

A micro-ebook reformatted from

Symbiosis: a Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations

Volume 1.2

Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin

To Love or Not To Love? Jack London and Anna Strunsky's *The Kempton-Wace Letters*

<http://www.humanities-ebooks.co.uk>

FOR GUIDANCE ON USE OF THIS EBOOK PLEASE SCROLL TO PAGE 2

PUBLICATION DATA

© Symbiosis 1997, 2007 all rights reserved

The Author has asserted her right to be identified as the author of this Work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published in SYMBIOSIS Volume 1.2 (October 1997) pp 255–274

2nd electronic edition published in 2007 by Humanities-Ebooks LLP

<http://www.humanities-ebooks.co.uk>

Tirril Hall, Tirril, Penrith CA10 2JE

Essays published in Symbiosis are subsequently digitized for the benefit of the author (80%) and the Journal (20%)

READING OPTIONS

To use the toolbar this Ebook should be read in default view.

To navigate use the hyperlinked 'Bookmarks' or thumbnails at the left of the screen.

To search, click on the binocular symbol in the toolbar.

Use <CTRL+L> to enlarge the page to full screen.

LICENCE AND PERMISSIONS

This ebook is licensed for reading on a particular computer.

The original purchaser may license the same work for a second computer by applying to support@humanities-ebooks.co.uk with proof of purchase.

It is permissible to print a watermarked copy of the book for your own use.

ISSN: 1362-7902

A cumulative index of Symbiosis essays and reviews is online at

<http://www.symbiosisonline.org.uk>

Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin

To Love or Not To Love? Jack London and Anna Strunsky's *The Kempton-Wace Letters*

Those differences—what were they but the healthy expression of our immaturity, of our aspirations toward the absolute of truth and right and justice. [...] The differences tortured us as they did precisely because in the great essentials we were at one—but this, youth could not know. [...] Was he not an ardent feminist and suffragist? Why, then, did I suspect him of thinking women the inferiors of men? Did he not finally marry with love and for love, and exemplify in his own life the need of love that men and women have in common. [...] Why, then, did we spend twenty-two months writing *The Kempton-Wace Letters*, trying to convert each other to positions which, at bottom, we must both have held?¹

In this 1919 letter to Charmian Kittredge, Anna Strunsky touches on some of the many ironies which characterized the biographical context, the writing, and the argument of *The Kempton-Wace Letters*. Indeed, the paradoxes are numerous and reach into Jack London's very personality, relationships, vision of women and of the role of humans in the natural world. A born romantic, London nevertheless defended in his early twenties the concept of the 'economic man' and the 'scientific man,' insisting on viewing love as merely a part of the reproductive process—that is as a trick played by nature on mankind to ensure procreation and the survival of the species—while, at the same time, arguing his scientific vision of love with more logic and passion than Anna her own romantic view of love. Ironically, London could probably have written Anna's side of the argument far more convincingly than she did, and the failure of his own so-called 'scientific' first marriage to Bessie Maddern only superficially appears to invalidate his side of the argument in both his life and the book.

Indeed, his losing the argument in *The Kempton-Wace Letters* is a fallacious parallel to his failed first marriage since that marriage was based on neither reason nor eugenics but was apparently brought about by Anna's rejection of his love—i.e.

Jack London and Anna Strunsky. Call of the Wild. Divorce. Political Development. London had a great love of books and he decided that he would now spend more time in Oakland Library. His reading included books by Rudyard Kipling, Gustave Flaubert, Leo Tolstoy and Herman Melville. London also began writing short-stories. Mabel Applegarth was horrified by this decision. Her mother wrote a letter to him concerning his proposed trip: "Oh, dear John, do be persuaded to give up the idea, for we feel certain that you are going to meet your death, and we shall never see you again Your Father and Mother must be nearly crazed over it. Now, even at the eleventh hour, dear John, do change your mind and stay." (15). Jack London. Jack London Biography - The iconic American novelist, short story writer, journalist and social activist, Jack London is best known for writing Call of the Wild (1903) and White. Around the same time London met Anna Strunsky, who would become a lifelong friend and also his writing partner for The Kempton-Wace Letters (1903). Some more works to follow during London's prolific writing career include The Faith of Men (1904), The Sea Wolf (1904), The Game (1905) was followed by War of the Classes(1905), Tales of the Fish-Patrol (1905), Moon Face and Other Stories (1906), Scorn of Women (1906), Before Adam (1907.), Love of Life and Other Stories (1907), and The Road(1907). The Kempton-Wace Letters was a 1903 epistolary novel written jointly by Americans Jack London and Anna Strunsky, then based in San Francisco, California. It was published anonymously. Kempton makes the case for feeling and emotion, while Wace proceeds "scientifically" and analyzes love in Darwinian terms: "I purpose to order my affairs in a rational manner....Wherefore I marry Hester Stebbins. I am not impelled by the archaic sex madness of the beast, nor by the obsolescent romance madness of later-day man.