultura. La narración, la explicación de un sentido ontológico, moral, un orden del mundo frente al caos del sinsentido. Quizá la necesidad de reivindicar lecturas olvidadas, los clásicos, la novela juvenil o de aventuras, formas diversas del mito. Destacamos, como objetivo más importante, la capacidad pedagógica del mito, la literatura y la filosofía.

Palabras clave: Mito. Jack London. Hermenéutica. Pedagogía. Nietzsche. *La llamada de lo salvaje*. Superhombre. Voluntad de poder. Übermensch.

I remember Gadamer when he spoke of poetic language, language that is never exhausted when we try to transform it into concepts (Gadamer, 2012, p. 100). The poetic stimulates that operativity of synthesis of ideas and emotions coming to generate concepts, so we can extract various lessons from a novel, song or poem. In this narration, the sensation of a certain atavistic primitivism, of timelessness, places us even further away, or closer, to a mythical time. It is the closeness to the roots of myth that Gianni Vattimo recognizes: the time known as the time of the hero. In this novel, proposed by London through a *symbolic animal*. Adventure at times harsh and cruel, seems to want to talk about some truth that we feel. It is shown, not said. Nietzsche understood man as an artist in a world that is a work of art in constant process of transformation. World, the Western world, which through guilt has weakened men physically and psychologically. It has deceived them, weakened them in a way that neither the philosopher nor the American writer accepts.

A brief synopsis is necessary: Buck is a strong, big and docile dog that moves away from an intentionally *gentrified* family, which is that of a judge. In other words, imposed law, *artificially* created. Captured and sold, he will be sent north to become a sled dog to serve the gold diggers. In a violent world, he becomes the leader of the sled dog. He passes through various hands until he meets John Thornton with whom he develops a deep relationship of respect and love. Attacked by the natives of the area, this last master is killed, so Buck ends up alone and at liberty. He then returns to atavistic world of the forest, of the cold mountain, joining the wolf pack until he becomes its leader.

In the workshops that give rise to these pages, I proposed to the students, in the classroom, to elaborate a theory, or to develop the "philosophical aspects" that they could find in the novel, without looking for a relationship with any previously studied theory, without the intention of directing the workshop. Various themes emerged such as loneliness as a test and as something common to all people at certain moments or life circumstances; the importance of nature in both its literal and metaphorical sense; personal morality and the morality of the group or community put to the test; metamorphosis; survival versus social behavior; cooperation; laws; mythical archetypes (we need to find a name for this idea of archetype with help, explain it in an introductory way).

The theories start to follow one after another, for example, "*Society vs. Nature*" where it is proposed that bourgeois laws can be unreal, absurd, normative, not adapted to the change of society, that "people skip them", or sometimes it is more than necessary to correct them and even break them. They present the proposal to become aware of our own individual/instinctive nature and the need to find and choose our own personal path, with our own rules that are different and adapted to our needs, which they called "*The Big Bang of honesty*". They speak of a dog finding his true nature (a "*super-dog*"), in an "*infinite search for his essence*", as they describe it. They consider at this point that we should behave honorably and propose the following equation: "*Honor = Moral Duty + Identity + Respect for oneself*". And a few more ideas, not few, although these are the ones that stick more to the Nietzschean philosophy. And, in the last part of the workshop, after having *experienced* Jack London's novel, after having formulated for themselves a theoretical proposal of its meaning, passionate about the "game", it was very stimulating and easy to look for -always in a playful way- the parallels with Nietzsche. From here on I develop the framework (hermeneutics, literature, psychology of myth) that brings us closer to the understanding of the text to finally extract the elements that allowed us to find Nietzsche in the Yukon, in the cold Klondike.

