

The Perfect Blend of Legendary Plot and Realistic Details —Jack London's Love of Life

Juan Jia

Abstract—Love of life is one of the representative works of American realist writer Jack London, who uses detailed descriptions of psychological and ideological activities to outline a breathtaking picture feeling, e.g. in the harsh Canadian tundra, the hungry, the wounded beat the limits of their lives and survive in extreme conditions, so that readers can have an immersive reading experience. In this 10,000 - word novel, London put the protagonist into an extremely difficult and menacing living environment that is almost detached from reality as well as very detailed and realistic details to present a dramatic and undulating journey of survival to readers by the third person narrative point of view. This paper will dig into the unique charm of Jack London's artistic creation from two perspectives: plot development and detail characterization.

Index Terms—Detail characterization, Jack London, love of life, plot.

I. INTRODUCTION OF AUTHOR AND WORKS

Jack London is an American realist writer and one of the representatives of Naturalism. What's more, he is known as the father of American proletarian literature. Meanwhile, he was forced by his livelihood to participate in the gold rush that swept through the United States at the beginning of the 20th century. The rapid expansion of capitalism led him, who born in a bankrupt family in San Francisco, California, to devote himself to the cause of the proletariat and to become an active voice for the working class in the flood of times. Due to his rich life experience and exquisite brushwork, he creates many outstanding literary works. Such as "love life", which is one of his many excellent works that profoundly shocked people.

Love of life: the story takes place against the backdrop of the gold rush that flourished in the United States at the end of the 19th century. The hero and a man named Bill went to the Canadian tundra for gold, and they both got a full Buckskin pocket's gold. But on the treacherous journey back, Bill abandoned him because of his sprained ankle. Although, he overcome the seemingly inviable environment by the tenacious will to live and the endless reason. After a long and arduous journey, he finally got to the beach, where he was found by scientists on a whaling ship at sea and rescued and returned to normal [1]. The recurring details in the novel echo back and forth, and the psychological changes and consciousness activities of the protagonist are well depicted. Thus a very vivid image of how a battered, exhausted gold digger struggled to survive alone in the wilderness through

his unyielding will and sober mind. The description of the ever-changing environment with the physical and mental changes of the gold seekers also plays a role in promoting the ups and downs of the novel. Vivid and tragic images are expressed through the vivid strokes of Jack London. In addition to the visual impact, it also makes us feel as if we were in the scene. Let a person read it with solemn as well as various emotions: life is so valuable that worth taking all to protect. Seemingly invincible difficulties in nature can be overcome by human beings. As long as we still have our own unyielding will, we will be able to safeguard the dignity of our lives and ultimately realize our value in life.

II. LOVE OF LIFE'S LARGER-THAN-LIFE PLOTS OVERLAP WITH EXQUISITE DETAILS

We can roughly divide the plot of the novel into five parts according to the psychological state of the protagonist and changes in his conscious activities. Each section is interspersed with a detailed depiction that echoes and evolves. It is the ups and downs of the plot and detailed descriptions that enable the readers to bring themselves into the protagonist's environment. Looking at the author's description of his psychological feelings and conscious activities, I experienced a kind of reading feeling like an immersive experience.

In the first part, the plot mainly tells that the protagonist was abandoned by his companion after being wounded in the sprain, but he still had fantasies about his companion and supplies in the distance, although he was suffering from hunger and fatigue. It doesn't matter who "he" is throughout the whole text. Although his name and background are not specified by the author, the author points out that "he" has a companion named "bill"[2]. The novel opens with a series of thrilling near-death experiences as they limp down the river bank. Having found the nugget, they fulfilled their original dream of becoming rich. But on the way back, the nuggets became an extra burden to the hungry. Looking at the spoils that would bring them a life of plenty food and clothing, they hoped, exhausted in the wilderness, that these nothingness could be transformed into actual pieces of bread that could be fed. In the face of life, all external things are not worth mentioning. Our hero "he" saw this clearly, but unfortunately his companion bill didn't see it until he died. The plot of this section mainly relies on detailed description, such as scenery, belongings and various creatures. 1. Scene: after Bill abandons him, he looks at the sun and feels like a ball of fire going out. Looking around the wilderness, there were no trees, bushes, or grass. Such a sad image is actually a reflection of the fear and anxiety gradually emerging in the

Manuscript received November 5, 2018; revised December 11, 2018.

