CHAPTER V

SECONDARY CONCERNS

WOMEN

Jack London has pictured his heroines in his fiction in a very gripping way. We deduce three types of women in his fiction. The first of these are the blonde, blue-eyed, virtuous heroine of the late nineteenth century romance, who are at the same time beautiful, often rich and always respectable. These female characters surrounded themselves with books, music and beautiful clothes and served as the embodiment of "culture" to London’s heroes. They probably served also as an embodiment of culture to London and his readers, but we also find that they are endless bore to the mid-twentieth century readers.

However, it is noted that the heroines of the second type are palatable to modern tastes. At the turn of the century new possibilities were beginning to open for American women, who were popularly referred to as the "New Women". They were well-educated, athletic, unchaperoned and preferred single independent status to marriage and domesticity. London in his short story "Priestly Prerogative", presents the "new women", in the form of Grace Bentham. Grace, the wife of Edwin Bentham, has come with her husband to the Yukon territory. Both have been reared in the city and thus are tenderfeet, until Grace realizes that in
order to survive, she must take charge of the family affairs. Eventually by Grace’s clever maneuvering of their money, her buying of land, and her strict urging and directing Edwin to push further north, the couple emerged wealthy. The “new women” motif is announced in London’s description of Grace’s efficiency:

This was the women who urged her husband in his Northland quest, who broke trail for him when no one was looking, and cried in secret over her weakening women’s body. So journeyed this strangely assorted couple down to old Fort Selkirk, then through five-score miles of dismal wilderness to Stuart River. And when the short day left them, and the man lay in the snow and blubbered, it was the woman who lashed him to the sled, bit her lips with the pain of her aching limbs, and helped the dog haul him to Malemute kid’s cabin.*1*

Her greatest energies are then directed in earning a fortune for them:

This is what Grace Bentham proceeded to do. Arriving in Dawson with a few pounds of flour and several letters of introduction, she at once applied herself to the task of pushing her big body to the fore. It was she who melted the stoney heart and wrung credit from the rude barbarian who presided over the destiny of the P.C. Company.... It was she who studied maps, catechized miners, and hammered geography and locations into his hallowed head, till everybody marveled at his broad grasp of the country and knowledge of its conditions.... She did the work; he got the credit and reward.*2*  

London indicates in the study of Grace Bentham, his early fascination with the strong, Amazon-like woman who became one of his dominant character types in the later works.

He tried to popularize the convention of the "comrade-
woman or new-woman", who take part in adventures with her men instead of sitting at home with her needlework. Quite a good number of London's heroines fall in this category. Frona Weise in A Daughter of the Snows introduces her men to the art of survival in the Yukon. London tried to have a harmony to the societal ambivalences concerning sex roles. Frona Weise, the heroine, is a dynamic woman of a type rare in American fiction. To her old friend Matt McCarthy, she offers her biceps to be felt, and proudly boasts that she can swing clubs, box, fence, swim, do high dives and walk on her hands. She personifies the "new women", in displaying her knowledge of the frontier on the trek inward to Dawson during which men dropped in their track with injury and death, and that too such display of knowledge just after her return from college to Alaska. Frona, by demonstrating her uninhibited behaviour on the trail and in her friendship with Lucile, depicts that she carries with her a mild but genuine aura of sexual freedom. She defends herself when Vance shows his displeasure at her befriending the prostitute Lucile, she notes that he can hardly be spotless.

"But I am - "

"A man of course. Very good. Because you are a man, you may court contamination. Because I am a woman. I may not. Contamination contaminates, does it not? Then you, what do you here with me?"*3*

Maud Brewester, demonstrates elements of London's personal ideal, the mate-woman. He writes about such a mate-women in one of his love letters to Charmain that such a
woman was the equivalent of the man-comrade, one who combined courage, assertiveness and imagination (in this culture "masculine" qualities) with tenderness, sensitivity and forgiveness ("feminine" qualities). Maud behaves with courage and vigor, shares his burden, even helps him out with rowing and hunting.

Avis Everhard, the narrator of *The Iron Heel* is a prototype of both the first and second type of heroine. The dependence of the heroine of popular nineteenth-century American fiction on the hero is reflected in Avis's romantic interest in her husband, as well as her conversion to socialism stems from her introduction to her husband. The four "virtues" of the nineteenth-century heroine-piety, purity, domesticity and submissiveness, all these generalizations apply to Avis Everhard. But at the same time Avis can also be lined with the "independent" heroines, as she is not content to sit at home and await reports of the revolution. Marriage does not domesticate her, instead, she shares Ernest's interest and activities to the extent of becoming a socialist and working beside him. Like so many of London's characters she behaves fearlessly during times of physical danger.

