

**THE LAST PHASE OF THE SOUTH SEA SLAVE TRADE:
JACK LONDON'S ADVENTURE**

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IN 1907–8, JACK LONDON, HIS WIFE CHARMIAN, and a small crew sailed westward from California aboard his ketch the *Snark* on what was to be an around-the-world voyage. Much as the harsh Klondike a decade earlier had defined London's masculine identity and shaped his acclaimed early fiction, now the vast tropical Pacific would serve as the site of his self-dramatization and literary production. Again he would impose his iron will, master the overwhelming natural forces surrounding him, and turn his personal dominance into texts for commercial distribution. However, because of illness and depression, he abandoned the voyage in late 1908 in the equatorial Pacific, barely a third of the way around the globe. Jack London, who had promoted himself as a perfect Aryan specimen, was very ill. He was suffering from rotting teeth, malarial fevers, diarrhea, an ulcerated rectum, burn-like skin lesions, and a mysterious ailment that had thickened his flesh in places and covered it with white scale. He was only thirty-two years old, and he was humiliated by his degeneration in the green hell of Melanesia. Giving up the cruise, the Londons took a steamer in November 1908 from the British Solomon Islands to Sydney. There Jack had surgery for a double rectal fistula. He also received clinical arsenic treatments for his silvery skin, diagnosed as severe psoriasis, which can be life-threatening. At the hospital, he was given opium for pain relief, the start of his worsening dependency on narcotics. Further, the arsenic doses almost certainly damaged his renal system. Ultimately, chronic uremia and drug overdose would

bring about his death in 1916 at age forty (Sinclair 1979: 157, 246; Reesman 2009, 110). Despite his breakdown on the *Snark*—and the collapse of his self-illusion as an Aryan superman—the Pacific voyage at least was a success for text production. London gathered material for a great deal of nonfiction, including his popular travel book *The Cruise of the Snark* (1911). He also wrote some of his best fiction during and after the voyage, much of it based on his experiences with indigenous Pacific peoples.

When his physical and mental disorders had brought him lowest, London began work in the Solomon Islands in October 1908 on a South Sea novel set on Guadalcanal. His misery had shaken his core belief in the white man's evolutionary destiny to triumph over other races and even the earth itself, and the new book was an overdetermined effort to reassure himself of his superiority. The opening sentence of this novel, titled *Adventure* and published in 1911, is both self-referential and racially apologetic in introducing the protagonist, David Sheldon: "He was a very sick white man" (London 1917, 1). This dysentery-ridden planter is fighting for survival among his enslaved indigenous field hands, whom he despises and abuses. In the long run, he feels certain of their eventual extinction as biological have-nots, doomed by the advance of superior European stock; in the short run, he knows they will murder him if given the slightest chance. London's biographer Jeanne Campbell Reesman speculates that "In *Adventure* London was fighting back, in a personally petty way, against the blackness overwhelming his adventure on the *Snark*, racializing his illness and failure" (2009, 169). London eventually finished *Adventure* in the spring of 1909, after recuperating in Australia and departing with Charmian for South America on a steamer. The novel falls into the popular Edwardian genre of colonial "encounter" writing, which dramatized for Western readers the dangers of contact with Eastern and Pacific lands and their peoples. Even so, the manuscript of *Adventure* raised little enthusiasm at London's publishing house; Macmillan held it for nearly two years before bringing it out in 1911 (Stasz 1992, 84). It then fared ill with readers and reviewers, sold poorly, and has long been out of print. Today it is largely forgotten. Yet it is one of the few (if any) literary resources to address the Pacific slave trade, and it is the only novel by an American author to portray with firsthand authenticity the body-snatching known throughout the colonial Pacific as "blackbirding."

This was the contemporary term for the dirty business of transporting native labor from their home islands and atolls to work on plantations in European colonies like Australia, Fiji, Samoa, Tahiti, and New Caledonia. It differed from the earlier Atlantic slave trade only slightly—Pacific slaves were contracted for a fixed number of years and paid a pittance. Thus, they

were technically indentured laborers rather than chattel. But once sold to a plantation, these laborers were “virtually the personal property of the master” (Docker 1970, 144). Most of them came from Melanesia—from the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), the Loyalty Islands (now part of New Caledonia), the British Solomon Islands, the German Solomon Islands (including Buka and Bougainville), the Bismark Archipelago, and German New Guinea (now Papua New Guinea). For more than six decades, these Islanders were the target of man-hunting efforts across the South Pacific. Often chained below deck and labeled with tin property tags around their necks, Islanders were abducted and shipped to be sold at auction at colonial ports. As one British naval officer wrote in the early 1870s, despite colonial efforts to label it a “labor trade,” it was “really nothing else than downright slavery if not worse” (quoted in Dunbabin 1935, 185). Large sums of cash could be reaped by ship captains and owners from the sale of a single human cargo to eager planters. Thus, high profits spurred blackbirders to deceit and violence to fill their holds with men. These Islanders in turn were sold and “contracted” to the owners of sugar, cotton, and copra plantations to provide cheap labor in equatorial and subtropical regions. As is now generally conceded, many Pacific colonies “were established, or at least consolidated, on a basis of slave labor” (Sharrad 1993, 1).

