CHAPTER V

TECHNIQUE
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LONDON'S TECHNIQUE

At the close of the 19th century, there was evidence of an increasing effort, to find new techniques, with which to reinterpret, the central issues of human experience, in American literature. Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Jack London were the pioneers in introducing themes, characters and styles of writing, previously unheard of, hence mainly, in the works of these writers, the technique and philosophy of modern American fiction took shape.

Jack London had selected literature, deliberately as a profession. He learned the art of writing, like a trade. The years between 1892 to 1902, could be called as his apprenticeship training period. According to his own statement, "At first, I had no conception even of relative values of comma, colon and semi-colon." He consulted rhetorics and guides like Barret's hand-book.

According to Joan, "Jack worked laboriously, through books of style and structure." He also read such professional journals, as 'The editor' and 'The writer', to learn, form and technique. He read popular idioms of his times and added to his voca-
-bulary, a few words daily. He worked them into his writings, sometimes, in an unfortunate forced ways. He tried as many forms of literature, as possible, in the beginning of his writing career.

He copied Kipling as a model, page after page to get his narrative methods and ideas.

He wrote to Hoffman, "There is no end of Kipling in my work. I would never possibly have written, any where, near the way I did, had Kipling never been." London worked out the tricks of narrative, of exposition, of style, of \textsuperscript{3}spigrams, paradoxes, points of view, contrasts.

He found in Spencer's, 'Philosophy of Style', 1892, a scientific method, for undertaking the didactic mission. London says, "It taught me to transmute thought, beauty, sensation and emotion, into black symbols, on white paper." \textsuperscript{4} According to McClintock, "Through Kipling's example and Spencer's theory in 'Philosophy of Style', he fashioned a literary style, congenial to his forms and themes and satisfied with what he learned, he never significantly altered his form, technique or style." \textsuperscript{5}

Walker feels, "His writing methods,
together with his attitude towards several phases of his craft, developed and became fixed during the five years, he spent on Klondike material. He developed his most sophisticated theory and practice of dramatic fiction."

As he learnt the art of writing, he tested and studied magazines, to learn what subject matter, was finding a market. The overwhelming trend in public taste, was for adventurous stories. The number of stories, glorifying individualism, strength and race identity, was extensive. Outdoor life, rugged masculinity, provided subjects, of many magazine stories. Critics asked for dramatic fiction, which combined honesty with idealism and strong truths of actuality.

We find all the above traits in London's writing. His hard earned mastery of narrative technique and his instinctive genius for myth, coincided precisely with a change in cultural taste and with the sudden national awareness that the frontier and all its dreams of glory were gone.

The final literary style of Jack London was the product of his own temperament.
Directed as he was at first, by Kipling, Gogol, O'Henry and Stevenson, he soon divested himself of their mannerisms, and voiced only himself. His sentences are short, often mere members of a sentence. Every thing is described at intense pitch. We find exaggeration. He shows no reserve or restraint. His style is vigorous and powerful. When he hits, it is always with a hammer blow. This overpitched, hectic quality infects more or less, all of London's work. Diction is sonorous and gorgeous. According to Foner, "Jack's style was often melodramatic and his writing was frequently marred, by flaws of structure, but it achieved stature, by its sheer intensity of conviction." Erbentraut feels, "London's style has been influenced by Charmian brand of expression. Style is artificial."

According to Walcutt, "Charmian invaded his art. Charmian's style invaded Jack's style, it was never quite the same again."

Rothberg comments, "The vigour, colour, brutal directness which characterized Jack's style, give his work a striking power and have made him an important influence in American writing."
11 Hendricks cites, "three major characteristics of London's writings as, ability to create a narrative, to create atmosphere and to use irony."

12 According to Joan, "He was superbly gifted writer, accurately and vividly stated the problems of the day, he was able to instil in his readers, his own love of life and eagerness to meet its challenges."

Though he has not formulated any specific theory on the art and craft of fiction, he has expressed his views on the technique of writing, from time to time, in his letters, and works, especially in his correspondence with Cloudsley Johnes, he had discussed, pace, diction, point of view, suspense, atmosphere, phrases, with enthusiasm.