Dede Mason in *Burning Daylight* as a "new woman" is far more convincing than Frona Welse, who lives in Berkeley, dates college men and keeps a horse. She proves the concept of "new woman" by showing her unwillingness to be considered
merely a "brief diversion" from an obsession with business. She confirms her unconventionality by frankly confessing her love, acknowledging that her behaviour by many men would be considered unwomanly manner. Their marriage is made possible only after Daylight agrees to abandon his business and Dede settles down by surrendering much of her own independence.

The concept of the "new woman" presents in Frona Weise. Joan Lackland in Adventure, who helps her hero to quell a native uprising. and fragile Maud Brewster, the poetess-heroine, who trades her pen for a club to help Humphrey hunt seals when the larder runs low on their deserted island: are a far cry from the "liberated" women of the mid-twentieth century. But on this aspect I am not going to dwell as it will give another dimension to the concept of the "new women", not related to London heroines.

Finally the women who takes away the main chunk of our fascination are the women of the third type. They are admirable on their own and less wooden than their counterpart, the "new-women". These females are the dance-hall girls. Indian wives and mistresses of London’s Alaskan heroes. They are more admirable because they possess virtues which the "respectable" heroines often lack. No doubt it is not an easy task to decide and decipher the racial attitude of Jack London towards these women of third type but in a comparative study. it comes out clearly that London did admire them as these "respectable" ladies do not always show
to the best advantage. These women are an integral part of
the realistic view of life in the Northland.

The most outstanding dance-hall girl in London's
Alaskan tale is Freda Moloof, a Greek dancer in the Dawson
saloon, Pioneer Hall, whose beautiful face reflects a
strength of its own. London tries to point out in this
confrontation between his two heroines, the dance-hall girl
and the leader of Dawson society, that they are sisters
under the skin and both devoted to noble purpose. Burning
Daylight has another dancer, Freda who is accompanied by
another woman, simply known as "the Virgin". London is
discreet in his description about the profession of these
women. He notes the denial of Freda's entrance to all
respectable gatherings after the arrival of the wives and
sisters in Dawson. He points out that Virgin gives up the
dance-hall, works at washing clothes, sewing parkas and
clerking in the Yukon bank. They are aware of their low
status and it becomes more clear in Freda's refusal to allow
the most respectable lady of Dawson to enter her cabin,
though in fact, she would like to entertain her. London does
not say in his fiction that many of these girls could be had
for the hour or for the night at very fancy prices, nor does
he mention the more common, who lived in the cribs in
Paradise Alley or in the swampland, well back of the
business district known as "Hell's Half Acre", but that is
beside the point as the intention here is to enumerate their
virtues and not their profession.
The recognition of their low status brings humility in them but the dance-hall girls are good-hearted, proud and possess knowledge which their respectable sisters lack. These girls often use this quality of theirs for someone else's advantage. For example, Freda shames one young man into remaining with the native wife. He had determined to set aside, she forestalls another young man's secret elopement in the face of his former fiance's impending arrival in the Yukon. She is a success in these incidents because of her knowledge of men. Burning Daylight is offered eight thousand dollars when he has lost all his holding in an all-night poker game by Virgin. The respect they have for themselves is outstanding. Freda refuses Mrs. Eppingwell entrance to her cabin, whereas Virgin decides to kill herself quietly rather than threaten the man she loves because "a certain still-kneed pride... would not have permitted her to accept marriage as an act of philanthropy. All these incidents cannot help but make us admire London's Dawson dance-hall girls.

Humility, good-heartedness, pride and success at the men-game are the standard characteristic features of frontier prostitutes. These dance-hall girls are no doubt endowed with such features, but they, at least one of them rises above these "respectable" women. In "The Scorn of Women", Freda takes over when the respectable Colonel's lady fails by keeping Floyd Vanderlip by her side, and thus
forestalls his elopement. Her ability to do so allows her to play more important part in Floyd’s salvation. London does not exactly exonerate Freda for her ability to play to a dishonest man’s weakness for her by letting Mrs. Eppingwell misjudge her. London forgives Mrs. Eppingwell for this short-coming which he say is a part of so called respectable ladies. By this judgment of London, Freda is shown as possessing greater worldly knowledge and humility. We are not asked to choose between these two main characters in this story, but we cannot help seeing that Freda is in many ways the stronger and more admirable of the two women.

