

## Jack London on the Fringe of Things

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Looking at a pair of Jack London stories set in the South Seas (from Polynesia to Melanesia), this essay traces the material fate of objects that take on special significance during disorienting transactions between Westerners and native islanders encountering one another across nebulous zones of contact on land and at sea. For Westerners these commodities (including slaves) circulate in an abstract global system of exchange, homogenized in value either by money or trade items such as tobacco. But for the Pacific natives these objects come to signify a kind of irreducible subjectivity ultimately tied to a corporeal integrity that struggles to resist the depersonalizing tendencies of worldwide capitalism. While London understands that the postcolonial condition makes it impossible to return to indigenous forms of value and identity, his ironic depictions of these entanglements between peoples and things (suggesting at once the power and limits of Western incursion) testify to his rather shrewd understanding of early twentieth-century globalization and its discontents.

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Setting sail for the South Seas in 1907 at the height of his fame, Jack London would appear to have been repeating himself. Ten years earlier he had traveled to the far North to seek his fortune in the Klondike, drawing on his experiences in Yukon territory to make his first mark as a writer. The Northland would define London as a master of naturalist short stories set in a primitive region that fiercely tested and defined white manhood. In these early short story collections, I have previously argued (47-83), his young adventurers' interactions with native tribes, particularly women, enabled London to invent for himself a complex symbolic genealogy, with miscegenation - real, threatened, imaginary - at its thematic center. But a decade later, his cruise aboard the *Snark* led London to explore a rather different set of issues, beyond a mere change in setting (from icy to tropical), and beyond his significantly changed position as a now secure, established author.

This new agenda, I submit, recasts cross-cultural contact in terms of economic rather than sexual exchange. Constituting a thematic thread from story to story, south sea island to south sea island, these encounters between Westerners and natives foreground the material status of certain special objects that London struggled to understand in relation to what Arjun Appadurai has termed "the politics of value" (3-63). The central figures in this drama are no longer adventurers but traders and other cultural intermediaries, buying and selling and giving and borrowing and bartering things. Nicholas Thomas has aptly dubbed such contested items "entangled objects," ones he examines in relation to the appropriations and reappropriations of material goods between Oceania peoples and European explorers, missionaries, and settlers throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Having arrived belatedly at a disorienting watery region, a loosely scattered array of islands already settled, colonized and exploited for over a century by various Europeans and Americans, London ruminates on the life of these powerful objects amidst volatile and uncertain zones of contact, at sea and on land, in an amorphous space both greater and lesser than any single nation-state.

London's Pacific short stories trace his progressively westward journey from Hawaii to the Polynesian islands (The Marquesas, Tahiti, the Cook Islands) to the Samoan and Fiji islands (a mixture of Polynesian and darker Melanesian races), and finally to the outer reaches of the Melanesian Solomon Islands, which Charmian London in her *The Log of the Snark* called "a black and unstable world" (434), and which Jack London in his *The Cruise of the Snark* located "on the fringe of things" (267). Beyond signaling the remoteness of The Solomons, a kind of end of the world, the phrase "fringe of things" literally calls attention to the way that objects materially shape subjects during episodes of negotiation. In the absence of traditional or national identity formations, these objects carry special significance for the native islander. A sequence of three stories, "The House of Mauphi," "The Whale Tooth," and "Mauki," the initial three in order as published in *South Sea Tales* (1911), can be read in relation to the *Snark's* journey from Polynesia to Melanesia. Concentrating on the first and third of this trio, I focus on London's growing interest in a vision of cross-cultural encounter where things - traded, displayed, exchanged, and gifted - mutually constitute the values of both colonizers and colonized, seeming at once to confirm and resist the universalizing abstractions of globalization.