Juan Jia is with Nanjing Normal University, China (e-mail: 285964990@qq.com).

protagonist's mind. Moving forward, he reached the bottom of the valley, thick with moss. A cold wind blew in the gloomy dark sky. It snowed heavily again, soaking his dry moss. The increasingly bad weather here bodes that his road ahead will only be more difficult and dangerous and sets the tone of the whole paper. 2. Paraphernalia: matches and watches are the most important clues in the novel. At the beginning he took out his watch and looked at the time, his heart was calm. When the picture was painted of him confirming over and over that he had sixty-six matches, a fear dominated him. This psychological transition from calm to panic creates a tense atmosphere that propels the plot forward. When he confirmed the match for the third time, he did not count it again, but this time he thought about a deerskin pocket for a while. This is the first time the buckskin pocket has appeared, and the author did not specify its use. But it focuses on the size of its appearance, as well as the protagonist's inner anxiety: It was as if the moor were going to take it away. This is a foreshadowing of the inner struggle of the gold-digger. As time went on, the text mentioned matches and watches again. The gold digger checked the match before he went to bed and wound his watch. The repetition of this detail gives the reader the illusion that he or she is experiencing something like this, which is very powerful. 3. Most species appeared in the first part, including berries, male deer, grouse, black fox with grouse in its mouth, cordyceps and small fish. The author spares no efforts to depict gold diggers beating grouse and catching small fish. He was reckless in the face of grouse. Driven by the pain of hunger, he threw stones and chased them and shouted endlessly. Especially when he found that he had missed a grouse close by, he hated it again, as if it had done something wrong to him. The vivid description of the change of consciousness reveals the ups and downs in the heart of the gold-digger. The plot to catch small fish was also designed in a zigzag way: at first he seized the water with his hands and stirred it up. Out of patience, he started to ladle with a white tin can. He was so mad that he scooped up all the water in the puddle until he found that the fish had swam through the dark crevice of the rock to the larger puddle on the other side. Here the author vividly shows the psychology of gold digger's gradual collapse with a group of progressive emotions: at first it was a light cry, after which he would wail over the moor, and then a long SOB. When grouse and fish were lost, and he could only chew the bitter, spicy root of the white berries and rushes, he was consumed by the pangs of hunger, and still had a fancy for his companion and the distant resupply of the cellar.

In the second part of the novel, the protagonist is tortured by hunger and gradually loses the pain of hunger. His stomach seemed to be asleep, and he felt weak as he grew numb. There is an emotional transition here: from being consumed in the first place, completely oblivious to bill and the far-away cellar, to losing his sense of pain and becoming less desperate to eat, to thinking of the little stick in front of him and the cellar supplies, which is actually a return to sanity. Here the author arranges a plot echoed above: catch Minnows. This time he had got rid of the frizz, and was able to calmly pick them up in a tin can. He tried to keep alive by eating alive minnows. It is worth mentioning that the buckskin pocket appears again in this section, and the gold