The students themselves are aware of how Friedrich happily fiddled with the totem poles. The indoctrinated Camel who follows the rule -ignorant- is transmuted before our eyes into the Buck who lives in a judge's seat. The fierce and wild Lion in search of freedom is the

dog that pulls the leash and fights with the leader of the group, Spitz. The Boy is the animal that achieves and assumes his authentic freedom, the true nature, in a community of *Übermensch* like him, if we understand the wolf as a free animal, not subject to the social norm imprinted by genetics. We allow our literary/artistic part to take center stage, as this is something we believe Nietzsche himself would have demanded. This wild *super-dog*, strong, noble and lover of whoever shows him love and honor is the man-who-transcends, the ultra-man that Zarathustra promulgates. They understand that no, he does not become a fascist Aryan, but describes those men or women who break with the imposed morals and so many times outdated and wrong by mistake or consciously that they do not stop looking for a superior, better morality, from their individual self. What they define in the workshop as the "*Big Bang of honesty*". Thus, we also understand that the will to power does not seek or imply imposing oneself on others, but to survive to overcome oneself, reaching greater heights of perfection in all senses. A transcendence that turns us into *Children*, or *Wolves*, in this case. It is not a complete vision of Nietzsche, of course, I know we left important nuances in the inkpot. But, to this day, I know that they have not forgotten that they keep the experience in their hearts and brains. We turn to myth, a great myth by Jack London, to work on concepts of some complexity and importance in philosophy and in life. We read, we play, we resort to myth and its ontological and passionate narrative condition.

For Gadamer (2012): "To read is to interpret, and interpretation is nothing other than the articulate execution of reading" (p. 100). Thus, he turned the written word into an open referent, far from the univocal or dogmatic message. It is always possible to extract a new meaning, nuance, to see how a text of any nature grows. And this is a quality, characteristic, objective of hermeneutics. He goes on to state the thesis that interpretation and poetry are intertwined for a compelling reason: "the poetic text can never be exhausted by transforming it into concepts" (p. 100). Whenever we read poetry our understanding wants to go beyond, and this invites us, or obliges us, to interpret one of the basic objectives of the workshop described here. Therefore, one of the fundamental aims or quests of philosophy is to generate concepts. It implies a creative act in the one who, at first, pronounces or writes the

words, followed by those who, listening or reading, interpret. An interpretative, dialectical, creative act. This is the kind of work that interests me when working with philosophy, not as a more or less complex compendium of knowledge, theories, concepts or authors, but as a mechanics of thought, an invitation to play, interpretation, achievement of constructed ideas.

This synthesis of ideas and emotions are stimulated by poetry, says Gadamer (2012), but let us not forget narrative, and poetics, in any of its forms, nor the depth that we extract from certain teachings present in poems, myths, films, among others. The expressive capacity of the author can reach, show or create concepts of certain weight, even when it would not even have been his first intention to do so. London's novel can be read in different ways, over and over again, in order to investigate what the writer proposed in the first moment and contrast it with a more contemporary reading and its possible interpretation or enjoyment. It is true, many of us can find a certain poetic epic in this return to ancestral nature.

Paul Ricoeur defined hermeneutics as the science and art of interpreting the text, and it is essential to take into account the original motivation or intentionality of the author, received by the reader, who strives to establish a dialectic between both forces. For Gadamer (2012): "The reason of our time is hermeneutics", attending to this as a proposal of solutions to classical and not so classical problems of philosophy and the interpretation of culture. Therefore, the novel can become a kind transmitter, an incentive in the creation or understanding of concepts, which stimulates the inner search. It invites the reader to feel creative at the moment of giving meaning to what is read and to himself in relation to the context of the narration, to give meaning to the world.

Nowadays, mythology and novel (and I would say any form of narrative) are much closer to each other than they are to philosophy. Poetic synthesis, ontological search that the reader/hermeneut enjoys re-reading this novel that perhaps he/she assimilated with a different spirit in his/her childhood, adolescence or already in his/her maturity. Narrative is part of our formation as persons, of our deepest development, that is why it is our personal

mythology. That is why it is so hard for me, and I do not think I am the only one, to emotionally accept the correct translation of the novel *The Call of the Wild*, and not the one we knew as *The Call of the Jungle*.

