

Book and Media Reviews

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of the more straightforward, historical details of Tahiti both reveal and substantiate Newell's claims.

Trading Nature is written in a manner accessible to both academic and general audiences. Newell should be lauded for bringing into conversation two important streams of contemporary Pacific scholarship—the renewed interest in cross-cultural encounters and exchange and the rapidly emerging literature on culture and nature in the Pacific. For scholars already embedded in Pacific studies, Newell draws on familiar arguments about and episodes in early and mid-nineteenth century encounters across the Tahitian beach. At the same time, she offers keen, fresh insights into how many previously well-discussed moments can be viewed through a less familiar, ecologically driven framework. For a general reader, she offers memorable insights into specific ways in which natural and cultural interactions do not stand alone or in contrast to one another but are, rather, co-constituting and ever-present—if overlooked—features of day-to-day encounters.

ZAKEA BOEGER

University of Hawai'i, Mānoa

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Le paradis autour de Paul Gauguin, by Viviane Fayaud. Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2011. ISBN 978-2-271-07093-7; 278 pages, illustrations, bibliography, index. Paper, €26.98.

New Cytheria. Point Venus. Swaying palms and languorous vahine on the luxuriant shores of an island paradise. For many, the Western myth

of Tahiti is almost inextricable from the life and work of Paul Gauguin. Yet, as art historian Viviane Fayaud argues in this volume, Gauguin did not single-handedly invent what she calls French Oceanic Orientalism. Rather, he inherited an iconographic tradition with fascinating roots and surprisingly overlooked antecedents. Throughout the nineteenth century, voyaging artists—for instance, officers on French naval and scientific expeditions—produced thousands of sketches and drawings of their travels in the Society and nearby islands. Fayaud analyzes this representational corpus and explores how it paved the way for Gauguin's own fin de siècle celebrity and the enduring tropes now synonymous with his oeuvre.

“In searching for Polynesia in this iconographic collection,” Fayaud argues, “we find France first” and then “the world of the artists themselves” (212). The actual islands come into view only thereafter. She focuses her analysis on four artists in particular. The first two, Jules Louis Lejeune and Max Radiguet, Fayaud terms “expedition artists.” Lejeune served as official artist aboard *La Coquille*, a ship that circumnavigated the globe between 1822 and 1825. His somewhat technically limited work consists mostly of detailed renderings of Tahitian material culture and picaresque portraits of Tahitian notables. Working twenty years later, from 1842 to 1844, Radiguet voyaged on the *Reine Blanche*, a ship engaged in gunboat diplomacy in Tahiti and the Marquesas. His drawings predictably reflect the political concerns of the expedition and depict interactions between French marines

and the native population. Rather than focusing on the supposedly more exotic elements of life in Tahiti such as tattooing, Radiguet's drawings record the everyday—families going about household activities, women preparing food, men fishing. In representing the “trivial aspects” of Tahitian life, Fayaud argues that Radiguet's work leads to a “demythification of these paradisiacal islands” (98).

The other two artists discussed by Fayaud were less interested in illustrating the quotidian, though they arguably spent more time immersed in Tahitian society than either Lejeune or Radiguet. A career professional artist for the French Navy, Charles Giraud lived in Tahiti from 1843 to 1847. He spoke Reo Maohi, married a local woman, and fought in the Franco-Tahitian War, ultimately earning the Legion d'Honneur for his service. Fayaud describes Giraud as being equally comfortable among native Tahitians as he was with his fellow military officers. She notes, with perhaps undue surprise, that Giraud's art remained firmly anchored in Western aesthetic conventions despite his intimacy with Tahitian ways. Giraud favored majestic landscapes, harrowing military battles, and portraits of (preferably nubile, female) royalty.

