

**The Dead of Winter:
A Literary Critique of Jack London's "In a Far Country"**

by

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to provide a detailed literary analysis of Jack London's short story "In a Far Country" by using a variety of different kinds of interpretation. The thesis consists of an introduction which gives a brief explanation of the theories used over the course of this thesis. The body of the thesis opens with a biography of London leading up to the writing of "In a Far Country." This story, until now, has been largely ignored in favor of London's more famous novels, *White Fang* and *The Call of the Wild*. After discussing London's biography, the first chapter continues with an in-depth analysis of the text utilizing multiple critical approaches but focusing especially on multicultural and moral approaches. Appended to the end of this thesis is a full reprint of the story as it was originally published in 1899 as well as an overview of various critical theories.

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Finally, a special thanks to Jack London for capturing the spirit of the White Silence and the fascinating nature of Alaska that was the impetus for this project:

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. And the fear of death, of God, of the universe, comes over him, — the hope of the Resurrection and the Life, the yearning for immortality, the vain striving of the imprisoned essence, — it is then, if ever, man walks alone with God. (“The White Silence”

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Introduction

Practically any work of literature can be examined from virtually any kind of perspective. In other words, every literary text lends itself to interpretation from multiple points of view. Some types of interpretation are based on a visceral response and originate in the reader's subconscious. These kinds of interpretations are very often rooted in the reader's own background, be it cultural, educational, or experiential. When readers become aware of their own assumptions regarding a text and bring that awareness to the forefront of their reading and thinking, they become more conscious readers. This kind of explicit awareness becomes even greater when multiple interpretations are considered. When any work is read by using a variety of critical approaches, the intricacies within that work are laid bare and the story itself seems richer and more full-bodied. This thesis seeks to utilize multiple interpretative theories to analyze Jack London's "In a Far Country." Perhaps the most concise and comprehensive method to facilitate this kind of analysis is the approach outlined by M.H. Abrams.

In his highly influential book *The Mirror and the Lamp*, the important literary theorist M.H. Abrams argues that for any critical theory to be thoroughly grounded and defensible, it must account for four basic components of literature: the author, the text, the audience, and the universe (Abrams 6). What this means is that a reader's assumptions about these components of all literary texts will affect how that reader views the author, the text, the audience, and the universe (or reality). For example, a reader

might assume that because Stephen King admitted to using drugs while writing some of his most famous novels, his texts might be tainted by fantastical delusions his audience could never truly grasp because they themselves could not imagine a reality in which a clown enjoys terrorizing children from the reaches of the city's sewers. Similarly, if a reader assumes that a text must be well-structured, the reader might admire King's texts for his skillful designs. If a reader assumes that an audience needs to be entertained, the reader might admire any entertaining aspects of King's texts. Likewise, if a reader assumes that reality is mysterious and unknowable, the reader might be interested in any aspect of King's texts that implies this view of reality. The important point is that methods of interpretation differ according to the kinds of prior assumptions a reader makes.

Abrams argues that each mode of criticism will tend to emphasize one of the four basic components above all others. Platonic criticism, for instance, would see very little of value in Stephen King's work. This type of criticism emphasizes the importance of an accurate, truthful depiction of reality itself, something that most literary texts (according to Plato) cannot provide. A Platonic critic would therefore probably dislike King's work because his texts seem to be lacking in logic and reason (at least from Plato's point of view). Archetypal criticism, on the other hand, sees humans as experiencing reality in terms of deeply shared emotions, symbols, and myths. An archetypal critic, therefore, would be interested in how such emotions as fear and desire, as well as common images, symbols, and myths might affect the author, the audience, and the text itself. Because King arguably taps into deep-rooted and widely shared psychological responses, archetypal criticism is a natural approach to use with a writer like King.

Still, while virtually all literature can be interpreted by using various theories and adopting a wide variety of points of view, some literature seems simply to invite the use of a particular theory or two. Take Jack London's writings, for instance. His stories are often strongly multicultural in emphasis. In other words, they often tend to depict people with different values and backgrounds coming together in shared spaces and common enterprises. Frequently their cultures conflict, and sometimes such conflict leads to violence and even death. Certainly this is what happens in London's story "In a Far Country," which is the main focus of my thesis.

At the same time, this story also invites interpretation from a moral perspective as well. That is, this story raises intriguing questions about what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad, how people should or should not behave. The story's two central characters could hardly be more different in their cultural backgrounds, but each displays a kind of immoral selfishness that ultimately leads to disaster for them both.

In examining London's story with morality in mind, I will employ a number of different kinds of theories that strongly emphasize the importance of ethics. However, I will also look at the story from the perspective of certain theories in which morality plays little role at all. For example, theories of interpretation influenced by Plato, Longinus, Marx, and feminists are almost by definition interested in morality. However, various other theories – such as structuralism, deconstruction, postmodernism, and Darwinian theories – are not. My chapter on "moral approaches" to London, therefore, will compare and contrast approaches that do emphasize ethics with approaches that do not.

Ultimately, my thesis seeks to offer a multifaceted approach to one of London's most interesting stories. In the process, it seeks to illustrate the value of looking at any piece of literature from multiple points of view.

“In a Far Country”: Jack London and Multiculturalism

Few “classic” American writers have been as obviously “multicultural” in their own lives and backgrounds as Jack London. London’s mother (Flora Wellman), a descendant of New England Puritans, had migrated as a child to San Francisco at a time when the west coast was still very much part of the American frontier. Later in life she practiced spiritualism, claiming that she could communicate with the dead. In particular, she claimed to be in touch, beyond the grave, with a Native American tribal chief. Meanwhile, London’s father (probably William Chaney) was apparently an astrologer. Both of the writer’s parents, then, were members of a very distinct (and somewhat odd) subculture in a city that was both literally and figuratively on the fringes of the dominant social structure of American civilization at that time.

This already complicated family history, however, soon becomes even more complex. When the female spiritualist (Flora) realized that she was pregnant by the male astrologer (Chaney), she claimed that she refused his advice that she should abort the baby. He then refused responsibility for the child. She, in turn, attempted suicide, but fortunately was not successful, although she was for a time mentally unbalanced. Her son, whom she named John, was raised in part (and for much of his life) by an African American woman (a former slave) named Virginia Prentiss. Flora, however, soon married a disabled veteran of the American Civil War, who adopted Flora’s son and raised him as his own child.

So: by the time he reached maturity, young “Jack” already had an enormously rich, very definitely multicultural background. He was the son of two dabblers in the occult, one of whom was obsessed with a dead Native American; the woman who helped raise him was black; his stepfather had been injured in the worst conflict between two cultures in American history; and he had grown up at the furthest western reaches of the United States, in a city visited by ships from all over the world. His family, although far from wealthy, was not destitute, but London himself soon became familiar with the hardships of working-class life by toiling for long hours in a cannery. Then, borrowing money from Virginia Prentiss, the African American woman who was still a major figure in his life, he was able to purchase a small ship and become an “oyster pirate” – in other words, a thief who raided privately-owned oyster beds. When his ship was ruined, he then, ironically, became a law enforcement figure as a member of the California Fish Patrol!

Thus London, by the time he was merely 17, could be described as a west-coast cosmopolitan who was descended from spiritualists, who was raised in part by a black woman, whose step-father was a disabled vet, and who had been successively a cannery worker, a law-breaker, and a law enforcement officer. He was also a devoted patron of the local public library and had developed a strong interest in literature and writing. It is hard to think of another significant figure in American letters who had a more complicated series of cultural backgrounds and influences than Jack London, even before he had reached full manhood.

But this was only the beginning. In 1893, London signed on to sail the Bering Sea in a sealing schooner, an undertaking that would consume seven months of his life. The

following year he journeyed east, joining a small contingent known as Coxey's Army, a group of jobless men who intended to protest economic conditions by marching on Washington, D.C. He did not remain with the group long, however, and was arrested for vagrancy and sent to prison. While in prison, he became an adherent of socialist doctrine and was influenced by the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Marx. Once released, he enrolled in and attended a single semester at the University of California at Berkeley. Though he dropped out quickly, he continued to educate himself by reading the works of Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad, and the philosophical and political works of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Immanuel Kant, and Herbert Spencer. The longer he lived, the more variously multicultural he became (Gianquitto xiii).

When London embarked on his arctic journey in 1897, he had lived a fuller life in his twenty-one short years than most people do in a lifetime. In fact, London once said: "The function of a man is to live, not to exist" – and live, he did (Shepherd vii). He could never be content to live a staid and stuffy existence. Instead, he experienced life from all corners of the world (including, and especially, his trek into the Klondike) and then spun that experience into works of pure literary genius. He encountered people of many different cultures and ethnicities and was able to imagine himself as part of each of those groups and see the world from their perspective. This allowed him to write compelling short stories, the first of which were included in a collection known as *The Son of the Wolf*, initially published in 1900. It is in this collection that we find the story "In a Far Country," certainly one of London's most culturally diverse stories.

“In a Far Country” from a Multicultural Perspective

London’s story opens with a warning that foreshadows the work’s conclusion: those who seek adventure must be adaptable and have the ability to appreciate the mutability of life and its varied circumstances. On the other hand, those who are steadfastly bound to their familiar beliefs and predictable ways of life should return to their own comfortable environment lest death seek them out in the wilds of a far country. When the main characters (Carter Weatherbee, a white-collar clerk, and Percy Cuthfert, a wealthy gentleman) are introduced, it becomes painfully evident that they are not the sorts of men who have the ability to adapt to changing or challenging surroundings. They join a party of adventurers headed north into Alaska in search of gold. However, they very quickly prove themselves a significant liability to the group simply because they fail to contribute equally to the manual labor this undertaking requires. Soon the group votes to continue to search for gold while Weatherbee and Cuthfert opt to overwinter in a cabin on the Porcupine River. Initially, the men take individual responsibility, work together, and live well in their cramped cabin. Personalities eventually clash, however, and the men begin to bicker before finally ignoring each other completely. Isolation, darkness, silence, and cold eventually drive them to insanity. As the story draws to a close and tensions are at their highest, Cuthfert shoots Weatherbee in the face at the same time that Weatherbee plants an ax in Cuthfert’s neck. Cuthfert is left to die from his injury while pinned beneath Weatherbee’s heavy and lifeless body. Meanwhile, the pervasive and persistently accumulating ice continues to overtake the cabin (London, “In a Far Country”).

Multicultural critics are interested in various cultural groups, especially minority cultures within a larger population. Typically, these critics are advocates for the rights of those minority cultures. Critics of this sort tend to look for specific and particular cultural markers in a text, such as whether a text reveals anything about the writer's experience as a member of a group or groups and/or his familiarity with particular kinds of "sub-cultures." This familiarity with different sorts of people is a real strength in London's writings. He had such a strong background in various cultures that his experience permeates his stories to a degree so significant that it is often difficult to keep in mind that his stories are works of fiction rather than true and factually accurate depictions of his own arctic adventures.