The Indian women who are presented as wives and mistresses in London’s frontier stories have the same social status as the dance-hall girls and are looked down upon by the “respectable” women. This attitude results in many stories, in the abandonment of the Indian women by their white husbands and lovers. London has a mixed reaction for such characters. In some places he portrays them as cowards and in some like “The Story of Jees Uck”, he hides this fault behind the grab of his racist outlook. The Indian women accept their low status uncomplainingly and rises above their counterpart, the “respectable” women. This is illustrated in a most devastating way in the story “Si Wash” where the Indian women prefers death, so that her white husband can go back to his own clan. In the dying throes of agony, which is not at all reflected by her, she extracts a
promise from him that he won't take another Indian girl as his wife, because she doesn't want him to be known as a "squawmen", who is looked down upon by his own people.

These Indian women have several admirable qualities. They are loyal—Passuk in "The Grit of Women", Unoa in "Odyssey of the North", self-sacrificing—Labikswee in "The Wonder of Women", Passuk in "The Grit of Women", stoical in the face of pain or disappointment—Jeess Uck in "The Story of Jeess Uck", Ruth in "The White Silence". They possess a natural sexuality which London does not allow to operate in the "respectable" white heroine. For example, Jeess Uck in "The Story of Jeess Uck", Zarinska in "The God of His Fathers", Tili in "The Grit of Women", and Lit-Lit in "The Marriage of Lit-Lit". The Indian girls are more down to earth and are not fussy about sharing the same hut. Their loyalty is above law of kind and it is an important principle throughout London's stories. For them self is insignificant and they do not hesitate in self-sacrificing for the welfare of their white husbands or lovers.

It is a tough choice to say that London admired these women more than their genteel sisters but one thing is sure that they come out in glowing terms. The list of Indian virtues corresponding white women's vices are a long one. White heroine deserts lovers for no reasons. Example "Flush of Gold", where loyalty is presented in the Indian girls who do not interfere in their men's work. White women, like
Genevieve in *The Game* and Ruth Morse in *Martin Eden*, try to turn their men away from what eventually becomes their life work. The comparative list can go to any end but I end with the admirable traits of Jees Uck, an Indian girl, who is deserted with a son after a three years time by her white husband. The novelty of Jees Uck is presented when she goes south in search of him and learns that he is married. She elects not to reveal their relationship or the identity of their son to his society wife, instead she returns to Yukon and opens a school to enlighten her own sisters about the ways of the world. Our admiration is won by this act of Jees Uck. London's only white heroine who comes out of this drab representation of the so called "respectable" women is Saxon Roberts in *The Valley of the Moon* who is fairly admirable. It can be concluded that London bestowed on his dance-hall girls and Indian squaws a sneaking admiration which he did not accord on their genteel sisters.

**FASCISM**

Fascism is a term as much abused by the Left as communism is by the Right. As the Right sees communism in women's liberation, racial integration, and sex education, so the left sees fascism in patriotism, family loyalties, and country music. Real fascism, however, is an ideology;
the ideology of the corporate state, in which government and business are intimate partners, and a mystical veneration for the organic unity of the state is usually personified in a charismatic leader. London was the first to anticipate the true brutality of fascism, and, in The Iron Heel, it develops along almost precisely the lines followed in its actual implementation in Germany and Italy: as a conscious movement to thwart socialism with a rival ideology.

The fascist strain was unconsciously presented by London in his novel, The Iron Heel. London seems to be a major precursor of fascism, but this position has been given to D.H. Lawrence by many a critic. In fact both of them did not consciously accept fascist ideology, it was the unconscious strain which has been pointed out. London's novel, The Iron Heel presents this theme of fascism. The novel is basically a great socialist future, but the events unfolding for the popularity of socialism and its acceptance by the masses seemed a distant dream. Socialism seemed to have come no nearer during that era. It had suffered numerous set-backs, especially the failure of the 1905 Russian Revolution was a severe blow to the movement of socialism, leading the socialist groups to lapse into gloom and despair. It was during such time and keeping the pessimistic factors into consideration that London wondered whether the socialist hadn't miscalculated their historical scenario. The idea prevalent among the socialists that "the decay of self-seeking capitalism" will automatically lead to
socialism shows its drawbacks; instead it presents a theme that perhaps capitalism would evolve into something even more exploitative and repressive before the inevitable socialism could emerge into.