However, because African slavery had been abolished in British possessions in 1834, practitioners in the Pacific slave trade strenuously insisted that it was a legitimate business. Indeed, the Polynesian Labourers Act of 1868 had effectively legalized slavery in the colonial South Seas by setting conditions for its operation (Bird 2005, 18). Dark-skinned Pacific “blackbirds” were given contracts (which they could not read), and their labor on the plantations was time-limited, usually to three to five years. While they were indentured in the work fields, these Islanders had no effective legal rights or safeguards, enjoyed the protection of no home government, and lived in virtual imprisonment in squalid compounds. Death rates were horrendous from disease and overwork. Indeed, planters actually profited from the deaths of contract workers by holding their accrued wages, which usually were paid only at the end of the indenture. The prevailing racial ideology, which was based solely on the white–black binary of skin pigment, “contributed that vital element upon which the widespread exploitation of workers was rationalized—they were uncivilized black savages whose physiological composition perfectly suited the requirements of a sub-tropical climate” (Saunders 1982, 15). In its depiction of violent white–black relationships in Melanesia during the last phase of the South Sea slave trade, London’s novel *Adventure* unmistakably sides with idealized plantation hierarchies of white masters and black slaves. However, in keeping with its

roots in American literary realism, the novel also graphically portrays the appalling conditions of indentured Melanesians, toiling and dying under European rule.

To nineteenth-century Western eyes, Melanesians closely resembled Africans, and many Europeans and Americans believed falsely that they were Africans. As the African American historian Gerald Horne argues, this physical resemblance facilitated the process whereby Europeans and Americans in the Pacific treated Melanesians as slaves (Horne 2007, 13). Many Westerners also believed that all Melanesians were cannibals, no different from predatory animals. The Australian novelist Louis Becke, who spent time as a supercargo aboard blackbirding vessels, dismissed Melanesians as “woolly-headed Papuan niggers who are always fighting, and ready to eat a man without salt” (1987, 283). When whites routinely referred to Melanesians as “niggers,” they were not just using “a racial slur but asserting their slave status as nonmen” (Phillips 1999, 192), that is, as subhuman beasts to be caught and caged. Further, the contract system of indenture was developed not to be more humane than African slavery but to “avoid the mistake of the United States where the Africans, introduced during the colonial period as a temporary measure, had become in the South by the late eighteenth century entrenched as permanent chattels” (Saunders 1982: 106–7). That is, the goals of the Pacific slave trade were to exploit indigenous field hands, deny them any status as residents, and expel them back to their home islands.

In the 1860s, when the American Civil War shut off exports of cotton and sugar from the Confederacy, there was a surge in European demand for these commodities. In a worldwide search for substitute suppliers, European importers sanctioned the rise of blackbirding in the Pacific to stimulate agricultural production in fledgling Western colonies. A corollary of this exploitation of indigenous labor was the racialized mythology that Westerners were physically unable to do fieldwork under the tropic sun. Soon planters in Queensland and Fiji, as well as other colonized regions of the Pacific, created a shipping network to transport Islanders to the work fields to perform hard labor that Europeans were said to be incapable of doing. Thus constituted, the Pacific slave trade continued for more than fifty years, well into the twentieth century. It largely ended with the First World War and the collapse of Germany’s Pacific empire. Nevertheless, recruiting continued into the mid 1920s in French New Caledonia, where Islanders were transported to work the nickel mines (Scarr 2001, 176).

