3

Polynesian Promises

For climate, for loveliness, and grandeur of scenery, for comparative freedom from disease, for the gentleness of its own people—now so pitifully few—and because it is under the control of the convivial French, Tahiti is the best tropic island in the world ... I like Tahiti. I have always liked Tahiti. I do not know anyone who has been there twice who does not wish to return—some day, somehow. But I do not blind myself to what has happened on this fair island which was once near to Paradise—to what has happened, and is happening still.¹

The promise of an exotic island paradise in the Pacific was hard to resist. For Australians disenchanted with their lives at home, weary of the constraints of their society or apprehensive of the winter season, the Pacific offered escape and reprieve, either temporary or permanent. Just as explorers had previously done, travellers of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries re-inscribed the Pacific as a region in which fantasies could be enacted, freedom and prosperity could be sought and true happiness could be found. It was ultimately in the region of Polynesia that popular tropes of the exotic, erotic and utopian Pacific Island were most frequently located. These tropes reinforced the romanticised image of the Polynesian as being feminine, alluring and inviting, which contrasted the masculine and threatening image of the Melanesian 'savage'. Within Polynesia, Tahiti was upheld as the ideal and authentic tropical island and Tahitians as the preferred type of 'native'.

1 Alan John Villiers, *Cruise of the Conrad: A Journal of a Voyage around the World* (1937), 292.

Australian representations of Tahiti and Polynesia were based on an extensive corpus of European literature—both fiction and non-fiction—that employed romanticised stereotypes to categorise the region as superior and idyllic. The most powerful allegorical device was the female body, which was used to portray the Islands as being natural, fertile, abundant and inviting, and the Islanders as carefree, primordial, physical and impassioned. Ascribing feminine characteristics to unexplored territories in the Americas, the Orient and the Pacific reflected the masculine nature of travel and exploration, as well as legitimised European colonisation. The notion of the south Pacific was contrary to that of the European north, suggesting a region that was subject to physical impulses and in which the laws of nature were inverted.² Although much has been written about Polynesia from the perspective of the north, few historians have concentrated on observations made from the antipodes. Australians occupied a distinct position, as a colony of the north that was positioned in the south.

The geographic isolation of Tahiti and French Polynesia, as well as their enduring dominance in European literature and fantasy, contributed to a persistent Australian fascination with these Islands. Despite widespread awareness of the fragility and temporality of this paradise in the early twentieth century, Australians continued to employ romanticised stereotypes to describe this region. What is most surprising about Australian representations of Polynesia is that they remained relatively unchanged from 1880 to 1941. When compared to the accounts of Melanesian Islands, in which public opinion shifted in response to the region's changing political and economic developments, Australian accounts of Polynesia were unusually static. This is distinct from the colonial accounts of European and American travellers, which had changed over time. At the turn of the twentieth century, the colonial powers of the north were more invested in the eastern Pacific; they exerted greater influence over the region's societies compared to Australians, with French colonial claims to parts of this region limiting Australian mobility to the east. Although most Australians confirmed Polynesian stereotypes, travel writing can reveal traces of a more nuanced understanding of Australian notions of femininity, masculinity and sexuality in the Pacific Islands. This is evident in the accounts of the Australian idealists and escapists who pursued the utopian lifestyle in Tahiti and who described the limitations of the Polynesian ideal.

2 Patty O'Brien, *The Pacific Muse: Exotic Femininity and the Colonial Pacific* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 37, 57.

