

## The Depiction of Nature's Power Over Humans and Character Building in the Short Story “The White Silence”

Liliya Khabibullina Jakhonovna

The teacher of English Department, Bukhara State Medical Institute

**Abstract:** This chapter of the work will analyze the short story "The White Silence" by Jack London that follows the journey of Mason, a prospector in the frozen wilderness of the Yukon. As Mason travels alone through the harsh and desolate landscape, he encounters the profound and eerie phenomenon known as the White Silence. This is a moment when nature seems to come to a standstill, with no wind, no movement, and an overwhelming quietness. In the midst of this frozen stillness, Mason confronts his own mortality and experiences a deep sense of isolation. The story explores themes of human vulnerability in the face of nature's forces and the psychological impact of extreme conditions on an individual's perception. London's vivid descriptions and atmospheric writing style contribute to the story's evocative portrayal of the unforgiving Arctic environment and its impact on the human psyche.

**Keywords:** naturalism, human, nature, influence, naturalistic determinism, circumstances, environment, forces.



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*Nature has many tricks wherewith she convinces man of his finity- the ceaseless flow of the tides, the fury of the storm, the shock of the earthquake, the long roll of heaven's artillery- but the most tremendous, the most stupefying of all, is the passive phase of the White Silence. All movement ceases, the sky clears, the heavens are as brass; the slightest whisper seems sacrilege, and man becomes timid, affrighted at the sound of his own voice. Sole speck of life journeying across the ghostly wastes of a dead world, he trembles at his audacity, realizes that his is a maggot's life, nothing more. Strange thoughts arise unsummoned, and the mystery of all things strives for utterance.(3,p. 6)*

Link says in another study of naturalism that when critics ponder what, exactly, literary naturalism is, the consensus is that it “is a branch of the realist movement...informed by a reasonably well-defined set of philosophical attitudes regarding the relationship of humans to their environment”. The quote says that literary naturalism is like a specific type of realistic storytelling. It's not just about style; it's influenced by certain beliefs about life. These beliefs focus on how people are connected to their surroundings. So, naturalism explores how outside forces affect human lives in a more defined way.

This paragraph discusses how nature has a strong effect on people, making them feel small and aware of their limitations. The author talks about different powerful aspects of nature, such as tides, storms, and earthquakes. However, they emphasize that the most powerful thing is the quiet part of the White Silence. In this phase, everything stops – there's no movement, the sky becomes clear, and people feel hesitant to make any sound.

During this silence, humans realize their smallness. The author describes them as a tiny dot in a vast, empty world. The term "maggot's life" conveys a sense of insignificance and powerlessness, suggesting that nature has control over them.

Furthermore, the writer notes that in this silent moment, people start thinking unusual thoughts, and they feel compelled to express the mysteries of everything.

This implies that nature not only influences the external environment but also triggers deep contemplation about life's mysteries within individuals.

The passage conveys that nature, particularly the quiet phase of the White Silence, prompts individuals to recognize their smallness and contemplate the mysteries of life. The vivid descriptions of nature's impact, from stopping all movement to creating a clear sky, help paint a picture of the profound influence it has on human perception. The use of accessible language at a B1 level ensures that the message is conveyed clearly, making the text understandable to a broader audience with varying levels of English proficiency. The paragraph illustrates how nature shapes human awareness and triggers contemplation on the mysteries of existence.

*The stillness was weird; not a breath rustled the frostencrusted forest; the cold and silence of outer space had chilled the heart and smote the trembling lips of nature. A sigh pulsed through the air- they did not seem to actually hear it, but rather felt it, like the premonition of movement in a motionless void. Then the great tree, burdened with its weight of years and snow, played its last part in the tragedy of life.(3,p. 7)*

In the frosty woods, a strange quiet settled in, as if nature took a big breath and held it. The trees stood still, covered in frost, not moving at all. The extreme cold and absolute silence made it feel like outer space, freezing everything and making nature seem completely still. It was an unusual calm, not the usual peaceful kind.

During this frozen moment, something peculiar happened. A sort of sigh seemed to move through the air. People didn't exactly hear it; it was more like they felt it, as if something important was about to happen in a place that seemed perfectly quiet. The stillness became a bit eerie, like something significant was on the horizon.

Then, in the midst of this frozen hush, an ancient tree, carrying the weight of many years and a heavy load of snow, played its final part in the ongoing story of life. This part of the story points to nature making decisions. The tree, affected by time and the weather, couldn't resist it anymore. It's like nature itself was deciding what would happen to the tree.

