



The Best of Robert Service

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This new and revised edition of poems about the men and women of the North features the most loved ballads by Robert Service, and is illustrated with lively art by Marilen Van Nimwegen. While living in Whitehorse, Robert Service wrote The Cremation of Sam McGee, and other well-known poems. He wrote and published into his mid-eighties. He was quoted as saying, I just go for a walk and come back with a poem in my pocket.

The Best of Robert Service Details

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From Reader Review The Best of Robert Service for online ebook

Richp says

It seems I prefer doggerel to intellectual poetry.

Kelsey Manning says

I loved this book mostly because it was fun to flip to a page and find a new poem to read. Maybe it is a poem that you have already read and are enjoying for the second time, but that is easy to do because all of the poems are so creative and interesting. I recommend this book to anyone who is looking for something interesting, sometimes with a twist at the end!

Mike (the Paladin) says

When I was in high school my "best subject" was public speaking (I know, the most feared thing in the world, public speaking. Maybe I'm put together wrong. Was it Seinfeld who pointed out that most people fear public speaking more than death...and that means that most people would rather be the corpse at a funeral than the speaker?) Anyway...we had to do a reading and while everyone else was doing Shakespeare or Poe, I read The Shooting of Dan McGrew.

I suppose the best know poem of Mr. Service is The Cremation of Sam McGee. Between the two mentioned, you can get a fair flavor of his work. I find that I don't often have the "quietness of mind" it takes to read and enjoy poetry. I always "feel" that I could and should be able to enjoy it more, but it doesn't happen often. When I do settle enough though, I love Service.

With the flavor of the Yukon and the gold rush, you can smell the wood smoke, feel the bite of the wind, hear the howl of the wolves. Mortality in every line, the fangs of Alaskan ice, the steel of a Bowie knife or the lead of a bullet is always here in the "land of the midnight sun". Nothing soft here, you're not getting into someone "finding his softer side" or "exploring his gentle feelings" you're entering a world that's hard, unforgiving, and often final...but sometimes with that trademark (often dark) humor.

Recommended.

Joey says

I really enjoyed this. Sure, its not the most intellectual of verse, but it is full of pleasant, poignant wisdom, humor and reflection. Service is required reading in my adopted state of Alaska, so I really picked this one up trying to fit in with the crowd. It far exceeded expectations. His "ballads of the north" are enjoyable and, having frozen my posterior off for now 13 Alaskan winters, I think he captured the arctic spirit spot on, but it was his other work to hit me most. Go ahead and skim the shootings and the cremations, but stop and slowly savor:

Contentment
Going Home
It is Later than you Think

and most importantly:

The Joy of Being Poor

This last title being my new favorite and theme song if you will in the coming new year. Not because I aspire to poverty, but because of its enlightening reminder of the power of simple pleasure and the angst that comes with amassing material wealth.

Scott Thompson says

I love the outdoors, and so does Robert Service. He connects to the natural through his words and shows us God in nature. I don't like to digest poetry books in one sitting. I like to read a little at a time. Good poetry should be absorbed like a fine wine, slowly.

I have this book on my Kindle smart phone app. Now it is always close to me when I need a break from the paved world.

Jeremiah Johnson says

This is one of my all time favorites. I think I've owned at least four separate copies and have given just as many as gifts. Service writes with great honesty and painful comedy. His depiction of the human condition in the throes of upheaval, destitution, war, and celebration are warm and invigorating with choice points of poignant realism.

Jen says

Strange...but true. My grandmother had 'The Cremation of Sam McGee' memorized, my Dad has it memorized, and boy I am trying to get the thing memorized. A family heirloom of sorts! I really want the children's book of 'The Cremation of Sam McGee' for my kiddos!

Harley says

When I first bought this book 10 or 15 years ago, I read a few of the poems and put it aside. I picked it up again a few weeks ago and have now read the entire book. Robert Service is a great storyteller who communicates through rhymed verse. Once I was able to get beyond the rhyming, I enjoyed what I read. During his lifetime (1874 - 1958), he actually made a living from his poetry. One poem, *The Shooting of Dan McGrew*, supposedly brought him half a million dollars by itself. He wrote poetry about the rugged Yukon

for the common person.