Paradise Found

The reports of three European explorers—Samuel Wallis, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville and James Cook—were influential in marking Tahiti as a ‘site of desire’.³ Reaching Tahiti in 1767, 1768 and 1769, respectively, these explorers’ accounts emphasised the beauty, sexual desire and desirability of the women whom they encountered; they drew on the European myths of Arcadia, paradise and utopia that had originated in classical antiquity and medieval Christianity.⁴ Although the sexual practices of the Tahitian *Arioi* held sacred and cultural significance, they were interpreted by Europeans as being symbolic of social freedom or moral weakness.⁵ These first reports of Tahiti, compounded by the arrival of Tahitians in Europe as early as 1769, generated public excitement and interest. Tahiti consequently became symbolic of the Pacific Islands as a whole in Europe’s imaginings. As a 1932 handbook described:

Ever since the exploration of the Society Islands by Cook, 150 years ago, writers and travellers have vied with each other in giving to tired humanity picturesque and delightful descriptions of the Society Islands; until Tahiti has come to be known, throughout the world, as the place of all others which most truly presents the beauty, charm and romance of the South Seas.⁶

In comparison, European visitors to Hawai‘i encountered stricter rules that regulated sexual exchanges. Additionally, the nature of US commercial tourism development in Hawai‘i in the 1900s ensured that the Island group was less mysterious than Tahiti and thus less desirable to Australian travellers.

The term ‘Polynesia’ was initially imbued with a sense of promise and potential. First coined by French geographer, Charles de Brosses, in 1756, it was used to encourage French expeditions in the Pacific, suggesting that the Pacific Ocean held ‘a large number of islands rich in spiceries’.⁷ However, it was not until the 1890s that the Pacific shifted from ‘being

3 Margaret Jolly, ‘Desire, Difference and Disease: Sexual and Venereal Exchanges on Cook’s Voyages in the Pacific’, in *Exchanges: Cross-Cultural Encounters in Australia and the Pacific*, ed. Ross Gibson (Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales, 1996), 187.

4 O’Brien, *The Pacific Muse*, 61; Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, 43.

5 Jolly, ‘Desire, Difference and Disease’, 197; Gavan Daws, *A Dream of Islands: Voyages of Self-Discovery in the South Seas* (New York: Norton, 1980), 8.

6 Robson, *The Pacific Islands Yearbook*, 309.

7 Tcherkezoff, ‘A Long and Unfortunate Voyage’, 179.

at the periphery of the imperial gaze to being at its centre', as argued by Patty O'Brien. In her history of exotic femininity in the Pacific, O'Brien emphasised the specific context in which the impressions of popular European travellers contributed to popular notions of the Polynesian idyll and how they made the female a central figure in both written narratives and visual forms. These European travellers included US writer Herman Melville, Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson, French artist Paul Gauguin and French novelist Pierre Loti. Accounts of Polynesia at this time reflected modernist concerns with primitivism, nature and sexuality, which challenged conventional European notions of race and gender. Concurrently, feminist movements advocated for women's political and economic independence from men; 'in these social and political struggles, the female body was strongly contested ground'.⁸ Although O'Brien highlights the broader racial and gendered dimensions of Polynesia's representations that were exhibited by colonial powers in the north, her analysis overlooks the specific historical context of Australian society and how it influenced popular tropes.

Arrival at Tahiti was highly anticipated by Australian travellers of the twentieth century, whose first glimpses of the Island confirmed that it was a natural paradise. As one 1920s handbook noted, 'Every traveller has extolled the beauty of Tahiti and the title "Paradise of the Pacific" is well bestowed'.⁹ The Island (and its capital port, Papeete) inspired travellers with its mountain peaks and luxuriant vegetation, which were deemed to be the 'most beautiful and picturesque' and 'superbly beautiful' in comparison to others.¹⁰ As Sydney Elliott Napier, a journalist, approached the Island in 1938, he wrote, 'And there, beyond, embowered in its scented groves, and bright against the dusky and contorted walls of triple-crowned Mont Diademe, we saw the roofs of queer, anomalous Papeete'.¹¹ Notably absent was any sense of danger or the sublime that was attributed to these mountains in Australian travel accounts. Other observations included the use of jewel metaphors to signify the Island's worth, such as 'pearl of the Pacific' and 'a perfect gem of an island'.¹² Such language was also frequently used to describe the Pacific Islands more generally (see Figure 10).