Like Giraud, Julien Viaud also preferred the poetic to the commonplace. Viaud—better known by his nom de plume, Pierre Loti—is the least obscure artist tackled by Fayaud. Loti's 1880 novella *Le Mariage de Loti* helped spark the Tahiti-mania that ostensibly convinced Gauguin to purchase his ticket for the Pacific. Yet the drawings and paintings Loti pro-

duced as a young marine officer have received scant attention from either art historians or literary scholars. According to Fayaud, Loti's drawings bear little trace of the romantic melancholy that famously imbues his literary representation of Tahiti.

Fayaud brings to light an area of study that remains woefully under-researched, and this is one of the most significant merits of this volume. Nearly all nineteenth-century French maritime expeditions employed official artists—indeed they were considered requisite crew members. Artistic ability was in some sense a professional requirement for naval officers. During the Second Empire, candidates for admission to the *École navale impériale* were required to faithfully reproduce the likeness of a Greek statue as part of their entrance exams (51). Fayaud argues convincingly that more attention should be paid to these official artists, as their lives and work illuminate the many ways that “art opened the way for expansionism and justified colonial conduct” (58). Lejeune, Radiguet, Giraud, and Loti—unlike Gauguin—did not choose to paint or sketch Tahiti because of a preexisting fascination with its people or way of life. They were there as officers on French State expeditions. Their art, according to Fayaud, is thus inextricable from Empire.

Curiously, given such assertions, Fayaud does not engage with theories of power and representation. Moreover, throughout this volume, the issue of colonial violence rests uncomfortably just underneath the surface, alluded to but never examined—particularly as it figures in the

relationships between the artists and the Tahitians they painted. In describing how one of Radiguet's works depicts "Timao, the eldest son of the chief at Vaitahu," Fayaud offhandedly mentions that Timao's tonsured head is not traditional (85). In fact, Timao had been taken hostage by the ship's commandant several days earlier, and his hair was cut by the crew as part of an effort to force his father to capitulate to French demands. Given that Tahitians consider the head—particularly the head of a chief's son—to be tapu (sacred), this was an extreme act of violence and profanation. Radiguet's own implication in such events goes unexamined. In a later chapter focusing on the iconography of the vahine, Fayaud's inattention to the issues of power embedded in the highly gendered colonial gaze of the artists will also disappoint some readers.

Each of the four artists featured here painted landscapes, and Fayaud offers particularly detailed discussions of Radiguet's and Giraud's work in this area. She describes how Radiguet's Marquesan landscapes "accentuate the island's wild character" and the fact that the space was "largely unoccupied" (101). I think we can safely assume that the Marquesans did not think of their land as unoccupied. Giraud's paintings of Tahiti "privileged the rustic aspects of the landscape over exotic elements" and often "evoked the French countryside more than the tropics" (134). All of this points to landscape painting as a domesticating, colonial practice—yet Fayaud fails to push her analysis in this direction, despite a substantial body of literature offer-

ing potentially intriguing comparative perspectives.

This omission is at least partially due to the fact that most of this literature is in English. Fayaud cites few anglophone scholars, with the exception of Nicholas Thomas, Bronwen Douglas, and of course Bernard Smith. This is somewhat ironic given that Fayaud seems to advocate for increasing the dialogue between francophone and anglophone scholars of the Pacific. She asserts that a disconnect between French- and English-speaking scholars is partially to blame for the fact that while we know much about the work of men like William Hodges, Sydney Parkinson, or John Webber, we know almost nothing of French expedition artists. Three out of the four artists Fayaud discusses are entirely absent from Bernard Smith's seminal (and otherwise seemingly comprehensive) study of European representations of the Pacific.

For these reasons, despite some shortcomings, this is a useful volume that points to interesting directions for further research. Historians of European representations of Pacific people will welcome this latest addition to Pacific art history. In focusing on Gauguin's predecessors, rather than on the "grand homme" of French Pacific visual Orientalism himself, Fayaud demonstrates that the myth of Tahiti has a longer and much more complex history than previously documented.

TATE LEFEVRE
New York University

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