that monsters offshoot, the oligarchy.
Too late did the socialist movement of the early twentieth century divine the coming of the oligarchy. Even as it was divined, the oligarchy was there—a fact established in blood, stupendous and awful reality. Not even then, as the Everhard Manuscript will shows, was any permanence attributed to the Iron Heel.*5*

The "Foreword" of the novel presents the above lines, in the guise of the editor, "Anthony Meredith". It also tells us that the subject of the novel is the repressive oligarchy of conglomerate capitalism who crushes the rise of socialism and rules with an iron hand.

London has nicknamed the oligarchy of the American capitalists as the Iron Heel, who seizes power when there was a danger of a socialist victory at the polls. The novel describes the crushing of the labour by this oligarchy between the year 1912 and 1932 and presents the terrible and bitter conflict between the socialist underground and the forces of dictatorship. The book abruptly ends in 1932, with victory for the Oligarchy. The details of the Iron Heel's oligarchy's repressive regime were hailed during the 1920's and 1930's as prophetic of European fascism. Anatole France, Leon Trotsky and George Orwell all stressed the fascist strain of The Iron Heel. Leon Trotsky wrote: "The book
surprised me with the audacity and independence of its historical foresight”. He further writes, "one can say with assurance that in 1907 not one of the revolutionary Marxists, not excluding Lenin and Rosa Luxembourg, imagined so fully the ominous perspective of the alliance between finance capital and labor aristocracy. This suffices in itself to determine the specific weight of the novel”. He writes on London’s prevision of fascism:

In this picture of the future there remains not a trace of democracy and peaceful progress. Over the mass of the deprived rise the castes of labour aristocracy, of praetorian army, of an all-penetrating police, with the financial oligarchy at the top. In reading it, one does not believe his own eyes; it is precisely the picture of fascism, of its economy, of its governmental technique, its political psychology. The fact is incontestable: in 1907 Jack London already foresaw and described the fascist regime as the inevitable result of the defeat of the proletarian revolution. Whatever may be the single "errors" of the novel—and they exist—we cannot help inclining before the powerful intuition of the revolutionary artist. 6

London perceived what the other socialist failed to perceive. London could foresee the multitude of coercive and cooptive strategies used by a clever and determined ruling class who could employ them even in the face of overwhelming popular opposition. At the outset of The Iron Heel, not only are the army and police the private instruments of the capitalist, but they are able as well to exercise totalitarian control over the churches, the universities, and the press, and systematically eliminating all opposition to their oppression. They are able to consolidate their
position into a lightly unified oligarchy. They divide the labour class, obliterate the middle-class, replace the regular army with mercenaries who are a race apart with their own class morality and consciousness, raizing and grounding life into dust. London tries to impress upon its readers that the oligarchy or fascist too are capable of forging their own solidarity to retain their hold and domination of society through various nefarious means which are vastly powerful: powerful enough to forestall for several centuries the socialist revolution. Thus Jack London was able to predict the coming of Hitler, Mussolini, McCarthyism and the Taft-Hartley laws in America. Foner is very correct when he makes his assessment of The Iron Heel:

The years have proved Jack London's picture in The Iron Heel to be tragically correct. We have but to substitute the word "fascism" for "Oligarchy" and the The Iron Heel becomes a living picture of what actually happened in the past two decades. It is true that London did not foresee the brutal forms which fascism would take in our time. Yet, despite many differences between what happened in Germany, and Italy and Spain, what is pictured in this book makes it probably the most amazingly prophetic work of the twentieth century. Since the advent of fascism, radicals the world over have come to realize the validity of Jack London's prophecies. In 1924, after fascism had come to Italy, Anatole France wrote in an introduction to a new edition of The Iron Heel: "Alas. Jack London had that particular genius which perceived what is hidden from the common herd, and possessed a special knowledge enabling him to anticipate the future. He foresaw the assemblage of events which is but now unrolling to our view."*7*