8 O'Brien, *The Pacific Muse*, 218.

9 Allen, *Stewart's Handbook of the Pacific Islands*, 293.

10 Allen, *Stewart's Handbook of the Pacific Islands*, 293; Villiers, *Cruise of the Conrad*, 286.

11 Sydney Elliott Napier, *Men and Cities: Being the Journeyings of a Journalist* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1938), 14.

12 Gerald Stokely Doorly, *In the Wake* (London: Sampson Low Marston & Co., 1937), 175; Mabel M Stock, *The Log of a Woman Wanderer* (London: William Heinemann, 1923), 143.

"*Pearls of the Pacific*"

*Papua, New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Lord Howe Island,
Norfolk Island, New Hebrides*

ONCE aboard the ship bound for these *Islands of Romance*, life becomes full of interest for the Tourist. One has plenty of amusements if one so wishes, or the opportunity of enjoying entire relaxation, and absorbing the exhilarating and health restoring ozone of the blue Pacific.

Then the voyage is broken by calls at places of interest with beautiful scenery, quaint Native Customs, giving pleasant thrills of wonder, which are in themselves a tonic.

For adventure, for education, for rest, and recuperation, you must Travel, and BURNS, PHILP & COMPANY LIMITED, will cater for your requirements and be pleased to supply all information upon application.

Figure 10: Pearls of the Pacific.

Source: *BP Magazine* 2, no. 1 (December 1929), 55.

Australians also attributed mystical and mythical qualities to Tahiti, with the Island acting as a blank canvas upon which imaginings and desires could be cast. Tahiti was frequently noted for its dream-like and supernatural qualities. Rather than following in the footsteps of other heroic explorers, Australians like Wilfred Burchett believed that they were visiting untouched territories: 'We had discovered what for us was an entirely new world'.¹³ Eric Muspratt characterised the Island as 'a dramatic citadel of land', Sydney Powell claimed that 'it belongs to fairy-land: an earthly beauty purified of earth's grossness' and Arnold Safroni-Middleton imagined it as 'some celestial harbour of a world beyond the stars'.¹⁴ These romantic visions were sometimes tinged with regret. This was the case for Alan Villiers, a sailor, who noted:

The loveliness of the Tahitian hills, abrupt and grand, the summits of the high mountains often hidden in the clouds, as if the gods of Orohena dislike to look too long upon the Tahiti of today.¹⁵

First impressions of the scenery usually confirmed Tahiti's status as a primordial Garden of Eden—as a place protected by its isolation, 'where time melts like the mist upon the mountains'.¹⁶ 'Each morning was like the morning of creation', wrote Sydney Walter Powell.¹⁷ In addition, Christian allusions were frequent and not reserved for missionaries. The mountain ranges 'resembled some old chaos of unhewn creation' that was populated by 'the savage children of Adam and Eve', wrote Safroni-Middleton. Clement Lindley Wragge, a meteorologist, also labelled Tahiti as 'the Summer Isles of Eden' and described it as possessing 'a warm, soft atmosphere, sweet as Elysium'. Wealthy yachtsman, Harold Nossiter, was pleased to encounter 'Nature's gentlemen'. All these popular descriptions¹⁸ of Eden reflected the influence of Christian missionaries who were well established in the eastern Pacific and whose conversion efforts had been more successful than those in Melanesia.

13 Burchett, *Passport*, 108.

14 Eric Muspratt, *Fire of Youth: The Story of Forty-Five Years Wandering* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1948), 181; Arnold Safroni-Middleton, *South Sea Foam: The Romantic Adventures of a Modern Don Quixote in the Southern Seas* (London: Methuen & Co., 1919), 72; Powell, *Adventures of a Wanderer*, 171.

15 Villiers, *Cruise of the Conrad*, 292.

16 Mordaunt, *The Venture Book*, 68.

17 Powell, 'Each to His Taste', 266.

18 Safroni-Middleton, *South Sea Foam*, 73; Wragge, *The Romance of the South Seas*, 125; Harold Nossiter, *Southward Ho!* (London: Witherby, 1937), 123.

