



South Sea Tales

Jack London , Tony Horwitz (Introduction)

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South Sea Tales Details

Date : Published April 9th 2002 by Modern Library (first published 1911)

ISBN : 9780375759291

Author : Jack London , Tony Horwitz (Introduction)

Format : Paperback 384 pages

Genre : Fiction, Classics, Adventure, Short Stories, Travel, Historical, Historical Fiction, Literature, American, Audiobook, The United States Of America

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From Reader Review South Sea Tales for online ebook

Meli says

¿Alguien que haya leído el libro entero me podrá decir si hay aunque sea un relato que no hable de asesinar y esclavizar negros? En general me gusta este autor y disfruto de su detallismo, pero esto es muy desagradable, la paso mal leyendo, abandono acá.

Laurie says

These stories really ranged from 1-3 stars. Most of the first ones were pretty good. A lot of them were way too long and incredibly dull.

BLT says

That last story was brutal.

Tom Cole says

No one should go through life without this. Just read "THE HEATHEN" if you don't believe me.

Joel Neff says

The House of Mapuhi

A great typhoon sweeps over a small atoll, leaving the inhabitants shaken and tossed about, only to realize that nothing, really, has changed. 4/5

The Whale Tooth

It's always a good idea to listen to the advice of those who are wiser than you, even when you have the hand of God on your side. 3/5

Mauki

The tale of the son of a chief who is taken away to be a slave and then a plantation worker, Mauki, is full of the kind of detail that makes the South Sea Tales come alive and a pleasure to read. 5/5

"Yah! Yah! Yah!"

A tale of the horrible, horrible reprisals that occur when the natives cross the white man. 4/5

The Heathen

I loved this story of how two men can become brothers and in doing so force them to become the men the other has always known them to be. 5/5

The Terrible Solomons

Essentially, this is the early 20th century version of "Boys in the Hood." You know, "If you've never been to the ghetto, don't ever come to the ghetto, because you wouldn't understand the ghetto," only in sailor talk. 4/5

The Inevitable White Man

Inevitable is a strange word to describe an ethnicity but, after reading this story, it becomes the only one that seems even remotely capable of encompassing all of Europe's attitude towards the less charted regions of the world and why they claimed dominion over them. 5/5

The Seed of McCoy

Almost more of a prose poem than a story, the gentle telling of this story belies its desperate stakes as a captain races to get his ship onto a soft, sandy bed, before the fire in her hold consumes her. 4/5

Lynn says

I found these stories by Jack London very compelling and interesting. My favorite is about an older woman washed up on a deserted island during a hurricane. She feeds on the few coconut trees on the island and is horrified at all the dead bodies that have washed up. Her home island is 15 miles away and after realizing there is no rescue she devises a boat out of a leaky canoe she discovers. Before she leaves, she notices the red hair of a white man who had conned her son out a pearl for a check. The pearl is on the man and she brings it back with her as she attempts to go home. Once home, she gives the pearl back to her son and they press on to sell the pearl for real money they can use. One thing that I don't know enough about and have a hard time trusting Jack London with is the idea that many islanders were cannibals just waiting for human flesh pass by that they could feed on without guilt. I would really have to do research on that subject to believe that one.

Joe Valdez says

My introduction to the fiction of Jack London is *South Sea Tales*, an immersive collection of short stories that rustled palm trees in my imagination and at times seemed to blow the aroma of banana leaves from the page. Originally published in *South Sea Tales* (1911), *House of Pride and Other Tales of Hawaii* (1912), *A Son of the Sun* (1912) and posthumously, *On the Makaloa Mat* (1919), these picturesque stories came after the *Klondike Tales* which London is so renowned and were the culmination of an exhausting two-year voyage the author made through Polynesia and Melanesia with his wife, Charmian, beginning in 1907.

Literature that predates The Beatles performing on *The Ed Sullivan Show* is hit or miss with me; it's often difficult for me to identify with the characters or process the writing style of some of the 19th or 20th century's most acclaimed novelists. Sometimes the serum turns me into Dr. Jekyll, other times it's Mr. Hyde and I want to sail the book through the nearest window. Based on these stories, Jack London is definitely a pharmacist who has me hooked. Of the sixteen stories presented here, my two favorite offer heady adventure

which London enthusiastically mixes with culture, geography, history, meteorology and seamanship into the action.