Set on Hikueru, one of the low islands of the Tuamotu Archipelago in French Polynesia, "The House of Mapuhi" divides sharply into two distinct halves. The first half details a series of negotiations centering on a magnificent, colossal pearl, "softly luminous, gleaming like a tender moon"

(1386). The Polynesian title character Mapuhi seeks to exchange this "perfect sphere" with first one trader, Alec Raoul, the son of a quarter-caste, and then another, the half-caste trader Toriki, who seizes the pearl to discharge a debt, and in turn sells it to a third trader Levy, "the German Jew, the greatest pearl-buyer of them all" (1389). London then shifts gears to describe in great detail a tremendous hurricane that hits the island just as these transactions are winding down. Based on an actual cyclone that devastated Hikueru in 1903, London's powerful account of the storm would seem to have little to do with the opening business. I will shortly discuss the significance of the storm, as well as the story's insistent racial and ethnic categorizing in relation to the pearl's escalating price. But for now I want to stress how in so focusing on the process of negotiation itself as the foundation of value, London largely ignores matters of production and consumption: the labor initially required to wrest the pearl from nature and its presumed eventual fate as a commodity, a piece of Western jewelry. While the story opens with a description of the native pearl divers "at work" (1385) on Hikueru's lagoon, London rejects a labor-theory of value, preferring instead to emphasize the pearl as simply a "found" object (1386) that triggers intense yearning on the part of all of the trading parties.

The key moment of the story occurs when the neophyte trader Alec Raoul nonchalantly asks Mapuhi, surrounded by his wife, his mother, and his daughter, what he wants for the pearl.

"I want-" Mapuhi began, and behind him, framing his own dark face, the dark faces of two women and a girl nodded concurrence in what he wanted. Their heads were bent forward, they were animated by a suppressed eagerness, their eyes flashed avariciously.

"I want a house," Mapuhi went on. "It must have a roof of galvanized iron and an octagon-drop-clock. It must be six fathoms long with a porch all around. A big room must be in the center, with a round table in the middle of it and the octagon-drop-clock on the wall. There must be four bedrooms, two on each side of the big room, and in each bedroom must be an iron bed, two chairs and a washstand. And back of the house must be a kitchen, a good kitchen, with pots and pans and a stove. And you must build the house on my island, which is Fakarava." (1386)

It's a remarkable scene for a number of reasons. While the incredulous Raoul in response calls Mapuhi a "fool," and asks him simply to "set a money price," the native repeatedly refuses, explicitly rejecting Raoul's suggested amount, in Chili (trade) dollars, to insist again on the building of

the house. London describes the baffled trader's "mental arithmetic" that enables him to estimate building materials and labor to arrive an equivalent sum of currency. But in so rebuffing Raoul's calculated amount (1000 dollars), Mapuhi more profoundly rejects the very idea of a money economy altogether, the "unobstructed and fluid transition of value" that Karl Marx in *Grundrisse* identified as "the fundamental condition" (535) for capitalism.<sup>1</sup> Mapuhi prefers instead the unmediated realization of his desire, its substance. Raoul points out that the fulfillment of this demand is impractical: "'What good will the house do you?' Raoul demanded. 'The first hurricane that comes along will wash it away. You ought to know. Captain Raffy says it look like a hurricane right now'" (1387). But Mapuhi replies, with some reason, that his own island is on higher ground than Hikueru, and reiterates his claim verbatim: "'It must be six fathoms long with a porch all around.'"

Flying in the face of the most basic assumptions about global commerce, Mapuhi's demand is not borne of suspicion about Westerners - he trusts the mixed caste Raoul to build his house, after all - but rather betrays a more fundamental misapprehension about the fungibility of money, its presumption to establish an underlying basis of equivalence between commodities that would locate value on a single plane of exchange. The native's stubborn refusal to accept money is a negation, as Franz Fanon invoked the concept: "As soon as I desire I am asking to be considered ... I demand that notice be taken of my negating activity insofar as I pursue something other than life; insofar as I do battle for the creation of a human world - that is, a world of reciprocal recognitions" (218). For London these reciprocal recognitions become materially embodied in surprising ways during the process of exchange itself.