The narrator of "In a Far Country" begins by making a simple assertion that opens the story as follows: "When a man journeys into a far country, he must be prepared to forget many of the things he has learned, and to acquire such customs as are inherent with existence in the new land" ("In a Far Country" 23). Immediately, then, the narrator implies that this story will deal with multicultural issues. The adventurer into a "far country" must be willing to put his old culture temporarily behind him and adapt to new challenges. Life in a "far" and unfamiliar country will pose challenges to new visitors, especially if that "far" and unfamiliar place happens to be (as it is in this story) a rugged, forbidding frontier. Frontier life is, almost by definition, multicultural. Frontiers often attract visitors from all over the world, and certainly this was the case in the Yukon at the end of the nineteenth century. People from many different cultures had to learn not only to adapt to the physical frontier but also to adapt to the cultures of all the strangers they met at the very edge of civilized existence.

In fact, the visitor to the “far country” of the frontier must (according to London’s narrator) “oftentimes . . . reverse the very codes by which his conduct has hitherto been shaped” (“In a Far Country” 23). In other words, the visitor must sometimes not only adapt to new conditions but must entirely reject his old cultural assumptions. He must give them up completely. This is an even more extreme version of multiculturalism. Rather than simply adding new customs to old ones, and rather than simply remaining open to the cultures of others, the person embracing this kind of radical adaptation must abandon his old culture altogether. London implies that in some cases a culture must fit its environment rather than easily controlling that environment. The environment, then, determines the culture, rather than vice versa. “To those who have the protean faculty of adaptability,” the narrator continues, “the novelty of such change may even be a source of pleasure” (“In a Far Country” 23). But the need for change results from the need to survive, not from any mere pleasure in change or variety for their own sakes. Although contemporary “postmodernists” admire “the protean faculty of adaptability,” London’s narrator implies that nature often determines culture rather than the other way around. In that sense, London’s narrator is far from being a real postmodernist. Many postmodernists assume that cultures are structured according to various kinds of fluid human desires. In contrast, London’s narrator suggests that in certain extreme conditions, cultures are shaped almost entirely by the simple need to survive. In fact, the narrator posits that should a man not be able to “fit himself to the new groove,” he should return to his home country before too long a delay results in his death (“In a Far Country” 23).

London’s narrator continues to introduce the story by describing the qualities that would make a frontiersman successful. Reiterating the idea of malleability in a frontier

environment, the narrator declares: “The man who turns his back upon the comforts of an elder civilization, to face the savage youth, the primordial simplicity of the North, may estimate success at an inverse ratio to the quantity and quality of his hopelessly fixed habits” (“In a Far Country” 23). This assertion restates the importance of the ability to let go of ingrained habits and beliefs in favor of methods that work best in the new environment. The narrator thus effectively embraces a multicultural mentality. A man who can turn his “back on the comforts of an elder civilization” (“In a Far Country” 23) acknowledges that while that previously known civilization may be comfortable and static, it also fosters beliefs and customs that could be, in the frontier, at best outdated and irrelevant, and, at worst catastrophic. The newcomer who can embrace the multitude of cultures in a frontier environment like the Yukon would be able to successfully navigate the “primordial simplicity of the North” because he would not be overly reliant on modern conveniences (“In a Far Country” 23). He also would not be so firmly rooted in his old convictions that he could not see the value of a cultural shift away from his prior set of beliefs. Having given up his “fixed habits” (those things his culture has taught him to expect) and instead making use of the knowledge and resources provided by people who have gone before him, this newcomer could live simply but well.

The Multicultural Mind

Interestingly, it is not just the physical realm of life that can reflect and demand a multicultural outlook but the mental aspect of life as well. The narrator asserts that a man “will soon discover, if he be a fit candidate, that the material habits are the less important. The exchange of such things as a dainty menu for rough fare, of the stiff leather shoe for

the soft, shapeless moccasin, of the feather bed for a couch in the snow, is after all a very easy matter” (“In a Far Country” 23). In other words, in the “far” country, it is nature that shapes the human experience rather than humans imposing some sort of order on nature. Success on the frontier demands a sense of practicality and adaptability. In some ways, one’s own culture is now as distant in relevance as the old life is distant in miles. Food on the frontier is simply for nourishment, not necessarily enjoyment. Clothing and footwear are chosen based on availability and functionality with no regard to fashion. Couches made of cold and hard packed snow don’t mold themselves to the human body. Instead, the human body is forced to follow the snow’s contours. In order to survive and thrive, a person must adapt to nature and use whatever useful tools he can muster from any and every culture he has sampled. Moreover, the person who hopes to survive on the frontier must also be able to free his mind to accept cultures or groups of cultures other than his own. Such a person’s “pinch will come,” the narrator continues, “in learning to properly shape his mind’s attitude” (“In a Far Country” 23). The “pinch” is managed easily enough if one can appreciate the importance and acceptance of acculturation and also demonstrate the ability to discard impractical old habits. After all, it is easier to adapt physically to new conditions than to adapt mentally. Muscle memory can be trained quite easily so that one can withstand new environments. Minds are not always so pliable. The narrator implies that open-minded persons, who can see the benefits of other cultures, tend to possess certain mental attitudes (unselfishness, forbearance, and tolerance) that are unquestionably crucial to survival. The narrator further implies that the ability to adapt to nature and therefore transcend shallow cultural differences will allow frontiersmen to thrive. Successful trailblazers are not beholden to any particular cultural

boundaries or cultural maxims. They become, in effect, part of a multicultural hodgepodge melting pot.

London's narrator suggests that one fundamental idea that transcends the ideas of any single culture, though certainly in varying degrees – is the idea of “more.” The endless pursuit of “more” that spans multiple cultures is evident when London introduces the first of his two main characters: “When the world rang with the tale of Arctic gold, and the lure of the North gripped the heartstrings of men, Carter Weatherbee threw up his snug clerkship, turned the half of his savings over to his wife, and with the remainder bought an outfit” (“In a Far Country” 24). The narrator implies that many humans, by their very nature, are driven to always want more. More money. More material goods. More food. More water. There is comfort and security in having more, and those who do have more, regardless of cultural background, tend to live a bit easier and survive a while longer than those who settle for less. The news of gold found in the Arctic stirred not just the interest of Americans like the fictional Weatherbee and his non-fictional counterparts; it also spawned worldwide interest from even the farthest reaches of the globe. Prospectors from all over the planet, “lured” by hopes and dreams of phenomenal wealth, converged on the Klondike to stake a claim and strike it rich. The narrator's assertion that the idea of gold “gripped the heartstrings of men” implies that the desire for wealth and economic security can surpass cultural differences or boundaries: virtually all people simply want more. However, it is notable that Weatherbee gave half of his savings to his wife, which is something that would not happen in many cultures around the world. A more nuanced reading of Weatherbee's financial preparations could suggest that he might stand a fighting chance of surviving and thriving in the Arctic because he appears to have

the ability to go against what his culture has taught him he should believe. He gives up his “snug” and predictable job and provides for his wife in a way that many would not. Still, his actions toward his wife are not necessarily charitable: “There was no romance in his nature – the bondage of commerce had crushed all that; he was simply tired of the ceaseless grind, and wished to risk great hazards in view of corresponding returns” (“In a Far Country” 24). While the pursuit of “more” is often present in some form in virtually every culture, a multicultural critic might argue that the narrator’s reference to a “ceaseless grind” reflects a capitalistic mentality that is not necessarily common to all human cultures universally. In other words, in somewhat “simpler” cultures, the kind of motivation that Weatherbee responds to might be less intense.

Multiculturalism is also relevant in relation to London’s second main character, Percy Cuthfert. Cuthfert is known to have “a bank account as deep as his culture. He had no reason to embark on such a venture – no reason in the world save that he suffered from an abnormal development of sentimentality” (“In a Far Country” 24). Unlike all the other prospectors on this journey, he is not interested in financial gain. Not only is he already wealthy, but he also believes that his sophisticated “culture” provides him both freedom and superior intelligence in any situation. In other words, he is motivated by a quite naïve cultural outlook: “He mistook this for the true spirit of romance and adventure. Many another man has done the like, and made as fatal a mistake” (“In a Far Country” 24). Where Weatherbee wants more money, both men want more from life than their previous everyday existence. One man sees the risk of the adventure but weighs it against the possible returns. The other man sees only the novelty of the adventure itself without considering all the difficulties he will encounter. Cuthfert sees only that he is

superior in his own sophisticated culture and wrongly assumes that that superiority will carry over into this adventure. The narrator implies that Cuthbert believes that because everything in his life has come to him easily, this trip will also be easy for him to complete. He fails to consider the differences between his east-coast, urban culture and that of the Klondike. He looks down on people outside his own culture. He does not realize that the rules he knows or the assumptions he makes will doom him to failure. He seems quite shocked, in fact, when the “disreputable contingent of half-breed voyageurs with their women and children” vote to leave him behind with Weatherbee (“In a Far Country” 24). His sole cultural experience has consisted of being led from event to event without ever making a real decision on his own. When forced to fend for himself, he becomes wavering and irresolute and is clearly far from confident in his own abilities. His limited exposure to other cultures and experiences will only serve to hinder his ability to survive in this new environment.

Jacque Baptiste et al.

London’s emphasis on multicultural experience widens even more with the introduction of the intrepid tour guide for this trek: “There was nothing unusual about this party, except its plans. Even its goal, like that of all the other parties, was the Klondike. But the route it had mapped out to attain that goal took away the breath of the hardest native, born and bred to the vicissitudes of the Northwest” (“In a Far Country” 24). This hardest of natives has the endurance necessary to withstand the elements and he also knows how to navigate the ever-changing conditions of the Arctic. His culture is adapted to the actual local living conditions. The narrator continues:

Even Jacques Baptiste, born of a Chippewa woman and a renegade voyageur (having raised his first whippers in a deerskin lodge north of the sixty-fifth parallel, and had the same hushed by blissful sucks of raw tallow), was surprised. Though he sold his services to them and agreed to travel even to the never-opening ice, he shook his head ominously whenever his advice was asked. (“In a Far Country” 24)

Jacques Baptiste, the quite literal embodiment of multiculturalism, has a name that alludes to two different cultures (French and Christian), but he also clearly embraces the culture that is distinct to the Klondike. Because he is part of (and has experienced) so many different cultures, he understands the actual living conditions of the real environment of the Arctic. He also understands the closed off, wealth-seeking mentality of many members of this party of adventurers. Jacques Baptiste can only shake his head when they ask his opinion. This so-called “half-breed” (“In a Far Country” 25) relies on a very practical multiculturalism to help him survive on the frontier. He is a “half-breed” both biologically and culturally. He is not bound by any single set of cultural maxims or societal assumptions. He understands the gravity of the trek he has been hired to lead. He knows that for the trip to succeed, all hands must be involved. When Weatherbee and Cuthfert turn mutinous and refuse to help (because they think their own cultures put them a social rung or two higher than their guide), “the half-breed thrashed the twain, and sent them, bruised and bleeding, about their work. It was the first time either had been manhandled” (“In a Far Country” 25). London’s narrator suggests that the effete culture Weatherbee and Cuthfert share has made them soft. They are clearly unfamiliar with the

physical demands required by anyone who dares tackle the Arctic. Unlike Jacques Baptiste, who has molded himself to the environment, Weatherbee and Cuthbert have yet to abandon their old belief systems and certainly have not rejected their old cultural assumptions. They continue to presume that this guide and this trip will fit their expectations. Their sense of social superiority makes them feel better than their guide. Their disdainful opinion of him is further cemented when they hear him speak: “Hudson Bay Post, long time ago. No use um now” (“In a Far Country” 25). They fail to realize that while Baptiste speaks in broken English and is in one sense less educated than they are, he is very well versed in navigation and survival. In that sense, his culture is superior to theirs, at least in this frontier environment.

