



## T.R.: The Last Romantic

*H. W. Brands*

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## **T.R.: The Last Romantic** H. W. Brands

In his time, there was no more popular national figure than Theodore Roosevelt. It was not just the energy he brought to every political office he held or his unshakable moral convictions that made him so popular, or even his status as a bonafide war hero—the man who led the Rough Riders up San Juan Hill in Cuba during the Spanish-American war. Most important, Theodore Roosevelt was loved by the people because this scion of a privileged New York family loved America and Americans. And yet, according to Bill Brands, if we look at the private Roosevelt without blinders, we see a man whose great public strengths hid enormous personal deficiencies. His highly exaggerated, and often uncompromising ways drove many of his business and personal friends crazy. His historical writings, which Brands quotes from extensively, are nothing if not a portrait of a boy’s endless macho fantasies. He was often so full of himself that his speeches and writings were the frequent subject of fierce satire in their time. Even more revealing, according to Brands, was Roosevelt as son, brother, husband, and father. According to Brands, to understand both the public and private Roosevelt one must understand the impact of his father’s death while he was still a child, denying him the opportunity to come to terms with his own manhood. When his first wife Alice died of complications from childbirth, leaving behind a baby daughter Alice, his response was to run away to shoot Buffalo in the west, leaving the newborn infant to the care of his unmarried sister Bamie. When his second wife Edith was seriously, perhaps fatally ill, he left her to fight in the Spanish-American war. His only concern when his brother Elliot, who had been his only friend as a child, became an alcoholic was to hide the news from the public. Determined that his four sons would not dishonor his belief that men, to achieve their manhood, must test themselves in war, he arranged for each to serve, often in the frontlines, during WWI. His youngest son Quentin would die in that cause. Beautifully written, powerfully moved by its subject, *TR* is nonetheless a biography more appropriate to today’s critical times.

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