Some planters and blackbirders involved in the early phase of blackbirding were Americans; some of them after 1865 were ex-Confederates and former slave owners. They established the Ku Klux Klan in the early 1870s

on the Fijian archipelago to enforce white supremacy and terrorize contract workers on the plantations (Horne 2007, 80). In Queensland, a vigilante organization called the "White League" was formed in 1876 (Corris 1973, 91). Similar racial hierarchies extended throughout the Coral Sea, Bismark Sea, and Solomon Sea regions. Blackbirders engaged in stratagems to snatch or lure Islanders onto their ships and haul them away. Further, the return voyages involved similar chicanery and violence. When time-expired Islanders were shipped back to their homelands, blackbirders could merely swap cargoes on a deserted islet, and their captives were resold to new planter-owners (Docker 1970, 142). When Islanders did make it back home, some brought with them devastating diseases like tuberculosis, venereal infections, measles, and leprosy. Some of the worst practices of the labor trade ended when Fiji was annexed by Great Britain in 1874—and Fiji, thus, joined Queensland as a British colony under crown control. However, the essential exploitation involved in providing racialized servile labor for the plantations remained constant for decades longer. Such conditions closely resembled life under Jim Crow in the southern United States, as the historian Peter Corris concludes: "At their worst, European attitudes towards the islanders fell little short of Mississippian racist segregationism (1973, 90).

By the 1880s, blackbirders resorted less to kidnapping and more to purchasing "recruits" from their chiefs and communities (Scarr 2001, 170), thus extending the commercial network of the South Sea slave trade. These transactions often involved trade goods such as tobacco, fabric, and tools in exchange for young men (and women). But even for those Islanders who went more or less willingly aboard the blackbirding vessels and understood the terms of service on the plantations, the work situation of the contract worker differed little from that of slave or convict labor (Saunders 1982, xvii). Actual living conditions for recruits changed or improved little on the plantations over time. When Jack and Charmian London sailed into Melanesia in 1908, Australia (the largest consumer of unfree labor) had only recently outlawed blackbirding—in 1904, three years after federation of the nation. However, Australia ended human trafficking not out of moral outrage but in defense of the official White Australia Act of 1901, which sought to make Australia a "whites-only" nation. In support of enforced racial purity, the Deportation Act brought about a forced relocation of dark-skinned laborers out of Australia from 1906 to 1908. As their labor contracts expired, Melanesian workers were forced into mass repatriation. Even so, Fiji, German Samoa, and German New Guinea continued to engage in blackbirding. After 1904, many Melanesians in Australia were shipped to Fiji, where they had little choice but to take on new labor

contracts, thus providing a surge in blackbirding activities there just as the practice was ending in Queensland. During the last phase of the Pacific slave trade, the Solomon Islands continued to be the main source of transported contract laborers.

The Londons spent nearly four months during the summer and fall of 1908 in the Solomon Islands. This archipelago was routinely referred to by Westerners as the “Cannibal Isles,” a name that dramatized the dire consequences of contact with indigenous people. The Londons were guests at Penduffryn, a coconut plantation on the north coast of Guadalcanal Island (then known as Guadalcanar). The setting is just west of the village of Lunga (London 1917, 108), which decades later would be the principal site of American troop landings in 1942 during the Solomon Islands campaign of World War II. The swampy, jungle region that rings the mountainous island was a clotted tangle of roots, vines, and ferns beneath a matted canopy of giant trees; thick rain forests were laced by crocodile-infested rivers running down to the sea. Penduffryn, one of the largest privately held copra plantations in the Solomons, was owned by two Englishmen, George Darbishire and Tom Harding. They were well known in the last phase of the blackbirding trade during the first decade of the twentieth century, actively recruiting Solomon Islanders and transporting them to Fiji for sale (Corris 1973, 148). They lived at Penduffryn with family members and overseers. They ruled over a large contingent of Melanesian laborers, who did the backbreaking work of clearing swampland and planting groves of coconut palms. The plantation house was a colonial fortress. For fear of a native uprising, Westerners slept with their revolvers under their pillows, “and bedrooms contained racks of loaded rifles” (Stasz 1988, 185). Skeptical contemporary reviewers of *Adventure*, enthralled by the popular myth of the South Seas as an earthly paradise, doubted the veracity of London’s gruesome novel, with its terrible scenes of racial strife: hatred, filth, disease, floggings, and mass killings. Even today, *Adventure* is little acknowledged for depicting the brutal South Sea slave trade and, thus, making a firsthand contribution to what has come to be called diaspora literature, colonial texts induced from “the global market in body-snatching” (Sharrard 1993, 1).