Multiculturalism, Language, and Speech

The multicultural aspects of the story become especially interesting in a later section, where London allows us to hear, in an extended passage, the actual thoughts and voices of the various men. Because this passage is so important from a multicultural point of view, it is worth quoting in full:

“We can’t be more ’n four hundred miles from the Yukon,”
concluded Sloper, multiplying his thumb nails by the scale of the map.
The council, in which the two Incapables had whined to excellent
disadvantage, was drawing to a close.

“Hudson Bay Post, long time ago. No use um now.” Jacques Baptiste’s father had made the trip for the Fur Company in the old days, incidentally marking the trail with a couple of frozen toes.

“Sufferin’ cracky!” cried another of the party. “No whites?”

“Nary white,” Sloper sententiously affirmed; “but it’s only five hundred more up the Yukon to Dawson. Call it a rough thousand from here.”

Weatherbee and Cuthfert groaned in chorus.

“How long’ll that take, Baptiste?”

The half-breed figured for a moment. “Workum like hell, no man play out, ten — twenty — forty — fifty days. Um babies come” (designating the Incapables), “no can tell. Mebbe when hell freeze over; mebbe not then.” . . .

The moment had come. Jacques Baptiste paused in the fitting of a harness and pinned the struggling dog in the snow. The cook made mute protest for delay, threw a handful of bacon into a noisy pot of beans, then came to attention. Sloper rose to his feet. His body was a ludicrous contrast to the healthy physiques of the Incapables. Yellow and weak, fleeing from a South American fever-hole, he had not broken his flight across the zones, and was still able to toil with men. His weight was probably ninety pounds, with the heavy hunting-knife thrown in, and his grizzled hair told of a prime which had ceased to be. The fresh young muscles of either Weatherbee or Cuthfert were equal to ten times the

endeavor of his; yet he could walk them into the earth in a day's journey. And all this day he had whipped his stronger comrades into venturing a thousand miles of the stiffest hardship man can conceive. He was the incarnation of the unrest of his race, and the old Teutonic stubbornness, dashed with the quick grasp and action of the Yankee, held the flesh in the bondage of the spirit. ("In a Far Country" 25-26)

The sheer variety of cultures alluded to in this passage is notable. It reaffirms the notion that in some ways no single culture is better than any other and implies that a successful group is a diverse group. Sloper, originally from South America but with stubborn German roots, is a wiry and unwell man who understands and appreciates the physical and mental demands of the Arctic environment. A man, likely from the South and possibly racially prejudiced, worries that there are no whites where the group is headed. Another man, this one from the Dakotas and heavily accented, advises Cuthfert to overwinter in the cabin with Weatherbee. Every man in the group speaks very differently from the ways Cuthfert and Weatherbee speak. None of them seems highly literate, but each knows how to live off the land. They all see the value of hard work. They all know that the ability to do what needs to be done to survive is what keeps them alive. They count on themselves and each other to keep their group moving forward. The men dubbed "The Incapables," on the other hand, can only be a drain on the rest of the group because they see the half-breed Jacques Baptiste as a bully who pushes them to do work they consider beneath them.

Interestingly, everyone in the group, with the exception of the Incapables, seems to smell the impending disaster. Sloper, thinking of a story he once heard, asks Jacques Baptiste if he knows the Irish limerick about the Kilkenny Cats, two cats who fought until nothing but their tails remained (“In a Far Country” 27). Jacques Baptiste’s answer is a classic multicultural response: “The Frenchman in Baptiste shrugged his shoulders, but the Indian in him was silent.” He knows that because the Incapables cannot adapt (let alone reverse) their cultural codes to fit their environment, they will surely die.

**Moral Approaches and Other Approaches
to Jack London's "In a Far Country"**

Almost any work of literature worth reading can be read from multiple perspectives. Even works that seem radically "simple" – such as Ezra Pound's famous two-line poem "In a Station at the Metro" – can be interpreted from numerous points of view. The same is clearly true of longer, more complex works, such as the plays of Shakespeare or the novels of Dickens. Many critics, in interpreting any particular literary work, tend to adopt just a single point of view. That viewpoint might be thematic, or Marxist, or feminist, or deconstructive, or any one of numerous other particular approaches. But a different approach to literary criticism – an approach known as *critical pluralism* – suggests the value of looking at any work from *multiple* perspectives. Rather than assuming that one method of criticism is the only correct or best possible approach, pluralists assume that there is some real value in keeping *varied* perspectives in mind as we read. A pluralist may have his or her own preferred approach (an approach that seems most interesting or congenial to his or her own mind), but a pluralist will never forget that there are many, many other ways to read and interpret any particular text. Reading as a pluralist involves being open to, or at least aware of, numerous possible points of view. In this sense, pluralism itself can be seen as a moral approach to literature – one that guards against inflexible dogma, one that is open to numerous other voices.

Jack London's short story, titled "In a Far Country," is a work that very much lends itself to interpretation from a specifically moral or ethical perspective. The two main characters of the work are anything but exemplars of virtue, and their moral shortcomings eventually lead to the deaths of both men. This is a story that can clearly be read and interpreted as a cautionary tale about the dangers of selfishness. This interpretation, in fact, may be the interpretation London himself had in mind. But this is hardly the only way the work can be read, and a pluralist would claim that the more complex a work truly is, the more complexly it can be understood and appreciated. In the present chapter, I will seek to show how two sample paragraphs from London's story can be interpreted not only in moral terms but in many other ways as well. A pluralistic approach to these sample paragraphs can illustrate how this story, or any work, can be read from multiple points of view.

"In a Far Country"

Late in the story, the narrator describes the personalities of Weatherbee and Cuthfert and the ways the two men interact when they are alone with one another in the isolated cabin:

Save existence, they had nothing in common, — came in touch on no single point. Weatherbee was a clerk who had known naught but clerking all his life; Cuthfert was a master of arts, a dabbler in oils, and had written not a little. The one was a lower-class man who considered himself a gentleman, and the other was a gentleman who knew himself to

be such. From this it may be remarked that a man can be a gentleman without possessing the first instinct of true comradeship. The clerk was as sensuous as the other was aesthetic, and his love adventures, told at great length and chiefly coined from his imagination, affected the supersensitive master of arts in the same way as so many whiffs of sewer gas. He deemed the clerk a filthy, uncultured brute, whose place was in the muck with the swine, and told him so; and he was reciprocally informed that he was a milk-and-water sissy and a cad. Weatherbee could not have defined 'cad' for his life; but it satisfied its purpose, which after all seems the main point in life.

Weatherbee flatted every third note and sang such songs as 'The Boston Burglar' and 'the Handsome Cabin Boy' for hours at a time, while Cuthfert wept with rage, till he could stand it no longer and fled into the outer cold. But there was no escape. The intense frost could not be endured for long at a time, and the little cabin crowded them – beds, stove, table, and all – into a space of ten by twelve. The very presence of either became a personal affront to the other, and they lapsed into sullen silences which increased in length and strength as the days went by. Occasionally, the flash of an eye or the curl of a lip got the better of them, though they strove to wholly ignore each other during these mute periods. And a great wonder sprang up in the breast of each, as to how God had ever come to create the other. ("In a Far Country" 28)

The (Im)morality of Cuthfert and Weatherbee:

A Common-Sense Interpretation

Before discussing how variously these paragraphs might be interpreted, in moral terms, from pluralistic points of view, it may first be helpful to suggest how they can be read from the perspective of common-sense ethics. Most people have an instinctive sense of what is right and wrong, fair and unfair, selfish and unselfish, and so most people can easily read these paragraphs with ethical ideas in mind. In fact, this is surely how London *intended* these paragraphs to be read (at least in part).

As the quoted paragraphs suggest, Carter Weatherbee is prideful, presumptuous, and socially ambitious. For instance, he is described as a “lower-class man who considered himself a gentleman” (“In a Far Country” 28). He does not sit back and casually accept anyone’s definition of his status, especially Cuthfert’s. He is a veteran at his job, knows he does it well, and takes great pride in his work. He boldly considers himself a gentleman because he knows his own work ethic. He believes himself to be just as entitled as Cuthfert to the riches of life because he works for them much harder than it appears to him that Cuthfert does. Weatherbee believes he is morally entitled to the respect of others; he thinks they are ethically responsible to respect him as much as he respects himself. The fact that he mentally classifies himself as a “gentleman” shows his ambition: he already lives as though he officially falls into that category. His main ethical concern is concern for himself (which is, ironically, not an especially ethical attitude).

In one of this story’s great ironies, the two outwardly divergent characters are actually somewhat similar, for Cuthfert is also prideful and presumptuous. He is described as “a gentleman who knew himself to be such,” and also as “a master of arts, a

dabbler in oils, ... [who] had written not a little" ("In a Far Country" 28). He is secure mentally, morally, and financially concerning his place in society and also appears to think of himself as occupying a higher mental plane than Weatherbee, the lowly clerk. He believes himself to be so morally and socially superior that he has time to dedicate his life to the arts rather than toiling in the trenches. However, like Weatherbee, Cuthfert thinks primarily of himself and is thus not an especially ethical person in the traditional sense of that term. Different as they are in so many other respects, these two main characters are quite similar in their selfishness. Neither would make a good friend, either to each other or to anyone else. Morally they are the same, despite their contrasts in other ways.

The narrator, usually invisible to readers in this story, peeks out from behind the curtain and delivers his own moral assessment of Cuthfert and Weatherbee: "From this it may be remarked that a man can be a gentleman without possessing the first instinct of true comradeship" ("In a Far Country" 28). The narrator, whose tone seems ironic and sarcastic, seems to disagree with this idea and instead implies that a true gentleman is, in fact, a true comrade – two words that cannot describe either of these particular two men. Furthermore, the narrator implies that morality itself can never be rooted in absolute selfishness. But Cuthfert and Weatherbee are miserably selfish. Each man believes he acts morally and ethically according to his social status, but because each has a skewed sense of what morality actually is, each is equally wrong in assessing what is moral and ethical.

Though fundamentally similar in their egotism, Weatherbee and Cuthfert strongly disagree about what constitutes moral and ethical superiority. This disagreement causes

each to look down his nose at the other. Weatherbee is described as being “as sensuous as the other was aesthetic, and his love adventures, told at great length and chiefly coined from his imagination, affected the supersensitive master of arts in the same way as so many whiffs of sewer gas” (“In a Far Country” 28). For all of Cuthfert’s dabbling in the arts, Weatherbee responds with obvious braggadocio, especially about his (imagined) exploits as a lover. Even though he invents and fabricates his romantic achievements, he postures as one who has life experience and is thus intellectually and socially superior – or at least equal – to Cuthfert. Cuthfert, on the other hand, who has written “not a little,” sees Weatherbee’s imaginative erotic escapades as equivalent to the kind of conduct found in a contemporary Harlequin ‘bodice-ripper.’ He considers Weatherbee’s stories trash and his character trashier. Yet despite these differences, both men are self-centered: one looks down on the other; one lies to his comrade. Condescension and dishonesty shape their interactions. From the sense of common-sense morality, they are both immoral and therefore cannot have a truly ethical relationship.

