



**A NARRATOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF JACK LONDON'S THE HOUSE OF PRIDE
AND OTHER TALES OF HAWAII**

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Abstract

According to Herman (1997), narratologists began investigating narratives and were determined to achieve a cataloguing system that could differentiate components or, universal "...ingredients of narrative" (p. 1046). According to Jahn's model, in fiction narrative the communication typically lies between the author and reader. While Pickett (2013) applied Jahn's model to creative nonfiction, the survey of the literature contained within this study demonstrates various ways in which authors communicate through their narratives with the readers.

Keywords: *Narratological Analysis; Narratological Framework; Narrative Communication; Free Indirect Discourse*



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Introduction:

As with any major undertaking whether it is an anthology, essay, or research project, the beginning is the most difficult part. Therefore, after many hours of research and reading, I had always wondered, what makes creative nonfiction successful? Could it be the story itself, regardless of who the author was? No, that really cannot be the answer because there are many good writers who are not as well recognized as they might have been, even with famous or infamous stories. As my research began to sift through the various nonfiction essays, I began to find several areas in which the essays began to display fundamental differences in the ways in which the authors developed the reader's interest with the ways in which they used narrative and voice. Hence, the discovery of these various characteristics are outlined within the following research.

Background

Herman's (1997) study was focused on the "...interrelations among linguistic form, world knowledge, and narrative structure" (p. 1048). In essence the integration of the three served to form the understanding of the narrative. This strand of research proved interesting in the blend of early cognitive theory (Herman, 1997; Jahn, 1997, 2005). Herman's research found relevance in the differentiation of the 'tellability' versus the 'narrativity' of the narrative in which the reader's use of scripts while reading is a mitigating factor of the narrative. While Jahn's (1997) use of frame theory posits that readers, when encountering new situations in narrative create a 'frame' wherein the new experience is developed and adapted to reality. Both views are similar in that the affect of the reader is cognitive based, whether readers use scripts for the integration of the narrative or the later frames from which readers are able to relate their experiences to the narrative.

In contrast, Zerweck (2001) argued that existence of an unreliable narrator is in essence a cultural and historical variable in narrative interpretive strategies. While the unreliable narrator notion is not found in nonfiction, according to Zerweck (2001), the cultural continuum of cognitive understanding is mitigated by "...the context of frame theory as projection by the reader who tries to solve ambiguities and textual inconsistencies by attributing them to the narrator's unreliability" (p. 151). This attribution error poses unreliability in a narrative discourse such that the subtle affects cause readers' interpretive strategies to vary, even within socio-cognitive framing paradigms. This 'unreliable' notion theoretically leads to the variable nature of the narrative.

Schneider (2001) in the development of a cognitive theory for characterization seeking the expansion of earlier mental model research was able to conceptualize cognitive and emotional structures for relevant character reception. Schneider argued that readers' mental models are able to "...capture what the text is about, not the text itself" (p. 609) thereby creating the need for the narrative to be cognizant of reader's 'working memory' to achieve sufficient reader engagement.

In addition, Schneider (2001) differentiates readers' cognitive structural mental models in terms of categorization and personalization. Categorization is the process by which "...readers try

to establish a holistic mental model of the character early on” (p. 619); whereas personalization is a process by which readers “...pay more attention to individual bits of incoming information” (Schneider, 2001, p. 625). Regardless, Schneider found that, while conceptualizing the dynamics of the construction of cognitive mental models, they remain a complex and dynamic entity in the narrative.