Play as a basic didactic of philosophizing

Many fictional narratives provoke reflection after an intense emotional experience, so that a more complex, conceptual, abstract learning can be achieved with help. In a pedagogical sense, hermeneutics opens ways, opens the possibility of the solipsistic point of view, helps to a change of attitude that allows to discover the *truth* without despising any option. In this way, novels, understood in this method of work as a possibility of play, especially in the identification of the adventure novel as juvenile, are an art form that generates a timeless illusion. It brings us back to mythical time, the one that is and is not, that was and will be, repeating itself in a cyclical way (first approach to the eternal return). Something that Vattimo already emphasized in *The Birth of Tragedy* (2002, p. 42). And even more so in this story, since the sensation of timelessness and evident atavistic primitivism takes us far away from our time and reality. It is the closeness to the roots of that myth that, as Vattimo also recognizes, indicates the time of the hero, here in the form of an animal symbol. Myth is an open game of meanings.

This novel seems to want to speak of some truth that we *feel*. Gadamer himself would say that it presents an "elevated ontological range," where "something emerges into the light, and it is what we call truth" (2012, p. 30). Therefore, hermeneutics goes beyond being a technique of reading or interpretation, for it is a form of experience, exploratory and creative. Hermeneutics is *koine*, a universal language, which leads us to dialogue, to intersubjectivity (Oñate *et.al*, 2006, p. 29). It is a game from the moment in which the text has its own rules, internal code and intention. Nietzsche found in the game the creative power of life and art, thus the mature man is the one who recovers the seriousness of the childish game. However, in all the games of poets or philosophers there is no false discourse, because there is no external rule to measure them (Gadamer, 2011, p. 181). Aesthetics

appears as a place of ontological truth, a place of play of ontology, free in spite of conventions and customs (Oñate *et.al*, 2005, p. 481). "I know of no other way of dealing with great tasks than play: this is, as an indication of greatness, an essential presupposition." (Nietzsche, 2011, p. 70).

Expressive and conceptual possibilities of the novel.

Of all the arts, we continue with Gadamer's vision, poetry is the one that allows the most dialogical creative game between interpreter and artist. It encourages interpretation. Of course, this author contemplates poetry in a broad sense, as an opening of meaning. The adventure novel, the juvenile novel, science fiction, when it shows epic or suspiciously ontological dyes, is very close to this *poetic language*. György Lukács (2016) compares epic and novel, objectified as the "great epic", and distinguishes between them only the historical-philosophical data that have shaped them. The novel is the epic in this epoch where the *extensive totality of life* is no longer given, in which the meaning of this life is problematic, but, in spite of everything, we continue to seek that totality, the *temper of totality* (p. 84).

Gadamer says of the novel that it is the *loosest* of the artistic forms, since it produces a dissolution between narration and reflection by expressing the narrated in a natural way. However, the author himself defines Franz Kafka's novel (2011, p. 208) as unnaturally natural; in this strange way he recreates the world to invite reflection and the discovery of truth in a bizarre situation that generates discomfort and uncertainty through a simulacrum of reality. We can say the same of Jack London in showing a wild, heroic world as the setting for a thoughtful, dog-like character. The open multivoicedness of the Prague native is given by an apparent normality, by that strange and inapprehensible character that disorients and confuses us. London's univocal message appears to us in the struggle against nature, in the Nietzschean proposal of overcoming (there are also those who have wanted to compare it with social Darwinism or Spencer's theories). Perhaps, by referring to the transcendence of humanity, to its freedom and self-discovery through the animal metaphor, the message should not necessarily be understood as univocal. It is more productive to imagine that a

seemingly simple story multiplies the possibilities of meaning. As Italo Calvino stated in *Why Read the Classics*: "a classic is a book that never finishes saying what it has to say". Moreover, a classic is a text that shapes an inner universe, one of whose possibilities leads us to define ourselves in relation and, perhaps, in contrast to it (1995, pp. 15-17).

In the nineteenth century, it was not only the artistic aspects that were valued, since the structural and content elements of the novel, for example, the plot, were also fundamental. Later, and Proust may be a good example, the discourse was more important than the story. *Style*, as part of the poetic stylistic processes, becomes the narrative structure of the structuralists, and is what accounts for meaning. This stylistic feature in the modern novel accustoms us to a reading that does not correspond to the reading of the mythological text that can be heavy and strange to our habits. Many readers are grateful, for example, for a Neil Gaiman (2017) who reconstructs the Norse myths with a fresh, lighthearted new style; a Stephen Fry (2019, 2021) who, with his British sense of humor, rewrites the Greek myths or a London with whom, as we have already seen, we return to myth in its primal style with his stark poetics.