The sigh, the frozen quiet, and the old tree coming down together tell a bigger story about how nature operates. Nature doesn't really pay attention to our small stories or dramas. It just keeps doing its thing, affecting everything around it. This shows that life and nature follow their own set of rules, indifferent to the individual struggles or triumphs within it. The frozen scene, with the sigh and the falling tree, highlights the naturalistic determinism at play, where nature's forces dictate the course of events, emphasizing the inevitable cycles of life.

*The sudden danger, the quick death- how often had Malemute Kid faced it! The pine needles were still quivering as he gave his commands and sprang into action.(3, p. 8)*

In this brief passage, we get a glimpse of Malemute Kid dealing with a threat, showcasing his familiarity with danger and his knack for handling swiftly unfolding, life-threatening situations.

The phrase "the sudden danger, the quick death" underscores how often Malemute Kid has confronted perilous circumstances, suggesting a life marked by continuous risk and challenge.

Even after the immediate danger has passed, the quivering pine needles paint a vivid picture of the aftermath. This tangible response from nature serves as a silent witness to the recent danger, highlighting the intensity of the situation. Malemute Kid's decisive response, issuing commands and springing into action, reflects not only his experience but also a readiness to face crises with a composed demeanor.

The quivering pine needles act as a symbolic representation of the lingering tension and potential danger in the environment. This visual image enhances the narrative, emphasizing the gravity of the situation and the impact it leaves behind.

Through the repetition of words like "sudden" and "quick," the passage conveys the unpredictable and rapid nature of the challenges Malemute Kid frequently encounters. This deliberate repetition adds a layer of urgency and intensity to the storytelling, emphasizing the swift decision-making and action-taking required in the face of danger.

*In essence, the passage captures not only the immediate danger Malemute Kid faces but also the aftermath and his adeptness in responding promptly and effectively to life's unpredictabilities. And men who have shared their bed with death know when the call is sounded. Mason was terribly crushed. The most cursory examination revealed it.(3,p. 8)*

In these lines, we get a glimpse of naturalistic determinism, which suggests that events are shaped more by external forces than personal choices. The phrase "And men who have shared their bed with death know when the call is sounded" hints that individuals who've faced life-threatening situations develop a heightened awareness of danger. This implies that experiences with mortality influence a person's instincts and reactions, shaping their understanding of life.

Moreover, the statement "Mason was terribly crushed. The most cursory examination revealed it" aligns with naturalistic determinism. It suggests that Mason's condition, being "terribly crushed," is a direct result of external forces acting upon him. The language used implies that the outcome isn't solely determined by Mason's decisions or actions but rather by the impact of some external event, possibly the one described earlier in the passage.

The text implies that confronting life-threatening situations shapes a person's awareness and response to similar challenges in the future. Additionally, Mason's condition is portrayed as a consequence of external events, illustrating the naturalistic idea that individuals are subject to forces beyond their control, influencing the course of their lives.

These lines subtly convey the idea that our experiences, especially those involving danger and mortality, play a significant role in shaping who we are and how we respond to future situations. The text suggests that, in the face of life-threatening events, individuals like Mason develop a kind of instinct or awareness, emphasizing the impact of external factors on one's understanding and actions. This notion aligns with the naturalistic perspective, where human lives are portrayed as deeply intertwined with and influenced by the forces of the external world.

*The dogs had broken the iron rule of their masters and were rushing the grub. Man and beast fought for supremacy to the bitterest conclusion. Then the beaten brutes crept to the edge of the firelight, licking their wounds, voicing their misery to the stars.(3, p.10)*

In this scene, we see a reflection of naturalistic determinism, the idea that events are shaped more by external forces than personal choices. The dogs, usually following the strict rule of their human masters, break free and charge toward the food. This action sets off a struggle between humans and animals, each fighting for dominance, and it doesn't end well.

The phrase "Man and beast fought for supremacy to the bitterest conclusion" emphasizes the intensity of the conflict. It suggests that this struggle between humans and dogs unfolds according to a predetermined course, driven by circumstances rather than individual decisions. The use of "bitterest conclusion" implies an inevitable and harsh outcome.

Following this conflict, we see a poignant image: "Then the beaten brutes crept to the edge of the firelight, licking their wounds, voicing their misery to the stars." This paints a vivid picture of the defeated dogs, physically hurt and expressing their suffering under the night sky. The mention of the stars suggests a larger, indifferent universe, echoing the naturalistic theme that external forces, like the vastness of space, influence and shape the fates of individuals.