Alonso furthered his earlier research by developing an integration network model from which to discern a level of metaphorical thinking in human cognition. Alonso’s model incorporates several of previously discussed conceptual components or attributes that are consistent with mental models, that of the integration of the narrative with the reader’s cognitive operations, yet Alonso integrates a blended space, essentially a construct for the proliferation of the metaphor. To develop this theoretical model, Alonso applies the conceptual integration network model to John Updike’s short story *The Wallet*. Alonso’s (2004) rationale for choosing this story was based on previous researcher’s arguments that Updike’s “...fiction was thematically weightless...” and “...his elaborate qualifiers, metaphors and images as mere ornaments that hang on to events” (p. 163). Therefore, according to Alonso (2004):

...it seemed quite adequate to progress in the investigation of the conceptual structure of complex narrative discourse by analyzing the work of an author who is precisely renowned for his gifted treatment of the metaphor, a central topic in all linguistic approaches to human cognition. (p. 163)

Alonso’s (2004) findings were positive in that he was able to utilize his conceptual integration network model to investigate the structure and cognitive components of Updike’s short story and has found that the model sufficiently was able to integrate all intricacies found in metaphor theory and cognitive operations.

Manfred Jahn (1997) conducted a survey of incipits, or the beginnings of the stories from which he then developed his narratological frameworks. According to Jahn (1997), narratology is:

...the theory of the structures of narrative. To investigate a structure, or to present a ‘structural description’, the narratologist dissects the narrative phenomenon into their component parts and then attempts to determine functions and relationships. (p. 18)

Jahn's (1997, 2005) research went to great lengths to detail, diagram, and develop a complete framework by which he is able to analyze and categorize the various components of the narrative. In consideration of the limitations of this paper, only a few of the Jahn's frameworks will be contrasted to Jack London's *The House of Pride and Other Tales of Hawaii* (See Appendix).

Narratological Framework

What is Narrative? By definition, a narrative is "...anything that tells or presents a story, be it by text, picture, performance, or a combination of these" (Jahn, 1997, p 18). For the purposes of this paper, I will be adopting this definition. Much like Patsy Simms in *Literary Nonfiction: Learning by Example* stated "In this anthology, I have tried to give you a head start by pointing out the various techniques that make these fifteen stories good" (p. 4). Similarly, I will survey the six excellent stories in *The House of Pride and Other Tales of Hawaii* to determine the relationships among the narratives and voice.

However, based on the limited scope of this paper I will look at Jack London's *The House of Pride and Other Tales of Hawaii* using only two concepts of Jahn's narratological framework; narrative communication and free indirect discourse.

Narrative Communication

According to Jahn's (1997) model, in fiction narrative the communication typically lies between the author and reader. However, the survey of the literature contained within this study demonstrates various ways in which authors communicate through their narratives with the readers. From an initial survey of the opening narratives I was able to ascertain varying levels within the narrative communication that, while extraordinarily different, create an initial bonding with the reader to fully engage them into further reading.

One way in which London communicates in *The House of Pride* is through an initial background and foundational setting:

PERCIVAL FORD wondered why he had come. He did not dance. He did not care much for army people. Yet he knew them all? gliding and revolving there on the broad lanai of the Seaside, the officers in their fresh-starched uniforms of white, the civilians in white and black, and the women bare of shoulders and arms. After two years in Honolulu the

Twentieth was departing to its new station in Alaska, and Percival Ford, as one of the big men of the Islands, could not help knowing the officers and their women.

This beginning, according to Jahn (1997, 2005) can be defined as a first-degree narrative; in other words, it is not contained or embedded within any other narrative. Another story that displays first-degree narrative that provides more imagery is *Aloha Oe*:

NEVER are there such departures as from the dock at Honolulu. The great transport lay with steam up, ready to pull out. A thousand persons were on her decks; five thousand stood on the wharf. Up and down the long gangway passed native princes and princesses, sugar kings and the high officials of the Territory. Beyond, in long lines, kept in order by the native police, were the carriages and motor cars of the Honolulu aristocracy. On the wharf the Royal Hawaiian Band played "Aloha Oe," and when it finished, a stringed orchestra of native musicians on board the transport took up the same sobbing strains, the native woman singer's voice rising birdlike above the instruments and the hubbub of departure. It was a silver reed, sounding its clear, unmistakable note in the great diapason of farewell.