Myth and hermeneutics in *The Call of the Wild*

Aristotle understood tradition as that link that allows us to recognize ourselves and others, which was part of the function of myths. It is the aim of hermeneutics to know oneself, that attitude of dialogue and encounter of the mythical in the text, particularly in the one that is the subject of this small study. Hermeneutics follows the trail of the multifarious (Gadamer, 2011, pp. 76-89), the suggestive of the text - as rich as the myth can be and a whole symbolic universe that is reinterpreted beyond a symbol of origin that, because it is ambiguous and ungraspable, survives in constant evolution. In this sense, poetics and mythical thinking have similar natures and, therefore, both are fertile and open fields for hermeneutics. Aristotle himself defined a path to follow for various forms of rationality: from myth to *logos*, as is

often reiterated, but myth and mythical thinking are more active forms of thinking than we recognize or expect today. In my opinion, they should be consciously recovered because they are there, as they have always been, because they influence our lives and because they are valuable pedagogical tools.

Vattimo highlights the Nietzsche who created his own myth after demystifying previous philosophies that he considered outdated: it is not only the rational aspect that understands and discovers. Zarathustra's preaching assumes that poetic and mythical thinking that shows the spirit realities that are not perceived with the naked eye. This author insists on the theme when he alludes to the contemporary myth, that which for the masses is presented on television, novels, press or radio (2002, pp. 75 and 110). Like the myth that we live through London (his own life is not far from some of his novels). A way of living and apprehending natural, instinctive reality that brings this canine narrative closer to the instinctive roots of Nietzschean morality is: "[...] most of a philosopher's conscious thinking is secretly guided by his instincts and is forced by them to run along certain lanes [...]" (Nietzsche, 2012, p. 30). It is perhaps that nihilistic Nietzsche who disregards logic to reconstruct meaning and the world. Essence of myth.

Symbolon

The symbol is at the center of the hermeneutic idea of art. The sign being ambiguous, Hegel affirmed the existence of a necessary relationship between form and content, since, beyond this relationship that we usually consider evident or manifested by consensus, interpretations follow one another due to the freedom of the spirit. The value of a work ultimately depends on: "its capacity to symbolize" (Vidal, in Oñate *et.al*, 2005, p. 495). Jack London sought to give meaning to the story of his dog, to its becoming as a character and symbol, p makes it necessary to capture its aura. However, from our current point of view, this symbol, and what happened in his narrative, allows and provokes its transformation, growth and adaptation to our moment and perspective. As Heinrich Zimmer said, there is no

sure system of interpretation of forms, for true symbols carry in their nature something inimitable. "One must perpetually reread meanings," something he considered an adventure (Zimmer, 1999, p. 14).

For Goethe everything is a symbol, since everything refers to something else, something else that appears to us. Therefore, every symbol that appears in *The Call of the Wild* refers to a meaning and an image that we can consider common to all. It is no exaggeration to recognize that it operates an eidetic reduction of a universal idea that goes far beyond the dog/wolf because we reach the idea of a free human being. Man is an entity open to metaphor and in the Nietzschean Dionysian process man undergoes a regression to the level of the tiger and the monkey, that is, a return to the barbarian. The Dionysian dithyramb is a symbolic world, a regression to the animal (Vattimo, 2002, pp. 171-172). Thus, I consider that Jack London's world fits seamlessly with Nietzsche's attitudes and intentions. Munz interpreted myth, being metaphor, as the "extreme case of metaphor", (1986, p. 109).

A summary of the most extended symbolism of the dog or wolf leads us to a friend and ally, a western symbol of fidelity, but its meaning is not limited to this. Dogs are guides to the spiritual world, inheritance or essence of their lupine ancestor. He walks beside us from the ordinary world into the unknown, from our conscious mind into the world of the unconscious. But the dog is also linked to the beyond, to death, even as a guardian of infernal gates, like Garm in Norse mythology or Cerberus in Greco-Latin mythology. Being a guide of souls, a psychopomp, he is able to heal or hurt, but he always appears connected to the fact that we are lost and in need of help.