Penduffryn Plantation was typical of its time and place more than a century ago in 1908, and it was here that the Londons had their harsh encounter with the commodified Pacific during the imperial age. Much of the copra trade in the region was organized by the English soap company Levers’ Pacific Plantations Ltd., later to become Lever Brothers. Its Melanesian headquarters were on Gavutu Island, just across a channel from Guadalcanal. Levers operated its own plantations and “recruited”

indigenous laborers on its own ships; it also contracted to buy copra from independent planters such as the owners of Penduffryn (Corris 1973, 108). In *Adventure* London indirectly refers to the Lever Brothers' empire, calling it "the Fulcrum Brothers' plantation" (1917, 112). London's use of "fulcrum" and his play on the word "lever" imply his criticism of their nascent monopoly in the tropics, suggesting an agency that brings irresistible and crushing weight to bear upon the individual entrepreneur. London's jibe is part of the antimonomopolistic critique of the novel, which laments the shrinking field of opportunity for the daring individual and the increasing centralization of corporate and bureaucratic power in the Pacific (1917, 65). His satire also is aimed at the crude logic of greed and oppression exhibited by whites in the tropics, a psychological subject treated in his story "The Inevitable White Man" (1910), which he wrote in October 1908, at the same time he was writing *Adventure* at Penduffryn (Riedl and Tietze 2006: 202, 214n7). In the Levers' business, coconuts were husked on the plantations, and the dried meat or copra was packed into sacks and delivered to company depots in the western Solomons. There copra was rendered into coconut oil, to be transported and later manufactured into scented soap. Lever Brothers made a fortune supplying this product to western consumers. At Penduffryn, which was a poorly run and economically precarious plantation, the Londons encountered the stark realities behind the emergence of globalized capital. They also took part in the colonial whites' frantic efforts to mask their fear of annihilation. In their plantation compound, the owners and guests at Penduffryn drank heavily, consumed hashish, cross-dressed, and took part in nightly masquerades and sexual revels—all desperate forms of denial to displace their terror of being massacred by their slaves within their fragile refuge.

Jack and Charmian had their most dangerous adventure of the *Snark* cruise when they sailed on a blackbirding vessel doing business for Penduffryn's owners. It made a recruiting trip from their plantation to the nearby island of Malaita. This island was "one of the wildest places in the British Empire at the time" (Corris 1973, 130), infamous for the ferocity of the upland Kwaio people, who were deadly headhunters and reputed cannibals. Malaita was the island that provided the largest number of blackbirds out of Melanesia, often through local warlords who sold captives, miscreants, and other undesirables to the recruiters. Indigenous people from the Malaita bush lands thoroughly despised Westerners generally—blackbirders, traders, planters, and missionaries alike—whom they associated with decades of kidnapping, deceit, shootings, and collective punishment. During blackbirding days, Malaita was regarded as the most dangerous island in the Solomons.

In 1908, most remaining blackbirders in the Coral Sea served the Fijian labor trade, which had been notorious since the 1860s for its poor wages and weak law-enforcement. One such vessel was the ketch *Minota*, “said to have been a luxury yacht in Sydney before being fitted out to carry Kanakas” (Bird 2005, 101). While the Londons were at Penduffryn, the *Minota* came to call during a voyage to return time-expired laborers to Malaita and pick up new recruits there, part of the larger blackbirding business of Penduffryn’s owners. The Dutch captain invited Jack, Charmian, and two members of their *Snark* crew to come aboard. The *Minota* had a bloody history in blackbirding. Just months earlier, it had been seized by islanders at the Malaitan village of Binu. Using steel hatchets, they broke open the main cabin door, chopped off the captain’s head, and stole the boat’s rifles. When the Londons looked around the *Minota*, gouges from this hatchet attack still showed. Because of the Malaitans’ willingness to attack blackbirding vessels, all whites on board heavily armed themselves. There are photographs of Charmian London wearing a pistol in a holster around her waist. The *Minota*’s railings were double wrapped with barbed wire to repel boarders. The *Minota* called at several Malaitan ports, and the crew was menaced at every stop. They learned that a British warship had recently indiscriminately shelled and burned villages on Malaita, in reprisal for attacks on whites, thus intensifying the hostility of the indigenous people. The *Minota* cautiously worked its way around to the northern tip of the island and stopped at Malu’u (London calls it Malu) Lagoon, where it took on laborers. However, in attempting to sail out to open water, the *Minota* became stuck on a coral reef. Soon it was encircled by war canoes, with armed paddlers seeking to come aboard, kill the crew, and loot the ship. It was also pounded by heavy seas, which washed over it as it lay grounded on the island’s weather side. The crew’s only hope was to be towed off the reef before the ship was boarded or torn apart. For three days and two terrifying nights, those on the *Minota* fought for their lives to stay afloat and fend off attackers. When another blackbirder, the schooner *Eugenie*, arrived at Malu’u, London described this celebratory moment in highly racialized language as the triumphant arrival of “the white man, the inevitable white man, coming to a white man’s rescue” (London 2004, 170). Jack and Charmian went aboard the *Eugenie*, which took them to Florida Island across the channel from Penduffryn. Pulled off the reef by the *Eugenie*, the *Minota* later called at Penduffryn while the Londons remained there. Similar blackbirding voyages in the British Solomons continued for three more years until 1911, when Fiji finally ended the labor trade.