While this opening narrative provides a descriptive background similar to the previous example, it provides readers with a much more visual interpretation of the overall feeling of the event.

Yet, another level of effective descriptive narrative may be found in *Koolau the Leper*:
Because we are sick they take away our liberty. We have obeyed the law. We have done no wrong. And yet they would put us in prison. Molokai is a prison. That you know. Niuli, there, his sister was sent to Molokai seven years ago. He has not seen her since. Nor will he ever see her. She must stay there until she dies. This is not her will. It is not Niuli's will. It is the will of the white men who rule the land. And who are these white men?

Within this prose, London is able to engage the reader into feeling of the terrible injustices done to the individuals that had been sent away. In addition, the question at the end of the paragraph causes the readers also to identify with those in Molokai.

Free Indirect Discourse

The notion of free indirect discourse is to develop an essence of thought or speech in a character without breaking the prose into portions of 'he said, she said' dialogic methodologies. The stories within *The House of Pride and Other Tales of Hawaii* provide some very good examples of this technique and create a subtle key foundation of London's style. One such example may be found in *The Sheriff of Kona*:

"YOU cannot escape liking the climate," Cudworth said, in reply to my panegyric on the Kona coast. "I was a young fellow, just out of college, when I came here eighteen years ago. I never went back, except, of course, to visit. And I warn you, if you have some spot dear to you on earth, not to linger here too long, else you will find this dearer."

Within this opening paragraph, London establishes almost a descriptive dialog narrative that provides the reader information within the dialogic prose. Another example of this type of methodology is found in *Koolau the Leper*:

Because we are sick they take away our liberty. We have obeyed the law. We have done no wrong. And yet they would put us in prison. Molokai is a prison. That you know. Niuli, there, his sister was sent to Molokai seven years ago. He has not seen her since. Nor will he ever see her. She must stay there until she dies. This is not her will. It is not Niuli's will. It is the will of the white men who rule the land. And who are these white men?

In this opening paragraph the narrator is engaging the reader through very short and concise sentences. In a span of only ninety-two words, London is able to provide the reader with an introduction that provides a political as well as psychological underpinning from which the story begins.

Another example of London's talent to initially engage the reader into the thoughts of the characters is found in *The House of Pride*:

PERCIVAL FORD wondered why he had come. He did not dance. He did not care much for army people. Yet he knew them all? gliding and revolving there on the broad lanai of the Seaside, the officers in their fresh-starched uniforms of white, the civilians in white and black, and the women bare of shoulders and arms. After two years in Honolulu the

Twentieth was departing to its new station in Alaska, and Percival Ford, as one of the big men of the Islands, could not help knowing the officers and their women.

Although now evident throughout all of the stories surveyed, the ability of London to seamlessly report on a character's thoughts, feelings, and expressions is clearly a successful strategy in which he makes it easier for readers to navigate through the opening narrative. From this abbreviated look into the incipits, or beginning paragraphs from London's *The House of Pride and Other Tales of Hawaii*, while his opening styles in these stories are much different than the strategy used in *The Sea Wolf*, or *The Iron Heal*, London's ability to engage the readers through the use of some of the concepts outlined by Jahn (1997) provide us with a clearer understanding of why Jack London writings have been so successful.

Conclusion

The communicative quality of the analyzed narratives through voice and mood subtly pulls one into the feel of the characters through varying levels of self-disclosure; coupled with the authors creative use of tense espouses a virtual realm in which the reader is one with the prose. Additionally, more often than not, these celebrated stories were developed through an overt-narrative that reinforced the first-person narratives through compelling communicative structures. The ability for the authors to develop a sense of urgency without creating a hurried sense of textual manipulation helps readers choose their individual levels of commitment within the narrative thereby creating a different sense and feel for each reader. Lastly, the usage of free indirect discourse produced the notion of thought or speech within the characters that helped the narrative flow through otherwise dialogic clutter.