Holding out for some alternative to the logic of capitalism, Mapuhi's negation is an ironic form of subversion, challenging entrenched Western beliefs about the equivalence of value. Yet the content of his desire is anything but scandalous, since what the native wants for the treasure he fished from the sea is not indigenous tokens of wealth and status, but the stuff of turn-of-the-century European culture at its most resolutely bourgeois and domestic: a house and all of its trappings, including a sewing machine and that late Victorian "octagon-drop-clock" which is mentioned five times during the course of the narrative. Here we see that Mapuhi's desire is resolutely gendered as well, a point which London underscores by showing how the "dark faces" of wife, mother, and daughter all goad him on. The

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1. For a famous precursor South Seas story whose plot similarly turns on currency and currency exchange, see Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Bottle Imp."

home is clearly at once a place and a desire, suggesting some sort of double-edged compensation for the colonized subject's, or rather the colonized family's, loss of indigenous roots. It may be argued, more specifically, that yearning for a sewing machine speaks to the native's quest for economic self-sufficiency, yet the sewing machine also conjures up tenement sweatshops that signify economic enslavement, not liberation. Given the incongruity of the context, it's hard to say why Mapuhi and his family want these particular items and what they mean, but we are left to wonder if and how it matters to them that these are the white man's things, that is, if Mapuhi's desire to live like a white man in a white man's house betrays the colonized's desire to supplant the colonizer, as Fanon claimed: "The fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master's place" (46).

As I've suggested, London in so focusing on exchange in the story doesn't say much about the sources and ends of desire, but it is worth considering where Mapuhi may have latched onto his imaginary house in the first place. His reiterated description, filled with exacting measurements and details, reads like a blueprint or a floor plan rehearsed from memory, evoking the advertisements for prefabricated model houses that show up in American ladies magazines in the first decades of the twentieth century. Displayed on the pages of the *Ladies Home Journal* and the *Woman's Home Companion*, these model houses were designed to inculcate middle-class morality for workers and immigrants striving to buy into the American way.<sup>2</sup> London's brilliant conceit here is to imagine a family of remote South Sea islanders in their native environs as newly arrived immigrants trying to learn the ways of the West by possessing and mastering its material spaces and goods. Mapuhi and his women seek to define themselves in relation to a dream of domestic consumption, but in the absence of any consumer culture to speak of. Collapsing the distinction between the foreign or exotic and the familiar or domestic, the effect of incongruity is even more complex once we realize that London contracted to publish accounts of his Pacific voyage in the *Woman's Home Companion*, where he also unsuccessfully submitted this very story, "The House of Mapuhi" itself. Taking into account London's mass magazine audience brings us full circle, for in imagining his Polynesian characters as potentially his own readers, London points to a curious kind of standardizing or modeling of desire that emulates Western domestic ideals at the same time that it refuses to accept the means (money) to materialize them.

This global rationalizing of desire becomes even clearer in the second half of the story. After protracted negotiations for the pearl conclude between

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2. For discussions of such model houses, see Wright 162-66, and Banta 205-71.

the two other traders, the storm that has been brewing from early on turns into a full-blown hurricane. After a period of uncanny calm, the wind hits with ungodly force. In one of Jack London's greatest pieces of nature writing, Raoul barely survives, strapped to a tree, Toriki and Levy go down in their ships, hundreds of islanders are drowned, and Mapuhi's family is literally blown apart.

The contrast between colonial trading and the storm's fury would seem to lend itself to a predictable allegorical reading: divine nature wipes clean all pathetic human attempts to establish value, returning the pearl to the depths from whence it came.<sup>3</sup> Yet in still another curious twist in the narrative, London concludes his tale by detailing the protracted three-week ordeal of Mapuhi's mother Nauri, who is swept away to another island, where she reappropriates the pearl from the pocket of the drowned trader Levy, who epitomizes the deracinated nature of the subject of global capitalism. We realize that value is not lost, only temporarily suspended by the advent of the hurricane, as the pearl (improbably) ends up where it began, not in nature, but in the hands of the native who originally found it. London thus suggests how the storm serves to right a particular wrong, not to deny the (often imbalanced) negotiation of desire that London presents as the basis of all exchange. In this reading, nature and culture are not opposed, but rather work together to establish the rightful value of things.