Much deliberately moral fiction showcases people whose actions are virtuous, honest, generous, and upright. Cuthfert is not such a person. He views Weatherbee as “a filthy, uncultured brute, whose place was in the muck with the swine,” and he does not hesitate to tell him so (“In a Far Country” 28). A good and charitable man would see the potential in Weatherbee. A moral and ethical person would guide his fellow man if he believed that man lacked honorable qualities. Cuthfert, however, offers no such help to Weatherbee (who would probably refuse it in any case). Instead, Cuthbert judges. He scrutinizes. He critiques. He condescends. A truly moral man would try to steer his cabin-mate in a better direction, but Cuthfert’s selfishness and lack of tact prevent any real

effort to help others. Concerned only with how the clerk affects him, he gracelessly points out all of Weatherbee's worst traits but offers no moral model or guidance. Rather, he sets a very poor example, thereby illustrating the narrator's point that social superiority does not equal moral superiority. Weatherbee, meanwhile, instead of living up to his self-proclaimed status as a gentleman, fights fire with fire. Stooping to the same immature level as Cuthfert, the clerk calls the master of arts a "milk-and-water sissy and a cad" ("In a Far Country" 28). He considers Cuthfert physically and morally weak, and even though he cannot define "cad," he clearly enjoys insulting Cuthfert by using the term. Although Weatherbee's inability to define "cad" is inconsequential, the use of the word "satisfied its purpose, which after all seems the main point in life." By offering this ironic statement, the narrator reminds us of each man's selfishness. Neither man lives as morally or ethically as he thinks he does.

Moral Commentary from Multiple Points of View

A common-sense approach to morality – an approach rooted in a sense of basic fairness – offers one way of looking at London's story from an ethical point of view. Ethical pluralism, however, would remind us that there are many different ways of responding to this story (or any literary work) in moral terms. In fact, various kinds of literary theories strongly emphasize moral questions and moral answers. Some, of course, do not. For example, formalism is an approach to literature that emphasizes the artistry, craft, and power of a work as a piece of writing rather than as a statement about (or illustration of) morality or immorality. But even the claim that morality doesn't really matter when interpreting a work has moral implications. Whether a theory emphasizes

moral questions, ignores them, or dismisses them tells us a good deal about that theory's moral implications.

Plato, for example, articulated an approach to literature that strongly emphasized moral concerns. He believed that literature should promote good behavior, and he distrusted any kind of literature that failed to do so. He even suggested that literature, by its very nature, might be immoral if it encouraged people to behave irrationally and emotionally rather than logically and intelligently. Above all, Plato believed that literature should encourage people to live rationally and morally: they should seek to know the truth and should try to behave in ethical ways. The best way to know the truth was to use one's reason. Thus, a Platonic critic might note that Weatherbee is a life-long clerk who deals with concrete facts. For this reason, a Platonic critic, concerned primarily with objective truth and social responsibility, might see Weatherbee as slightly more appealing than Cuthfert because Weatherbee's occupation and livelihood are based on logic and reason. His career is rooted in black and white facts. Similarly, a Platonic critic might see Cuthfert as morally lacking because his life is ruled by his emotions: he is an artist who seems to have little interest in genuine philosophical pursuits. Plato, however, would probably find neither man very appealing because both are so fundamentally selfish. Instead of caring about the greater good, each cares only about himself.

Likewise, an Aristotelian critic might also find Weatherbee slightly more appealing than Cuthfert. Aristotle agreed with Plato that moral behavior is rooted in intelligent thinking, but he also believed that continued learning and personal growth are positive aspects of human nature that all persons should pursue. At least Weatherbee has some serious focus in his life, but an Aristotelian critic would see Cuthfert as morally

lacking because he appears to believe he was born superior; he feels no need or desire to better himself. His life is in stasis – he sees no need for improvement, and, because he is morally lacking, he sees no need to live his life in a way worthy of imitation. Neither character, however, would impress Aristotle; both exhibit a selfishness that Aristotle, like his teacher Plato, would condemn. Neither displays the kind of virtue, generosity, or high-mindedness that Aristotle admired. Both are shallow men driven by self-centered desires.

Critics influenced by Longinus would also condemn both Weatherbee and Cuthfert. Longinus is the name given to an unknown author writing possibly in the first century of the Common Era. He believed that literature should be “sublime” or elevated above the ordinary and that this moral elevation should be exhibited by the writer, the audience, and many of the characters alike. A Longinian critic, then, might note that Cuthfert fancies himself as elevated above the ordinary Weatherbee even though his conduct is anything but inspiring or admirable. He is petty and immature in referring to Weatherbee’s fanciful stories, which affect him in much the same way as whiffs of sewer gas, but he is not alone in failing to rise to the sublime. Weatherbee is likewise immature and responds to Cuthfert by goading him to a tearful rage by singing lower-class Irish folk songs for hours on end. A Longinian critic might also believe the two men are morally lacking because their original purpose of the mission was to find gold: they thereby participated in a very materialistic undertaking. Additionally, the same critic might also scoff at the notion that either man truly wondered how God had come to create the other because neither man displays godly, Christian, generous, loving, or forgiving attitudes. God is nothing more than a figure of speech for them. Longinus would likely

find both men immoral because they do not strive for excellence or elevation but instead focus on trivialities and materialistic pursuits.

A Marxist critic, concerned with power struggles and/or injustices between social classes, especially oppression of the poor by the rich, would very much take issue with the oppression perpetrated by Cuthfert and other people of his wealthy social class. Founded on the principles of Karl Marx, the well known advocate of communism, Marxist criticism is centered on the belief that literature should promote the interests of the working class. Those interests are clearly evident in Weatherbee's singing to pass time, an activity long used by marginalized groups to maintain some type of individuality as they work or simply exist in subordinate positions. And subordinate Weatherbee is – at least according to Cuthfert. A Marxist critic would probably get some satisfaction from Cuthfert's rage and subsequent tears because those reactions indicate that for all his beliefs about class and self worth, his sense of moral, ethical, and social superiority will not save him from the fate he shares with Weatherbee. Still, Marxist critics would probably consider both Cuthfert and Weatherbee immoral because neither man is interested in the welfare of anyone else. While Weatherbee is a dedicated worker, his only concern is for himself. Cuthfert is an upper-class snob who looks down on the clerk because of his supposedly inferior social standing. Neither man would strike Marx as moral because they do not believe in social and economic equality. Their personal selfishness stems from a broader kind of selfishness encouraged by capitalistic competition. Ironically, they are in a physical location where social background could not matter less. Whether they like it or not, their existence in the tiny cabin in the far country has made all things equal. True comrades could survive, if not thrive, in the space of 120

square feet. That space, shared by workers willing to cooperate rather than eager to compete, would be more than enough for both of them.

A feminist critic would be conscious of the fact that females have been both oppressed and underrepresented both in traditional cultures and in traditional literature and that biased beliefs about women would have influenced the stereotypes in Jack London's culture. Such a critic would first note that very few women are mentioned in the story, nor do any females play a significant role in the tale. While London likely did not intentionally exclude women from the story for sexist reasons, he did present the story as realistically as possible given the time and place in which the story occurs. Additionally, a feminist critic would likely find it immoral that Weatherbee's imagined love escapades were created for the sake of entertainment at the expense of women in general. Like many men, Weatherbee boasts about his sexual success with women so that he can impress another man. Apparently his language is crude: to Cuthbert it stinks like "sewer gas." It seems doubtful, then, that Weatherbee shows any respect for the women he describes (or invents). His views about women are as immoral as his other self-centered views. In fact, feminist critics would see the conduct of both men as immoral, partly because they were raised in an environment that encouraged men to be selfish, competitive, and macho. Their moral flaws reflect the moral imperfections of the culture as a whole.

Critical Approaches that Do Not Emphasize Morality

Almost any approach to literary criticism implies *some* stance toward morality and some attitude toward moral interpretations. Even theories that show no obvious or

special interest in practicing or promoting ethical criticism (formalism is just one example) thereby imply a position concerning the value of moral interpretation.

Formalism, which was especially influential in the middle decades of the twentieth-century, resembled the “art for art’s sake” approach advocated by various late nineteenth-century writers, such as Oscar Wilde. The moral or ethical content of a work is not what formalist critics focus on most when they examine a piece of literature. Instead, formalist critics are primarily interested in the literary form of the work itself and in how the work is deliberately crafted. Formalists are interested in literature *as* literature – that is, in language interesting as language. For formalists, every word, every sound, every rhythm, every punctuation mark counts in determining not only *what* a text means but (even more importantly) whether a work is effective in literature. A formalist critic, then, might find it interesting that London portrays his two characters as very similar but also very different, and that London does this in such a seamless and invisible way. Formalists admire subtlety, understatement, and irony because all three qualities imply artistry and careful craftsmanship. Anyone can overtly preach; only a true artist can imply a meaning rather than openly stating it. Formalists might say that London offers a fascinating presentation of the complex reality of life. Formalists tend to assume that few real human situations are ever black and white. Life is complex, and art must be complex to do justice to reality. In this sense, formalism can imply a view of morality, but moral arguments, by themselves, are not formalists’ chief interests.

Other kinds of literary theory also, like formalism, tend to de-emphasize morality *per se*. In fact, any theory that sees itself as scientific and objective will tend to de-emphasize morality. Thus, psychoanalytic criticism tries to describe truth rather than

offer moral judgments. Critics influenced by psychoanalysis might, for instance, be interested in the unconscious motives of literary characters. Founded on the beliefs of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), psychoanalytic criticism assumes that the human mind involves interaction between the *id* (the instinctual, pleasure-seeking, subconscious mind), the *ego* (the conscious, rational mind), and the *superego* (the conscience). Because the rational ego and the moral and ethical superego often attempt to control the irrational id, a psychoanalytic critic examining London's story might note that Weatherbee is sometimes rational in his thinking, especially given his background as an accountant. His irrational id, however, often takes over when he interacts with Cuthfert. For example, he continually sings songs that he knows will annoy his cabin-mate. Similarly, Cuthfert allows his id free reign when interacting with Weatherbee, as is evident in his repeated insults and insinuations of his superiority. Nevertheless, a psychoanalytic critic might find both men sometimes under the power of their egos and behaving somewhat rationally, at least for a time. Even though they are entirely annoyed with and by each other, they realize the cold outside is too severe to allow for physical escape. Ultimately, however, their uncontrolled ids lead them to destroy each other. This (a psychological critic might say) is merely a statement of psychological fact. It is not a moral judgment.