We can find similarities in *The Call of the Wild* with Buck, which is not too complicated. True, we see that it is the animal himself, Buck, who is lost and pursues a path to find his *spiritual self* once transformed into a wolf. Death always hovers around him and he himself ends up with his opponent: the bestial dog Spitz. Moreover, his fidelity to man is present, although, it could not be otherwise, he is faithful only to the one who has shown himself worthy of such honor. John Thornton treats Buck as an equal, from an act of freedom, from love. The rest of the dogs in the novel, and of course Buck himself in the first chapters,

represent the dominated being, too docile and unable to free himself, submissive. A symbol that we find diametrically opposed to the wolf.

It was not too much to venture that Buck, phonetically, invites us to feel or think of *back*, return. It is a clear allusion to his return to a primordial nature, ontologically of a higher order -that of the wolf- and to his place of origin, the mountains and forests, far from the artificial city. In this case it is also possible to translate *buck* as dollar in reference to the fact that Buck was exchanged for a handful of dollars for a single purpose: the feverish search for gold in the Yukon. Gold that may also be a symbol to study in this narrative. However, we do see other details that may be pertinent to comment on, without going any further, returning to the Spitz dog, a name that refers directly to the name of a strong breed, with abundant hair, very resistant in cold ecosystems. *Spit* is also a simply unpleasant word that can be translated as spit, skewer or snort.

John Thornton's subject is more delicate and I run the risk of venturing "my translation". I try to keep a certain restraint, but I think we must play with all possibilities; playful, open hermeneutics. John is the real name of Jack London, Jack being an affectionate diminutive (Buck reminds us of Jack, on the other hand), but it is almost boring to interpret the presence of this character in such a simple way. John is evidently John "the Baptist" and certain resemblances to the biblical figure of this saint may be plausible. Buck meets the man on the shore of a lake, at which point John unties him and frees him from the dog sled, since he knows the dangers of crossing the frozen lake at that time of year. The sled, while trying to cross on the ice, breaks it and sinks. Buck has saved his life thanks to the love of a man; he has been freed from a *baptism* that would have led him directly to death. Regardless, John Thornton will die, as we know he ends up at the bottom of a lagoon (sorry if I'm giving away too many narrative details, I'm innocently assuming we all know the story). No one expected, on the other hand, that London, being prone to annihilate any glimmer of hope or pity, would caress our souls with a Disney-style *happy ending* (a situation similar to that of other of his characters, such as Martin Eden). *Thorn*, finally, is translated as thorn, which may mean

absolutely nothing or perhaps lead us to imagine a crown of thorns, we leave it to the imagination and sense needs of the hermeneut or reader. Transcendence, ritual, sacrifice.

And, if we speak of wolves, we must remember that their symbolism is different from that of the dog. In a first impulse we think of the terror of their vision, but also a mystical communion with nature, closer to that of the cultures where the novel takes place. The apparition that we only see when it is the animal's own desire, when it arrives to communicate something to us, since the wolf only appears on rare occasions before Buck. It reminds us or inspires us of the need or the yearning to recover our primal soul (something not without a certain fear, on the other hand). The wolf and his relative the dog do coincide in that they can be linked to death. Both can accompany the god of war Ares in Greek mythology; or Odin or Wotan in Germanic mythology, accompanied by two wolves, Gere and Freke. For Jack London we could venture that, as we will discuss a little further on, the wolf symbolizes the *Übermensch*, with the difference of not accentuating his isolated individualism, since he lives with a group of equals: the *pack*, *the pack*. Friedrich Nietzsche also fed on the animal symbol. Zarathustra enjoyed the company of the eagle and the snake, besides presenting one of his most commented metaphors (or preachings of the wise Zoroaster) in the fable form of the Camel, the Lion and the Child as we have already commented above. Heidegger considered the eagle as a symbol of the eternal return in its circular flight over Zarathustra; coiled around its throat the serpent, the most intelligent animal, which gives more power to the image and its meaning. The eagle - the proudest animal in creation - drives the superman, the *Übermensch*, to rise, to transcend.