Allusions to Eden also rested on an assumption of Tahiti's natural abundance and fertility: 'It was truly a land of plenty, where those lucky sons of Adam who had found it could live as their forefather before he was sent packing'.¹⁹ Following this logic, and encouraged by prolific descriptions of fruit and vegetation, Australians believed that Tahiti supported a carefree lifestyle for all its inhabitants (as opposed to only possessing suitable resources for European exploitation). This was most clearly demonstrated by the depiction of Tahiti and the Pacific Islands in general as 'lotus-eaters'—a reference to Homer's *Odyssey*, which described a mythical island in which the people ate lotus plants, a narcotic that instilled relaxation and apathy.²⁰ This idle existence was attractive to many Australians who sought a better life, as Powell noted:

The lotus isles, these islands used to be called, and you can still see the name in steamer advertisements. You were supposed to spend your life under a tree waiting for the fruit to fall. This idea retains a strong appeal.²¹

Imagery of flowers and descriptions of their scents were popular literary devices in travel accounts. Flowers suggested beauty, femininity, fertility and love, while fragrances were effective metaphors for articulating the more mysterious and indefinable qualities of the tropical island. Flower 'leis' were popular tourist souvenirs in Hawai'i. In Tahiti, visitors commonly associated flowers with women and were aware that their adornment signified their availability.²² Fragrances, be they of coconut oil, frangipanis or even 'the indefinable scent of dusky humanity', were often alluring and satisfying in the descriptions of Tahiti.²³ The HMS *Bounty* mutineers were frequently cited as a reminder of the potentially overpowering nature of this 'lure' and the attraction of forbidden pleasures. In contrast, Melanesia was rarely associated with flowers or fragrances; if it was, then it was usually associated with scents of stench and decay.

Utopian ideals were also applied to the Tahitian people. Observations about their appearance and behaviour informed (and were informed by) racial theories about the Polynesians and their place in the racial order of

19 Powell, 'Each to His Taste', 200.

20 Burchett, *Passport*, 109. See also John Archibald Fraser, *Gold Dish and Kava Bowl* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1954), 174; Robert McMillan, *There and Back: Or Notes of a Voyage Round the World by 'Gossip'* (Sydney: William Brooks, 1903), 353.

21 Sydney Walter Powell, *A South Sea Diary* (London: V. Gollancz, 1942), 53.

22 Mordaunt, *The Venture Book*, 77.

23 Napier, *Men and Cities*, 18.

the Pacific. The term 'Polynesia', as it was used by Australian travellers in the 1900s to articulate physical, social and mental differences among Pacific Islanders, was defined in opposition to Melanesia. This racialised category was distinct from the original use of the term 'Polynesia', which was intended to describe a geographical region that comprised 'many islands'. Serge Tcherkezoff has demonstrated that the perceived dichotomy between dark- and light-skinned peoples was first noted in the Pacific in 1595 by Spanish explorers. Searching for the Solomon Islands, Pedro Fernández de Quirós's report emphasised the Marquesans' beauty and admired the naked women, observing that they appeared 'almost white' and that they did not practise cannibalism.²⁴ Following this first European–Polynesian exchange, a 'science of race' developed in the nineteenth century. It challenged Christian beliefs of a common humanity by proposing the concept that race was innate and absolute. Most Australian travellers of the twentieth century repeated many of the racial debates and theories of the previous 200 years, but in forms that were simplified, indiscriminate and inconsistent.

Few Australians challenged popular racial assumptions in their travel accounts. Labour recruiter William Twizell Wawn noted in 1893 that 'the true Polynesian' was superior to the 'Malay' and 'Papuan/Negrito' races (this included Aboriginal Australians and Melanesians).²⁵ Albert William Pearce, a tourist, admired the 'handsome' Polynesians because they were 'without a trace of the Melanesian or "nigger" type'.²⁶ This racial superiority was believed to be identifiable by a lighter skin colour, described as romantic shades of 'copper', 'brown' or 'mahogany'.²⁷ Journalist Paul McGuire even argued that Polynesians were 'basically Europoids' and that they descended from the West.²⁸ Polynesians were admired for their physical beauty—the men for their handsome, muscular physiques and the women for their graceful, beautiful forms.