13 "Don't you tell the reader. But have your characters, tell it by their deeds, actions, talk etc. Then are you writing fiction and not a sociological paper upon a certain substratum of society." p.106.

14 "Put all yourself into your work, until your work, becomes you, but nowhere, let
yourself be apparent. Work hard, to attain better phrases, sit down and grope after them, hammer them out, sweat and blood, to get them good, fresh and vivid. And write intensively, not exhaustively or lengthily." 

"Get the atmosphere. But put all those things which are yours into the stories, into the tales, eliminating yourself (except when in first person as participant) And this will be the atmosphere, and atmosphere will be you." p. 107.

"Don’t narrate - paint! Draw! build! create! Better 1000 words, which are built than a whole book of mediocre, spun out, dashed off stuff." 

London wrote to Elwyn Hoffman, "After all it is the substance that counts, what is form! What intrinsic value resides in it? None. None." Jack advocated that vigorous content is essential in writing.

London asserted, "I will sacrifice form every time, when it boils down to a final choice between form and matter. The thought is the thing. The honest writer, should therefore, eschew decor-
-tive prose and strive to develop a style not concentrate, compact, but crisp, incisive and terse."

Max Irwin in London’s story ‘Amateur night’, says, "Get the atmosphere, strong colour. Be terse in style, vigorous of phrase - apt and concretly apt - exercise selection. Seize upon things, salient, paint the pictures in words." He wrote to Mabel, "I am learning and learning anew. I shall subordinate thought to technique, till the latter is mastered, then I shall do vice a versa."

"The person who would be precise, is merely an echo, of all the precise people who have gone before and such a person's work is bound to be colourless and insipid."

In Read he says, "Art is only com-artfulness, and by artfulness, he means lying with imagination artistic skill and detail."

He observed two schools of fiction - The Godman and the Clodman. The old school placed too great emphasis on man's spiritual nature and potentialities, the new practically denied their existence. He believed both to be wrong, so he decided to choose a mean, a middle path.
He insists that the best method of writing is to depict the objective reality of life in all its aspects. His best fiction would not rely primarily upon plot, but would derive its impact from 'truth of detail', 'the air of reality', and solidity of specification. He devoutly believed, that he was a realist, and that his extreme pictures came only from his thoroughness. He derived his writing material, from his own rich and varied experience of life. He says in Martin Eden, "Realism is imperative to my nature and the bourgeois spirit hates realism. It is afraid of life."

In preface to his novel, 'Cane', London wrote, "People find fault with me, for my disgusting realism. Life is full of it. I know men and women as they are - millions of them, as yet in slime state. But I am an evolutionist, therefore, a broad optimist, hence my love for human, comes from my knowing him, as he is and seeing the divine possibilities, ahead of him. As for style, anybody, by hard work, can achieve precision of language, but very few can achieve strength of style, what the world wants, is the strength of utterance, not precision of utterance."
Jack London saw two types of writers -
1) Those who have or think, they have a message the world needs or would like to hear. 11) Those writing for livelihood and cash. The poor literary artist aspirant has to serve two masters- 1) The reading public and 11) The critics - the one that he may live, the other that his work might live.

It was part of his literary creed, that behind all art, which is worthy of name, must lie, something more than appears on the surface, "There must be a major motif, the big unmentioned motif, the cosmic and universal thing. I tried to make it, keep time to the story itself. This cosmic theme underlies the works of all the great artists. They must seize upon and press into enduring art forms, the vital facts of our existence. They must tell us, why we lived. Applying his test to Kipling, he says, "he has sung the sweat, blood and toil of the Anglo-saxon race." And this is the cosmic quality of his own work London says, "It was the apotheosis of adventure - real adventure. He felt the stress and strain of life, its fears, sweats and wild insurrections."

London was passionately earnest, he wrote
with a motif and this he never forgot. Behind his work, was a principle that he fought for, a conviction, that was puritanic, in its intensity. *The Sea Wolf* is structured upon the universal timeless motif of initiation. The quest for a better life, of paradise, is recurrent, throughout London's work, both fictional and autobiographical. We have already discussed the underlying motifs in *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* and other works.