-- *The Seed of McCoy*. Chief magistrate and governor of Pitcairn Island and a descendant of the mutineers from the *Bounty* who settled there, McCoy boards the ailing *Pyrenees*, a tall ship that has been on fire for two weeks. Hoping to save the hull, the captain is searching for a beach to scuttle the ship and McCoy volunteers to lead them to an ideal spot. The voyage goes on longer and longer while the ship grows hotter and hotter. A fire is one of the deadliest events a sailor can encounter aboard his ship and London does a tremendous job ratcheting tension, while the islander McCoy handles each obstacle in his typically unruffled island manner.

He spoke to the sailors, and at the first sound of his dove-like cooing voice they paused to hear. He extended to them his own ineffable sense of serenity and peace. His soft voice and simple thoughts flowed out to them in a magic stream, soothing them against their wills. Long forgotten things came back to them, and some remembered lullaby songs of childhood and the content and rest of the mother's arms at the end of the day. There was no more trouble, no more danger, no more irk, in all the world. Everything was as it should be, and it was only a matter of course that they should turn their backs upon the land and put to sea once more with hell fire hot beneath their feet.

-- *The House of Mapuhi*. In what is in my opinion the jewel of the collection, London visits the low lying atoll of Hikueru, where an islander named Mapuhi has found a magnificent pearl. Rather than name a money price for the traders who flock to him, Mapuhi--as directed by his wife Tefara and mother Nauri--holds out for a very specific house to be built for them. The white man pulls a fast one on Mapuhi, but nature intervenes when a killer hurricane descends on the atoll, covering it with the tide and scattering Mapuhi and his family. Worse than a fire aboard a ship is an island being swallowed by the sea and London hurls the reader through this story breathlessly.

-- In *A Son of the Sun*, *The Devils of Fuatino* and *The Feathers of the Sun*, London jettisons literary import for strict pulp fiction, with dashing trader David Grief sailing from island to island and finding adventure. The situations that Grief must extricate himself from are exciting and the locales colorful, but these pieces--originally running in the *Saturday Evening Post*--are anticlimactic and easy to forget once London shows how Batman, I mean, Han Solo, I mean, Grief, gets himself out of trouble. These inspired a syndicated TV series, *Captain David Grief*, also known as *The Jack London Stories* that ran for 39 episodes from 1957-60.

Of his many schooners, ketches and cutters that nosed about among the coral isles of the South Seas, David Grief loved most the Rattler--a yacht-like schooner of ninety tons with so swift a pair of heels that she had made herself famous, in the old days, opium-smuggling from San Diego to Puget Sound, raiding the seal-rookeries of the Bering Sea, and running arms in the Far East. A stench and an abomination to government officials, she had been the joy of all sailors, and the pride of the shipwrights who built her. Even now, after forty years of driving, she was still the same old Rattler, fore-reaching in the same marvelous manner than compelled sailors to see in order to believe that punctuated many an angry discussion with words and blows on the beaches of all the ports from Valparaiso to Manila Bay.

-- The rest of the stories are picturesque and deeply sensuous to varying degrees--*Good-bye, Jack* addresses the leper colony of Molokai, albeit from the perspective of the white man, while *Koolau the Leper*

dramatizes the siege of Molokai from the point of view of the afflicted--but tend to drift away without the engine driven narratives of the adventure tales. Still, London's facility with the natural world, politics, destiny and how a man struggles against some if not all three is evident throughout. I quite often got the feeling I was being transported to the South Seas, such as with this description at the beginning of *The Bones of Kahekili*:

From over the lofty Koolau Mountains, vagrant wisps of the trade wind drifted, faintly swaying the great, unwhipped banana leaves, rustling the palms, and fluttering and setting up a whispering among the lace-leaved algarroba trees. Only intermittently did the atmosphere so breathe—for breathing it was, the surprising of the languid, Hawaiian afternoon. In the intervals between the soft breathings, the air grew heavy and balmy with the perfume of flowers and the exhalations of fat, living soil.

From here on out, whenever I shop for groceries at Trader Joe's, I'll appreciate that Polynesian motifs go beyond interesting health elements and great value to include colonization, labor exploitation, small pox, leprosy and the occasional run-in with headhunters. It might give me something to do other than stress myself out over the lack of parking outside their markets.