As a writer of nonfiction, Jack London turned this episode into the most thrilling chapter of *The Cruise of the Snark*. But he also used his experience

at Penduffryn and nearby Malaita to write a number of short stories that deal with blackbirding. Mostly, London "was not impressed with blackbirding, describing how Islanders were lured, sold by their chiefs or even kidnapped into years of labor, close to slave conditions, in the fields" (Bird 2005, 102). This negative stance toward blackbirding and the South Sea imperial project is taken in taut London stories like "Mauki" (1909) and "Yah, Yah, Yah" (1910), which effectively portray "the viciousness of colonialism" (Riedl and Tietze 2006, 265). But London was capable of taking an opposite stance toward blackbirding. His Solomon Islands novel *Adventure* sought to combine sentimental romance with the exploits of enterprising Western fortune hunters. London hoped it would be a swash-buckling bestseller and restore his fading reputation following poor sales from his downbeat novel *Martin Eden* (1909), which he had finished aboard the *Snark*. London had reason to worry about sales. The popular acclaim built upon his Northland stories had diminished both from his Socialist lecture tour of 1905–6 and "his absence for two and a half years on the *Snark*" (Kingman 1979, 214). In *Adventure*, London reverses the anticolonialism of his South Sea short stories and celebrates instead Euro-American racial dominance and entrepreneurial daring in the tropics (anticipated at the close of *Martin Eden* before the protagonist's suicide).

Adventure is a lurid tale that promotes the imperial enterprise as a necessary means of subjugating the "lower" races and improving their "wild" homelands through Westernized agriculture. Thus, in *Adventure* it is not enough that Anglo-Saxons be elevated as superior humans (Gair 1997, 26). It also is necessary that black-skinned Melanesians be reduced to half-beasts in a hellish wilderness and their cultural life devalued to primitive worthlessness. The novel not only insists upon the historical necessity of Western domination in the tropics but also advocates blackbirding as the most effective means of subordinating Islanders to this racialized project. As Clarice Stasz notes, "Jack London did not require consistency of himself" in his treatment of social themes (1992, 89). He was not bothered by being self-contradictory, just as his novel *Adventure* promotes white supremacy while his story "The Terrible Solomons" (1910) satirizes it. He began *Adventure* within two weeks of completing "The Terrible Solomons," with no sense of inconsistency. Given the wide disparity in how the two texts treat racial hierarchies, Riedl and Tietze (2006, 132) are right to conclude that "The Terrible Solomons" slyly erases the novel (*Adventure*, not yet composed) that follows it in order of composition. London was a highly commercial author who took pains to shape his works to suit the tastes of his various reading audiences. Readers of novels, short stories, or essays might be approached from different perspectives to appeal to their

supposed beliefs or biases. In *Adventure*, the eugenicist fantasies of the late Edwardian age are reinforced by London's polarized racial depictions. In sum, this brutal "encounter" novel elevates whites above Pacific Islanders and justifies violence to subjugate (or eradicate) indigenous peoples and make their lands commercially productive for global markets.

The plot of *Adventure* is set in 1908 on a Penduffryn-like plantation called Berande, situated between two rivers that empty into the channel that separates Guadalcanal and the Florida (or Nggela) Islands. A lone white man rules over these coconut groves. He is a brutal young Englishman named David Sheldon, who has been there four years and recently has lost his business partner to blackwater fever. Although wasted by dysentery and financially buried by debts, Sheldon clings to his faith in "the flaming mastery of the white man" (London 1917, 15). This is defined as his Aryan will to dominate the hostile peoples and even the harsh environment of the Solomons. Despite his enervation, Sheldon holds the whip hand over nearly 200 Melanesian indentured workers and practices a form of managerial terrorism through shootings and whippings. Much as on the actual Penduffryn plantation, however, Sheldon and his late partner, Hugh Drummond, cannot make enough money in the copra trade to balance their accounts. Therefore, they supplement their income by running their own slaving schooner in the blackbirding business on nearby Malaita. This aspect of *Adventure* duplicates the business dealings of the real-life owners of Penduffryn, who took part in dealing Malaitamen to the Fiji slave markets in business partnership with the owners of a blackbirder aptly named the *Clansman* (Corris 1973, 148). In a bit of buffoonery when the Londons were visiting Penduffryn, its co-owner Darbishire styled himself as the "King of Malaita" (Kingman 1979, 204), an acknowledgement of his deep involvement in the Solomons slave trade. The *Clansman* even earns a mention in *Adventure*, strengthening the novel's factual basis; this vessel is cited as "a Samoan recruiter" that pays a call at Berande (London 1917, 246). Indeed, the *Clansman* called frequently at Penduffryn to conduct recruiting business with Darbishire and Harding—very likely when the Londons were guests in 1908. The *Clansman* was the most notorious vessel still active in the last phase of the South Sea slave trade. It even had the dubious distinction of carrying the last cargo of Malaitamen to sell at Suva harbor in Fiji in 1911, the year the blackbirding trade finally was ended there and in the British colonial Pacific (Scarr 1967, 5).