According to Pattee, "He is the interpreter of a region. In his under-running motifs we find motifs of the new era of western civilization. London voiced the recklessness and venturesome-ness that came to Americans as heritage from the early pioneers."

Like Martin Eden, London felt that he had taught himself almost every thing he knew, about writing. He learnt, through trial and error, often making mistakes, never curing himself of grave faults, which badly mar, much of his prodigious output.

London wrote too much and too hurriedly. In sixteen years, he wrote nineteen novels,
eighteen books of short stories, three plays, five juveniles, six books of social studies, besides numerous letters, reviews and articles in the newspapers. That shows the versatility and many-sidedness of the author. He wrote books as diverse as 'The Call of the Wild', 'People of Abyss' and 'Star Rover.' He had not the patience to revise; he refused to read his earlier chapters, day by day, as he proceeded in writing. He says, "I doubt if I shall ever be able to polish."

The most irritating of his faults being lack of precision and economy in his prose. There is repetition, verbosity and clumsiness. He wrote too much and often in haste. His dialogues seldom ring true, never indeed, in his later novels. When his characters speak, it is London in his study, the voice is the voice of Jack. Many of his novels are marred, by occasional didacticism and sentimentality. His heroes were often tall, and he was not at his best in creating convincing female characters. His longer plots tend to be episodic and disjointed.

Alfred Kazin calls him, 'the period's greatest crusader and the period's most unashamed hack.'
Geismar brands him "as a consummate charlatan in the practice of commercial art."

According to Pattée, "He was not a genius driven to creation by fire within him, he was a journalist."

Whipple feels that "his intrinsic literary value is not great."

By his own admission, London was a commercial artist, who wrote from the belly need. London writes, "I shall surely develop expression some day. I lack origination. I cannot develop a creative faculty. Stevenson never had to worry about ways and means, while Kipling, a mere journalist, hurt himself, by having to seek present sales rather than posthumous fame. It is the feed and not the breed which makes the man. I am in pursuit of dollars. If cash comes with fame, come fame, if cash comes without fame, come cash."

London says, "I was moved towards literature by belly-need." (The material side, Junior Munson Magazine, Dec. 1900) He declared that "he did not write, because he loved writing. He hated it." I always write what the editors want, not what
I would like to write. The editors are not interested in truth." No doubt his only source of income was his pen. He did not believe, in the theory of Art for Art's sake. Even the typhoon story, he wrote, when he was seventeen years old, was produced, in the hope of winning twenty five dollars. Bread first, glory afterwards, was his formula. He wanted to make money, and writing for which he had a talent, was a means to an end. With such attitude naturally, some critics, felt that the joys of creation escaped him completely. But that is far from truth. In the early years, the very quality of his prose, its vehemence, its vitality, its surging rhythms - indicated he must have found at least momentary delight in his work.

In his early work, he was obviously a careful craftsman, and the pleasure of creativity is strongly there. He bitterly attacked an editor for blue-pencilling his work. He wrote, "I weave my stuff - who the Dickens are you, to think that you can better my work." Unless the joys and agonies of the creative artist were upon London, how account for the reason, for his refusal of an editorship with McClure's? "I want to be free to
write what delights me, whencesoever and wheresoever, it delights me."

31 According to Labor, "He was a self-respecting professional writer. He was a poet, a dreamer, an idealist. Finally, he was an ideological firebringer, who wrote a good many messages, with a sharper eye to indoctrination than to profit."

Thomas Moul wrote in Book man, "It is a mistake to underestimate Jack London's compelling artistic impulses. His, "ability to tell an arresting and vigorous story," has been admired by Walcutt.

32 According to Mencken, "The man in truth was an instinctive artist, of a high order. No other popular writer of his time, did any better writing, than you will find in "The Call of the Wild" or in parts of John Barleycorn. Here indeed, are all the elements of sound fiction, clear thinking, a sense of character, the dramatic instinct and above all the adept putting together of words. There was in London, a vast delicacy of perception, a high feeling, a sensitiveness to beauty and there was in him too a poignant sense of the infinite romance and mystery of human life. Even in London's
worst work, one comes upon sudden splashes of brilliant colour, strong proofs of adept penmanship, half wistful reminders that London, at bottom was no fraud."