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Appendix

Excerpts from:

London, Jack (1912). The House of Pride and Other Tales of Hawaii. Retrieved July 26, 2006 from: <<http://london.sonoma.edu/Writings/HousePride/>>

THE HOUSE OF PRIDE
(First published in *The Pacific Monthly*, Dec, 1910)

PERCIVAL FORD wondered why he had come. He did not dance. He did not care much for army people. Yet he knew them all? gliding and revolving there on the broad lanai of the Seaside, the officers in their fresh-starched uniforms of white, the civilians in white and black, and the women bare of shoulders and arms. After two years in Honolulu the Twentieth was departing to its new station in Alaska, and Percival Ford, as one of the big men of the Islands, could not help knowing the officers and their women.

KOOLAU THE LEPER
(First published in *The Pacific Monthly*, Vol. 22, Dec., 1909)

"Because we are sick they take away our liberty. We have obeyed the law. We have done no wrong. And yet they would put us in prison. Molokai is a prison. That you know. Niuli, there, his sister was sent to Molokai seven years ago. He has not seen her since. Nor will he ever see her. She must stay there until she dies. This is not her will. It is not Niuli's will. It is the will of the white men who rule the land. And who are these white men?"

Good-Bye, Jack!
(First published in *The Red Book Magazine*, June, 1909)

HAWAII is a queer place. Everything socially is what I may call topsyturvy. Not but what things are correct. They are almost too much so. But still things are sort of upside down. The most

ultra-exclusive set there is the "Missionary Crowd." It comes with rather a shock to learn that in Hawaii the obscure, martyrdom-seeking missionary sits at the head of the table of the moneyed aristocracy. But it is true. The humble New Englanders who came out in the third decade of the nineteenth century came for the lofty purpose of teaching the kanakas the true religion, the worship of the one only genuine and undeniable God. So well did they succeed in this, and also in civilizing the kanaka, that by the second or third generation he was practically extinct. This being the fruit of the seed of the Gospel, the fruit of the seed of the missionaries (the sons and the grandsons) was the possession of the islands themselves, of the land, the ports, the town sites, and the sugar plantations. The missionary who came to give the bread of life remained to gobble up the whole heathen feast.

ALOHA

OE

(First published in *Lady's Realm*, Dec, 1908)

NEVER are there such departures as from the dock at Honolulu. The great transport lay with steam up, ready to pull out. A thousand persons were on her decks; five thousand stood on the wharf. Up and down the long gangway passed native princes and princesses, sugar kings and the high officials of the Territory. Beyond, in long lines, kept in order by the native police, were the carriages and motor cars of the Honolulu aristocracy. On the wharf the Royal Hawaiian Band played "Aloha Oe," and when it finished, a stringed orchestra of native musicians on board the transport took up the same sobbing strains, the native woman singer's voice rising birdlike above the instruments and the hubbub of departure. It was a silver reed, sounding its clear, unmistakable note in the great diapason of farewell.

CHUN AH CHUN

THERE was nothing striking in the appearance of Chun Ah Chun. He was rather undersized, as Chinese go, and the Chinese narrow shoulders and spareness of flesh were his. The average tourist, casually glimpsing him on the streets of Honolulu, would have concluded that he was a

good-natured little Chinese, probably the proprietor of a prosperous laundry or tailorshop. In so far as good nature and prosperity went, the judgment would be correct, though beneath the mark; for Ah Chun was as good-natured as he was prosperous, and of the latter no man knew a tithe the tale. It was well known that he was enormously wealthy, but in his case "enormous" was merely the symbol for the unknown.

THE SHERIFF OF KONA

"YOU cannot escape liking the climate," Cudworth said, in reply to my panegyric on the Kona coast. "I was a young fellow, just out of college, when I came here eighteen years ago. I never went back, except, of course, to visit. And I warn you, if you have some spot dear to you on earth, not to linger here too long, else you will find this dearer."