digger still chooses to take it after a deep thought. The more the authors describe the treasure of the gold seekers, the better the shock effect when the hero finally chooses to give up it. This is also an ingenious use of the techniques of eager to advance. His abandonment of the nugget won him a chance at life, and it was the rational abandonment of the nugget that made his companion bill's folly all the more remarkable. Here is an ancient fable: the stingy man, who could not shut his eyes for the sake of one more burning rush, finally closed his eyes when he saw the appearance of lighting only one rush. But he himself was already dead, and what could he do with the spare rushes? Both *Love of Life* and this fable tell us that when life is threatened, all external material pursuit is in vain, and people's excessive greed will only eventually destroy their precious lives. In the contemporary era of material desire, we are always tempted by the life of debonair. Only when we can reasonably control our desires and make rational choices can we overcome our greedy material and grasp the gift of life. A man who was both hungry and sorrowful overcame the limits of his life to survive in such an extremely harsh environment! He survived the double pressure of mind and body, escaped the call of death, and regained consciousness in hallucinations. In order to survive, he endured hunger, with a strong will to scare away the terrible brown bear! [3] He also firmly believes that bill -- his companion will wait for him in the forehead, even after he found bill's skeleton he still does not give up the hope of survival. He wanted to use the gun to kill prey; He saw the sea in a daze, and the sea called him. His life consciousness lets him continue to move forward. Never give up! Such miracles can only be attributed to the love of life in human nature. That is the tenacious call of life consciousness. Human nature fundamentally determines and explains human behavior. Man has two instincts: the instinct to live and the instinct to die. The reason why human life is so indestructible, can overcome the enemy in the most difficult and difficult moment, overcome difficulties, first of all, because of the greatness of human nature. The nature of life stimulates people's consciousness of life and enables them to actively find ways to save themselves. "Consciousness has two meanings: wisdom and perseverance. Wolf's nature is brutal, its cruelty is just an instinct of the beast, its behavior is unconscious. Although it is cunning and brutal, but this is a natural habit or wild, different from people through the big brain thinking will and wisdom. Only the human brain can generate consciousness, understand the meaning of this life-to-death struggle, think of the Wolf's strength and fatal weakness, think of the way to overcome the Wolf, people finally overcome the sick Wolf with wisdom. In nature, in addition to human beings who are high-level thinking animals, other animals are still in the hazy stage of the unconscious. They exist in a primitive and savage state, and life to them is a chaotic instinct. That alone will enable man to dominate the world! In the confrontation between man and Wolf, the reason why man is able to win is not only the battle between the strength of the desire for survival, but also the fact that man has thought and will and does not yield to the spirit of death.

In the third part, he comes to a strange land. Out of reason, he begins to abandon his belongings. The gold in the

deerskin pocket was successively abandoned by him, With only one gun, half a blanket and a tin can left, he began to hallucinate: he began to imagine the relief of death, but his life did not want to die, forcing him to move forward. Here the author arranges an echo with the beginning of plot: catch grouse. But this time the prospector was lucky. He plunged into a pine nest, ate the grouse pups that had just been born, and made his way across the bottom of the moor in pursuit of the mother grouse. The detail that he does not forget to Wind up the watch before he enters his dream, as if to remind the reader of the hopeful future of the gold digger [4]. Then the author arranged the appearance of the big brown bear, and the solution of this crisis was also a series of twists and turns: at first he thought of killing brown bear and eating his flesh, but when he calmed down, considering his weak health, he feared of being attacked by brown bears. Then he raised his spirits in fear and let out a fierce cry that stopped the bear and this step put him out of danger. The author's depiction of the inner activities of gold seekers is delicate and tortuous, making readers feeling like authentic. The most important part of this episode is actually the description of the gold-digger's abandon the gold in the deerskin: In chronological order, with a clear head in the early morning, he poured out the golden nugget in the buckskin pocket, divided it into two equal parts, and gave up half. At noon the parcel was too heavy for him to bear, and he emptied half of it again until he had emptied the rest of the gold in the afternoon. This process of abandoning gold seems to have little ground for conscious activities, but it is arranged without trace and still seems reasonable. And this creates a strong contrast with the following content that Bill died for gold. After the author drives away the brown bear, he is possessed by a new fear: the howling of wolves that permeates the wilderness. Looking at the skeletal carcasses of deer killed by wolves, he began to doubt the agony of struggling to survive and that death might be a relief. But his life refused to die, and he moved forward almost instinctively. Just like the metaphor in the passage: although his soul and body move forward together, they are separate, and the connection between them is very weak. He was obsessed by hallucinations. He always fancied that there was still a bullet in the barrel of his gun, but at the same time he denied his illusion again and again. The repeated psychological activities create a tense and profound atmosphere for the readers. Here "he" is engaged in a mind-boggling intellectual game with the threat of starvation and death. Jack London uses his extremely delicate and profound brush strokes to make us feel the potential of life that can erupt out of desperate people. Jack London USES his extremely delicate and profound brush strokes to make us feel the potential of life that can erupt out of desperate people.