33 Labor comments, "A consummate storyteller, he is gifted with the power to modulate narrative tempo, so that his reader is often spell bound. Guided by the principles of sincerity, functionalism, and imaginative realism, London ushered in a new prose for the modern fictionist - clear, straight forward, uncluttered, imagist, that is well suited to the depiction of violence and physical action."

34 According to Hendricks, "London had the ability to write lucidly and accurately. His tramp diary, written, during hoboing in 1894, written under varying conditions, is remarkable for its sentence structure and mechanical accuracy."

In evaluating Jack London's literary output, we must remember that unquestionably he placed substance above form, as did most of his contemporaries. The substance of London's first successful writing was man's experience, in the
far north of white silence. We find awe of vastness, harshness and indifference of nature, set against a fierce admiration of man's fighting spirit and intellect. The Klondike gold rush, was at the heart of fiction, which made him famous.

Five of his novels, "The daughter of the snows", "The Call of the Wild", "White Fang", "Burning Daylight" and "Smoke Bellew" are set entirely or in part, in far north. London endeavours to create an atmosphere of the story, with meticulous description of the situation. He reproduces before us the image of the white north. We get pictures of hushed primeval forests, snowy wastelands, and the austere blaze of the æôra borealis. He draws a vivid pictures of the terrors of the cold, darkness and starvation, the pleasures of human companionship in adverse circumstances and the sterling qualities which the rough battle with nature brings out. We get virility, narrative qualities and masterful description of the north country. The effect is pictorial. By the power of the written word, he makes us feel, hear and see. He achieved this end most successfully in "The Call of the Wild" and "White Fang".
London shines as a superb narrator of the external movement of man and nature, in his works. 'The Road' is an example. We find his interest in outdoor life. In London's fiction superb description of primitive landscape, images of nature and irony of life supplement one another. London's art of romantic narrative of the primitive landscape reached its zenith, in 'The Call of the Wild' where the finest and purest elements of nature have been crystallized to romanticize social reality. He was a lover of nature. He brought to American literature almost poetic appreciation of the beauties of nature in the raw.

London shows infinite variety. All the terms like naturalism, realism and romanticism can be applied to his work. Naturalism is found in violence and brutality of his supermen, the struggle of Indians and White adventurers to conquer the northern wild. His fantasies of violence and prophecy are naturalistic. We find extreme of naturalism in 'Before Adam' and 'Scarlet Plague'.

Though his outlook was realistic, his own deep love of adventure, prompted him to illustrate his ideas, with incidents and characters that
are unusual and romantic. His settings born of keen observation are realistic in the extreme, but their far offness, gives them, a flavour of romance too.

The distinctive aspect of London's craftmanship lies in his being a realist artist. London's realism had revolutionized the tone of popular fiction in 1900. In the 'People of the Abyss', he actually participates in the life experiences of the carters, carpenters, factory workers, wage labourers and slum dwellers. London's realistic fiction contains glimpses of symbolic wilderness, cosmic imagery and images of mechanical life. Human actions, struggles, conflicts and adventures are focussed against the background of the beauty of nature, of sea, sky, icy vastness, steep mountains and animal world. An accurate description of these, acquires a realistic meaning, when transmuted into the terms of the actions, of the human beings. When London wrote of the sea, he drew his material from his own blood and sweat in the forecastle of the 'Sophie Sutherland'. He had himself known the depth to which drunkenness and vagrancy bring men. He had himself seen what men became
when the restraints of civilization are relaxed. He told his generation in words as strong as his generation could bear, the naked truth.

In a letter he wrote, "I am an idealist who believes in reality, and who therefore, in all I write, strive to be real, to keep my own feet and the feet of the readers on ground."

Being an enthusiastic exponent of the new style and technique, he soon became the pioneer of American realism. He broke every writing tradition and seemed ultra modern and shocking.

Thus Iron Heel, White Fang and Burning Daylight, are meticulously realistic, yet his Byronic superman heroes, his exotic setting, his interest in strange parts and hazy future are too tally romantic. We find a perfect balance between realism and romanticism in 'The Call of the Wild'.