Nihilism

Briefly and quoting again Vattimo (2002, pp. 47-52) nihilism recognizes the lack of meaning and order of reason in becoming as the value and meaning of the world is lost. Reason searches, but history insists forcing us to think that there is no order or end, so that nothing has value or meaning. It is a redefinition of the individual psychology of modern men and women. In Nietzsche this spirit of vengeance for a past that he cannot, we cannot, correct or

change is gestated. The will to power will be the next step towards liberation and redemption. Buck the dog fights against his past, a meaningless existence and, through the world of man, loses any positive value he might have found. The good is gone, the superficial love of a few is not enough, although he has been treated at times as a human being is not, indeed, it is something different that arises within him as revenge against that past and those experiences. But there is no reason to carry out a bloody revenge, but revenge of liberation, confrontation to the future with no other reason or sense than the individual one guided by instinct.

I turn again to Vattimo to differentiate what he considers three historical phases of nihilism (Oñate *et.al*, 2006, pp. 124-125), which is a journey from a psychological to a historical process of truth. The first phase, which is not found because it simply does not exist, of response to the metaphysical and moral search for becoming manifests itself as shame and disillusionment. The second phase attempts to systematize the situation in a unity or "totality" to a world that we have simplified. The individual is sacrificed, and such an order is revealed to be of non-divine origin, for in reality it is our deceptive artifice. The third and final phase comes after these two disillusionments. It sees all reality as false and constructs an ordered "beyond" that demonstrates that we had psychological needs that, once we reach this point, show that nothing makes sense, there is no value and no truth. It becomes unbearable to live in this world.

This whole network of realities and desolation can be found in London's novel, although, as we can imagine, with different nuances. First, it is possible to reverse the order. Buck lives a full, quiet, painless life since he is a puppy, in the *truth of* a contrived world, created by humans (we insist, the family of a judge) where the purpose is none other than to fulfill certain functions in a neatly ordered and hierarchical structure. A reassuring, comfortable bourgeoisie, in a world delimited by the fences of an estate where everything makes sense, a sort of Eden. But the world becomes unbearable, painful, unknowable when he is robbed, when the dog is betrayed, trusting a couple of men he follows. Thus he discovers the *law of club and fang* (*The Law of Club and Fang*, chapter two), leaving this first

phase of disenchantment far behind. I do not think it is accidental that it was a gardener with a gambling problem who stole him from the paradisiacal garden. Chance, the randomness of destiny, disorder without cause.

In a second moment, as we have already seen, individuality is dissolved in favor of the group, in a whole ordered in a contrived and cruel way; a universe that is actually false, although we can think it makes sense, with its own rules, where every act has consequences. Buck, in this new reality, after the first disillusionment is forced, in a perfidious psychological game, to be part of the leash. Laws, imposed rules, with no choice but to abide by them and even learn to enjoy them while the icy world manifests itself, step by step, as a hidden truth is revealed.

The third phase would correspond to the disillusionment and shame defined by Vattimo, although it is not so in Buck, since the animal's moral and metaphysical search comes to fruition when he finds his true nature. He transcends his essence as a dog to remember what he was before, what he should be: a wolf. A free entity with its own morality that has shown itself to be superior to that of the men it has accompanied or confronted. Without forgetting Zarathustra, it is not superfluous to remember that the wise anchorite of the mountain understands that one cannot love the truth without loving the world as it is.

Will to Power

In this novel it is difficult to feel a final tragedy, there is no despair or shame, perhaps we mourn the loss of Thornton, but neither has it accompanied Buck throughout his journey where we have already seen more than one scene of death or violence of some kind. Freedom, love, the struggle that leads to the discovery of self and the world. The character is transformed, of course, but also his environment is transformed, the forest, as he becomes the leader of the herd, which will have great repercussions, on the one hand, on the overall behavior of the herd and the hunt, as well as on the relationship between its members and also with that of the men who enter the forest.