What connects the extended description of the hurricane and the bargaining for the pearl, we see, is precisely rational calculation, an obsessive means of measurement that runs throughout both halves of the story. Herein lies the significance of the devoutly cherished "octagon-drop-clock," an object that is seemingly simply another indication of the incongruity of Mapuhi's demand, a bourgeois domestic adornment with little practical use in the South Seas. Its counterpart in the storm sequence is a sea captain's barometer, which makes its first appearance immediately after Mapuhi initially presents his vision of a house, "six fathoms long." A captain's mate suddenly enters to warn that "[t]he barometer's dropped to twenty-nine-seventy," information which Raoul immediately follows with his counter offer: "A thousand Chili dollars, cash down, Mapuhi" (1388). Signaling

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3. This is essentially the point of Steinbeck's allegorical novella *The Pearl*, which is a sentimental rewriting of the London story. I should mention that London in effect also rewrites his own tale, making a similar juxtaposition between a storm and pearl dealing in a later story "The Pearls of Parlay" published in *A Son of the Sun* (1912). Pearls in these stories allude to the parable of the Pearl of Great Price (*Matthew* 13), as Reesman points out (139).



the hurricane's growing intensity, even during its period of invisible calm, the falling numbers of the barometer ("twenty-nine-twenty," "twenty-nine-ten," "twenty-nine flat," "twenty-eight-sixty," "twenty-eight-twenty") are juxtaposed in the story with the rising dollars attached to the pearl.

The clock, the barometer, Mapuhi's house dimensions (cast in advertising copy), and the pearl's worth are thus parts of a larger system of reification governing the tale. While the native's rejection of a money price signals his refusal to believe in the fungibility of commodities, such abstraction and standardization inevitably takes hold throughout the story as London tries to account for transactions in time, space, value, and desire itself. By the story's end, even the stubborn South Sea islanders now show a new respect for currency, as Nauri concludes: "It will be better if we take the thousand French in cash. Money is better than credit in buying goods from the traders" (1404).

Mapuhi's acceptance of money after Nauri's return supports another sort of allegorical reading of the storm, which functions as a displaced, naturalized version of the historical violence marking the various struggles for liberation from colonial powers around the globe during the twentieth century. It may be giving Jack London too much credit to suggest that he is anticipating these wars in his intense rendering of the hurricane and Nauri's struggle to survive its aftermath. But the condition of the islanders post-storm in the story certainly mirrors a postcolonial situation, where life cannot be innocently restored to any precolonial state of affairs. Before the storm, London makes it clear from the start that there are no indigenous forms or expressions of value for Mapuhi and his family, so that after the storm, all they can do is reach some sort of adjustment, accepting the abstractions of global capitalism, but insisting that the surviving trader Raoul must still materially build the house for them - a kind of parody of Victorian domesticity, radically displaced in its tropical island setting.

Naturalized as a hurricane, the violence of colonial relations is only a subtext in "The House of Mapuhi." Race remains submerged, shifting from the "dark faces" of the native family to the mixed blood of the traders, finally to be located in the white corpse of the German Jew. In London's other Pacific stories collected in *South Sea Tales*, however, corporeal brutality is far more explicit and racial representations are less benign. Put off by London's apparent endorsement of white supremacy in many of these cruel tales, critics have tended to slight them, or read them primarily as hyperbolic and fierce demonstrations of Darwinian evolutionary theory.<sup>4</sup> Yet attending to material objects that play such a crucial role during these troubled en-

4. See, for instance, Moreland 1-35.

counters between white and native, we are in a better position to appreciate the exactitude with which London depicts colonial economics as working at the particular expense of bodies. What makes the white man inevitable in the Pacific, it would seem, is less racial superiority per se than his thirst to commercially exploit, or "harvest" the darker races, as a character bluntly remarks in one of these stories ("The Inevitable White Man"): "The white man's mission is to farm the world" (1558).