In general, the dogs breaking the rule and the ensuing conflict show how events can unfold beyond the control of individuals, driven by the circumstances they find themselves in. The beaten dogs, licking their wounds and voicing misery, convey the idea that in the face of these external forces, individuals, be they human or animal, can experience hardship and suffering. This aligns with naturalistic determinism, where the events of life are depicted as being influenced by powerful, external factors beyond the control of individuals, leading to outcomes that are sometimes harsh and inevitable.

*It is not pleasant to be alone with painful thoughts in the White Silence. The silence of gloom is merciful, shrouding one as with protection and breathing a thousand intangible sympathies; but the bright White Silence, clear and cold, under steely skies, is pitiless.*(3, p. 12)

In the Yukon, nature can be unforgiving, especially in the harsh conditions described as the "White Silence." This phrase paints a vivid picture of the cold, clear, and bright landscape under steely skies. Here, the environment becomes an unyielding force, demonstrating the harshness of nature in this icy region.

The White Silence is not merely an absence of sound but a dominating presence. The narrator expresses the discomfort of being alone with painful thoughts in this setting. Unlike the silence of gloom, which might offer a certain merciful shroud, the bright White Silence is depicted as pitiless. The use of the word "pitiless" suggests a lack of mercy or compassion, emphasizing the severity of the natural environment.

The description of the White Silence as clear and cold under steely skies points to the relentless and unyielding nature of the Yukon's climate. The harsh conditions, with freezing temperatures and a stark landscape, become a dominant force that individuals must contend with. This aligns with the concept of naturalistic determinism, where external forces, such as the environment, shape the course of events.

According to Pizer, "The naturalist often describes his characters as though they are conditioned and controlled by environment, heredity, instinct, or chance. But he also suggests a compensating humanistic value in his characters or their fates which affirms the significance of the individual and of his life." This suggests that naturalist writers often portray characters as influenced by factors like surroundings, family traits, instinct, or luck. However, at the same time, they highlight a humanistic value in these characters, showing the importance of individuals and their lives, even in the face of these deterministic influences.

In the Yukon, survival depends on adapting to the rigors of nature. The steely skies and bright White Silence are not just atmospheric conditions but elements that influence and determine human experiences. Naturalistic determinism, in this context, underscores the idea that individuals are subject to the forces of nature, and their actions and thoughts are shaped by the harsh realities of the environment.

The isolation described in the White Silence adds another layer to the narrative. Being alone with painful thoughts in such an environment amplifies the challenges individuals face. This solitude

becomes a part of the naturalistic equation, where the interplay between the external environment and the internal thoughts and emotions of individuals contributes to the overall harshness of life in the Yukon.

The harsh conditions of nature in the Yukon, particularly the bright White Silence, exemplify naturalistic determinism by portraying how the environment dictates the tone of human experiences and shapes the individuals who navigate its challenges. The unforgiving nature of the Yukon becomes a formidable force that individuals must confront, highlighting the power of external elements in influencing and determining the course of life.

*The White Silence seemed to sneer, and a great fear came upon him. There was a sharp report; Mason swung into his aerial sepulcher, and Malemute Kid lashed the dogs into a wild gallop as he fled across the snow.*(3, p. 13 )

In the Yukon's White Silence, something unsettling happened. It seemed like the silence was mocking, almost sneering, and a deep fear gripped Mason. Suddenly, there was a loud noise – a sharp report. In response, Mason swiftly swung into what's described as his "aerial sepulcher," which implies a high or elevated place, possibly a shelter.

In the face of this mysterious and frightening event, Malemute Kid, reacting quickly, urged the dogs into a frantic run, a wild gallop, as they hurriedly fled across the snowy landscape. This intense moment highlights the instinctive reaction to the perceived threat, with Mason seeking refuge and Malemute Kid rapidly directing the dogs away from the source of fear.

The White Silence, typically serene and bright, takes on an eerie quality here. It's no longer just a tranquil environment; it becomes an entity that seems to taunt and mock. The fear that overcomes Mason suggests a profound unease, a sense of dread triggered by an unknown and potentially perilous force in this desolate setting.

This passage illustrates the vulnerability of individuals in the face of nature's unpredictable elements. The sudden shift from a calm environment to one imbued with fear reflects the harsh and capricious nature of the Yukon. The naturalistic perspective emerges as external forces, like the White Silence, play a role in shaping the emotional and physical responses of the characters. Mason's retreat and Malemute Kid's urgent escape on the sled pulled by dogs demonstrate the immediate and instinctive reactions required in this unforgiving environment.

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