PRIZE-FIGHTING

Off all sports used by American writers to project and criticize an impersonal way of life, boxing has been an
obvious choice, since it can so characteristically represent
the unscrupulous ways of a callous system. The first major
modern American author to use American popular sport in his
fiction was Jack London who can rightly be said to be the
inventor of the modern prize-fight. We note that by
extension, prize-fight especially boxing, in literature
becomes symbolic in depicting a way of life where man finds
himself struggling against insurmountable odds. We find this
predicament operative in varying degrees in works ranging
from Ring Lardner’s Champion (1916), Earnest Hemingway’s,
Fifty Grand (1927), Clifford Odet’s, Golden Boy (1937),
Nelson Algren’s, Never Come Morning (1940) to Budd
Schulberg’s The Harder They Fall (1947) and more recently
Leonard Gardner’s brilliant Fat City (1968). The prototype
of all these stories is perhaps Jack London’s “A Piece of
Steak”, (1912) which is certainly a representative story as
it presents its villain, boxing, being directly equated with
life.

London took prize-fighting as the subject of a novel.
The Game, three short stories, “A Piece of Steak”, “The
Mexican”, and “The Madness of John Harned”; and a novella,
The Abysmal Brute wherein each of the protagonist is a
prize-fighter, presented with their superficialities. Here
London associated as closely as he could do to the elements
of life and death in the contest. London very vividly
presents the audience confronting their feelings about the
fighters and tries to figure out for the reader whether the

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fans really wish for blood, death or human sacrifice. He also wishes his readers to know whether the fans are content with the less primitive "manly art of self-defense", fast footwork and stamina. In his thematic concern of prize-fight London weaves the Success Myth to the reality of life around it, making us observe that there is something of the athletic manner about all his heroes. No doubt he always sympathized with the under dog, but his heroes possess the competitive sense of an athlete, where the accomplishment is never equated with the expense of effort, as it is merely always crushed by superior forces. The American Dream results in a nightmare for London and the controlling athletic metaphor of his prize-fight stories are one where the odds are most of the time set up by an unbeatable system.

London is par excellence in his portrayals of the boxers in action as well in his description of the prize-fighting crowds and their reactions. His fiction embraces both views of boxing which are the traditionally heroic and the aspects of brutality. The opposing views of boxing correspond well to London's posed tension between the dignity of men in the ring or arena-Fleming in The Game, Tom King in "A Piece of Steak", Felipe Rivera in "The Mexican", John Harned in "The Madness of John Harned" and Pat Glendon in The Abysmal Brute - and the blood and danger of the contest - the death of Joe Fleming, the defeat of Tom King,
death of John Harned and the menacing ugly fans and
opponents in all these works. London presents as usual the
solitary individual who tests himself in competition,
whether it be in a prize ring, in the Yukon or in the high
seas, and to him victory or defeat in the contest literally
meant living or dying. In these works London elevates the
"game" of prize-fighting and its action to larger games of
existence, specifically to life and death.

The Game is a realistic presentation of the contest,
imbibed with ominous romantic interpretation of the
philosophical overtones of the potentially deadly sport. It
presents a fatalistic view of events where disparity between
hopes and the fact of one's own mortality exists. The Game
presents a rather melodramatic plot wherein the main
character, boxer Joe Fleming and Genevieve, his fiance, have
risen up from their poor working-class background and are
planning to get married the next day; the day after Joe
Fleming's final bout. Many a time it veers to the note of
sentimentality but presents a very realistic picture about
the ring through the eyes of Genevieve who was asked by Joe
to witness his last fight. London as usual is great in his
vivid description of the prize-fight and the novel is
liberally illustrated with realistic representation of
characters and scenes, reflecting the bright promise of Joe
and Genevieve's life together but with ominous background
where the grim fate, death, is stalking them. It reduces
their earnest love and seriousness in striving to obey all
of society's rules, into mockery by snatching way Joe at the moment when he was winning the prize-fight. Joe slips, and fractures his skull and dies while on his way to hospital. In a state of shock, Genevieve follows her lover's body to the hospital where she uses, "This, then, was the end of it...the thrilling nights of starshine, the deliciousness of surrender, the loving and being loved. She was stunned by the awful facts of this Game she did not understand."