I recommend *South Sea Tales* for anyone planning a trip to the Hawaiian Islands or who wishes they could ditch work and take a trip to there. London is no tourist; it seems clear from his writing that he left something of himself on each beach he landed and strives to do the same for the reader with an impressive multitude of study. Based on this, I'll definitely make the trip to London's *Klondike Tales*.

Manu/Holu says

Partimos de que las obras maestras de Jack London son Colmillo Blanco y La llamada de lo salvaje.

Bien, dicho esto, encontramos una serie de relatos cortos en una ambientación totalmente opuesta a las dos obras anteriores. Leyendas y mitos cobran fuerza alternándose con historias muy cotidianas.

La narrativa y la descripción siguen siendo impecables, aunque es cierto que algunas historias no me han terminado de enganchar. Este autor gana mucho más en el género de la novela.

Alyssa Nelson says

I enjoyed this collection a lot more than I thought I would. Some stories are much better than others, as is the case in general with these sorts of collections, but on the whole, I thought each story had something of interest to offer. What surprised me the most was London's portrayal of the harsh realities of colonialism and how the islanders suffer from colonial greed and brutality. The sympathy to the islanders was what drew me to many of these stories, since these are, to some extent, criticisms of the colonial way.

Favorites from this collection: The House of Mapuhi, Mauki, "Yah! Yah Yah!" The Inevitable White Man. There were no stories in this collection that I straight up disliked, but those four were ones that I greatly enjoyed. London's depiction of the islands effortlessly drew me in; they were so detailed and vibrant, that I

felt as if I were there. I also loved his characters; they felt so real, that I can't help but think that they must have been based on real people.

Definitely pick it up if you're a London fan; if you're at all interested in colonial writings, this is something to check out as well. I wouldn't say it's a must-read, but it's interesting and provides some insight to life in the colonized islands.

Also posted on Purple People Readers.

Shaun says

I don't know much what to say about this book. Jack London has sort of become my favorite writer. This book is a collection of short stories inspired by a trip he took with his wife to the South Pacific.

“The House of Mapuhi” is about a native who wants to sell a pearl to buy a house, and then a typhoon or hurricane comes and wipes out the area. I didn't like this story so much, I'd probably give it a two stars.

“The Whale Tooth” is about a Christian missionary. Another two-star story.

“Mauki” is about a slave determined to escape his masters. I actually liked this story quite a lot. It wasn't a really intricate character, but I was still curious how things would turn out for him. I'd give it four stars.

“Yah! Yah! Yah!” is about a white guy terrorizing and killing the natives. I liked it, solid three-and-a-half stars.

“The Heathen” is about a guy who sort of devotes himself to the service of another guy. ... That may have came out wrong... I didn't like the start of the story so much, but the ending was pretty suspenseful and thankfully didn't give me nightmares (yet). Three stars.

“The Terrible Solomons”... I kind of get this one confused with the next story. Although looking back, most/all of these stories had heavy racial overtones, these next couple stories are more overtly racist. In this one, a captain is killing off black members of his crew and listing their deaths as being due to disease and drowning and such, both because he doesn't owe any restitution if they die of disease/drowning etc., and also because the local authorities will charge murder for anything else. I'm probably phrasing it wrongly, but that's the gist of it. Toward the end, it deals with the house the main character is staying in comes under attack and he thinks he's been poisoned. I'd give this one three stars, too. It was almost funny how the captain or whoever he was kept almost running out of excuses for his employees dying (because he was murdering them).

“The Inevitable White Man” To tell you the truth, by this point in the book, the racism was kind of weighing on me, and I couldn't get into it. So this one I didn't finish, I think.

“The Seed of McCoy”. A captain tries to beach his ship that's on fire. Okay story; two stars.

For the whole book, I'll go ahead and give three stars. I'm not giving it three stars compared to some other book, I'm simply rating it three stars as in “liked it”. Perhaps my expectations for London are higher, and the book didn't amaze me, so three stars. I don't know. I don't read many short stories.

Ron says

I read a bit of Jack London when I was in grade school but that was long ago. Intrigued by stories like Michener's *Adventures in Paradise* and the Pacific setting I wanted to read something by a writer who'd actually been there and lived the life. My copy was published circa 1925 and most of the stories are set in the early part of the 1900s. Interesting to note the place names--Solomon Islands, Guadalcanal, Savo Island, Tulagi, and many others unknown in this era but destined to become household names less than twenty years later from the early Pacific campaigns in World War II. The stories were good for the most part and I'll probably read more London. I preferred his strong, descriptive style to Hemingway's although it does feel more dated.