Moral judgments also tend to be ignored by other theories of psychology. The archetypal theories of Carl Jung (1875-1961), for instance, have enormously influenced literary criticism. But Jung, like Freud, is mainly interested in how the mind works rather than in whether human thoughts, feelings, and behavior are right or wrong. Similarly, both structuralist and deconstructive literary criticism are more interested in how meanings are communicated (or how they are unstable or incommunicable) than in

issuing moral judgments. If a theorist assumes that meaning is impossible, s/he is also likely to assume that objective moral judgments are also impossible. For this reason, post-modernists and deconstructors have often been accused (especially by Marxists and their “cultural materialist” allies) of promoting views that make moral assessments illusory. If there are no stable meanings, if there are no objective ways to determine right from wrong, ethical criticism collapses. Deconstructors and post-modernists sometimes defend themselves by claiming that their skeptical, relativistic views promote morality by undercutting dogmatic moral claims and thus showing that no moral claims are objectively “true.” But if no moral claims are objectively true, it is hard to see how deconstructors and postmodernists are free from this conundrum. How can they claim to be promoting morality if moral claims are endlessly open to dispute and constant interpretation?

Summary Comments

As the foregoing survey of various literary theories suggests, each particular theory has some implications for the ethical interpretation of literature. Among the most recent theories, for instance, ecocriticism is obviously and overtly moral in purpose and application: ecocritics warn about some humans’ immoral, self-destructive abuse of the planet and (thereby) of other human beings and other living creatures. Darwinian literary criticism, on the other hand, seeks to be objective, scientific, and non-judgmental. It seeks to explain why and how literature is what it is rather than offering ethical claims about it. Yet almost any claim to be objective has ethical implications and is also open to moral

objections. Literature can never be easily disentangled from moral questions, and some theorists (most of them, in fact) believe that it never should be.

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APPENDIX A

In a Far Country

Jack London

When a man journeys into a far country, he must be prepared to forget many of the things he has learned, and to acquire such customs as are inherent with existence in the new land; he must abandon the old ideals and the old gods, and oftentimes he must reverse the very codes by which his conduct has hitherto been shaped. To those who have the protean faculty of adaptability, the novelty of such change may even be a source of pleasure; but to those who happen to be hardened to the ruts in which they were created, the pressure of the altered environment is unbearable, and they chafe in body and in spirit under the new restrictions which they do not understand. This chafing is bound to act and react, producing divers evils and leading to various misfortunes. It were better for the man who cannot fit himself to the new groove to return to his own country; if he delay too long, he will surely die.

The man who turns his back upon the comforts of an elder civilization, to face the savage youth, the primordial simplicity of the North, may estimate success at an inverse ratio to the quantity and quality of his hopelessly fixed habits. He will soon discover, if he be a fit candidate, that the material habits are the less important. The exchange of such things as a dainty menu for rough fare, of the stiff leather shoe for the soft, shapeless moccasin, of the feather bed for a couch in the snow, is after all a very easy matter. But

his pinch will come in learning properly to shape his mind's attitude toward all things, and especially toward his fellow man. For the courtesies of ordinary life, he must substitute unselfishness, forbearance, and tolerance. Thus, and thus only, can he gain that pearl of great price, — true comradeship. He must not say "Thank you;" he must mean it without opening his mouth, and prove it by responding in kind. In short, he must substitute the deed for the word, the spirit for the letter.

When the world rang with the tale of Arctic gold, and the lure of the North gripped the heartstrings of men, Carter Weatherbee threw up his snug clerkship, turned the half of his savings over to his wife, and with the remainder bought an outfit. There was no romance in his nature, — the bondage of commerce had crushed all that; he was simply tired of the ceaseless grind, and wished to risk great hazards in view of corresponding returns. Like many another fool, disdaining the old trails used by the Northland pioneers for a score of years, he hurried to Edmonton in the spring of the year; and there, unluckily for his soul's welfare, he allied himself with a party of men.

There was nothing unusual about this party, except its plans. Even its goal, like that of all other parties, was the Klondike. But the route it had mapped out to attain that goal took away the breath of the hardest native, born and bred to the vicissitudes of the Northwest. Even Jacques Baptiste, born of a Chippewa woman and a renegade *voyageur* (having raised his first whimpers in a deerskin lodge north of the sixty-fifth parallel, and had the same hushed by blissful sucks of raw tallow), was surprised. Though he sold his services to them and agreed to travel even to the never-opening ice, he shook his head ominously whenever his advice was asked.

Percy Cuthfert's evil star must have been in the ascendant, for he, too, joined this company of argonauts. He was an ordinary man, with a bank account as deep as his culture, which is saying a good deal. He had no reason to embark on such a venture, — no reason in the world, save that he suffered from an abnormal development of sentimentality. He mistook this for the true spirit of romance and adventure. Many another man has done the like, and made as fatal a mistake.

The first break-up of spring found the party following the ice-run of Elk River. It was an imposing fleet, for the outfit was large, and they were accompanied by a disreputable contingent of half-breed *voyageurs* with their women and children. Day in and day out, they labored with the bateaux and canoes, fought mosquitoes and other kindred pests, or sweated and swore at the portages. Severe toil like this lays a man naked to the very roots of his soul, and ere Lake Athabasca was lost in the south, each member of the party had hoisted his true colors.

The two shirks and chronic grumblers were Carter Weatherbee and Percy Cuthfert. The whole party complained less of its aches and pains than did either of them. Not once did they volunteer for the thousand and one petty duties of the camp. A bucket of water to be brought, an extra armful of wood to be chopped, the dishes to be washed and wiped, a search to be made through the outfit for some suddenly indispensable article, — and these two effete scions of civilization discovered sprains or blisters requiring instant attention. They were the first to turn in at night, with a score of tasks yet undone; the last to turn out in the morning, when the start should be in readiness before the breakfast was begun. They were the first to fall to at meal-time, the last to have a hand in the cooking; the first to dive for a slim delicacy, the last to discover they had

added to their own another man's share. If they toiled at the oars, they slyly cut the water at each stroke and allowed the boat's momentum to float up the blade. They thought nobody noticed; but their comrades swore under their breaths and grew to hate them, while Jacques Baptiste sneered openly and damned them from morning till night. But Jacques Baptiste was no gentleman.

At the Great Slave, Hudson Bay dogs were purchased, and the fleet sank to the guards with its added burden of dried fish and pemmican. Then canoe and bateau answered to the swift current of the Mackenzie, and they plunged into the Great Barren Ground. Every likely-looking "feeder" was prospected, but the elusive "pay-dirt" danced ever to the north. At the Great Bear, overcome by the common dread of the Unknown Lands, their *voyageurs* began to desert, and Fort of Good Hope saw the last and bravest bending to the tow-lines as they bucked the current down which they had so treacherously glided. Jacques Baptiste alone remained. Had he not sworn to travel even to the never-opening ice?

The lying charts, compiled in main from hearsay, were now constantly consulted. And they felt the need of hurry, for the sun had already passed its northern solstice and was leading the winter south again. Skirting the shores of the bay, where the Mackenzie disembogues into the Arctic Ocean, they entered the mouth of the Little Peel River. Then began the arduous up-stream toil, and the two Incapables fared worse than ever. Tow-line and pole, paddle and tump-line, rapids and portages, — such tortures served to give the one a deep disgust for great hazards, and printed for the other a fiery text on the true romance of adventure. One day they waxed mutinous, and being vilely cursed by Jacques Baptiste, turned, as worms sometimes will. But the half-breed thrashed the twain, and

sent them, bruised and bleeding, about their work. It was the first time either had been man-handled.

Abandoning their river craft at the head-waters of the Little Peel, they consumed the rest of the summer in the great portage over the Mackenzie watershed to the West Rat. This little stream fed the Porcupine, which in turn joined the Yukon where that mighty highway of the North countermarches on the Arctic Circle. But they had lost in the race with winter, and one day they tied their rafts to the thick eddy-ice and hurried their goods ashore. That night the river jammed and broke several times; the following morning it had fallen asleep for good.

“We can’t be more ‘n four hundred miles from the Yukon,” concluded Sloper, multiplying his thumb nails by the scale of the map. The council, in which the two Incapables had whined to excellent disadvantage, was drawing to a close.

“Hudson Bay Post, long time ago. No use um now.” Jacques Baptiste’s father had made the trip for the Fur Company in the old days, incidentally marking the trail with a couple of frozen toes.

“Sufferin’ cracky!” cried another of the party. “No whites?”

“Nary white,” Sloper sententiously affirmed; “but it’s only five hundred more up the Yukon to Dawson. Call it a rough thousand from here.”

Weatherbee and Cuthfert groaned in chorus.

“How long’ll that take, Baptiste?”

The half-breed figured for a moment. "Workum like hell, no man play out, ten — twenty — forty — fifty days. Um babies come" (designating the Incapables), "no can tell. Mebbe when hell freeze over; mebbe not then."

The manufacture of snowshoes and moccasins ceased. Somebody called the name of an absent member, who came out of an ancient cabin at the edge of the camp-fire and joined them. The cabin was one of the many mysteries which lurk in the vast recesses of the North. Built when and by whom, no man could tell. Two graves in the open, piled high with stones, perhaps contained the secret of those early wanderers. But whose hand had piled the stones?

The moment had come. Jacques Baptiste paused in the fitting of a harness and pinned the struggling dog in the snow. The cook made mute protest for delay, threw a handful of bacon into a noisy pot of beans, then came to attention. Sloper rose to his feet. His body was a ludicrous contrast to the healthy physiques of the Incapables. Yellow and weak, fleeing from a South American fever-hole, he had not broken his flight across the zones, and was still able to toil with men. His weight was probably ninety pounds, with the heavy hunting-knife thrown in, and his grizzled hair told of a prime which had ceased to be. The fresh young muscles of either Weatherbee or Cuthfert were equal to ten times the endeavor of his; yet he could walk them into the earth in a day's journey. And all this day he had whipped his stronger comrades into venturing a thousand miles of the stiffest hardship man can conceive. He was the incarnation of the unrest of his race, and the old Teutonic stubbornness, dashed with the quick grasp and action of the Yankee, held the flesh in the bondage of the spirit.

"All those in favor of going on with the dogs as soon as the ice sets, say ay."

“Ay!” rang out eight voices, — voices destined to string a trail of oaths along many a hundred miles of pain.

“Contrary minded?”

“No!” For the first time the Incapables were united without some compromise of personal interests.

“And what are you going to do about it?” Weatherbee added belligerently.

“Majority rule! Majority rule!” clamored the rest of the party.

“I know the expedition is liable to fall through if you don’t come,” Sloper replied sweetly; “but I guess, if we try real hard, we can manage to do without you. What do you say, boys?”

The sentiment was cheered to the echo.

“But I say, you know,” Cuthfert ventured apprehensively; “what’s a chap like me to do?”

“Ain’t you coming with us?”

“No-o.”

“Then do as you damn well please. We won’t have nothing to say.”

“Kind o’ kalkilate yuh might settle it with that canoodlin’ pardner of yourn,” suggested a heavy-going Westerner from the Dakotas, at the same time pointing out Weatherbee. “He’ll be shore to ask yuh what yur a-goin’ to do when it comes to cookin’ an’ gatherin’ the wood.”

“Then we’ll consider it all arranged,” concluded Sloper. “We’ll pull out tomorrow, if we camp within five miles, — just to get everything in running order and remember if we’ve forgotten anything.”