We find blending of realism and romance in many novels. In Sea-Wolf, there is realistic description of the Ghost's crew and romantic love of Humphrey and Maud on Endeavour islands. In the 'Mutiny of Elsinore', the romantic love of Pathurst and Miss West is shown against a realistic back-
ground of mutinous crew. In *Martin Eden*, the hero is fascinated by Ruth's ethereal beauty. "She consciously delighted in beholding his love manifestations - the glowing eyes, with their tender light, and the never failing swarthy flush, that flooded darkly under his sun burn." But we find stark realism in the laundry scene. "Out on the broad verandas of the hotel, men and women in cool white, sipped iced drinks and kept their circulation down." London preached the more obvious radicalism of his day in romantic fiction like *The Iron Heel*.

The romantic impulses of the new century vigorous, naive and prolific are personified in his work. He wrote of adventures in remote corners of the world, the arctic region as in *M unborn* novels, the tropical islands, as in *Adventure*, far east Japan and Siberian pacific in *Sea-Wolf*, South American Cape Horn in *Mutiny of Elsinore*, post-catastrophic world in *Scarlet Plague*, of ancient and medieval times in *Star Rover*, of prehistoric period in *Before Adam*. When we compare his writings of the North Country and the South Sea, we feel that he was more at home as writer of sub-arctic than of tropics.
London brought to American literature the brutality of the primitive struggle for survival, red-blooded action and glorified men of action.

According to O'Connor, "He was compared with Kipling as an apostle of the heroic and a minstrel of brave men contending with a savage environment."

In the field of action and adventure, especially action in primitive areas of life, he stands on par with the supreme masters. Few have surpassed him in power, to present vivid moving pictures, and records of fights. The fight between Buck and Spitz for mastery, in 'The Call of the Wild' between White Fang and the bull dog Cherokee in White Fang, the fight of a bull moose with a wolf pack, described in the above novels, singlehanded fight of Wolf Larsen with the crew in the Sea-Wolf, fight of Pike and Pathurst with the mutinous crew of Elsinore, can be quoted as examples.

Description of typhoons in Sea-Wolf and Mutiny of Elsinore is heart-rending. The prize fight in The Game between Joe and Ponta and Pat Glendons' fights with his numerous adversaries in Abyzmal Brute are all described superbly.
The adventures in the *Road*, the adventures of Elam Harnish in *Klondike*, his record trip with Yukon mail, gold hunting and his conquering single handed, a whole firm of wall street sharpers in *Burning Daylight* thrill the readers. Buck's winning of 1600 lbs. by pulling 1000 lbs. of weight, White Fang's killing of Jim Hall, are all action-packed. In *Mutiny of Elsinore* in chapter 38, Pike, single handed fights the ship, off the Horn, is as stirring a bit of adventure as in any sea-novel. The violence and red bloodness in London are exemplified in Wolf Larsen's brutal treatment of his crew, bloodshed and murders among the ruffian crew of Elsinore, in the utter ruthlessness of the plutocracy and Chicago Commune revolt scenes in *Iron-Heel*, the havoc and devastating desolation caused by *Scarlet Plague*, harsh treatment and cannibalism in *Adventure*, terror and awe of Red-Eye in *Before Adam*, strike scenes in *The Valley of the Moon* and some incidents in *The Star Rover*. Startling subjects, a bold narrative line and the play of new ideas constitute London's appeal. His best writing has extra-ordinary power, which is generated by bold ideas, vigour, concreteness of language and that combination of mystery and suspense, that is the mark of a born story-teller.
The reader is kept guessing by London's withholding the facts, which makes the reader participate in the action.

Eugene O'Neill called London his chief source of inspiration. According to O'Connor, The Russian poet Ilya Selvinsky said in 1941 that, "London is the first cigar we smoke in our youth, In Russia no one could consider himself a man until he had soaked himself in London's work."

38 Pattee, evaluates his writings as follows, "To read Jack straight through is to emerge in confusion from a swift running film of vignette like pictures, hobbies furiously ridden, headlong narratives, wild snap-shots of Jungle and borealis, naked head hunters and fur-muffled dog drivers. Everywhere extremes and anti-thesis, Soap-box shrillness and harmonious music, poverty of style Sonorous ornateness, vulgarity, sublimity, realism, romanticism, brutality, humanitarianism, always superlatives and exaggerations in wild riot, the astonishing hodge podge - we call London's writing."

