

The Adventurous Deeds of Deadwood Jones

Helen Hemphill

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In *The Adventurous Deeds of Deadwood Jones* Helen Hemphill combines conventions of Southern and Western literature, reflecting a firm foundation of historical research. Born the day Lincoln penned the Emancipation Proclamation, her first-person narrator Prometheus Jones (based loosely on the real Nat Love) is wonderfully assured. An ace at breaking over-spirited horses, he heads west from Tennessee in 1876, finding lucrative employment on a cattle drive. Astride a horse he feels unbeatable: “The rope cuts into my gloved hand, and my shoulder aches with every jerk, but I hold on like me and this old mustang is blood and bone growed together.”

The optimistic Prometheus progresses on fulfilling a promise made to his dying mother to find the father he never met. Self-confidence reigns until a fateful river crossing which brings to mind Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove*. The towns along the trail test Prometheus as much as the elements or the hostile Lakota. For example, “...Dodge City. The town is alive with cardplayers, friendly women, drunks, and restless cowpunchers, all ready to tell you stories and take everything you got.”

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