
2. Ibid p. 83.


18. Ibid. p.6.


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CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Jack London's vast corpus makes the task for a scholar one of selection. For the most part I have expended my critical energies on his thematic aspects. As we come to the end of this study of the major and minor thematic concerns and craftsmanship through which London has presented them in his novels and stories, we may begin first with a brief recapitulation of what we have seen so far.

Jack London has always been an enigma for critics. No doubt he had been neglected by critics in his own country but his revival centers there in about 1976, the centenary of his birth. It is also seen that what emerges from the view of the writers around London is the fact that both in chronology and in the subject matter and its treatment, London stands alone. There are no other voices in the early part of the twentieth century which were looking at America from London's perspective. It has further contributed to the ambivalence with which most critics regard him. Gordon Mills states this problem as:

Probably everyone would concede that all of Jack London's full-length novels and most of his short stories are as works of art, demonstrably and seriously flawed in one way of another way, then, too many sophisticated readers continue to find his work appealing, as they unquestionable do?"1"

He suggest that "in accepting as fact the powers of London's
fiction despite its weakness, we are forced to ponder our concept of either art of literary sophistication, or both" is a recognition of the complexity of London's work and of the multifarious appeals it makes to widely varied readership.

The period in which London lived and wrote did have a tremendous effect on him, as it did on Frank Norris, Upton Sinclair, Theodore Dreiser and others. Quite a few of the similarities in subject matters and technique, as well as something of the confused aims and contradictory impulses of all, were a result of the certain common experiences of an era. It was a period of ferment, of change from frontier to "civilization", a period torn by contradictory views of man and his society, a time in which traditional philosophies clashed with Darwinism and social evolutionists, which were popularized and sometimes perverted by American prophets and interpreters. A literary change was strongly affected by European realists and naturalists, but it also reflected the unique national experience and tradition. And the crudeness or naivete sometimes seen in the works of writers of this time, is because they were in a period of transition; they were struggling to create a new kind of literature, which really came of age only in the 1920's and beyond. It was during this era that Jack London held a contradictory but central position. He reflected that tension, ambiguities and illusion of the American society. A society which on
its part and exactly in that period came in such a
demineering way to the world forefront. It was during such
a time that he lived and wrote. One of his biographers points
out the effect of this action and reaction on the author:

The hungers, the passions, aspirations and
contradictions of Jack London...were deeply rooted in
troubled times that produced him.... His life began and
ended in a period of transition, the change from
frontier and farm to city and factory.... In everything
he wrote and everything was, London reflected that
turbulence, beneath which was the gnawing suspicion
that a country as rich and energetic as the United
States ought to be able to produce a better life for
the submerged portion of its people.*3*

London was born on January 12, 1876. He personified the
most crucial transition in American cultural society. John
Griffith London, he preferred "Jack" - or better "Wolf", was
a child of this experience. Honest, vital, optimistic he
became a man of the twentieth century: complex, sensitive,
frustrated, and after a short span, died on November 22,
1916. His death till date is shrouded in mystery.

London’s literary emergence and recognition has been
fairly well accounted by Fred L Pattee in this way.

London was swept into notice upon the crest of the
Kipling wave, that protest of the 90’s against
Tennysonian sentiment, preraphaelitism, Oscar Wildeism,
Aubrey Beardsleyism.... It was inevitable that he
should have taken his own stand with the prophets of
blood and vulgarity: his birth and his training had
fitted him for nothing else. Moreover it was his good
fortune that the time was ripe for such prophets.*4*
It was also the new spirit in literature that cleared the way for London in America.

They were many who influenced London and a contradiction arose in him because of his emotional acceptance of certain ideas which became opposed to his intellectual acceptance. He developed a tendency which lead in him to an acceptance of those ideas that appealed to his emotions or supported his experience of life. At the same time he gave no consideration to those ideas in content and in its implications and consequences. But it would be pity to completely belittle his intellectual accomplishments. He read widely, if not deeply, and his dramatization of opposing philosophies often shows greater understanding than he is usually credited with, though a strong overall grasp or obvious commitment is finally lacking. He read as he did everything: with great gusto, often nineteen hours a day, apparently selecting those things which struck home and rejecting the rest as "metaphysical nonsense". He had no time for assimilation. The thinkers who influenced him most throughout his life were Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Carl Jung. The others who also had influence on him were Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad and Herman Melville. His works shows the effect of his reading.