The philosopher Nietzsche soaks the literary Nietzsche: the will to power enters the field of art as a deconstruction of the subject, a kind of liberation that neither plans nor organizes (Vattimo, 2002, p. 131). An internal confrontation, against itself. Perhaps the necessary courage implicit in that aphorism where we fear to look into the depths of the abyss.

In *Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism number 6, Nietzsche wonders which is the *instinct of knowledge* that guides the philosopher. Every instinct enters the battle trying to dominate, although, for a philosopher, the one that desires, must and imposes itself in the last moment is the moral instinct. Moral duty and its instinct leads us to isolation, because being independent is a dangerous attitude, with unsuspected consequences and reserved for the *strong*. It is the isolation of the dog Buck as long as he does not find the pack of equals. In the times of London, a certain idea of social Darwinism, the law of the strongest, is an idea that spreads and gives rise to violent interpretations of evolution, of society and even, as we can suspect, of Nietzsche's ideas. Alasdair MacIntyre, without going any further, understands that the philosopher has been misunderstood, for he makes us doubt with his language angry, violent, he tells us of his *historical irresponsibility* (2019, pp. 277-278). Vattimo, weak thought, tells us about his *metaphorizing activity*, which is not far from London's literary work. Everything remains on paper: activate your desire to know, play at unraveling metaphor.

Nietzschean concepts perfectly describe the central character, the hero-dog. The instinct of the philosopher is intuited in the maturation processes of the hero, in London's proposal, in the combat between the instinct of knowledge and the moral instinct, and we see how it is added, to generate a certain degree of confusion, to the struggle for an idea of good, for the common good, for the right/wrong choice that a myth always poses. From this point of view, the will to power is presented as an *aggressive pathos* proper to that strong nature that faces the enemy, morality and even itself. As he wrote in *Ecce homo*: "*Becoming what one is presupposes not even remotely guessing what one is.*"¹ It drags the

¹ Author's own italics.

poet, tragic, will to life that compels one to sacrifice, not to turn one's back on the hardest problems we encounter (Nietzsche, 2011, pp. 42, 66, 89). There are unequal and unbalanced forces in this world that struggle to impose themselves, to dominate, and it could be said, along with Nietzsche and London, that they resemble the personal struggles we carry within us as that struggle is the will to power. But if the human being is the will to power, it is something far removed from instincts such as superiority, dominance or greedy avarice (gold fever). It would be better to think that this power is that which desires over the will, a creative desire that includes art, morals, any instinct, thought or motivation that seeks and gives meaning. It is the inner combat that impels to creation, to forge new values. And we already know which norms, which moral systems have killed the will to power in the Western world: idealism, Christianity?

The will to power can be represented, if we look for archetypes, models that our minds seek fiercely, by the adventurer or the artist, which invites us, obliges us even, to discover Jack London as a person and a character who, in his own life, wished to incarnate this will to power. The *canis familiaris* that is, in a beginning, Buck, is a valid metaphor, because, although we are not able to anticipate our own transcendence, we can experience through reading the enviable energy of the metamorphosis of the dog Buck into a wolf, *canis lupus*. From chaos to order, from adventure to calm. *The call of the wild* (of the jungle, if I may), as a myth, does not return the established order by repairing it, we do not return to a point of origin, it is more the destruction of its past universe to re-encounter the essence of the wolf. An almost Platonic idea, may the Athenian excuse me. The ancestral myth as a proposal for a new order.

Der Übermensch

It is true that it has been translated as superman as this is the most widespread form in which his theory is known. With its provocative prose and destructive epic, as we have already seen, it was not difficult for interested figures to confuse the idea *ex profeso* with attitudes and theories of a fascist or Darwinist type (even London himself confused the possible

relationship between Darwin, Spencer or Nietzsche). A more interesting translation, with more nuances or, better, translations could lead us to transman, ultra-man and even man-that-transcends. It seems simpler, or more useful, to recognize the *Übermensch* as the person capable of creating his own values by virtue of his own will.

