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*Jack London* by Kenneth K. Brandt (review)

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*Jack London*. By Kenneth K. Brandt. Devon: Northcote House, 2017. 149 + xi pp. Cloth, \$60.00; paper, \$29.95.

Kenneth K. Brandt's deceptively slim volume *Jack London* belies the intellectual weightiness of its contents. The book is a concept-driven study of London's major works, *The Call of the Wild*, *White Fang*, *The Iron Heel*, *The Sea-Wolf*, *Martin Eden*, *The Road*, and *The Star Rover* as well as popular and lesser-known stories from the Northland to the Pacific Ocean.

In his introduction, "Jack London: An Adventurous Mind," Brandt lays out key philosophical influences on the "fusional vision" through which London brought together and revised multiple theoretical perspectives. He carefully delineates different interpretive approaches that lend complexity to the ideas of evolution, socialism, psychology, and ethics. Rightly noting that London's "progression of ideas is not always a constant," Brandt outlines up a number of competing theories that London grappled with in his fiction by thinkers such as Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Darwin, Spencer, and Huxley. That London engaged with these ideas is of course not new, and Brandt acknowledges the long history and ongoing scholarly debate about "philosophical contradictions" in his writing. What Brandt adds to the conversation is deep and sustained analysis of selected pieces that illustrate London's practice of testing out divergent theories within individual works throughout his oeuvre.

Chapters 2 and 3 take up questions of epistemology and ontology in stories and novels in the Northland. Brandt notes the "ethical flexibility" in a naturalistic world of survival, where both individualist and cooperative behavior can be read as Darwinian responses to a hostile environment. Drawing on evolutionary psychology and animality studies, Brandt examines the collapse of the human/animal dichotomy in stories like "To Build a Fire" and "Love of Life" as well as the allegorical implications of "pack sociality" in *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*. Thus in a "dialectical fusion of primitivism and solidarity" London constructs "an imaginative space" in nature that offers a "respite from the uniquely human discontinuities of modern life" and at the same time "mirrors capitalism's ruthless social Darwinism."

In chapter 4 Brandt applies the "fundamental tension between self-interests and communal obligations" to the class struggle in London's socialist writings. In his dystopian novel *The Iron Heel*, London "forecast[s] a scenario of human destiny that fuses biological evolution with socialist politics." Brandt draws connections between its political concerns and the negotiation of individual and communal values in the "proto-human culture" of *Before Adam* and in the lesser-known "darkly satirical" socialist utopia in the story "Goliah." The chapter ends with an analysis of London's frequently an-

thologized Marxist critique of child labor, "The Apostate," in which Brandt points out the "ethical cul-de-sac," a dead end that leaves no possibility of escape from the "maul of American capitalism" and a questionable future for Johnny, who takes to the road after refusing to continue to sacrifice himself for his family and to "the industrial Moloch."

Chapter 5 continues with problems of the individual, society, and the hierarchy of class in *The Sea-Wolf* and *Martin Eden*. Brandt presents a nuanced analysis of ethics and evolution in the philosophical dialogue between Wolf Larsen and Humphrey Van Weyden, pointing out, for instance, the greater influence of Huxleyian idealism over Spencerian evolutionary naturalism. Brandt then turns to alienation in *Martin Eden*, "London's most psychologically sophisticated novel," and the idealistic limitations of Martin's "intellectual-aesthetic quest."

Chapter 6 addresses "the complexly muddled and inevitable intermingling" of freedom and determinism in *The Road* and *The Star Rover*. Despite generic differences between the tramp memoir and prison novel with an astral-projecting protagonist, the question of agency resonates in the plight of criminal vagrants and death-row inmates. Brandt raises the uneasy position of readers and writers who may imagine themselves as "detached spectators"; yet, he argues, London was aware that "we are all beneficiaries of the predatory network of economic discrimination and exploitation." Brandt's observation that ideological conflicts in London's act of writing "protest against the very system that enables his success as a professional writer" can also apply to the ethical dilemmas inherent in London's act of traveling in the Pacific.

In chapter 7, Brandt points out that in his Pacific stories "London cannot wholly remove himself from the cultural-imperial discourses that form his identity and values." He notes, for example, that London draws on tropes of the American western in "Koolau the Leper" and on the picaresque literary tradition for "Mauki." His fusional vision of culture, genre, and philosophy is left open-ended in "The Water Baby," London's last completed story, in the unresolved dialogue between the "epistemological skepticism" of the Hawaiian-born white man Jack Lakana and the "mythical outlook" of the native Hawaiian Kohokumu.

Readers unfamiliar with the complexity and range of London's narrative and thematic experimentation as well as those who know London's work well will be rewarded with interpretive gems throughout this book. Scholars intrigued by London's often contradictory and perplexing ideological positions will find new ways to apply Brandt's critical methods to works not included in his study. Read as a whole, the chapters tease out key concepts and philosophical complexities in interesting ways but they also stand as discrete arguments that could be assigned individually for

students of London and of American literature. *Jack London* wraps up with a “Coda: Literary Legacy and Scholarship,” which presents a comprehensive overview of book-length scholarly publications, archival repositories, and online resources.

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*The Civil War Dead and American Modernity.* By Ian Finseth. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2018. 296 pp. Cloth, \$65.00.

*Remembering World War I in America.* By Kimberly J. Licursi. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2018. xxiii + 294 pp. Cloth, \$55.00.

Between their separate remits, Finseth’s and Licursi’s studies span America’s cultural reception of the Civil War and World War I, ranging in the scope of their commentary from the 1860s to the 1940s. Coming from adjacent centuries, fought in very different ways, these conflicts are also distinguished by the disparity of cultural prestige they have garnered in American collective consciousness. While the Civil War may have amassed greater gravitas and attention, Finseth’s and Licursi’s works clarify that each conflict was caught up in the same evolving trajectory of American modernity, with its concomitant effects on the media employed to shape perceptions of warfare.

For Finseth, the Civil War dead “are endlessly reinscribed” through diverse and complex modes of commemoration, involving teleological assertions of national identity, increasing secularization, and awareness of the “essentially mediated character of all existence.” Licursi, meanwhile, discusses a range of print and film sources and contends that Americans never formed a cohesive ideological response to the war “as they would about World War II and the Civil War,” concluding that the war’s cultural reverberations were ultimately of an attenuated, nebulous form.

Each work investigates four vectors of memory. Finseth examines modernity’s influence on perceptions of the Civil War, before moving on to images, history, and fiction. He argues that individual subjective interpretation of the conflict parallels, in microcosm, larger cultural mediations, and offers Freudian melancholia as an analogy to understand profound, yet still unassimilated emotional attachment to the war. Finseth’s most compelling argument is in regard to Civil War photography. He challenges the scholarly truism that photographic verisimilitude shattered Victorian concepts