

The characteristics of the man in jack londons to build a fire

Literature



**ASSIGN
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The Characteristics of the Man in Jack London's "To Build a Fire"

One of the most celebrated short stories in American literature, "To Build a Fire" by Jack London (1876-1916) has been the product of the author's thriving experiences in the sub-polar area of Alaska. London's adeptness in the portrayal of the major character in the short story contributed appreciably to its grand success and the characteristics of the man who ultimately submits to death have opened impressive discussions in the literary circles. Thus, an enthralling topic of debates has been the surprising behavior of the man in suddenly submitting to death towards the close of the story. In fact, he had chosen to fight against his ordeal until the final paragraph and from the point of view of the only other character, "never in the dog's experience had it known a man to sit like that in the snow and make no fire." (London, 435) Some of the explanations for his anomalous surrender to death connect with the man's thoughtless behavior and suicidal tendencies. However, considering the elements of naturalist movement and Man vs. Nature conflict in the story, the principal characteristic of the protagonist is his fight against nature all through the life and his ultimate submission to the greater power of the nature which was most comfortable and satisfying to him.

The story has been properly recognized as the finest illustration of naturalist movement and Man vs. Nature conflict. As Clell Peterson explains, the tale opens out "as a journey taken in the face of serious danger in which the conflicts between man and nature and between man and dog provide the drama." (Peterson, 3) Throughout the journey, the man is aware of the implicit dangers, but greatly confident

about his capability to fight against the nature. In the story, there is an obvious conflict “ between ‘ the man’ and his environment” and the man fails to take the essential armament needed to win the conflict. (Tucker, 23) Therefore, the man with naked hands cannot ultimately build a fire and he realizes the superiority of nature over men. “ Take my word for it,” Jack London pronounces, “ that a man simply cannot build a fire with heavy Klondike mittens on his hands.” (London1) The characterization of the man in the novel has been in a way to help the author’s interests in favor of the naturalist movement. That is to say, the major characteristic of the man, who once was highly confident about his supremacy to the nature, is that he yields to the nature’s power completely and with satisfaction when he realizes the fact. When the man admits that the old-timer of Sulphur Creek was right in his advice to watch over the nature’s superior power over man, he surrenders absolutely to the nature. “ Then the man drowsed off into what seemed to him the most comfortable and satisfying sleep he had ever known.” (London, 435) Therefore, the man is content with his realization of the nature and its power and ‘ the most comfortable and satisfying sleep he had ever known’ suggests the same. Setting is the vital factor in ‘ the man-against-nature story’ and the man plays the function of the setting as well. “ The setting,” as Novakovich suggests, “ is the main character of the story, as grand and unforgiving as God in the Book of Genesis.” (Novakovich, 32) To conclude, therefore, the man’s disregard to build a fire at the end of the novel can best be realized as his recognition to the superiority of the nature. This characteristic of the protagonist makes the story “ To Build a Fire” the finest example of Man vs. Nature conflict and the naturalist movement.

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