In such a commodified market, the value of Melanesian laborers is calculated by Sheldon only in monetary terms, by which they are "worth thirty dollars apiece" (London 1917, 12), the wages he is bound to pay at the expiration of their contracts—if they have not died of disease or been fatally

shot or beaten. He regards them as the worst labor force in the Solomons and orders gory floggings to subjugate them, exulting as they “screamed and howled while the blood oozed down their backs” (London 1917, 27). His “orgiastic frenzy” during these beatings reveals Sheldon’s underlying “sadism” (Sinclair 1979: 155–56) towards his all-male, indigenous workforce. It also suggests that his racism is potentiated by his sexual repression, because he leads a lonely bachelor life on an isolated beach. Much of Sheldon’s time is spent in a state of fearful enfeeblement. He is a depleted “master” who must be carried around piggy-back by a slave “man-horse” (London 1917, 1)—to Sheldon a bestial subhuman, but one who nevertheless is his physical superior. This hostile dependency suggests not only Sheldon’s sexual impotence but his “racial pessimism” (Farrier 2007, 224 *passim*), because whites like him and his partner prove less capable of bearing up in the tropics than indigenous peoples, who supposedly are their evolutionary inferiors. The colonizer who would dominate his native workers is in danger of being overthrown by them, a situation of both anxiety and abjection. Thus, Sheldon’s physical instability threatens the popular contemporary Social Darwinist belief in “a strict evolutionary hierarchy of races, with the Anglo-Saxon as undisputed, ‘natural’ leader,” a hierarchy supported by Jack London (Gair 1997a, 37).

Adventure takes place in an atmosphere of extreme racial tension. Sheldon’s workers’ hatred for him as master is matched by his contempt for them as beasts of burden. Proffering a fanciful racialized chain of being in which blackness is the mark of subhumanity, he scorns them as the racial scum of the earth, “a whole lot lower than the African niggers” (London 1917, 98). Extending a literary tradition going back at least to Richard Henry Dana’s *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840), however, London takes pains to elevate light-skinned Polynesians in *Adventure* to a point of racial development far above dark-skinned Melanesians (and Micronesians). Even so, Sheldon’s essentialist definitions of race always insist upon the racial superiority of whites. Further, not unlike Melville’s narrator in *Typee* (1846), a book Jack London greatly admired, Sheldon believes that Pacific Islanders (or at least Solomon Islanders) are doomed to annihilation as whites penetrate into their formerly isolated archipelagoes. That *Adventure* today is considered obsolete while *Typee* attracts close readings in Pacific Island literature should not obscure the two books’ similarity in their assumption of white supremacy over the tropics and the eventual extinction of indigenous peoples. Indeed, Sheldon expresses the eugenics-based hope that the entire indigenous population of Melanesia will die off quickly after making contact with white settlers and their “scientific” uses of soil and sea. The eradication of Pacific Islanders, much like that of Native Americans,

will then leave tropical lands to beneficial white control and resource extraction (London 1917: 113–14).

However, in his state of collapse Sheldon barely clings to his own hope of survival. Like Jack London in his debilitated state in the Solomons, Sheldon too has reached the defeatist stage “where he lived by will alone” (London 1917, 36). Sheldon’s imploding Aryan body is too weak to enforce submission from his workers. Sheldon tries to suppress this humiliating reality by consoling himself with constructed notions of white evolutionary superiority and the global Aryan destiny to dominate. But even these supremacist fantasies falter in “the terrible Solomons,” and Sheldon dwells instead on suicidal ideations that promise release from his physical disgust and racial shame. This disturbed condition recurs in numerous encounter novels of the age, which often employ delirium or “madness” as a metaphor for the colonial experience. Such works frequently show how “‘psychological’ disorders serve as mirrors of the chaotic and brutal consequence of occupation” (Luangphinit 2004, 59). As with so many other Western adventurers in the tropics, Sheldon’s capitalist dream to exploit a Pacific frontier ripe for consumption has withered on the beach, where he disintegrates physically and mentally.