Sarah says

This is a difficult read. On the one hand, it is probably historically accurate. But history never seems to be as convenient as you'd like. The racial slurs and outright violence of the islanders in Hawaii, Polynesia, and Fiji as the white men took over at the turn of the century is, at a minimum, uncomfortable, but primarily very sad. The tales of sea life were very interesting, as were the malaria, bug ridden descriptions of what are now accepted as the most beautiful and coveted islands in the world.

Lyn says

Most readers or casual observers of Jack London recognize his masterpiece *The Call of the Wild* and the adjoining tales about the Klondike. Others may also recognize *The Sea Wolf* or *White Fang*. *South Sea Tales* is a collection of eight stories thematically set in and around the South Pacific.

As brutal and stark as his cold north stories, these short stories evoke the same primitive lusts and hungers but in a warmer setting. Also evident is London's casual racism. This may have been simply a product of his time and place, but if a modern reader is particularly sensitive to racial slurs, especially the N word, then that reader may want to skip this collection.

The House of Mapuhi – may have inspired Steinbeck's *The Pearl* and is also similar in style and voice to Hemingway or Conrad.

The Whaletooth – missionaries and cannibals on Fiji. When I was in Iraq, I found myself at Christmas time in Kirkuk. The air base hosted a very nice Christmas dinner and talent show of sorts. A sight and sound I will never forget, and I am sure remains with all of the folks there that night, was the contingent of Fijians who arrived to sing. The shortest of them was six feet tall and they were all huge, dark, barrel chested men with corded muscles standing out on their arms. Dressed simply in brown work clothes, they entered in a straight line and formed up in front of the dining facility. With a brief queue, they broke into a Christmas song but sang in their native tongue. The combined baritone of the group made the ground vibrate and I worried about the integrity of the windows. They may have sung two or three songs, all in the same timbre, accepted with bright smiles our standing ovation, and quietly filed out in a single line. Very, very impressive. Reading this story, with a scene of a giant Fijian swinging a fatal war club, I could not help thinking of our gentle giant

visitors and their beautiful performance.

Mauki – a particularly brutal story about the peculiar institution. All the classic London themes are here, somewhat evocative of his short story, “The Mexican”.

“Yah! Yah! Yah!” – colonial brutality and race relations in the South Seas, London as racist? Maybe, or maybe not, this is somewhat sympathetic to the islanders.

The Heathen – tale of bad weather and an odd couple that results. London may have been a racist, but here is another story where the islander demonstrates more humility and virtue than the westerners and / or the Christians. Was London using the unreliable narrator or was he a Nietzschean genocidalist?

The Terrible Solomons – This also could have been titled Guadalcanal Diary of a Different Sort or Corporate Recruiting Gone Wrong. Here is one where London demonstrates that he may have been, after all, a racist. Something also to consider about London was his penchant for literary violence. I read The Iron Heel, a carbon copy, Polaroid negative take on the dystopian genre as London was also a radical socialist. Many of his apologists want us to remember the rugged, inspirational and lovable tale of Buck in Call of the Wild, but want the serious, modern western reader to forget about Wolf Larson and may not even know about The Terrible Solomons. A must read for a true London student and one to even the score for his objective biographers.

The Inevitable White Man – Not for the racially sensitive as London drops the N word as often as the F bomb is dropped in The Big Lebowski. Some critics will say that here London shows his true stripes, still others may show that London accurately documented a brutal tale set in a harsh time and place. There is no mistake, though, about his philosophic leanings.

The Seed of McCoy – The editors, in my humble opinion, saved the best for last. This one is the least violent story of the collection and the one most reminiscent of Joseph Conrad, particularly Youth. This is a simple sailing the seas story with some twists. Go to a globe and spin it to have the Pacific Ocean facing you. The vast blue side of the globe is spotted with little dots of brown and green and one of them, almost in the middle of the blue between the Chilean coast and the eastern coast of Australia and almost due south of distant Hawaii is tiny Pitcairn Island. Yes, the same island populated by the HMS Bounty mutineers. Our adventure begins here and London tells a gem from there.

For London fans.

Charles says

I had forgotten what a great pleasure good Jack London can be. This is a light hearted clutch of adventure in the South Pacific. The Stevenson was more naturalist, more anthropologist. London throws in the occasional Melanesian word, dwells for a few sentences on canibal lire and then is off to an extended drinking story.