Nietzsche considered him a free spirit, a *spirit that has become free, that has regained possession of itself* (p. 100). He confronts guilt and morality, the culture that imposes these burdens without allowing us to question the dogma, the obedience that leads us into a slavery that turns its back on life. Our great hero dog listens and accepts the call, although never at the first time, according to Campbell's monomyth (2010). The call is one of the basic characteristics of the heroic path and is already contained in the title of the novel. Buck accepts the responsibility of giving himself his own morality in autopoietic act; he has lived among *slaves*, and these, unable to take the risk, cannot try to change their condition. Self-improvement is for Buck and others like him. For the rest, it can be nefarious (Campioni, 2011, pp. 16-17).

Eternal Return

It is probably, of the main Nietzschean concepts, the most difficult to interpret in *The Call of the Wild*. A complex concept that was never well configured, open to interpretation. Nevertheless, key in his philosophy, with a moral and a cosmological reading (Vattimo, 2002, pp. 32-59). The cosmological one escapes from a possible interpretation of the novel, so we leave it aside in this small work, not because it is not important.

Heidegger, who else, understood that it was not something to be understood from a physical or cosmological point of view, that it did not refer to physical time and its movements nor to its chronological processes. It refers, in any case, to a different ontological temporality: the *being-possible* of the return or return characteristic of memory and the recreational imagination of historical-hermeneutic time. That which is given in the language of the sciences of the spirit, in a spiritual experience of language (Oñate *et.al*, 2012).

In this way, the eternal return can be understood as an obligatory desire of repetition of the instant, indefinitely, eternally. We cannot avoid this fact, which conditions us to define

the right choice in each instant of our lives. Past and future are thus united in the instant that is the present and in this circle that forms the eternal return, future and past already exist or continue to exist. Returning to the wolf essence is something cyclical, it is a cosmological repetition that has something special in Buck. The movement of time is interrupted and the moment of transcendence to wolf is chosen as defining, but in a superior, supreme form. Like Heracles, who, without being man or god, is driven to his ultimate transformation into a star, catastrophe. Buck is not a wolf, for he arrives as a dog and his physical being does not change: it is his essential, inner transformation that is howling at the moon. The natives will know him as *Ghost Dog*, his descendants will carry a white spot on his chest, like a star.

This experience or interpretation of time in the novel is very reminiscent of mythical time, perhaps because the temporal passage of this animal. Its passage from potency to act could be that of an exceptional specimen of the species as a mythical archetype. Archetype, model beyond time, beyond the story, myth in a uchronic time, rather than utopian, and, therefore, eternal. The mythical time, the moment of creation or adventure, revives every time someone narrates the story to access that extraordinary, magical world that never ceases to be there, accessible from the experience of spiritual or mythical narration. The wonderful experience of reading.

We can turn to the Greek time called *aidíon*, non-generated, to which belongs that which does not perish, but Buck's majesty depends on his mortality, on his accepted, sincere, courageous finitude. However, his mythical or heroic essence leads us to the *aion*, the intermediate time between our fleeting temporality and the eternal time belonging to the divinity (Fernández in Oñate *et.al*, 2012). It is possible, as in Buck's case, that our blood still boils when contemplating the full moon. A possible sense interpretation of the eternal return, the instinct, the nature that flows alive and hot, in the form of the *amor fati* posed by Nietzsche, love of destiny, which we make our own when we face it. Luc Ferry describes this love as the struggle to recover order from chaos in order to recognize in ourselves the underlying essence: Odysseus escaped death only to accept his finitude and return to his small universe of meaning, Ithaca, together with Penelope (2009, pp. 44-45). Buck rejects

the imposed order of men that rather violence and chaos: law that tarnishes reality, our essence and returns to the jungle, to the wild, to the forest, to the mountain that is not chaos, but natural order.

All these ideas, basic description on Nietzsche's theories, on certain characteristics of literature or aesthetics are treated in a processual way; as useful pedagogical tools to work consciously and creatively to learn to learn, to play with the divergent transversality of our thinking. Mythical thinking hand in hand with *logos* and the narrative we need is part of who we are, how we explain the world or our own life, as it is a wonderful force to motivate the reader. Gilbert Durand (1993) emphasized the *optimal character* of myth: that capacity to express beyond the purely logical or rational, beyond the precise description, its expressive-symbolic capacity to evoke what is impossible to transmit in any other way.

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