“Native Encounters: Examining Primitivism in Hemingway and London’s Short Fiction”
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For two of the more preeminent twentieth-century American authors, Hemingway and London share an interest in examining the limits of primitivism, particularly as they come to delineate the impact of race privilege. By considering Hemingway’s “Indian Camp” and London’s “Keesh, The Son of Keesh,” in the broader context of other selected texts by these two authors, one might consider how these works problematize primitivism. In Hemingway’s “Indian Camp,” for instance, white, western culture imposes itself on the Native American community, bringing with it violence and death; in London’s “Keesh, the Son of Keesh,” the title character’s sacrifice is depicted as a fight for his soul’s redemption, as the title character must engage in a battle between himself and his primal instincts versus the incarnate Word, as told to him by a white, Christian missionary. For both short stories, we are left with images of death. By examining these selected texts, one might understand how Hemingway and London foreground primitivism, calling attention to the erasure of a people and a way of life, and offering shared critiques of white privilege.