Like Conrad he is horrified by the treatment of the natives; the physical abuse, the exploitation of their labor, the cheating they receive on the true value of their products and labor.

A special mention here for The Heathen. I read a lot of the South Sea literature when I was twelve. I may well have read these stories before, but they all seemed new and fresh. The Heathen is about the bond of friendship between an American adventurer and a south sea native (head hunter and cannibal).

Frank says

I picked this up for it's very cool cover (not shown), and decided to give it a whirl as my book to read down on a boat (Key West instead of the Indian Ocean, but hey).

Very impressed. I've tried to read Call of the Wild a few times, and could never stick with it, but these stories engaged me.

The liberal use of the N-word is a bit hard to handle, but London is no Kipling. He goes to great lengths to show how a handful of whites can seemingly dominate whole islands (spoiler: from their--the whites--savagery) and even has a revenge story of the islander who bests "the man"...reminded me of the documentary about Sweet Sweetback's Badass Love Song, where Van Peebles was determined to make a blaxploitation film where the title character gets away in the end.

Divad says

pretty uneven. If you're going to read a lot of wetern oceania literature, add this one. If a little, skip it and go to Stevenson, Hall (personal experiences), Frisbie (earlier works), Grimble, Gessler, and John Russell

Karen GoatKeeper says

There are eight short stories in this book. All are set at a time when cannibals were common in the South Seas and white men were moving in to take pearls, copra, oyster shell and fish. There were plantations being established on various islands and the cannibals were recruited to work on them.

These stories are not for the faint of heart. Men are killed and eaten, massacred, killed in storms, eaten by sharks and more.

None of the main characters are particularly likable. They are coarse, mean, with very biased views. The N word is used commonly as it was in speech at that time.

Why read this set of short stories? It is a window into a view of life and a way of life now gone. They offer a window into understanding this part of the world today as today is built on yesterday.

The last story has a very interesting take on the white race. I can not quote it as many would find the language objectionable, not due to profanity. It boils down to the white man being inevitable, not due to being smart, but because he is stupid and greedy and persistent.

Do read these stories, not because they will be wonderful reading, but because they are that window into life and attitudes we need to remember so that we can do better in the future.

Booksandbe says

London no llegó a cumplir 40 años. Tras de si dejó casi 200 cuentos, más de 15 novelas, una polémica vida de escritor en la que se le acusó de plagio en varias ocasiones, dos matrimonios, extremas convicciones racistas (aún más intensas que las de Kipling), un viaje en busca de oro a Klondike (Alaska) y otro por el Pacífico.

Azorosa vida, verdad?

Este título es una recopilación de ocho relatos, ambientados en esas islas, en los que con un lenguaje descarnado y la particular crudeza que caracteriza a London, nos transporta a un entorno, lejano y exótico. Por aquí desfilan el hombre "blanco" (codicioso y altivo), los nativos (obligados a padecer de todo por culpa del colonialismo), el racismo y una naturaleza salvaje e inmutable, llena de selvas espesas, huracanes y mares turquesa.

Después de muchos años por mis estanterías, se me ha hecho denso y cuesta "arriba", no lo he disfrutado como esperaba....?

Mike Orta says

I sometimes wonder what makes a great short story. Seems like many authors think it is to push the story forward, to streamline the story so that it is a real page turner. London takes his time to fully develop the character. It is almost as if the conflict and the resolution of conflict is purely incidental to the story. Even these sometimes exotic characters are universal in their character make up. I happen to read this book of short stories while I was in Hawaii. Certainly that added to the richness of the story, but a plane ticket to Hawaii is not a prerequisite to enjoying this book! Read it. Especially if you are a Jack London fan.

Jim says

This isn't the correct edition, but I'm using it for Libervox recordings of London's stories.

"A Thousand Deaths" is a SF story with some magical science & horror elements. I'd give it 3 stars. Reminiscent of The Island of Dr. Moreau in some ways.

"Terrible Solomons" gets 2 stars, barely. It's supposed to be humorous, but largely missed the mark due to the old Colonial prejudices & the stilted style. "Niggers" & "pickaninnies" are subhumans used to scare a fop the way one might use a mongrel dog. The only redeeming feature was the idea of taking the fop down a couple of pegs.

This may get updated as I find more stories that aren't listed.