London's classic of the ring, the unforgettable tale of the old fighter's last bout, "A Piece of Steak", is a very moving story. London is at his best in describing the violent physical action presenting his kinaesthetic sense of the gymnast and of the true poet. The enthusiastic sports reader is held spell bound through the agonizing round after round moments of the whirlwind rushes of young Sandel and the deliberate sledge hammer blows of old Tom King, with the fight moving relentlessly towards its tragic denouement. It is a gripping story where the implications of the battle go far beyond the square ring. The result being a vivid lesson in the law of life. This particular lesson is universal and Tom King is no exception. Even though throughout the story our heartfelt sympathy is with Tom King as London shows him walking the two miles because of his poverty and leaving behind his desperate little wife and hungry children: the show of the prize-fight is finally won by Sandel who is a representation of youth. Irrespective of age we share the
terrible epiphany of the protagonist's tears at the end of the story where individual pathos deepens into the human tragedy as we realize that Tom King is Everyman and that his predicament is ultimately our own. It has been rightly observed by Howard Latchman that this is one of the very greatest boxing tales in the literature of the sport, but a slight modification will be a fitting tribute to this story when we say that it is one of the very greatest tales in literature.

The implication in "A Piece of Steak", that the system of organized boxing is akin to life itself is evident from London's conviction that one can never expect things to go his way when he would most like them to. Tom King, a veteran of many ring wars, would like to win one more fight and quit for the "misus and kiddies". No doubt King is wise in ring savvy and makes effective use of his great advantage of experience, he stands no chance against the "system" which must have its own way. Even after King has outpointed his younger opponent all the way, in the end he is knocked out by him. London suggests that this is the way of life, when King expresses his predicament: "Always were these youngsters rising up in the boxing game, springing through the ropes and shouting their defiance and always were the old uns going down before them". We realize that the dream of success can never be greater than the facts surrounding it. Even King's inability to get the piece of steak that he felt might have given him the strength to win is a portent
of his eventual submission to the overwhelming odds. Though
"The Madness of John Harned" lacks the impact of "A Piece of
Steak", it is nevertheless one of London's better effort. The
narrator of the story is Manuel de Jesus Patino, an
Ecuadorian aristocrat, who takes notable pride in his
Spanish antecedents and in such Spanish traditions as the
bullfight. The tale which he narrates is about a wealthy
American, John Harned, who had fallen in love with his
beautiful cousin Maria Valenzuela, and is witnessing a bull-
fight in Quito on her invitation. Harned does not enjoy the
prize-fight as the others do, instead shows his contempt for
the time-honoured ritual, because he feels the bull is not
given a sporting chance. He witnesses in the uneven fight
the demoralizing cruelty which for the Ecuadorians is a
noble spectacle. He is not as much moved at the death of the
bull than the degrading effect the fight has on the audience in
their enjoyment at animal suffering. He is scornful of
the fortune meted out to the poor bull at the hands of the
so-called five brave men of the arena. He looses all sense of
humanity when he witnesses the disemboweling of one of
the blindfolded horses, and goes berserk slaying half a
dozan Ecuadorian soldiers and officials and in the process is
shot down himself. Patino's reminisces at the death of
the American Gringo, John Harned, and his failing to
understand the reason of John Harned going berserk is quite
ironical. As it is evident from other London stories, that
London abhorred animal cruelty and took no pleasure at all in
the killing of animals nor he saw any sport in the shedding of that kind of blood. This is the real concern of this prize-fighting story. London sharply criticized what to him was little more than the slaughter of animals and he did so from the point of view of John Harned, who is, fittingly enough, a boxer.

"The Mexican" is another prize-fight story, wherein a young Mexican, Felipe Rivera, fights a professional boxer, Danny Ward, a representation of the corrupt system which is surrounded by corruption. Ward and his cohorts use every dirty trick of the trade to beat the young foreigner, but is finally defeated as Felipe represents the true spirit of the revolution.

London adopts the sports frame and presents a number of his major concerns like survival, brutality etc., in them along with a variety of character—super fighters, doomed heroes, heroic veteran pugs, revolutionaries, simian-like villains. But the deeper theme is the important thing: no amount of prejudice and corrupt power can overcome the universal human desire for freedom, regardless of race or colour or nationality.
SCIENCE-FICTION

Works that we call science fiction to-day were originally called "scientific romance". Actually all popular escapist literature—the gothic horror story, romantic fiction, the Western detective and thriller fiction, and science fiction—derives from the romance, and given the prevalence of the romance in American Literature, it is not surprising that all forms of the popularised romance have flourished with particular intensity in America. No one has defined science fiction to everyone's satisfaction. One way of approaching the genre is to say that it is a popular Anglo-American form with technological interests that has developed down the ages. To put the widest possible definition to the term science fiction would be to say that it deals wholly or in part with exotic, supernatural or speculative topics, or fantasy by adding scientific atmosphere to make it credible. The true father figure of the genre were Jules Verne and H.G.Wells and some of Edgar Allan Poe's stories did anticipate modern science fiction.