While such exploitation remains a secondary concern in "The House of Mapuhi," "Mauki" addresses the consequences of colonial traffic in bodies more directly, suggesting in the process the profoundly disturbing effects on native subjectivity itself. The story is initially set on Malaita, "the most savage island in the Solomons - so savage that no traders nor planters have yet gained a foothold on it" (1532). Unlike the Polynesian Hikueru, this island offers no room for pearl buyers, and yet this does not mean it is exempt from Western incursion, as London proceeds to make clear:

So Malaita remains to-day [sic], in the twentieth century, the stamping ground of the labor recruiters, who farm its coasts for laborers who engage and contract themselves to toil on the plantations of the neighboring and more civilized islands for a wage of thirty dollars a year. The natives of those neighboring and more civilized islands have themselves become too civilized to work on plantations. (1532)

On this most remote "fringe of things," it is not objects that change hands, but rather persons themselves. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, whites (mostly British) sailed the South Pacific looking to find and transport indentured plantation workers, a common practice called blackbirding.<sup>5</sup> Unlike "The House of Mapuhi," in this story London is therefore most definitely concerned with work. But, as we shall see, work here is less a mode of production than a means of punishment doled out measure by measure.

London narrates the life history of one labor recruit named Mauki, first stolen as a child by bushmen and given to a tribal chief Fanfoa, who orders his teenage slave to sign on with a recruiting vessel for "half a case of tobacco advance, along with knives, axes, calico and beads, which he [Fanfoa] would pay for with his [Mauki's] toil on the plantations" (1534), in this case three years on plantations owned by the "Moongleam Soap Company"

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5. On the practice of blackbirding, see Phillips 13-27. Jack London (*The Cruise*, 262-294) and Charmian London (*The Log*, 386-422) each describe participating in a nine-day blackbirding expedition in the Solomons aboard *The Minota*, but both emphasize adventure and danger rather than the abuse of labor.



(1535). The negotiation between Melanesian tribal chief and global corporation thus moves effortlessly from tobacco to soap. Fanfoa is motivated primarily by being "out of tobacco," first obtained by killing two white men, then lost in punishment, finally restored by the transfer of his slave. For its part, the company seeks to convert Mauki's pledge, enforced by "the ferocious will of the white man ... and all the power and all the warships of Great Britain" (1535), into the labor necessary to turn coconut oil into Victorian society's prime fetish for cleanliness, soap.<sup>6</sup>

Given that Mauki's position within this worldwide circulation of commodities is akin to "a pig or a fowl," what constitutes his character's subjectivity? London begins to address this question at the beginning of his story, by focusing on the man's physical attributes:

He weighed one hundred and ten pounds. His hair was kinky and Negroid, and he was black. He was peculiarly black. He was neither blue-black, but plum-black. His name was Mauki, and he was the son of a chief. He had three *tambos* ... Of a different black were his teeth, which were deep black, or, perhaps better, *lamp*-black ... Mauki's ears were pierced, not in one place, nor two places, but in a couple of dozen places. In one of the smaller holes he carried a clay pipe ... and for a Melanesian it was a remarkably good-looking face. Its one fault was its lack of strength. It was softly effeminate, almost girlish ... The chin was weak, and the mouth was weak ... In the eyes only could be caught any hint of the unknown quantities that were so large a part of his make-up and that other persons could not understand. (1532-33)

