

THE ARTISTIC NARRATOR AND THE SEMANTIC INTERPRETATION OF METAPHOR IN JACK LONDON'S "AN ODYSSEY OF THE NORTH"

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Abstract

This article discusses the image of the author-narrator and one of the most frequently used stylistic devices — metaphor — in the short story “An Odyssey of the North” by the American writer Jack London.

Keywords: Story, image, author-narrator, speech, metaphor, artistic stylistic device.

Introduction

It is known that metaphors play an important role in the narration of the characters and events created by Jack London. This feature serves as one of the main factors ensuring the wide artistic impact and the maturity of the writer's creative skill.

A metaphor is “a figure of speech in which one thing is expressed through another,” and it represents one of the key tools of artistic expression. Its basis lies in comparison and implicit resemblance, through which meaning becomes more vivid and precise [2, p. 432].

In this sense, in Jack London's “*An Odyssey of the North*,” the author-narrator, while observing the world, expresses every detail and movement through another artistic means that he perceives and feels deeply. This approach gives the story — and London's style in general — a distinctive poetic tone and artistic depth.

Moreover, the language of London's stories is rich in stylistic devices and complex in grammatical and poetic structure. This is, in fact, a reflection of the writer's emotional and epic perception of reality, through which his individual style and artistic mastery are revealed.

In “*An Odyssey of the North*,” London's vivid depictions of Alaska and Canada — the tundra, the Arctic landscape, gold seekers, and the lives of the indigenous northern people — display the charm and expressiveness of his language.

This can be clearly seen in the following passage:

“The sleds were singing their eternal lament to the creaking of the harness and the tinkling bells of the leaders; but the men and dogs were tired and made no sound. The trail was heavy with new-fallen snow, and they had come far, and the runners, burdened with flint-like quarters of frozen moose, clung tenaciously to the unpacked surface and held back with a stubbornness almost human.”

In this excerpt, the persistence and endurance of the leading dogs are expressed metaphorically, resembling human strength and willpower. Through this, the harshness of nature and the human struggle against it are artistically conveyed, demonstrating the depth of London’s imagery and stylistic mastery.

In this passage, London vividly describes the caravan of men and dogs moving through the Arctic expanses, using metaphors, epithets, similes, and comparisons with great skill. The howling of the dogs, the sound of the bells around the leaders’ necks, the exhaustion of men and animals, and the heavy sleds moving through soft snow — all are presented through the narrator’s observant and emotional vision.

Thus, London represents the harsh and testing nature of the Arctic and the lives of its people through a combination of philosophical and artistic expression. Even the title *“An Odyssey of the North”* carries metaphorical meaning: the word *“Odyssey”* refers to Homer’s ancient epic, symbolizing the courage, endurance, and heroism of the northern people facing the merciless forces of nature. Hence, the author introduces the metaphorical idea from the title itself and develops it consistently throughout the story.

In another part of the story, the author writes:

“They drove the dogs of the Queen, wrought fear in the hearts of her enemies, ate of her meager fare, and were happy. They had seen life, and done deeds, and lived romances; but they did not know it.”

Here, London metaphorically describes the life of the Queen’s servants. Phrases such as *“they drove,”* *“wrought fear,”* *“ate of her meager fare,”* and *“were happy”* express the simplicity, endurance, and inner contentment of these people in a few words. Through these metaphors, London reveals the impact of a harsh environment on human nature while maintaining respect for human dignity and perseverance.

As linguists note, “a metaphor is an artistic facet of language formed in the process of the growth of thought.” From this perspective, London’s perception of reality and his manner of expression are inherently metaphorical. The consistent



development of the narrator's speech allows the reader to sense, imagine, and contemplate the setting in which the story unfolds.

Metaphorical thinking has long been a part of literary theory, and numerous scholars have explored its function in artistic texts. Aristotle defined metaphor as "the transference of a word's meaning from one genre to another or from one species to another," emphasizing its power to create new artistic forms through semantic transformation.

Therefore, a metaphor can first be viewed as a mode of perception and later as a means of expression. The writer does not describe reality directly but conveys it through resemblance or symbolic association.

In Jack London's works, metaphors often appear in this form. In his late 19th-century stories depicting American society, London uses metaphors to express the cold, merciless, and harsh realities of life. This metaphorical approach is reflected not only in the depiction of nature but also in the inner world, character, and psychological state of his protagonists. Thus, metaphor in London's works serves as a means of understanding real life more deeply and depicting it in harmony with the human spirit.

London employs a metaphor in describing the movement of weary dogs and sleds. When the dogs hesitate, the lead dog suddenly pulls the harness tight and forces the sled forward, followed by the others, while the men's fatigue seems forgotten. The scene is expressed through the metaphor:

"'Gee! Gee!' the men cried, each in turn, as their sleds abruptly left the main trail, heeling over on single runners like luggers on the wind."

The phrase "*heeling over on single runners like luggers on the wind*" creates a metaphor based on comparing a sled to a sailing ship. Through this comparison, the vast icy landscape, the bright white snow resembling an endless ocean, the dogs' effort to move forward, and the men's leaning to balance the sled are all likened to a sailing boat cutting through the wind.

In this way, the description of the landscape merges with human movement, creating a sense of **psychological parallelism**. The men's cries of "Hey! Hey!" and the sleds' sharp turns symbolize an inner lightness and emotional uplift in the narrator's consciousness. Thus, through metaphorical expression, the writer introduces psychological parallelism into the story's composition.

By this technique, the narrator's **personal epic emotion** — his inner feeling — is harmonized with the depiction of nature. The snowy landscape, the freezing

cold, and the seemingly unpleasant environment acquire a new artistic function: they express not only the physical setting but also human vitality, joy, and resilience. In this way, the author evokes warmth and admiration for the cold Arctic world in the reader's heart.

A similar metaphorical quality can be observed in London's story "*To Build a Fire.*" The writer describes the snow-covered landscape as follows:

"It was an unbroken white, save for a dark hairline that curved and twisted from around the spruce-covered island to the south."

(The dark line, like a strand of hair, stretched from the spruce-covered island to the south, marking a part of untouched nature.)

Here, the author compares the narrow path on the snow to a strand of human hair, thereby revealing a hidden closeness between nature and humankind. This metaphor reflects the idea of harmony between man and nature and portrays nature as a living, breathing entity.

In the same story, London also uses the metaphor "*They were traps*" to describe the unfrozen springs beneath the snow. Through this expression, he metaphorically presents the springs as dangerous traps for careless travelers who might step on them and fall into freezing water — a fatal mistake unless they immediately stop to build a fire and dry their feet.

Thus, through the use of metaphors in the narrator's speech, Jack London enhances the artistic impact of the story, blending the physical struggle for survival with a profound philosophical reflection on human existence and nature.

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