I was surprised that a number of his poems were anti-war including one of my favorites, *The March of the Dead*. The closing lines are:

*O God, in Thy great mercy, let us nevermore forget
The graves they left behind, the bitter graves.*

Other anti-war poems include *Bill the Bomber*, *My Job*, and *The Twins*.

Service also wrote a number of poems in the voices of women including *The Harpy*, one of my favorites. The poem opens with these line:

*There is no hope for such as I on earth, nor yet in Heaven;
Unloved I live, unloved I die, unpitied, unforgiven;
A loathed jade, I ply my trade, unhallowed and unshriven.*

A few lines later she says:

*With overhead a lamp of red I sit me down and wait
Until they come, the nightly scum, with drunken eyes aflame;
Your sweethearts, sons, ye scornful ones...*

Another one I liked was *The Outlaw* which tells the story of an outlaw who was hung for his crimes and when he appears before the judgement throne everyone thought he was bound for hell but a dog showed him love and God did not condemn him to hell but sent him back to earth reincarnated as a man.

I was also surprised by the humor that I found in many of the poems including *The Ballad of Casey's Billy Goat*, *Battle of the Bulge* and *Tea on the Lawn*.

I recommend this book to both poet and non-poet alike. Just don't let your personal bias and expectations get in your way. If you accept Service for who and what he is, you will enjoy the poetry.

Cathy says

A deluxe edition of the works of Service, with stunning period photographs of the Yukon territory he immortalized through his incomparable verses. Photos are from the famed Kinsey collection, taken in the 1890s during the height of the Klondike gold rush.

Stunning pictures and truly, Robert Service is a wordsmith, deluxe! Such fun poetry to read.

Margaret says

If you are a lover of free verse, you will probably not appreciate the work of Robert Service, as he writes in a lilting rollicking meter with rhyming verse as his medium. Although I was familiar with offerings like *The*

Cremation of Sam McGee and The Shooting of Dan McGrew, I was unaware of the sheer scope of his poetry. If rhyming verse is a problem for you, I suggest you try to put it into the background and enjoy the bone-chilling descriptions of the Yukon and its beautiful unforgiving geography. Many of the selections are more like tight little short stories with outrageous characters. A strong current of religious philosophy runs through much of the poetry, and just when you are beginning to think Service is taking himself too seriously he spins another surprise-ending ballad. There is a section of poems about World War 2 and Service's time spent in Paris; I didn't enjoy these as much as the ones about the wild and lawless north.

Rob says

More reviews can be found on my book blog.

I started reading this nearly two and a half years ago, just after my dad passed away, because *The Cremation of Sam McGee* was a poem he used to recite in his youth at his Masonic meetings. I really enjoyed that one, but then put it on my shelf after only reading half the poems in the book, forgetting about it entirely. It wasn't until recently when I happened to notice the bookmark in it that I remembered never having actually finished it.

Robert Service was born in England to a Scottish father, and at the age of five moved back to his father's hometown of Kilwinning. When he was twenty-one, he moved to southern Vancouver Island with dreams of becoming a cowboy. After travelling over much of western North America, he eventually took a job in Victoria at the Canadian Bank of Commerce. A year later, he was transferred to Kamloops, my hometown, for six months before heading to the Yukon. It actually makes me wonder now if my dad knew Service's history and if that came to his mind while deciding to emigrate from Scotland to western Canada.

Service seemed to love the gold rush. I don't know if all of his poetry centered on that, or if it was just this collection, but I think every poem in this had to do with the people of the gold rush and the northern landscape. There are many snow-capped peaks to be had in this little book. Some of this just felt like the sort of poetry you might find embroidered and hung on a kitchen wall. To be fair, though, I'm not sure I gave it a fair chance, as my natural reaction to encountering anything bordering on Canadiana is to immediately lose consciousness.

Some of these I did actually genuinely enjoy, and flipping through now I feel like I might have enjoyed more than I originally thought. The two-year break I took in the middle of this, combined with a few of the poems that really bored me, is probably tainting my memory of the collection as a whole. *The Cremation of Sam McGee*, *The Man From Eldorado*, and *The Men That Don't Fit In* are a few that stick out as being quite good. I start to drift when he begins to go on too much about snow, but he also writes about killers and the desperate and lost.