Marked racially before he is given a name, Mauki is built body part by body part through a series of incongruous effects combining the recognizable with the unfamiliar. We might be reminded of Mapuhi's surprising request for a house, but in this case the South Sea Islander's incongruity is corporeal, reinforcing his status as a thing. While both Mapuhi and Mauki are shaped by gender in ways that cut across cultures, Mauki's femininity is actually inscribed on his face. His peculiar plum blackness at once exoticizes him as a strange primitive and yet particularizes him in ways we might find comforting, suggesting a distinct consciousness or psychology behind the mask of color. This mixture of Otherness and the familiar runs through

6. For soap's role in Victorian "commodity racism," see McClintock 207-231. McClintock extensively examines soap advertisements, but only briefly (211) touches on its production from coconut oil in relation to the exploitation of colonial labor in the South Seas. London's fictitious "Moongleam Soap Company" presumably alludes to the Pears Soap Company.

London's description of the native, who would seem to possess bourgeois forms of individuality, such as a mother and a father and "personal belongings" and a trio of taboos that roughly correspond to Western notions of personality quirks, yet whose contents (never eating a clam, shaking hands with a woman, or touching a crocodile) reaffirm his distance from us.<sup>7</sup>

In making Mauki the hero of his story, London clearly wants us to sympathize with his plight, his intense desire for liberty and dignity and personal freedom; yet for the most part he seems content to account for the silent Mauki from without, as a sum of body features and measurable quantities, with very little mediation between his interior and exterior. What counts is Mauki's behavior. London in the first half of the story recounts his repeated failed efforts, nearly a dozen, to run away from his indentured servitude and return to his home. In detailing Mauki's thefts and escapes with such tedious repetition, London seems more interested in recording the calculus of punishment than in celebrating the indomitable will of the fugitive. As in "The House of Mapuhi," colonial experience is measured by a relentless quantification, a logic of numbers and equivalences, as transgression upon accumulating transgression translates Mauki's labor into time and money:

But daylight brought a cutter, in which were two white men, who were not afraid of eleven Malaita men armed with twelve rifles ... And the great white master held a court, after which, one by one, the runaways were tied up and given twenty lashes each, and sentenced to a fine of fifteen dollars ... The fine of fifteen dollars had been paid by the men from whom he had run away, and he was told that he would have to work it out, which meant six months' additional toil. Further, his share of the stolen tobacco earned him another year of toil. (1537)

It's as if Mapuhi's octagon-drop-clock has been enlisted to count out and in effect narrate Mauki's punishment, year by year. When he finishes totaling up Mauki's sentences, what London significantly calls the "tale" - his character's tally - "was now eight years and a half" (1538), the sum of years he owes the Company. Since he has no resources but his own labor, time rather than money becomes the medium of exchange between Mauki, the goods he steals, his penalties, and the rewards put up to secure his recapture. Both these rewards and thefts materially center on tobacco, a second exchange medium akin to money that caused him to be signed over

7. For brief descriptions of the Melanesian servant on the Lord Howe atoll who served as the inspiration for Mauki, see Charmian London 445 and Johnson 319.

to the Moongleam Company in the first place. Tobacco becomes the narrative's all-pervasive trade item, at once material and abstract, which begins to function simply as a stand-in for Mauki himself. Under colonial economics, what's the difference between a labor recruit and a stick of tobacco?

Yet London does manage to tell us what makes Mauki a person and not a thing, and he does so paradoxically by way of a thing itself. Describing the South Sea islander's ear piercings, London ponders the "embellishments" adorning his face:

Mauki was catholic in his tastes. In the various smaller holes he carried such things as empty rifle cartridges, horseshoe nails, copper screws, pieces of string, braids of sennet, strips of green leaf...His most prized possession was the handle of a china cup, which he suspended from a ring of turtle-shell, which, in turn, was passed through the partition-cartilage of his nose. (1533)

Although London calls the china cup handle Mauki's "possession," insofar it is physically attached to his body/face, it is not a piece of alienable property and therefore remains exempt from the circulation of trade items such as tobacco that are openly exchanged for the bodies of Melanesian slave labor. Calling attention to the Victorian ritual of tea drinking, itself linked to British imperialism in Asia, the china cup handle is a fragment of bourgeois domesticity perversely appropriated, recontextualized, and made his own by the "taste" of an effeminate victim of plantation exploitation. Affixed and hanging at the center of Mauki's face, the cup handle mediates between his inside and his outside, serving as a material sign of his subjectivity. Mauki may not be able to realize a house such as Mapuhi's, but at least he carries with him (or more accurately, on him) his own version of the domestic.