24 Tcherkezoff, 'A Long and Unfortunate Voyage', 188–9.

25 William Twizell Wawn, *The South Sea Islanders and the Queensland Labour Trade: A Record of Voyages and Experiences in the Western Pacific, from 1875 to 1891*, ed. Peter Corris (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1973), 7.

26 Pearce, *A Windjammer's Prentice*, 133.

27 Louis Becke, *Notes from My South Sea Log* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1905), 142; Allan, *Homeward Bound*, 22.

28 McGuire, *Westward the Course*, 46.

Polynesians were also believed to be morally superior. Compared to the 'inelegant and cruel Melaneseans', Polynesians were 'kind and sympathetic', as argued by Safroni-Middleton.²⁹ Henry Tichborne admired 'their sterling qualities, their large hearts, their lovable natures, and their genial humours' and argued that 'no women of any colour or kind are more beautiful or tender-hearted than theirs, no men on earth more modest or brave'.³⁰ Wilfred Burchett further noted 'the noble, kindly character of the Tahitian people' and Muspratt, in admiration of their primitivism, wrote that 'the very soul of these people turned away from money and all modern values'.³¹ An extensive history of Christian evangelism in the East encouraged this distinction between Polynesians and their 'heathen' Melanesian neighbours. Reverend John Burton argued that Polynesia contained 'loyal converts' and 'higher and more vigorous races' because the East was Christianised first.³² Political organisation within the Islands (which was often more centralised than in Melanesia) and the existence of kings and queens in Hawai'i, Tahiti and Tonga also reinforced popular assumptions of Polynesian superiority.

Symbolic of this superiority was the Polynesian woman, a popular stereotype that was usually situated in Tahiti. The trope of the 'South Sea Maiden' or 'Pacific muse' possessed numerous appealing characteristics: she was pure, natural, fertile, beautiful, graceful, exotic, sexually alluring, compliant, passionate and available.³³ The Polynesian woman became a symbol of youth and purity in the same way that Australia's purity was represented by a young female figure.³⁴ This figure was consistently connected to nature, with imagery of ripening fruit and blooming flowers, descriptions of her oceanic characteristics and photographic images portraying her as naked or semi-naked. Her docile, passive and graceful nature, which served to justify colonial dominance, was balanced by her potential to be a seductress or *femme fatale*.³⁵ Tahitian women were believed to be especially skilled in the art of seduction. Nossiter observed that:

29 Safroni-Middleton, *Tropic Shadows*, 23.

30 Henry Tichborne, *Noqu Talanoa: Stories from the South Seas by Sundowner* (London: European Mail, 1896), vi; Henry Tichborne, *Rambles in Polynesia by Sundowner* (London: European Mail, 1897), 5.

31 Burchett, *Passport*, 107; Muspratt, *Fire of Youth*, 182.

32 John Wear Burton, *The Call of the Pacific* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1914), 15.

33 O'Brien, *The Pacific Muse*, 3–5.

34 White, *Inventing Australia*, 120.

35 O'Brien, *The Pacific Muse*, 44.

The charm of the women is hard to define. They possess a certain seductiveness helped by a femininity that women are losing today, and an assurance and experience of men, whom they well understand ... There is a glamour about these women, for they had a reputation for beauty which seafarers have given them in the past.³⁶

His reference to the loss of femininity also reflected wider concerns among some Australian men that European women were becoming more masculine, in light of the feminist movement for equal rights that had gained momentum worldwide.