I'd like to find a copy of his autobiography, *Ploughman of the Moon, An Adventure Into Memory*. He lived an exciting life full of travel, and that would be fun to read about. I think I might revisit these poems soon as well. Just reading through a bit while writing this has piqued my interest again on a couple of the poems.

Wanda says

There are some old favorites in this collection like "The Cremation of Sam McGee." There are some thoughtful poems on such subjects as the true value of work, money, simple life, etc. Some are bawdy and irreverent. Others are beautiful. Some are gruesome and gritty. They are all written from the varied life he lead.

Danni says

this book belonged to my grandfather that recently passed away. I inherited it. Some of these poems I have heard him read so many times that I can hear him reading them. It is precious to me.

Benjamin says

Nothing too deep, everything is rhymed and metered, a lot of the sentiment is pretty corny. The adventure poems about the Yukon are great, I think they inspired some of the Don Rosa Scrooge McDuck stuff. Probably to blame for some of those Inspector Murdoch episodes, too.

The Great War poems aren't bad, considering. The Paris Bohemian poems are sweet. There is a set of folk-philosophizing that I felt was kind of weak. Probably the best poem in here is the one about the Pullman Porter.

Reading this, I kept asking myself, how did this get on my "to read" list in the first place? I must have stumbled on one of his poems in an anthology and thought it was cool. Or did I read somewhere that he wrote poems about workers? Or maybe it was Don Rosa all along?

Amy says

This isn't the edition I read. The one that I read has 6 of Robert Service's poems that are sure to be "the best of"s. They are excellent poems that put a picture in your head and a smile on your face. I learned about Robert Service while I was in Alaska and was not disappointed by his work. Since Alaska inspired Mr. Service it was appropriate and fun to read them while there. However, my husband has been reading the poems and he enjoys them as much as I even though he has never seen the likes of the Alaskan wild.

Matthew Dambro says

He was known as the "Canadian Kipling". His work has been denigrated by the critics and called mere doggerel, but people still read him aloud and love his work. Although known for his Yukon poems, his range is astonishing. His style is as old as Beowulf and just as dramatic. His poetry is meant to be heard and not read. I loved the book.

Wendy Joyce says

If you can find the large, illustrated edition, buy it! It's more than worth the extra money. The century-old photographs accompanying the poems take you right into the heart of Alaska, the trials, the hardships, the vigor of the men, the stamina of the women. While Service's poems have an innocent beat to them, like a Dr. Seuss's story, his language, par for the day, is candid and passionate.

Wendy Joyce

Nutkin says

A good collection of his works covering a number of topics. I was familiar with his famous works about the Yukon and have been able to quote sections of "The Cremation of Sam McGee" and "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" since I was a kid, but this introduced me to his poems on other topics.

I definitely found it handy to have my phone nearby to look up older terminology!

Poems tended to be about nature, living hard and working hard.

I actually discovered one of his poems ("Pantheist") that seems like it'd be a nice choice for my memorial service some day since I'm not religious, but love nature.

Casey Hampton says

A brief and enjoyable collection of Robert Service. I found the first half more engaging than the latter, but there are gems scattered throughout this work. The style of Service does show its age, his representation of minorities and women are certainly a reflection of his time. I think he's best when he doesn't aim for profundity. In the same way that the most beautiful laughter is that laughter which be authentic, Service is most true to his style when he turns his back to the reader and just observes a land, a happening, a rumination. Robert Service is best read aloud. And while it's tempting to ever only skim the surface for the humor or inferred social commentary, I encourage you to occasionally feel for deeper waters.

A few standout poems:

- * "The Ballad Of Blasphemous Bill"
- * "Victory Stuff"
- * "The Battle Of The Bulge"
- * "Heart Of The North"
- * "The Three Voices"
- * "Men Of The Nigh North"

Honorable mention goes to "The Ballad Of Casey's Billy Goat"

Brian says

This book of poetry gets even better the second time around. Robert Service wrote heroic poems of the Yukon at the turn of the last century. Each is a ballad, an ode to the way of life, a frontier long passed. The accompanying contemporary photography carries the reader into the past. Great read. I will be quoting from it.