This special object takes on greater significance in the second half of the story, when the Moongleam Soap Company tries literally to domesticate Mauki, to turn him permanently into a house servant. Here London shifts from the large-scale global effects of colonial crime and punishment to stage a more intimate confrontation between this one recalcitrant labor recruit and an equally unruly Moongleam trader, a sadistic German named Max Bunster, who has been sent by the Company to Lord Howe, an obscure atoll 150 miles north of the main Solomons. Dubbed "the falling-off place," Lord Howe in its extremity and remoteness marks the outer limits of colonialism for London. Both Mauki the "primitive savage" and Bunster the "degenerate brute" end up here because they are misfits, neither one able to adjust to the

rules of the soap company's global plantation system. It is as if all the excesses and horrors of the system are now concentrated in this one small place in the middle of nowhere. During one key moment of rage, the savage trader rips the cup handle from Mauki's face, and soon after takes the skin off Mauki's back "from neck to armpit" with a mitten he has fashioned from the skin of a ray fish. These two sadistic acts constitute the turning point of the story, for only after losing the twin corporeal markers of his identity, his plum black color and his prized hanging cup nose ring, is Mauki able to exact his revenge. Planning the destruction of the white trader, suddenly weakened by fever, Mauki packs the china cup handle into "his trade box" as he is preparing to divulge his scheme to the village elders. No longer a part of him, the object is now simply an alienable piece of property ready to be exchanged like any other. It is precisely at this moment that London gives Mauki the power of speech, the first and only time we directly hear him express himself. Once flayed and defaced, Mauki can realize a Western form of self-expression, a trader's pidgin English that levels all local differences among disparate islanders. But such a gain (if one can call it that) comes at the expense of his Solomon Island mode of signifying selfhood, the hanging cup handle. Although he manages to return home after killing the trader (with the same ray fish mitten used against him), Mauki is a different person. As a wealthy village chief he now owns "many other things." But his new prized possession is Bunster's decapitated head, the special source of his greatness for the villagers who regard it as a powerful "devil-devil" (fetish), which he is left solemnly contemplating at the conclusion of the story.

London substitutes the "precious" talismanic head for the "prized" china cup handle in order to dramatize Mauki's triumph over his enslavers, signaling a restoration of islander will, dignity, and tradition. Severed from the oppressor's body, the magic shrunken head functions as a new sort of alienated commodity, even as it reminds Mauki of his former objectification. But there are limits to native autonomy. Those limits are set by the "all-powerful" Moongleam Soap Company, which Mauki is said in the end still to fear even more than the British government. When the company with its inevitable white man comes to collect its debt of labor accrued through punishment, Mauki readily pays seven hundred and fifty dollars in gold sovereigns - "the money price of eight years and a half of labor plus the cost price of certain rifles and cases of tobacco" (1544). With this reference to the omnipresent trade item that triggered Mauki's sale in the first place, the tale thus comes full circle. As in the case of "The House of Mapuhi," nothing can fully escape or resist the worldwide reach of colonialism and

its markets. Following the westward wake of *The Snark* from Polynesia to Melanesia, we are left, like Mauki, to muse on the German's shriveled head, pondering those items of entangled value - a pearl, a clock, a china cup handle, two corpses, soap, many sticks of tobacco - that are bought, sold, traded, measured, imagined, consumed, appropriated, displayed, and displaced, like so many ironic emblems of twentieth-century globalization and its discontents.

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