An interesting exception to this stereotype was the Polynesian queen, a popular figure in the royal kingdoms of Tonga (Sālote Tupou III), Hawai'i (Lili'uokalani) and Tahiti (Pōmare IV). Most fantasised about the female monarchs, since face-to-face encounters were rare, with romantic notions of power and prestige replacing ideals of beauty and youth. Narratives that celebrated their status were 'usually linked to a nostalgia about their past romances and a lament about their faded beauty', as argued by Margaret Jolly.³⁷ Representations of the queens varied from exotic romanticisms (at 'once Helen of Troy and Cleopatra') to respectful admiration ('stood out above all of them in her dignity and serenity').³⁸ Whether admired for their innocent youth or royal wisdom, Polynesian women were portrayed in stark contrast to Melanesian women, who were usually represented as ugly, savage and undesirable 'beasts of burden'.³⁹ Similarly, although naked Polynesian men were depicted in active positions that often symbolised their 'virility and aggression as warriors', Melanesian masculinity was portrayed as a violent and sexual threat.⁴⁰ In some cases, such as in a 1933 advertisement in *BP Magazine* (see Figure 11), Polynesian ideals of a South Sea Maiden were transposed onto Melanesia in an attempt to lure tourists to the region.

36 Nossiter, *Southward Ho!*, 139.

37 Margaret Jolly, 'From Point Venus to Bali Ha'i: Eroticism and Exoticism in Representations of the Pacific', in *Sites of Desire, Economies of Pleasure: Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Lenore Manderson and Margaret Jolly (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 108.

38 Safroni-Middleton, *Wine-Dark Seas and Tropic Skies*, 83–6; Mordaunt, *The Venture Book*, 180.

39 Anderson, *What a Tourist Sees in the New Hebrides*, 99.

40 Jolly, 'From Point Venus to Bali Ha'i', 119.

THE B.P. MAGAZINE

March 1st, 1933

Cruise to the SOLOMON ISLANDS

Four and a half weeks crowded with novel and amusing incidents, and the delights of a sea voyage under the best conditions. The exotic charm of these Isles of Enchantment cannot be denied, and the fact that fares from Australia are free of exchange is another inducement to those in search of a vacation voyage. There are no hotel expenses; you live on the steamer throughout the cruise.

At your request we shall be pleased to forward illustrated folder No. 50/S.

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Figure 11: Cruise to the Solomon Islands.

Source: 'A Typical Portrayal of a South Sea Maiden in the Solomon Islands', *BP Magazine* 5, no. 2 (March 1933).

Interactions with Polynesian women were limited for many Australian travellers of the 1900s. In the Islands, the women were supposedly considered static and silent objects on which visitors could gaze, similar to how they had been in position as alluring photographic illustrations in travel accounts and advertisements. Dance performances presented an opportunity for Australians to remark about the local females; however, descriptions tended to emphasise the primitive and savage nature of dances rather than the seductive and sexual. Missionary influence had restricted more provocative dances, and Australian accounts suggest that the Hawaiian hula was not popular and well known until after World War II. The image of the Polynesian woman was gradually commodified and standardised by tourism advocates. Young travellers Edward Way Irwin and Ivan Goff recalled being beckoned to the Pacific by an Auckland billboard in the 1930s, showing a girl with 'gleaming brown skin', 'black curly hair' and 'warm eyes'.⁴¹ Cinematic productions in the 1930s also distributed a Hollywood version of the Polynesian that blended Hawaiian characteristics, such as the lei and the hula dance, with European actors and fantasies. This became a powerful medium that normalised colonial stereotypes 'and their accompanying insidious ideas, attitudes and interactions', as argued by O'Brien.⁴² Polynesian tropes even spread to inland Australia, where Indigenous women performers were provided with Pacific Island personas and names.⁴³

Although this distinction between Polynesian and Melanesian was clearly articulated in Australian travel accounts, the differences between Islanders within these racial categories were less certain; they depended on traveller's personal sympathies. Every individual discovered his or her own paradise. For example, Hawai'i's location on major shipping routes and the development of a commercial tourism industry explains the large number of Australian impressions recorded about the region. Samoa was also a popular stopover, and Stevenson's legacy prompted further European fascination with the Island. Accounts of Fiji, which was situated between the eastern and western Pacific, sometimes stressed Polynesian attributes because they were more favourable. Other accounts of the Maori in New Zealand considered them to be the most advanced.