The mainspring of the plot of *Adventure* is the arrival of its heroine, an energetic young castaway. She is a twenty-two-year-old American woman from Hawai‘i (which had been annexed by the United States a few years earlier in 1900). Joan Lackland is a shipwrecked Aphrodite, the skipper of a schooner that breaks up on a nearby uncharted coral reef. She washes ashore at crumbling Berande and marks Sheldon and his business enterprises as projects for rehabilitation. Joan is a twentieth-century New Woman who claims to reject marriage, insist on personal independence and economic freedom, and expect equal treatment from men. She also holds the romantic belief that “adventure was not dead” (London 1917, 79), which gives the novel its title. Her financial ambition leads her to the southwest Pacific to establish a coconut plantation and fulfill the capitalistic dreams of her late father. He was a rancher and investor who lost everything in the Wall Street Bankers’ Panic of 1907, a swipe by London at the suppressive agency of East Coast plutocrats (Gair 1997b, 256). Her fixation on travel and adventure also is an alternative to and substitution for sexual attraction and marriage, a social institution which she foresees will lead to entrapment.

Joan Lackland as a heroine is a composite of the sexually liberated Charmian London (Stasz 1988, 143 *passim*) and the tomboyish Armine von Tempsky (Stasz 1992, 85). The latter was a teenager who rode with the *paniolas* (Hawaiian cowboys) at the Haleakala Ranch (where her father was overseer) on Maui; the Londons befriended her during their visit there in

1907 (Stasz 2001, 123). In *Adventure*, Joan is a bronzed young ranch woman in sea boots who combines sex appeal with masculine camaraderie. She reflects London's preference for outdoorsy women with strong bodies. Joan hides her sensuous "great ropes of hair" (London 1917, 172) under a man's Baden-Powell hat, disguises her feminine figure beneath baggy garments, wears a cartridge belt around her waist, and packs a long-barreled revolver on her hip. In the novel Sheldon is too repressed to admit his sexual longing for Joan, but he spends long hours fixated on the phallic nail in his living room hall and wishing that her "Stetson hat and revolver belt were hanging from it" (London 1917, 245). Sheldon also must compete in a romantic-triangle plot (common in London's fiction) where he and a gold-hunting American (John Tudor) contend for Joan's affection. Tudor seems to have the upper hand because of his grinning bravado and sexual aggressiveness, but Joan also responds to Sheldon's gritty stubbornness and loyalty. Indeed, both males seem to represent a division of London's idealized self-image. This romantic competition is violently resolved in Sheldon's favor by means of an absurd modern duel fought with firearms; Tudor is wounded and defeated by Sheldon. But Joan too is one of London's female projections of his idealized self, a composite of feminine emotional sensitivity and masculine prowess with guns and horses. Her faith in Anglo-Saxon individualism clearly expresses London's Social Darwinistic creed of the self-made white man. Also, her sturdy physical ability to ward off tropical diseases and dominate the tropical environment is a wish-fulfillment that offsets the author's own bodily decay in the Solomons (just as Charmian London bore up in the malarial tropics better than Jack did).

Although she mocks his paternalism, Joan becomes Sheldon's business partner and infuses her \$7,000 patrimony into his failing plantation. She also nurses the fever-ridden and "mad" Sheldon back to health, shoots a Malaitaman to save Sheldon's life, and stands beside him to vanquish an armed gang of "fourscore cannibals" who threaten Berande (London 1917, 242). In contrast to his backward financial management, Joan opportunistically sees the need to expand their markets, get more productivity out of their contract laborers, recruit and sell more slaves from Malaita, and compete more successfully in the emerging global economy. In addition to being a fine sailor and a daring adventuress, Joan most of all is London's type of the shrewd business(wo)man. As an American, she shows far less reverence than Sheldon for the authoritarian codes of Euro-colonialism—indeed, French, German, and British officialdom in the South Seas is mocked throughout *Adventure* as venal and inept (London 1917, 65 *passim*). Her scofflaw attitudes toward British anti-blackbirding laws eventually save Sheldon from financial catastrophe and the loss of his plantation. But although she shares Sheldon's white supremacism and reliance upon the

slave trade, she criticizes his harsh treatment of his labor force as bad management. She insists that good business practice requires a measure of racial uplift to promote morale and productivity among the contract workers—which was the gradualist attitude of the day for “improving” indigenous peoples by encouraging them to look up to and emulate whites. Even so, her racial idealism has its limits.