The sleds groaned by on their steel-shod runners, and the dogs strained low in the harnesses in which they were born to die. Jacques Baptiste paused by the side of Sloper to get a last glimpse of the cabin. The smoke curled up pathetically from the Yukon stove-pipe. The two Incapables were watching them from the doorway.

Sloper laid his hand on the other's shoulder.

“Jacques Baptiste, did you ever hear of the Kilkenny cats?”

The half-breed shook his head.

“Well, my friend and good comrade, the Kilkenny cats fought till neither hide, nor hair, nor yowl, was left. You understand? — till nothing was left. Very good. Now, these two men don't like work. They won't work. We know that. They'll be all alone in that cabin all winter, — a mighty long, dark winter. Kilkenny cats, — well?”

The Frenchman in Baptiste shrugged his shoulders, but the Indian in him was silent. Nevertheless, it was an eloquent shrug, pregnant with prophecy.

Things prospered in the little cabin at first. The rough badinage of their comrades had made Weatherbee and Cuthfert conscious of the mutual responsibility which had devolved upon them; besides, there was not so much work after all for two healthy men. And the removal of the cruel whip-hand, or in other words the bulldozing half-breed, had brought with it a joyous reaction. At first, each strove to outdo the other, and they performed petty tasks with an unction which would have opened the eyes of their comrades who were now wearing out bodies and souls on the Long Trail.

All care was banished. The forest, which shouldered in upon them from three sides, was an inexhaustible woodyard. A few yards from their door slept the Porcupine, and a hole through its winter robe formed a bubbling spring of water, crystal clear and painfully cold. But they soon grew to find fault with even that. The hole would persist in freezing up, and thus gave them many a miserable hour of ice-chopping. The unknown builders of the cabin had extended the side-logs so as to support a cache at the rear. In this was stored the bulk of the party's provisions. Food there was, without stint, for three times the men who were fated to live upon it. But the most of it was of the kind which built up brawn and sinew, but did not tickle the palate. True, there was sugar in plenty for two ordinary men; but these two were little else than children. They early discovered the virtues of hot water judiciously saturated with sugar, and they prodigally swam their flapjacks and soaked their crusts in the rich, white syrup. Then coffee and tea, and especially the dried fruits, made disastrous inroads upon it. The first words they had were over the sugar question. And it is a really serious thing when two men, wholly dependent upon each other for company, begin to quarrel.

Weatherbee loved to discourse blatantly on politics, while Cuthfert, who had been prone to clip his coupons and let the commonwealth jog on as best it might, either ignored the subject or delivered himself of startling epigrams. But the clerk was too obtuse to appreciate the clever shaping of thought, and this waste of ammunition irritated Cuthfert. He had been used to blinding people by his brilliancy, and it worked him quite a hardship, this loss of an audience. He felt personally aggrieved and unconsciously held his mutton-head companion responsible for it.

Save existence, they had nothing in common, — came in touch on no single point. Weatherbee was a clerk who had known naught but clerking all his life; Cuthfert was a master of arts, a dabbler in oils, and had written not a little. The one was a lower-class man who considered himself a gentleman, and the other was a gentleman who knew himself to be such. From this it may be remarked that a man can be a gentleman without possessing the first instinct of true comradeship. The clerk was as sensuous as the other was aesthetic, and his love adventures, told at great length and chiefly coined from his imagination, affected the supersensitive master of arts in the same way as so many whiffs of sewer gas. He deemed the clerk a filthy, uncultured brute, whose place was in the muck with the swine, and told him so; and he was reciprocally informed that he was a milk-and-water sissy and a cad. Weatherbee could not have defined “cad” for his life; but it satisfied its purpose, which after all seems the main point in life.

Weatherbee flatted every third note and sang such songs as “The Boston Burglar” and “The Handsome Cabin Boy,” for hours at a time, while Cuthfert wept with rage, till he could stand it no longer and fled into the outer cold. But there was no escape. The intense frost could not be endured for long at a time, and the little cabin crowded them — beds, stove, table, and all — into a space of ten by twelve. The very presence of either became a personal affront to the other, and they lapsed into sullen silences which increased in length and strength as the days went by. Occasionally, the flash of an eye or the curl of a lip got the better of them, though they strove to wholly ignore each other during these mute periods. And a great wonder sprang up in the breast of each, as to how God had ever come to create the other.

With little to do, time became an intolerable burden to them. This naturally made them still lazier. They sank into a physical lethargy which there was no escaping, and which made them rebel at the performance of the smallest chore. One morning when it was his turn to cook the common breakfast, Weatherbee rolled out of his blankets, and to the snoring of his companion, lighted first the slush-lamp and then the fire. The kettles were frozen hard, and there was no water in the cabin with which to wash. But he did not mind that. Waiting for it to thaw, he sliced the bacon and plunged into the hateful task of bread-making. Cuthfert had been slyly watching through his half-closed lids. Consequently there was a scene, in which they fervently blessed each other, and agreed, thenceforth, that each do his own cooking. A week later, Cuthfert neglected his morning ablutions, but none the less complacently ate the meal which he had cooked. Weatherbee grinned. After that the foolish custom of washing passed out of their lives.

As the sugar-pile and other little luxuries dwindled, they began to be afraid they were not getting their proper shares, and in order that they might not be robbed, they fell to gorging themselves. The luxuries suffered in this gluttonous contest, as did also the men. In the absence of fresh vegetables and exercise, their blood became impoverished, and a loathsome, purplish rash crept over their bodies. Yet they refused to heed the warning. Next, their muscles and joints began to swell, the flesh turning black, while their mouths, gums, and lips took on the color of rich cream. Instead of being drawn together by their misery, each gloated over the other's symptoms as the scurvy took its course.

They lost all regard for personal appearance, and for that matter, common decency. The cabin became a pigpen, and never once were the beds made or fresh pine boughs laid underneath. Yet they could not keep to their blankets, as they would have

wished; for the frost was inexorable, and the fire box consumed much fuel. The hair of their heads and faces grew long and shaggy, while their garments would have disgusted a ragpicker. But they did not care. They were sick, and there was no one to see; besides, it was very painful to move about.

To all this was added a new trouble, — the Fear of the North. This Fear was the joint child of the Great Cold and the Great Silence, and was born in the darkness of December, when the sun dipped below the southern horizon for good. It affected them according to their natures. Weatherbee fell prey to the grosser superstitions, and did his best to resurrect the spirits which slept in the forgotten graves. It was a fascinating thing, and in his dreams they came to him from out of the cold, and snuggled into his blankets, and told him of their toils and troubles ere they died. He shrank away from the clammy contact as they drew closer and twined their frozen limbs about him, and when they whispered in his ear of things to come, the cabin rang with his frightened shrieks. Cuthfert did not understand, — for they no longer spoke, — and when thus awakened he invariably grabbed for his revolver. Then he would sit up in bed, shivering nervously, with the weapon trained on the unconscious dreamer. Cuthfert deemed the man going mad, and so came to fear for his life.

His own malady assumed a less concrete form. The mysterious artisan who had laid the cabin, log by log, had pegged a wind-vane to the ridge-pole. Cuthfert noticed it always pointed south, and one day, irritated by its steadfastness of purpose, he turned it toward the east. He watched eagerly, but never a breath came by to disturb it. Then he turned the vane to the north, swearing never again to touch it till the wind did blow. But the air frightened him with its unearthly calm, and he often rose in the middle of the night

to see if the vane had veered, — ten degrees would have satisfied him. But no, it poised above him as unchangeable as fate. His imagination ran riot, till it became to him a fetich. Sometimes he followed the path it pointed across the dismal dominions, and allowed his soul to become saturated with the Fear. He dwelt upon the unseen and the unknown till the burden of eternity appeared to be crushing him. Everything in the Northland had that crushing effect, — the absence of life and motion; the darkness; the infinite peace of the brooding land; the ghastly silence, which made the echo of each heart-beat a sacrilege; the solemn forest which seemed to guard an awful, inexpressible something, which neither word nor thought could compass.

The world he had so recently left, with its busy nations and great enterprises, seemed very far away. Recollections occasionally obtruded, — recollections of marts and galleries and crowded thoroughfares, of evening dress and social functions, of good men and dear women he had known, — but they were dim memories of a life he had lived long centuries ago, on some other planet. This phantasm was the Reality. Standing beneath the wind-vane, his eyes fixed on the polar skies, he could not bring himself to realize that the Southland really existed, that at that very moment it was a-roar with life and action. There was no Southland, no men being born of women, no giving and taking in marriage. Beyond his bleak sky-line there stretched vast solitudes, and beyond these still vaster solitudes. There were no lands of sunshine, heavy with the perfume of flowers. Such things were only old dreams of paradise. The sunlands of the West and the spicelands of the East, the smiling Arcadias and blissful Islands of the Blest, — ha! ha! His laughter split the void and shocked him with its unwonted sound. There was no sun. This was the Universe, dead and cold and dark, and he its only citizen. Weatherbee? At

such moments Weatherbee did not count. He was a Caliban, a monstrous phantom, fettered to him for untold ages, the penalty of some forgotten crime.

He lived with Death among the dead, emasculated by the sense of his own insignificance, crushed by the passive mastery of the slumbering ages. The magnitude of all things appalled him. Everything partook of the superlative save himself, — the perfect cessation of wind and motion, the immensity of the snow-covered wilderness, the height of the sky and the depth of the silence. That wind-vane, — if it would only move. If a thunderbolt would fall, or the forest flare up in flame. The rolling up of the heavens as a scroll, the crash of Doom — anything, anything! But no, nothing moved; the Silence crowded in, and the Fear of the North laid icy fingers on his heart.

Once, like another Crusoe, by the edge of the river he came upon a track, — the faint tracery of a snowshoe rabbit on the delicate snow-crust. It was a revelation. There was life in the Northland. He would follow it, look upon it, gloat over it. He forgot his swollen muscles, plunging through the deep snow in an ecstasy of anticipation. The forest swallowed him up, and the brief midday twilight vanished; but he pursued his quest till exhausted nature asserted itself and laid him helpless in the snow. There he groaned and cursed his folly, and knew the track to be the fancy of his brain; and late that night he dragged himself into the cabin on hands and knees, his cheeks frozen and a strange numbness about his feet. Weatherbee grinned malevolently, but made no offer to help him. He thrust needles into his toes and thawed them out by the stove. A week later mortification set in.

But the clerk had his own troubles. The dead men came out of their graves more frequently now, and rarely left him, waking or sleeping. He grew to wait and dread their

coming, never passing the twin cairns without a shudder. One night they came to him in his sleep and led him forth to an appointed task. Frightened into inarticulate horror, he awoke between the heaps of stones and fled wildly to the cabin. But he had lain there for some time, for his feet and cheeks were also frozen.

Sometimes he became frantic at their insistent presence, and danced about the cabin, cutting the empty air with an axe, and smashing everything within reach. During these ghostly encounters, Cuthfert huddled into his blankets and followed the madman about with a cocked revolver, ready to shoot him if he came too near. But, recovering from one of these spells, the clerk noticed the weapon trained upon him. His suspicions were aroused, and thenceforth he, too, lived in fear of his life. They watched each other closely after that, and faced about in startled fright whenever either passed behind the other's back. This apprehensiveness became a mania which controlled them even in their sleep. Through mutual fear they tacitly let the slush-lamp burn all night, and saw to a plentiful supply of bacon-grease before retiring. The slightest movement on the part of one was sufficient to arouse the other, and many a still watch their gazes countered as they shook beneath their blankets with fingers on the trigger-guards.