41 Irwin and Goff, *No Longer Innocent*, 31.

42 O'Brien, *The Pacific Muse*, 231. See also Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon, eds, *Hollywood's South Seas and the Pacific War: Searching for Dorothy Lamour* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

43 Kate Hunter, 'The Interracial Theatre of "Strip Tents" in Travelling Shows: Spaces of Sexual Desire in Southeastern Australia, 1930s–1950s', *Journal of New Zealand Studies*, no. 14 (2013): 54–66, doi.org/10.26686/jnzs.v0i14.1747.

Australians generally regarded Tahiti as the superior, ideal Polynesian island. This is partly due to the literary legacy of past explorers and to the more recent works of artists such as Gauguin, who inspired future travellers and influenced their style of writing. It was also due to the isolation of Tahiti, as well as its limited exchange with Australia, which allowed fantasies about these Islands to endure much longer than in other places. Apart from a brief pork trade with New South Wales from 1801 to 1826, transportation to Tahiti from Australia was limited, and communication was difficult due to the absence of a wireless telegraph until 1915.⁴⁴ Romanticised notions about Tahiti were perpetuated by the nature of French colonialism in the region, which overlooked narratives of conquest and conflict in French Polynesia in favour of a narrative that was based on love, alliance and devotion, as argued by Matt Matsuda.⁴⁵ Christian outreach in Polynesia encouraged a more sanitised representation of the region in comparison to the dangerous and 'savage' Melanesia. Australians were consequently convinced about the safety of these Islands.

Unlike Australian attitudes to the French territories of New Caledonia and the New Hebrides, Australians were not opposed to French colonial rule in Tahiti. Narratives about the natural abundance of Tahiti and French Polynesia did not allude to the possible exploitation of resources and wealth as had been done with Melanesia. In fact, Australian travellers often admired the influence of French culture in Tahiti, which was believed to have brought a particular refinement to the people: 'The French had a flair for gaiety that appeals to the Polynesian with his own happiness of heart'.⁴⁶ Australians acknowledged Tahiti's importance as a regional hub, but they recognised it as a region existing beyond Australian colonial desires. Ralph Stock noted that Tahiti was the 'metropolis of the southeastern Pacific Islands, just as Honolulu is of the northeastern'.⁴⁷ Consequently, Tahiti was enshrined as an exotic ideal because it was out of Australia's imperial reach.

44 Colin Walter Newbury, *Tahiti Nui: Change and Survival in French Polynesia, 1767–1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1980), 9.

45 Matsuda, *Empire of Love*, 7, 94.

46 Villiers, *Cruise of the Conrad*, 292.

47 Stock, *The Cruise of the Dream Ship*, 169.

'Too Good to Be True'

The expansion of shipping routes through Polynesia encouraged the marketing of the Islands as being an untouched paradise, while simultaneously making the region more available and vulnerable to Australian tourist traffic. Consequently, the imagined ideal was increasingly challenged by the colonial reality. USSCo.'s establishment of a regular steamship route to San Francisco via Rarotonga and Tahiti from 1909 to 1936 unlocked a new region that was once out of reach to Australian travellers. As Wragge noted in 1906, 'People don't know; they have no conception of the glories of Tahiti; the globe-trotter follows the beaten tracks, and leaves this fascinating spot out of his calculations'.⁴⁸ This growth in travel is evidenced by the number of travel accounts. Between 1880 and 1900, three colonial Australians described their experiences of travel to Tahiti. George Robertson Nicoll, Henry Tichborne and William Meeke Fehon were of similar ages and class, and their travel accounts emphasised similar themes of the alluring Polynesian maiden, of picturesque scenery and of adventures involving reefs, storms and cannibals. Between 1900 and 1918, seven Australians wrote nine accounts of Tahiti, and between 1919 and 1941, 14 travellers wrote 18 accounts. This growing body of travellers expressed their dissatisfaction with Tahiti, as it failed to meet their expectations of a pristine paradise. This was in part prompted by the effects of war (physical destruction caused by the German bombardment of Papeete in 1914) and a general disillusionment with the European world order. However, this dissatisfaction could also be attributed to a gradual weariness of exaggerated stereotypes and to the colonial influence of development and commerce within the Pacific. As Eric Muspratt noted, it was 'too good to be true and too good to last'.⁴⁹