Jack London, who died a decade before the first science fiction came to the notice of the reading public, wrote science fiction. No doubt, he was not one of the first science fiction writers, but he is acknowledged by many first critics of science fiction to be among the first science fiction writers, as his name finds itself in their
critical pages. In Dale L. Walker's critical anthology Curious Fragments: Jack London's Tales of Fantasy Fiction, Philip Jose Farmer, an award-winning contemporary science fiction writer, talks of London's influence on both the genre of science fiction and on himself personally. Farmer describes the element of London's fiction which he feels specifically moulded science fiction writing:

These were the awe of the vastness, harshness, and indifference of nature set against a fierce admiration of man's fighting spirit and intellect; man's insistence of saying Yea in the face of the inevitable Nay. London's moulding of fantasy with reality, so that the two seem to be one; his basic dictum (anticipated by Heraclitus but are as true now as then) that character determines destiny; the striving by men of awareness to prove that, though they came from the apes, they were more than the apes; the importance of using vivid physical detail to exemplify a philosophical basis; the importance of telling a story as if it were fuel for a life.*10*

Jack London's early life which was permeated with mysticism and spiritualism left its mark on his writings. London always showed a keen interest in the infinite mysteries of the universe and the regions of the fantasy. He himself called his science fiction tales "pseudo-scientific" in his letters to his publisher George Brett.

Jack London's science fiction can be classified more clearly when it is scrutinized in the light of criticism on the genre of the science fiction as a whole. David Ketterer in The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction and American Literature distinguishes between three different levels of science fiction. The first type of writings extrapolate
the future consequences of the current situation and generally fall into a sociological framework such as Utopia or dystopia novels. Novels falling under this perview of science fiction is probably the least scientific of the levels posed by Ketterer, as only a view into the future is offered and no scientific modification is presented. This type of science fiction writings can be best labeled as a type of "social science" fiction, and is the major area of Jack London's science fiction efforts. The second level of science fiction is Wellsian in nature and it starts with a basic scientific idea or happening which modifies the existent conditions and then carries this change to a seemingly logical conclusion. H.G. Wells was a master of this style with such modification as Martian invasions, invisibility, and time travel which he extrapolated into treatises on human nature. London shows this Wellsian type in his scientific fiction like "The Scarlet Plague" which is a reminiscent of The War of the Worlds. Ketterer's third level of science fiction is a philosophical form which looks at humanity in a radical new perspective wherein Ketterer refers to Vonnegut, Arthur C. Clarke, and H.P. Lovecraft as writers in this mode. Ketterer points to Vonnegut's The Sirens of Titan as a perfect illustration of this method, wherein Vonnegut portrays men as nothing but as insignificant pawn in the galactic purpose—not exactly men's popular conception of himself. London borders on this style with his "evolutionary fiction", like Before Adam, The
**Star Rover.** "A Relic of the Pliocene", "When the World was Young", etc., in which London shows us visions of the human race as an evolved animal rather than a divine creation of God.

Yeoman service to Jack London's classification of science fiction have been rendered by Dale Walker in his *The Alien World of Jack London* and by Gordon N. Blackman Jr. in his "Jack London: Visionary Realist". Jack London's interest in science fiction developed at an early age. His first science fiction story was "A Thousand Deaths", where a sailor is fished out of San Francisco Bay, resuscitated by a contraption reminiscent of today's iron lung, by his father who had disowned him many years before and now fails to recognize the sailor as his own son. The sailor is enlisted to help him in a series of biological experiments to take place in an island laboratory. While working together, the sailor realizes that he is to be the "guinea pig", in a series of experiments hence the title "A Thousand Deaths". His revelation that he is his son makes no change in his role, instead it justifies his father's experiments. The sailor plays both co-scientist and subject to the numerous successful experiments, but finally finds dying to be less and less pleasant and thus in his spare time invents a disintegration field with which he returns his father, his father's bodyguard and the household dogs to their basic molecular composition—a pile of dust.
London's second science fiction was "The Rejuvenation of Major Rothbone". This simple tale is about Major Rathbone (Max), a vibrant and popular public figure in his prime and now a tired old man, whose nephew discovers a potion capable of restoring youthful vitality. After much experimentation he feels it is ready to be used on Uncle Max. Major Rathbone not only becomes his old self, but also surpasses himself by going around the countryside performing feats of heroism and manly prowess. Major Rathbone finally settles down when his old flame Icborab Furbush is rejuvenated by his nephew to control his antics and thus restoration of normalcy takes place. The tale can be classified as science fiction because it starts with the ever-popular theme of scientific discovery of a "fountain of youth", the discovery leads to complications, with science finding out a solution to the problem it has created. The pattern of the old-fashioned science fiction stories takes place in this tale with science finding its own solution and restoring normalcy again.