What with the Fear of the North, the mental strain, and the ravages of the disease, they lost all semblance of humanity, taking on the appearance of wild beasts, hunted and desperate. Their cheeks and noses, as an aftermath of the freezing, had turned black. Their frozen toes had begun to drop away at the first and second joints. Every movement brought pain, but the fire box was insatiable, wringing a ransom of torture from their miserable bodies. Day in, day out, it demanded its food, — a veritable pound of flesh, — and they dragged themselves into the forest to chop wood on their knees. Once, crawling

thus in search of dry sticks, unknown to each other they entered a thicket from opposite sides. Suddenly, without warning, two peering death's-heads confronted each other. Suffering had so transformed them that recognition was impossible. They sprang to their feet, shrieking with terror, and dashed away on their mangled stumps; and falling at the cabin door, they clawed and scratched like demons till they discovered their mistake.

Occasionally they lapsed normal, and during one of these sane intervals, the chief bone of contention, the sugar, had been divided equally between them. They guarded their separate sacks, stored up in the cache, with jealous eyes; for there were but a few cupfuls left, and they were totally devoid of faith in each other. But one day Cuthfert made a mistake. Hardly able to move, sick with pain, with his head swimming and eyes blinded, he crept into the cache, sugar canister in hand, and mistook Weatherbee's sack for his own.

January had been born but a few days when this occurred. The sun had some time since passed its lowest southern declination, and at meridian now threw flaunting streaks of yellow light upon the northern sky. On the day following his mistake with the sugar-bag, Cuthfert found himself feeling better, both in body and in spirit. As noontime drew near and the day brightened, he dragged himself outside to feast on the evanescent glow, which was to him an earnest of the sun's future intentions. Weatherbee was also feeling somewhat better, and crawled out beside him. They propped themselves in the snow beneath the moveless wind-vane, and waited.

The stillness of death was about them. In other climes, when nature falls into such moods, there is a subdued air of expectancy, a waiting for some small voice to take up the

broken strain. Not so in the North. The two men had lived seeming aeons in this ghostly peace. They could remember no song of the past; they could conjure no song of the future. This unearthly calm had always been, — the tranquil silence of eternity.

Their eyes were fixed upon the north. Unseen, behind their backs, behind the towering mountains to the south, the sun swept toward the zenith of another sky than theirs. Sole spectators of the mighty canvas, they watched the false dawn slowly grow. A faint flame began to glow and smoulder. It deepened in intensity, ringing the changes of reddish-yellow, purple, and saffron. So bright did it become that Cuthfert thought the sun must surely be behind it, — a miracle, the sun rising in the north! Suddenly, without warning and without fading, the canvas was swept clean. There was no color in the sky. The light had gone out of the day. They caught their breaths in half-sobs. But lo! the air was a-glint with particles of scintillating frost, and there, to the north, the wind-vane lay in vague outline on the snow. A shadow! A shadow! It was exactly midday. They jerked their heads hurriedly to the south. A golden rim peeped over the mountain's snowy shoulder, smiled upon them an instant, then dipped from sight again.

There were tears in their eyes as they sought each other. A strange softening came over them. They felt irresistibly drawn toward each other. The sun was coming back again. It would be with them to-morrow, and the next day, and the next. And it would stay longer every visit, and a time would come when it would ride their heaven day and night, never once dropping below the sky-line. There would be no night. The ice-locked winter would be broken; the winds would blow and the forests answer; the land would bathe in the blessed sunshine, and life renew. Hand in hand, they would quit this horrid

dream and journey back to the Southland. They lurched blindly forward, and their hands met, — their poor maimed hands, swollen and distorted beneath their mittens.

But the promise was destined to remain unfulfilled. The Northland is the Northland, and men work out their souls by strange rules, which other men, who have not journeyed into far countries, cannot come to understand.

An hour later, Cuthfert put a pan of bread into the oven, and fell to speculating on what the surgeons could do with his feet when he got back. Home did not seem so very far away now. Weatherbee was rummaging in the cache. Of a sudden, he raised a whirlwind of blasphemy, which in turn ceased with startling abruptness. The other man had robbed his sugar-sack. Still, things might have happened differently, had not the two dead men come out from under the stones and hushed the hot words in his throat. They led him quite gently from the cache, which he forgot to close. That consummation was reached; that something they had whispered to him in his dreams was about to happen. They guided him gently, very gently, to the woodpile, where they put the axe in his hands. Then they helped him shove open the cabin door, and he felt sure they shut it after him, — at least he heard it slam and the latch fall sharply into place. And he knew they were waiting just without, waiting for him to do his task.

“Carter! I say, Carter!”

Percy Cuthfert was frightened at the look on the clerk’s face, and he made haste to put the table between them.

Carter Weatherbee followed, without haste and without enthusiasm. There was neither pity nor passion in his face, but rather the patient, stolid look of one who has certain work to do and goes about it methodically.

“I say, what’s the matter?”

The clerk dodged back, cutting off his retreat to the door, but never opening his mouth.

“I say, Carter, I say; let’s talk. There’s a good chap.”

The master of arts was thinking rapidly, now, shaping a skillful flank movement on the bed where his Smith & Wesson lay. Keeping his eyes on the madman, he rolled backward on the bunk, at the same time clutching the pistol.

“Carter!”

The powder flashed full in Weatherbee’s face, but he swung his weapon and leaped forward. The axe bit deeply at the base of the spine, and Percy Cuthfert felt all consciousness of his lower limbs leave him. Then the clerk fell heavily upon him, clutching him by the throat with feeble fingers. The sharp bite of the axe had caused Cuthfert to drop the pistol, and as his lungs panted for release, he fumbled aimlessly for it among the blankets. Then he remembered. He slid a hand up the clerk’s belt to the sheath-knife; and they drew very close to each other in that last clinch.

Percy Cuthfert felt his strength leave him. The lower portion of his body was useless. The inert weight of Weatherbee crushed him, — crushed him and pinned him there like a bear under a trap. The cabin became filled with a familiar odor, and he knew the bread to be burning. Yet what did it matter? He would never need it. And there were all of six cupfuls of sugar in the cache, — if he had foreseen this he would not have been

so saving the last several days. Would the wind-vane ever move? It might even be veering now. Why not? Had he not seen the sun to-day? He would go and see. No; it was impossible to move. He had not thought the clerk so heavy a man.

How quickly the cabin cooled! The fire must be out. The cold was forcing in. It must be below zero already, and the ice creeping up the inside of the door. He could not see it, but his past experience enabled him to gauge its progress by the cabin's temperature. The lower hinge must be white ere now. Would the tale of this ever reach the world? How would his friends take it? They would read it over their coffee, most likely, and talk it over at the clubs. He could see them very clearly. "Poor Old Cuthfert," they murmured; "not such a bad sort of a chap, after all." He smiled at their eulogies, and passed on in search of a Turkish bath. It was the same old crowd upon the streets. Strange, they did not notice his moosehide moccasins and tattered German socks! He would take a cab. And after the bath a shave would not be bad. No; he would eat first. Steak, and potatoes, and green things, — how fresh it all was! And what was that? Squares of honey, streaming liquid amber! But why did they bring so much? Ha! ha! he could never eat it all. Shine! Why certainly. He put his foot on the box. The bootblack looked curiously up at him, and he remembered his moosehide moccasins and went away hastily.

Hark! The wind-vane must be surely spinning. No; a mere singing in his ears. That was all, — a mere singing. The ice must have passed the latch by now. More likely the upper hinge was covered. Between the moss-chinked roof-poles, little points of frost began to appear. How slowly they grew! No; not so slowly. There was a new one, and there another. Two — three — four; they were coming too fast to count. There were two

growing together. And there, a third had joined them. Why, there were no more spots. They had run together and formed a sheet.

Well, he would have company. If Gabriel ever broke the silence of the North, they would stand together, hand in hand, before the great White Throne. And God would judge them, God would judge them!

Then Percy Cuthfert closed his eyes and dropped off to sleep.

APPENDIX B

Critical Theories

The following descriptions of various critical theories are adapted from Robert C. Evans's book *Close Readings*. They are designed to function as a companion to the main chapters of my thesis by more fully explaining the basic assumptions various kinds of critics make and the various methods they employ. For a complete explanation of the theories listed below, please refer to *Close Readings*.

PLATONIC CRITICISM:

Plato believed creative writers and literary texts offered a subjective viewpoint which distracted the audience from the objective pursuit of truth. This type of distraction would conflict with Plato's belief that all human beings should try to behave as rationally and morally as possible. Instead, literature might leave humans under the control of emotions, which would prevent them from behaving in ethical ways. A Platonic critic, then, would ask certain basic questions about a text, some of which include these: does the work accurately reflect the true nature of reality? Does it appeal to the reader in a logical or emotional way? Does it utilize logic and reason rather than emotion in order to explore truth? Does it instruct or entertain?

ARISTOTELIAN CRITICISM:

Aristotle, like Plato, believed moral behavior must have intelligence as a foundation. However, where Plato decried the usefulness of art, Aristotle could appreciate the craftsmanship within a text. He also saw creative literature as being a potentially valuable way to understand the complexity of “reality” because he believed that humans have an intrinsic desire to learn, and thought that well-crafted, intelligent literature could provide real knowledge. An Aristotelian critic, then, might ask the following questions about a text: Does the work demonstrate deliberate craftsmanship? Does the text reveal an accurate depiction of reality? Does it help satisfy an innate desire for knowledge? Does the text seem plausible and valuable as an imitation of reality?

HORATIAN CRITICISM:

Horatio believed the creative writer’s primary goal in writing was to please or teach the audience and that the text must exhibit custom and moderation in order to appeal to the widest possible audience. He believed that human nature does not change in any fundamental way and that works similar to those that had had positive appeal in the past would be more likely to win approval in the present. A critic utilizing a Horatian approach, then, might ask the following questions regarding a text: Does the work reflect the preferences of the chosen audience? Does the text reflect literary customs or traditions? Does it utilize language familiar to the audience? Does it instruct and/or entertain the reader? Does it imply the customs and values of the intended audience? Does it credibly reflect reality in its presentation of characters?

LONGINIAN CRITICISM:

Longinus was a rhetorician who believed literature should be lofty and sublime and that a text should inspire moral thoughts and emotions. He believed a text should reflect the power of an author over his audience, especially the power to induce the yearning for elevation to the sublime. A Longinian critic, then, might be interested to ask the following kinds of questions about a literary work: Does it reflect the careful craftsmanship and morally elevated character of the writer? Does it convey sublime spiritual, moral, and/or intellectual power? Does it emphasize spirituality over materialism? Does it encourage noble aspirations and ideas?