The turning point comes when she herself becomes a blackbirder to save Berande, which is losing its workforce as time-expired workers go back home. New labor recruits are urgently needed to expand planting operations. Therefore, she acquires a ship and enters the labor trade to carry off more Melanesians. Joan’s blackbirder is a salvaged schooner called the *Martha*, the biggest in the Solomons (London 1917, 226). She takes a Malaitan chief hostage, and under threat of violence, she forces 150 of his men to become blackbirds on her ship, bound back to Berande. This abduction/extortion was an open breach of the Pacific Islanders Protection Act of 1872, although a common practice among blackbirders because of the lack of government oversight (Corris 1973, 101). Thus, she casually breaks the anti-blackbirding laws of the day in much the same way that Sheldon does when he savagely whips his workers—he is supposed to turn them over for punishment to the Resident Commissioner in nearby Tulagi, the colonial capital of the British Solomons.

That is, to protect her economic investment, Joan takes part in and actively supports near-slavery in hopes of a financial steal. Her racial tolerance, it turns out, is less earnest than her pursuit of quick profits and more land. Thus, she readily adopts Sheldon’s dream of absentee landlordism—a bourgeois hope to reap wealth, gain leisure, travel the world, and leave behind “the day-to-day oppression that produces their income” (Phillips 1999, 204). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that on the final page of the novel, with Berande now on solid business ground because of her success in the Coral Sea slave trade, Joan accepts at last Sheldon’s proposal of marriage. She does so following months of refusing to accede to his expectations for a conventionally submissive wife. However, her new role in a successful economic venture built on exploited indigenous labor has melted her opposition to marriage and legitimized a sexual bond with her business partner. Thus, their romantic union is the crowning moment of a Euro-American “adventure” to raid the resources of the Pacific, including the human capital of its people, and to elevate the white race to its appropriate pinnacle. Even in the face of oligarchic forces that seek to ruin them (as Joan’s bankrupted late father was ruined), this highly commercialized Euro-American couple shrugs off monopoly domination to become independently rich planters and traders in the tropics. On this level, the marriage has a symbolic business logic beyond any physical attraction. As a

morally sanctioned partnership that establishes their success in the globalized marketplace, their marriage vindicates Joan's financial investment in Berande and completes her project to rehabilitate Sheldon, who in the opening pages of the novel was both a physical and financial ruin. These Euro-American adventurers are now joined into a single business enterprise. Each contributes what the other lacks to be whole, as Joan's surname Lackland ("lack-land") indicates. Sheldon contributes the acreage he has carved from the wild swamps of Guadalcanal, and Joan contributes the private capital, investment know-how, and reckless success in the South Sea slave trade to turn them from dreamers into raiders, prevailing over all odds to mark the victory of imperialism in Melanesia. Together they fulfill what Joan calls their white "racial destiny" (London 1917, 106), exercising their atavistic right to take away the commodities of non-white peoples (including their sturdy bodies) and to convert them into commercial gain and social rise. Thus, we learn that this marriage had always been determined by their white "blood" and that the howling gale from which Joan emerged onto Sheldon's beach was deterministically pushing her toward her destiny as a successful blackbirder in the last phase of the South Sea slave trade.

However, neither Dave nor Joan—nor more important, Jack London himself—was prescient enough to foresee that within a generation the racially and economically stratified world of the imperial Pacific would be demolished by World War II. Surrender by Japan in 1945 would not stem the wide tide of Asian, Indonesian, and Oceanic nationalism that was swelled by Japan's early wartime successes in expelling Euro-American colonialism from East Asia and the South Pacific. However self-serving and brutal its goals, Japan's anti-Western drive to create a vast pan-Asian sphere gained early support from indigenous independence leaders across the region (Spector 1984, 465). They launched an anticolonial crusade that accelerated after Japan's surrender and eventually led to the overthrow of British, Dutch, and French empires in South Asia and the South Pacific. These world-changing events did, in fact, occur within Charmian London's long life, before her death in 1955 at age 83. Early in World War II, she even received a visit in California from US Navy representatives, who took possession of "the *Snark's* charts and logs for use in planning an assault on the Japanese" in poorly mapped areas of the southwest Pacific around Guadalcanal (Stasz 1988, 187); Charmian herself played a small part in the far-eastern conflict that tore apart the old colonial world of Joan and Dave Sheldon. Thus, despite Jack London's intention for the upbeat conclusion of *Adventure* to convey the inevitability and durability of white control of the Pacific, the triumphal wedding at the close of the novel fails to prefigure the rapidly approaching breakdown of white dominion over the tropics and the death of European empire.

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