London's third fiction was "The Shadow and the Flash", a story about two friends who are rivals in everything throughout their life. They are similar in nature and temperament, take the same subject, chemistry, woo the same girl and are turned down by her. They both take to seclusion of experiments after graduation and both are in constant touch with the narrator because of being a frequent visitor to his house. Their only difference is the colour of their
skin. Lloyd Inwood is dark complexioned whereas Paul Tichlorne is fair complexioned. They once happen to meet at the narrator's house and debate on the issue of invisibility. They both develop the formula of invisibility according to their complexion, but the drawback resulting due to their invisibility is that Lloyd casts a shadow and Paul creates a flash due to light refraction. The end of the tale see each other confronting themselves on a tennis court and proceeding to kill each other. Their grieving relatives burn their laboratories with the narrator going back to his gardenning of roses. The symbolism involving the light/dark dichotomy is clearly evident with the dark representing the physical and material aspect of life and light the spiritual side of life. Lloyd's comment after attaining invisibility that now he will conquer the world testifies to this aspect of symbolism. It seems that London is trying to suggest through this story that good and evil are a part of science and it can have beneficial as well as dangerous effect. The universal message of the story is even relevant today as it was in London's day of rapidly increasing scientific interest.

"The Unparalleled Invasion" deals with the Chinese conquest of the world through their sheer size of population, employing the tactics of invasion by settlement and expansion of boarders. The Chinese have been able to reach this pinnacle of dominance over the rest of mankind.
through the help of Japanese, who have translated the Western technology into concepts, that the pictographic minds of the Chinese could fathom. By enhancing their might through modernization and industrialization, the Chinese did whatever they felt with the immigrants and silenced those who complained, with their massive military strength. When the whole world is helpless against the onslaught of the Chinese, an American by the name of Jacobus Lannigdale, develops a deadly germ and with the united army of the world exterminates the Chinese in the bacteriological warfare, thereby solving the problem for the rest of mankind. The portrayal of this bacteriological war was experimented in the Korean War of 1950, in the First World War between the French and the Germans and the pages of history till date are littered with such wars.

"Goliath" presents that weapon which the present day world know as nuclear energy. "The Scarlet Plague" entrusts the author with killing a human being in fifteen minutes and destroying humanity in a few days; has been brilliantly reproduced and mastered by present day science. Nuclear physics is capable of obtaining and verifying results similar to those of the destruction imagined by Jack London, even exceeding him in effectiveness. London has written a number of stories, to name some, "The Enemy of the World", "A Relic of the Pliocene", which can be grouped under the heading of science fiction but to touch them all will not elaborate this thematic concern. London wrote at the end of
his career "The Red One", considered by many as one of the finest piece of science fiction London ever wrote. London presents in this story his protagonist, Bassett, a scientist and his search for a soul. It portrays a scientist who experiences the self-awareness process through which every man must pass in order to achieve a unified psyche. In short it is a story of the birth, struggle and final awareness of a man who is all man. It is a lost-race story wherein London presents a realistic picture through his naturalistic interpretation of the situation. London shows that the savages in this story are anything but noble while the civilized man are merely a sophisticated brute and in the process proves that man irrespective of their background are brothers under their skin.

Jack Londons thematic concerns where numerous, as such only the tip of the iceberg has been touched. His writing are to prolific and limited pages will not be able to do justice to his thematic concern. His works has no end to them and to justify them in few pages will be a great injustice.

London's works present many concerns like the theme of conflict, loss and acceptance, astral projection, priesthood, reform, resignation, orphanhood, humour, fantasy, Gothic concern and many more. His protean creativity produced many thematic concern and all of them were dear to his heart, as he wrote the life he lived. He espoused the
thoughts in his works and tried to justify them in his brillant stories which even till date has an everlasting appeal with its readers because his certain concerns are universal in nature.
2. Ibid. p. 99.
9. London. To Build a Fire and Other Stories p. 258.