The writings of London presents his belief in his
various ideas. He wrote as an American proletariat. His impoverished background never allowed him to forget the miseries of indigence and much of his work began as labour of love for the poor working man. He pointed out the inequities in the American economic structure and for nearly two decades, he espoused Socialism in his non-fictional writings. His writings contained the voice of the reformer, the disillusioned who would change the world into a better one. He turned from the romance of the Klondike to the disgust of the city and the conflict between the individual and society. To have a glimpse of London’s writing, his life must be considered carefully for any estimate and the fact that he lived much of his fiction, so much so that fact and literature are often difficult to separate. As it was typical of his period, his own background and peculiar experience of that period make his work distinct from even those usually grouped with him. Fred Pattee says:

To read any of London’s work is to be in the presence of his own biography: few authors have drawn so freely upon their own experience for literary material.... He was as egocentric as Byron. All his characters - Jacob Weise, Wolf Larsen, Martin Eden, Burning Daylight, Billy Roberts, Dick Forest - are Jack London in masquerade, or Jack London as he dreamed of himself. Like Byron’s, his imagination was kindled only by life translated into his own experience. *5*

We have noticed that the thematic concerns of London were too numerous. He practically dealt with all the themes relevant to his reading public. No other writer has more dramatically epitomized in his own rise to success the rich
contrarieties of the American dream. Despite his enthusiasm for various ideologies, socialism alone provided a means of salvation for him and was psychologically crucial to him throughout his life. Socialism was the strongest pillar in the justifications for his passionate emotional attachment to his idea. It enabled him to protest against the cruelty and exploitation he had personally suffered and found socialism as the only means for the down-trodden's ultimate redemption. It also showed the effect of capitalism on the society which was chained to its exploitation and presented the dehumanization and alienation theme. His thematic concern of naturalism provided him the scope to present themes like determinism, survival, violence. His Alaskan settings and South Sea tales presents heredity and environmental, love, atavism and racism concerns. At the same time many others secondary concerns have been touched by him, which further enlightens his reader. London enjoyed immense popularity during his lifetime became the first writer to make million dollars from his writing. His work has been translated into more than sixty foreign languages and is today immensely popular in other countries, especially the Soviet Union where he is the most widely read American author. Some of the stories of science fiction are quite prophetic in nature. Jack London anticipates a variety of themes. He is a pioneer in introducing, in propounding a number of themes. He is influenced by major ideas and philosophical theories of the modern times. He represents
the quality of vigour and intellect in his thought content which is the essence of American Civilizations. The robustness and ruggedness has a youthful appeal and therein lies the secret of his appeal to the modern readers.

Nearly all of London's work is interesting and readable and his narrative skill seems most effective when it is least obstructed by intellectual "hobbies". His mastery of narrative technique and his instinctive genius for myth were the hallmark of his craftsmanship. He uses many narrative and other devises to construct his fictional world. His techniques consists the use of imagery, colour and irony. Metaphors, similes, images, comparisons, contrasts, compressions, far-fetched conceits abound in his work. There is little emphasis on plot in London's fiction as he dealt with situations and his field of characterization was weak too.

London's contribution to the American literature can be summed in the following few lines. London's self dramatizing style of existence and his short jerky bold method of writing is seen in Hemingway. London's invention of modern prize-fight opened up a new arena in the American literature of boxing. His Martin Eden reveals a major innovations of the modern novel - the stream of consciousness. London wrote science fiction, decades before the first science fiction magazine popularized this genre. His "Told in the Drooling Ward" reminds us in style, comedy and realism of certain fictional experiments with the
feeble-minded to come. Through his psychoanalysis in *The Little Lady of the Big House*, he came close in exposing the myth of the heterosexual superman and introduced a more realistic and interesting point of view on human nature and sexuality into his fictional world.

London's career resembles in some respects the careers of his contemporaries: Dreiser, Crane and Norris who all had wide experience as journalists and strongly held political and social ideas based in part on experience and in part on the currency of ideas of Darwin and Spenser. They depended on their personal experience and autobiography for subject matter. The reader of London's work encounters that biographical legend wherever he turns, but it is a legend that changes from one work to the next, and his biographical legend is in constant interplay with his works, framing them, commenting on them, and progressively modified by each. His archetypal quality appeals in unconscious ways to readers of all ages and nations. His view of life as a struggle probably remain his greatest attraction. From this account of Jack London's fiction, its thematic and artistic concerns, with which they have been presented, assures him a lasting place in American literature. His different themes presents some memorable vignettes of life, and it makes him as good a modern writer as anyone else. Had not the belly need and the hidden fear of the dark depths of poverty come his way, he would have probably been a great writer in American literature; even then he is a writer who will never
be irrelevant. Fashions may change in respects of devices employed and writers will come and go but Jack London's works' worth and force of writing can not be ignored in times to come.

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2. Ibid. p.9


4. Fred L Pattee, "Prophet of the Last Frontier", in *Sidelights on American Literature* (New York, 1922) p.151

5. Ibid. p.117