

*Island of Shattered Dreams*, by Chantal T Spitz. Translated by Jean Anderson. Wellington, NZ: Huia Press, 2007. Distributed by University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu. ISBN 978-1-86969-299-5. 163 pages. Paper, US\$19.00.

How difficult it is to assess a pioneering literary work. It is ahead of its time when it appears, marks an awakening occasioned by things already past, and yet is so much of its time that later readers can have trouble appreciating its significance as a contribution that cleared the way for the works and cultural conditions with which audiences today are more familiar. Chantal T Spitz is a pioneer of indigenous fiction from Tahiti, and the French version of this book, *L'île des rêves écrasés* (1991), created a scandal in Papeete for blowing apart the myth of happy egalitarianism under French assimilation; for openly criticizing the complicity of local elites in the destruction of Mā'ohi culture and self-respect; and for attacking France's nuclear testing in the Pacific. A text conflicted in its own workings and centrally engaged in the social conflict of the times, the novel charts the path to a younger generation of politically aware Islanders equipped with the skills and confidence to write about their troubled worlds.

*Island of Shattered Dreams* tracks the love affairs and family generations of Tahitian and mixed-race people within a colonial color hierarchy, showing the struggle to maintain cultural continuity and a sense of belonging in the face of growing alienation of soul and separation from land. It moves in a present-tense flow

interspersed with poetic outpourings at moments of emotional stress (births, separations, realizing new loves) and takes as its historical beginning the departure of the son, Tematua, to fight for France in World War Two. This and the subsequent movements of Tematua's children are framed by competing epigraphs: the Polynesian and Biblical creation stories, and a historical prophecy about the "fatal impact" of colonial contact.

The importance of names is highlighted by the narrator, making clear the impulse to employ allegory, both in the sense of the central couple representing Tahiti as a whole, and individual characters (eg, Tematua as strength) acting parts in what amounts to a morality play. This is consistent with Pacific theatrical conventions and helps novice readers faced with a groundbreaking text to see the significance of the plot. In retrospect, and from the outside, it can also make the book seem a bit contrived. This is not helped by the narrator "loading the dice" with regular commentary: "The descendants of the former royal family are proud to donate a few hectares of their ancestral lands to the Central Administration, *a first sign of the bankruptcy of a people that loses its soul when it sells its land*" (60; reviewer's italics). Hostile responses to the original work (in part because characters were recognizable from real life) may well have been aggravated by this insistent, strident style, though it was possibly necessary at the time to shock readers into action. There are echoes of the rhetorical violence of John Kasaipwalova's protest poem from Papua New Guinea, "Naked Flame" (including the hot-cold imagery of

native passion versus Western leaching of pride) in conformity with the early protest phase of literary production in a decolonizing country's cultural politics. This imagery of explosively hot feeling serves as a link to the nuclear testing in the second half of the novel, and while its positive Tahitian aspect is at odds with the disastrous French intervention, the human associations of the former make the latter seem an unnatural travesty of civilized values.

Robert Nicole has noted that Spitz names one character, Terii, after the lead figure in Victor Segalen's *Les Immémoriaux*, an outsider's 1907 novel of the tragic impact of European culture (and print media) on Tahitian oral and priestly culture (Nicole, *The Word, the Pen, and the Pistol: Literature and Power in Tahiti* [2001, 196]). One of the points here is to highlight the fact that, contrary to Segalen's nostalgic clearing away of the romantic past for an inevitable modernity, Tahitian culture lives on in ordinary Mā'ohi people. However, Spitz's countering of popa'a (European) views is also complicit with them, and the saccharine romance of Pierre Loti haunts her pages, and arguably contributes to some of the problems in the text. Heightening the emotional drama of cross-racial love exaggerates some of its problems, so that we wonder exactly why everything is so conflicted for mixed-race Emere/Emily; why her Tahitian lover (who has been fighting in Europe) needs her to open his mind to the world; and why the author reprocesses colonial binaries in which whites and half-whites are venal, urban, French-speaking, smart, literate, and exclusivist, while "natives" are "slow," kindhearted,

but also oral, earthy, and noncompetitive. Obviously there is a positive weight given to the latter, but it leaves the Islander trapped in a discursive box that threatens to perpetuate racist stereotypes.

Part of the impact of the original book was its style—not only its abrasiveness in relation to French literary tastes, but also its mixing the "master tongue" (French) with Reo Mā'ohi as an assertion of local literary competence. The translator, Jean Anderson, teaches French language at Victoria University, Wellington. She has translated works by Patricia Grace and Janet Frame and provides a short introduction to this volume, outlining some of the ways in which the original text transgressed conventions of elegant literary French (eg, repetition, capitalization of key ideas). She recognizes the way the text is infused with elements of Tahitian culture, maintaining the motif of "the belly" as the seat of the emotions, and supplying a glossary of Mā'ohi terms. She also acknowledges the importance of orality in shaping the book, but notes the difficulty in translating the distinction between "parole" (spoken) and "mot" (written) that Spitz consistently makes. What Anderson is not able to do is give the anglophone reader a literary context in which to appreciate the rhapsodic "poems" that keep bursting forth like items in a stage musical. It is clear that they are signs of Tahitian orality and constitute culturally validated spontaneous expression of emotion (untamed by any Wordsworthian retrospective tranquility). However, as free verse in English, they seem both banal and melodramatic; some greater sense of

the original structuring of rhythm and sounds would have helped to convey their full impact.

Although the story ends inconclusively, even pessimistically, it does predict the poverty and urban unrest of more recent times, and foreshadows efforts to recover Tahitian culture as a ground for independence struggles. While it remains conflicted, the book still impresses with the sheer passion of its lament and critique. It is well worth having available in English, as the Tahitian contributions to Pacific writing are not always as well known as they could be. If this edition sends readers back to the original and to other writing in both French and Mā'ohi, then it will indeed be a significant contribution to Pacific literary studies.

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*Solomon Island Years: A District Administrator in the Islands 1952–1974*, by James L O Tedder. Stuarts Point, NSW: Tautu Studies, 2008. ISBN 978-0-646-49018-2; 303 pages (including front matter), maps, photographs. Paper, £16.00.

This book joins a long list of colonial memoirs of Solomon Islands, which includes a much smaller number of considered historical accounts giving due respect to the Islanders as both colleagues and colonial subjects. It shares this distinction with Tom Russell's *I Have the Honour to Be* (2003); as Russell and James L O Tedder were contemporaries who

even worked in some of the same posts, it is curious that they do not make more mention of each other.

Tedder joined the colonial service in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate from Australia, and was posted to Malaita in 1952, a few years after Russell and in the wake of the Maasina Rul [Rule] independence movement. Tedder had to deal with its more local successor, the Federal Council, and gives an evocative account of arduous tours around the island, meeting local people and their leaders as he promoted the government's Malaita Council, encouraged economic development, and carried out routine administrative duties. What he does not deal with are the issues underlying the political situation on Malaita, falling back on a conventional description of Maasina Rul as "a type of independence and cargo cult movement" (31).

From Malaita, Tedder was posted to the neighboring island of Makira, farther from the colonial center of Honiara, less populated and less militant. There he continued to implement official policies promoting economic development through cash cropping, public health, education, and elected local councils. His recollections of colleagues, local and colonial, continue to be complimentary or diplomatic, the most severe criticism usually being that someone was "a little laid-back" (72). But as on Malaita, all this was work, from which Tedder, like other colonials, retreated into a family recreating the domestic life of Australia and a social life within the small European community. Attempts to socialize with "senior islanders"