The plot of the fourth part of the novel is also the climax of the whole text: the desperate prospector saw the nearby sea and the ship lying at sea, and at first he only thought it was his own illusion. Then he followed his voice to find the sick wolf who followed him. Here the author used a lot of details to describe the appearance and physical condition of the sick Wolf, so that the readers could conclude: this is an old, sick, dying lone Wolf abandoned by wolves. But the prospector was not alarmed; he was preoccupied with what he had

mistaken for a vision, and concluded that he was not far from the arctic ocean, and that the ships at sea were whaling ships [5]. He saw the promise of life and felt sick at the sight of the sick Wolf. He looked at the sick and weak Wolf, Unwilling to feed such animals, he acted rationally when he could not stand: the author mentioned matches and watch for the fourth time. The match was dry, and the watch was still running, pointing to eleven o'clock. In fact, it implies that the reader is the pure reason of the gold miner to help him overcome the seemingly impossible situation and finally get help. He knew clearly that this sick Wolf was waiting for him to die, and that he could only live by killing the sick Wolf. The wounded, hungry man and the old, sick, hungry Wolf are playing a game of life and death on the waste land. But reason and calm allowed him to constantly wake up from hallucinations and stupor, and finally use himself as bait, taking advantage of the moment the Wolf bit his wrist, and bite the Wolf's neck with the last strength. Eventually he killed the Wolf and drank its blood. In this section, the author describes the situation of gold diggers fishing for the third time: seeing his terrible face in the river, he woke up with a start. After spooning several times with a tin can, he was afraid that he would fall into the water because of his extreme weakness and finally decided to give up. Here we can see the changes in the mentality and consciousness of the gold digger: from the impatience at the beginning, then the calm response, and finally out of the reason to give up, leading the reader step by step into the protagonist's heart. Here, the author also gives an account of the ending of Bill: Bill, who was eaten by beasts and left with a pile of bones, died with his sack of gold. The prospector thought he could laugh at Bill's greed, but he couldn't bear to leave. Here through the life and death of the two of the end of the comparison, more strongly highlight the reason and survival of the faith of the thrust. Therefore, under no circumstances can people lose their integrity, in the face of survival we also need to be a straight uppercase person. He has been rolling and crawling forward, although he has only a weak life energy, but his desire to survive is constantly replenishing this energy, so his life fire has been burning, which also supports him to continue to overcome fear and fight against all difficulties and obstacles [6]. As he neared the shore, which symbolized the hope of life, he saw the wreck bones of his companion bill. Out of greed, out of reluctance to part with the lump of gold, bill finally lost his precious life. He continued his journey with a sneer, but at the same time maintained his integrity. He didn't eat bill's bones like a wild animal to survive and get out of hungry. He didn't eat his body. He just laughed then moved on. Despising greed and difficulties, he courageously headed for the shore of life. Human life is sometimes extremely fragile, the moment will be gone; Sometimes it's so powerful that you can't help but marvel at it. When bill ignored his peers' cries to him, as a capable person, he ran towards the hope of life with greed and selfishness, but life abandoned him. This is the tragedy of cowardice when people turn their backs on their conscience.

At the end of the article, the hero is saved by scientists on a whaling ship at sea, but this horrible experience made him deeply afraid of the lack of food, but he finally returned to normal. Here's a vivid detail: after breakfast he would beg the ship's sailors like a beggar for some hard bread and hide it in

his quilt or in the corner. The author uses a vivid analogy when he describes the gold-digger looking at the hard bread he is begging for: like a miser staring at his gold. Reading this description, we can not help but laugh at the same time as the protagonist with a long sigh of relief. This novel is deeply touching. It vividly shows us a person's whole journey of struggling to survive in the extremely difficult living environment, and meticulously depicts the greatness and strength of life. It tells us such a universal truth -- respect for our lives, cherish our lives, and our lives are interdependent, and form the closest Allies with our lives, we will enjoy the beauty of life, the miracle of life will always be with us. What is life? Maybe not. What is the force of life? Maybe we can't say for sure. But we must know, "I" -- is this world's greatest life. Life gives "I" the ability to overcome all difficulties and gave me the spirit of courage to go forward! In any case, as long as there is life, the fire of hope will burn, as long as there is a spark, there is hope to form a prairie fire. As an old saying goes, "as long as the green hills last, there will always be wood to burn." this is what everyone needs to know.