TRADITIONAL HISTORICAL CRITICISM:

Traditional historical critics believe a proper understanding of literature is rooted in a full understanding of the historical period in which the text was created. Not only do these critics believe social realities affect the writer and his/her creation of a text along with the audience's reaction to a literary work, but they also believe critics are obligated to study the past objectively in order to determine how a text's original readers understood it when it first appeared. A traditional historical critic, then, might ask the following questions regarding a text: Does the work reflect the writer's values or experiences? Does it reflect the values of a particular historical era? Does it give us insight into the period in which it was written and become more comprehensible once we understand the language of that era? Is the text open to different interpretations in different historical eras?

THEMATIC CRITICISM:

Thematic critics are interested in how main ideas, concepts, and/or topics shape social and psychological reality. These critics also look for the ways in which those ideas are found in the texts that writers create. They believe audiences utilize texts for both enlightenment and entertainment. A thematic critic, then, may consider the following questions when analyzing a work through the thematic lens: Does the work contain abstract ideas to convey meaning? Does the work imply the values of the author? Does the work repeatedly focus on one central theme? Does the work utilize broad ideas to convey meaning (good vs. evil; right vs. wrong)? Does it convey insights into the ideas it explores?

FORMALISM:

Formalist critics are interested in all aspects of literary form. They especially value the text as a unified piece in which all the parts, from the effectiveness of words and sounds to the overall design and structure, work together to create a rich effect. They are less interested in the morality within a work. Instead, their focus is on how and if the work achieves a powerful artistic form. A formalist critic, then, might consider the following questions regarding a text: Does it reflect the writer's skill in creating a particular kind of writing? Does the text exhibit deliberate craftsmanship? Does it demonstrate complexity so that each part is necessary to the whole and do those parts connect to each other in a way that seems natural and inevitable? Does it make audiences admire the ways it integrates content and form?

PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITICISM:

Derived from the thinking of Sigmund Freud, this particular kind of criticism emphasizes the role of the human mind in perceiving and shaping reality. These critics believe that the minds of writers, audiences, and critics alike are both highly complex and highly conflicted. These conflicts involve the three basic parts of the mind: the id, which is the unconscious part of the psyche that is rooted in individual impulsive emotions; the ego, which is the rational, conscious part of the mind that deals with actual reality; and the superego, which is the cradle of conscience, morality, and traditional social values.

Psychoanalytic critics, then, might consider some of the following questions when analyzing a text: Does the work suggest the unconscious motives of the writer, the reader, and/or the characters within the text? Does it suggest any interaction between (or conflict among) the id, ego, and superego? Does the text imply repression of the id? Does it imply ideas about psychosexual or gender roles?

ARCHETYPAL OR “MYTH” CRITICISM:

Based on Carl Jung’s work, archetypal criticism assumes that all humans experience reality in much the same way and therefore share certain basic and fundamental responses to common fears, desires, images or symbols, and stories or myths. These critics argue that humans tend to think and feel in predictable ways and that writers can employ stereotypical patterns in order to tease out forceful reactions from their audience. An archetypal critic, then, might ask the following kinds of questions about a text: Does the work appeal to thoughts and feelings that all readers tend to share? Does it provoke typical human responses? Does it reveal an underlying meaning that is often more

important than the surface meaning? Does the text appeal to its readers emotionally and psychologically rather than intellectually, and is this an almost automatic reaction?

MARXIST CRITICISM:

Influenced by the teachings of Karl Marx, these critics assume that conflicts between economic classes shape reality. They are especially interested in the moral treatment of members of the working class or other marginalized and oppressed groups as well as social and economic equality for all. These critics will tend to emphasize the ways marginalization affects the writer, his audience, and the text itself. Marxist critics will assume a text will reflect, reinforce, or undermine the standard patterns of thought that help structure social relations. A Marxist critic, then, may be interested in answering the following questions when reviewing a text: Does it reflect the writer's own socioeconomic background? Does the text reveal the distribution of power within a given social structure? Does the work strengthen or weaken the interests of a particular social class? Does it reveal social or political agendas of the time in which it was written? Does it provoke different reactions in people of different social classes?

STRUCTURALIST CRITICISM:

Structuralist critics argue that humans make sense of reality by imposing structures or patterns of meaning on it. The most common structure is language itself. Structuralist critics assume that structures of meaning can only be interpreted by people who have learned the relevant codes. They, therefore, believe that writers must inevitably rely on such codes to create meaning. Likewise, they believe the text will embody such codes

and the audience will use those same codes to interpret texts. Structuralists approach texts objectively and scientifically. They are less interested in making moral judgments than they are in looking for the binary oppositions that underlie all systems of meaning, such as black vs. white, male vs. female, and so on. A structuralist critic, then, might try to answer the following kinds of questions about a text: How does the text use a particular code or structured language? Does the work suggest that codes change in different cultures or time periods? Does the text use opposites to reveal meaning within the text? Does it use codes that allow a reader to understand the meaning of the text on a deeper level?

FEMINIST CRITICISM:

Feminist critics generally begin with the assumption that in most cultures females have been oppressed by male dominated societies. They believe it is morally correct to challenge and combat such oppression because reality is (they believe) inevitably affected by categories of sex and gender. They also believe that men have historically enjoyed dominant social power, and that writers, texts, and audiences will be affected negatively by this long-standing patriarchy. A feminist critic, then, would ask the following kinds of questions about a text: Does the text reflect the assumptions the writer and his culture makes about sexuality and gender? Does it challenge or affirm the sexual or gender identities of the audience members? Does the text show characters either upholding or challenging society's assumptions about sexuality and gender? Does it promote or stifle social progress as it applies to sexuality and gender?

DECONSTRUCTION:

Deconstructionists believe that reality can only be experienced through language but that language is inevitably full of contradictions. For this reason, they believe no writer, text, audience, or critic can ever avoid the paradoxes embedded in language. Unlike structuralists, deconstructionists look at binary oppositions as unstable in their relations with each other and believe that clarity never really exists (or can exist) in a text. Moral distinctions or judgements are difficult to establish under the flag of deconstruction and these critics generally create more questions than answers. Some questions a deconstructionist might ask are: How does the text reveal codes or structures that show the work is full of contradictions, inconsistencies, and paradoxes? Does the text reflect but also violate the rules of a particular genre? Does the work seem unsuccessful in depicting reality? Does it undermine the reader's expectations or assumptions about reality?

READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM:

Reader-response critics are interested in how individuals respond to a particular text and tend to assume that it is the reader who determines how a text is interpreted rather than the writer who might impose a particular interpretation. Adherents of this method would consider these individual interpretations as valuable and worthy because they are based on an individual's reception of the text. A reader-response critic, then, might be interested in the following kinds of questions: Does the text seem subject to the reader's control rather than controlling the reader? Does the work seem open to different interpretations by different readers? Does it reveal that the author's control over the text is limited?

DIALOGICAL CRITICISM:

Dialogical critics are most interested in the different voices and tones within a single text. They assume that a given text will embody differing points of view and will also engage in a constant dialog — among characters, among genres, with the audience, with other texts, etc. A dialogical critic, then, might consider the following: Does the text show the effects of having been written for a specific and intended audience? Does the text seem like it has been shaped with particular audiences in mind? Does it present individual voices and echo specific genres? Does it use different points of view? Does it seem to allude to other texts or kinds of texts?

NEW HISTORICISM:

New historicist critics claim that they offer a more complicated approach to history than traditional historicist critics, especially concerning marginalized and powerless groups. They also see culture and society as a site of struggle and negotiation rather than a single coherent entity. New historicists argue that no texts, audiences, or critics can separate themselves from contemporary dynamics of power. A new historicist critic, then, would be interested in the following questions when considering a text: Does the work reveal and interact with complex historical contexts? Does it seem especially meaningful when read in light of other texts from its historical time period? Does it seem affected by diverse or conflicting ideologies? Does the text suggest that the popular view of an event is not the only or even correct view of that event? Does it suggest numerous and conflicting interests of individuals or groups within a society? Does the text explore historical figures in new ways?

MULTICULTURAL CRITICISM:

Multicultural critics are especially interested in the plight of various minority populations within larger populations. They emphasize the differences that shape and divide social reality and tend to see all people as members of divergent yet sometimes overlapping groups. These groups can fall into many different categories such as race, sex, gender, age, and class. Awareness of these groups affects how literature is both written and read. A multiculturalist, then, would be interested in the following questions regarding a text: Does the work reflect a writer who is a member of multiple, often over-lapping cultural groups? Does it reflect anything about the writer's experience in a particular group? Does it appeal to readers of different groups? Are the characters within the text representative of multiple groups? Does it either affirm or undermine the values of social powers or a cultural group? Does the text reflect relations between a colonial power and a culture that is or once was colonized?

POSTMODERNISM:

Postmodernists question any large-scale explanations that claim to provide broad, reliable, accurate truth. They believe, not very differently from deconstructionists, that attempts to impose order on reality are pointless because reality is too complicated. Any attempt to understand reality in general is almost inevitably doomed to be defeated. This type of critic will seek out and value any hint of a text's instabilities because those instabilities signify the paradoxes and contradictions of life. A postmodernist, then, might ask the following kinds of questions about a text: Does the text explore multiple positions and roles within the work? Does it seem complex, ambiguous, or contradictory? Does it

suggest that incoherencies or chaos in the text represent a freedom of some sort? Does the text suggest that popular culture is always in a state of flux? Does a text mix or combine varying genres? Does it reject the existence of coherent reality in any way? Does it seem playful or ironic? Does it challenge ideologies? Does the work seem open to multiple, often contradictory interpretations? Does it seem to lack any absolute, stable significance?

ECOCRITICISM:

Ecocritics emphasize the importance of humans' relationship with physical nature, especially the natural environment where all life exists. These critics believe humans have an obligation to preserve the environment and protect it from unnecessary harm. Some questions an ecocritic might consider are: Does the work emphasize the relationship between humans and nature? Does it reveal the way humans exploit nature? Does it implicitly oppose human misuse of nature? Does the text appeal to the human love of nature and humans' self-interest in being good stewards of the environment?

DARWINIAN CRITICISM:

Like archetypal theorists, Darwinian critics assume that all human beings share a fundamentally similar human nature. This basic similarity of thoughts and feelings is rooted (Darwinians believe) in millions of years of evolution. The struggle to survive has led certain traits to be selected and shared and other traits to die out. Shared human traits result from shared genes. Human nature determines the most basic traits of writers, readers, texts, and texts' relationships with reality. Darwinian critics, when analyzing a

text, are interested in answering such questions as: Does the text resemble certain basic kinds of stories that humans have told for generations? Do the characters seem similar to various basic kinds of human beings? Does the text satisfy any fundamental human needs and appeal to any basic human traits?

PLURALISM:

Pluralists assume there is value in keeping varied perspectives in mind when considering any text. Critics of this vein do not believe there is only one possible or valid approach to literature. For this reason, they ask different kinds of questions in order to get different answers that are valuable in their own right. While this type of critic may have a preferred approach, he will also keep in mind that there are many ways to read and interpret a text. This mode of criticism considers numerous points of view and thus guards against inflexible dogma. A pluralist might ask the following: Does the work seem to lend itself to one mode of analysis over another? Does it invite multiple approaches? Does the critic try to bring together different ways of thinking and does the critic acknowledge each theory as potentially valuable in its own right?