London's writings tend to be subjective. His own beliefs and feelings colour his treatment. His self-dramatization, led him, persistently,
to romanticize and glorify himself. We have already discussed this aspect.

Recent critics have begun to perceive that this supremely popular story-teller, was also a skillful and accomplished writer. They have brought out forcefully the element of myth and fantasy in his writing. He had an intense interest in the mystic and the esoteric. According to Dale Walker, "But for all his reputation as a claw and fang realist, he had always an eye on the stars, a keen sensitivity for the mysteries of life and universe, for the unknown, the occult, the otherworldly - a region of fantasy." *Before Adam* and *Star Rover*, *Scarlet Plague* are science fiction classics.

Labor has forcefully shown the distinctive feature of London's technique - especially in his images and symbols, as they relate organically to elements of mood, setting, theme, characterization which raises segments of London's fiction to a high level of literary achievement and proves London's artistic handling of significant themes. Labor has pointed out the symbolic motifs of the 'trap' and the 'sea' in *Martin Eden*, how the metaphors of personal fear in *Before Adam*, adumbrate those of world
terror in 'The Scarlet Plague', how 'Soul's flight' is used as an escape from the horrors of reality in Star Rover. We have already seen the mythic element in 'The Call of the Wild'. As a proof of his mastery of his craft, the most beautiful prose passage can be quoted, "In the fall of the year they penetrated a weird lake country, sad and silent, where wild fowl had been, but where then, there was no life nor sign of life — only the blowing of chill winds, the forming of ice in sheltered places, and melancholy ripp-ling of waves on lonely beaches." And the landscape of myth continues to the end of the book.

Roy Werner Carlson has shown how London has created heroes who symbolize his evolutionary thought.

London wanted himself to be known as a thinker, a reformer, a practical philosopher. He would entertain his readers, but at the same time he would teach them. He became a preacher of socialism. We have already seen that his social works are overtly propagandist, and how much of his profit motivated fiction is also didactic. Jack London knew how to combine invention and hard facts for didactic ends. Few major fictionists have committed themselves, more openly in ideology, in so much of
their writings. Being satirist, he discovered and condemned abuses of every sort, from capitalism, in all its corrupt manifestations. London had an exceptional feeling for irony, cosmic as well as dramatic. Foner writes about his social writings, "Jack brought to these writings the sensitivity of a poet, the polemical skill of a pamphleteer, the magic of a master craftsman in words and the analytical power and sweep of an acute student and interpreter of social forces."

In the novels, *Iron Heel, Martin Eden* and *Sea Wolf*, we find that the narrative at times, shows argumentative style, whenever the heroes articulate their social consciousness in the presence of antagonists. Thus Ernest argues with the preachers, the philomaths, the savage industrialists and the people, in order to convince them. Martin Eden argues with Judge Blount, the Morses, Prof. Caldwell, and Humphrey with Captain Wolf Larsen. Jack London was accused on the charge of plagiarism, in *The Call of the Wild*, *Before Adam* and *Iron Heel*. Jack admitted his indebtedness to Egerton Young's *My dogs in the northland* from which London borrowed liberally.
There was a charge of plagiarism from 'The story of Ab' by Stanley Waterloo in 'Before Adam'. Mr. Harris claimed that Jack lifted the 'Bishop's Vision' in Iron Heel from a satirical magazine article published in 1901.

Jack leaned to the view that plagiarism is simply a concentrated form of research. He felt that a writer may exploit any material, anywhere he finds it. He felt that the term plagiarism should be substituted by 'Sources of material'.

The use of coincidence, if it is unavoidible, is a legitimate technique. London has used it in 'Sea-Wolf' when the 'Ghost' with only Wolf Larsen abroad, by coincidence comes to the same Endeavour islands where Humphrey and Maud have taken shelter, and secondly by coincidence, Maud and the sailors, are taken abroad 'The Ghost'.

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