Jack London caught the reader's eye with a larger-than-life setting: In the harsh Canadian tundra, the hungry, the wounded beat the limits of their lives and Survive in extreme conditions! He withstood the double pressure of mind and body, regained consciousness in the illusion, and broke away from the call of death again and again. Just to survive, he ate berries, weeds, raw food, and sucked bones and marrow. The courage given by the desire to live scared the bear away! In spite of the betrayal, he still had pity and hope for his companion who abandoned him. He fell into the illusion but was able to survive by the instinct to sober again and again, and with his own calm and rational victory over the sick Wolf, and finally obtained the hope of life. It is the indomitable sense of life in human nature and the sense from beginning to end that enable him to complete self-salvation in the predicament. To live is human, but to choose to live is rational [7].

III. CONCLUSION

In "Love of Life", Jack London depicts vivid details in plain language. He is good at using detailed descriptions of psychological and ideological activities to outline a breathtaking picture feeling, so that readers can have an immersive reading experience. He places the protagonist in an extremely difficult situation. The novel is engrossed by a plausible reading of the plot. The love of life expressed through the plot and the theme of eulogizing reason is also enduring, which is in the same line with the traditional spirit of "the gentleman should strive for self-improvement" carried forward in China, and is of great enlightening and guiding significance.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I want to express my appreciation to many who supported my efforts in writing this paper during past few months.

I am greatly indebted to my supervisor, Chen Liping, who spares no time and energy, out of her heavy load of office work, teaching and research commitments, to provide substantial guidance to finishing this paper. I also wish to take this opportunity here to thank her for opening up a world of wonders in English literature and literary criticism before me.

Heartly thanks should also be given Prof. Chen. During the preparation of this paper, the detailed advice and constant help from her have been both academically authoritative and generous.

Special thanks should be extended Li Ming, whose lectures have made me fully aware that language is not transparent as a system of signs at the first year of my study in literature. Their lectures have greatly helped me in my search for the author and the audience, and the additional meanings in the form of language itself, and I hope this is reflected here.

REFERENCES

- [1] Y. Yang, "Research on the image roots and themes in love of life by jack London," *Journal of Social Science of Harbin Normal University*, vol. 4, pp. 102-104, Jun. 2015.
- [2] C. Mao and C. Wu, "The value of life consciousness — reading jack London 'love life'," *Journal of Carey College*, vol. 4, pp. 88-90, Jun. 2017.
- [3] S. Y. Liu, "Game between rationality and nature — on jack London's love of life," *Intelligence*, vol. 34, pp. 230-231, Jun 2016.
- [4] X. M. Rong and C. Yu, "Exuberant life consciousness -- close reading of jack London's love of life," *Journal of Guizhou University for Nationalities (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)*, vol. 6, pp. 100-102, Jun.
- [5] S. Yi, "Life consciousness of Chinese people from jack London's love for life," *Journal of Hunan University of Science and Technology (Social Science Edition)*, vol. 5, pp. 13-16, Jun 2016.
- [6] P. Wang, "Analysis of life in Jack London's 'love of life,'" *Journal of Lanzhou Institute of Education*, vol. 12, pp. 20-21+24, June 2016.
- [7] J. London, *Love of Life*, Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 1998, vol. 2, p. 11, Jan 2009.



Juan Jia was born in Huai'an, Jiangsu, China, in 28th May, 1994. She got bachelor of arts, in 22th June, 2018, in Huaiyin Normal University, Huai'an Jiangsu, China. She received master of education, in June, 2020, in Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing Jiangsu, China.

From July 7, 2016 to August 26, 2016, she worked as a teaching assistant in Enlai Cadre College; from Dec. 2014 to Jun. 2016, she worked as a deputy director of New Media Department, Students' union; from Sep. 2014 to Jun. 2015, she work as a class leader, and she commissary in charge of culture and entertainment.