Evidence of colonial settlement in the port of Papeete frequently tarnished the natural paradise that Australians expected. Villiers advised those who sought 'wondrous scenery' to trek beyond the 'unlovely little town', regretfully noting that 'if it had been still a native island I should have loved it'.⁵⁰ Nossiter's reaction was mixed; he found Tahiti to be 'a land of glamour and false romance', and Papeete to be filled with

48 Wragge, *The Romance of the South Seas*, 247.

49 Muspratt, *Fire of Youth*, 182.

50 Villiers, *Cruise of the Conrad*, 292, 287.

'a conglomeration of artistic and unsightly buildings'.⁵¹ He was also surprised by the strong Chinese presence, as was Napier, who wrote: 'What we found was a somewhat prosaic dusty little town, filled—or so it seemed to us—with Chinamen and bicycles'.⁵² The town's residents were also unappealing and amoral, with the 'debauchery and drunkenness' shocking several Australians. Expectations of a carefree life were thus shattered by the reality of economic depression and corruption: 'There is the depression now; there had been, it was vaguely whispered, a financial scandal. Some of the leading citizens had been in jail.'⁵³

In this environment, the Tahitian was considered corrupt and ignoble.⁵⁴ Stock found the Islanders to be 'a sad relic ... of a once-superb race' and Muspratt noted that 'some strange quality dwelt here, a lonely forgotten spirit now dying in isolation in this modern world. Like Honolulu, only more so'.⁵⁵ Blame was generally attributed to contact with Europeans, though the specific causes were varied and speculative. Safroni-Middleton deemed missionary efforts to be futile, alleging that 'girls and boys made love to each other and eloped with the missionaries chasing after them', and that:

The brave old chiefs ... loved their old customs deep down in their heart ... and cherished hopes that some day the gods would help them drive the white men into the sea.⁵⁶

Others blamed the influence of traders and beachcombers for bringing disease, alcohol and misguided notions of progress. Upon reflection, Stock questioned the merits of his own 'civilisation': 'Perhaps—who knows?—these things are but another proof that we harbingers of progress were not intended to invade the sanctuary of the South Seas'.⁵⁷ Tourists were also held responsible, with Villiers remarking that 'the nasal tones of

51 Nossiter, *Southward Ho!*, 138.

52 Napier, *Men and Cities*, 21.

53 Arnold Safroni-Middleton, *Sailor and Beachcomber: Confessions of a Life at Sea, in Australia and amid the Islands of the Pacific* (London: Grant Richards, 1915), 149; Villiers, *Cruise of the Conrad*, 287, 292.

54 Ian Christopher Campbell, 'Savages Noble and Ignoble: The Preconceptions of Early European Voyagers in Polynesia', *Pacific Studies* 4, no. 1 (1980): 45–59; Ian Christopher Campbell, 'Gone Native' in *Polynesia: Captivity Narratives and Experiences from the South Pacific* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998).

55 Stock, *The Cruise of the Dream Ship*, 174; Muspratt, *Fire of Youth*, 181.

56 Safroni-Middleton, *Sailor and Beachcomber*, 149–50.

57 Stock, *The Cruise of the Dream Ship*, 195; Safroni-Middleton, *Sailor and Beachcomber*, 149; Allen, *Stewart's Handbook of the Pacific Islands*, 293.

loud Americans being “free” offend an ear that strains for the loveliness of Polynesian speech’ and Baume recounting the perspective of a female resident in 1913 who resented the ‘Americanisation’ of Tahiti and the ‘bastardising’ influence of Gauguin impersonators.⁵⁸ George Meudell also argued that the ‘Isle of Dreams’ had been ‘spoilt by the tourists’, and he predicted the future construction of large hotels and a casino.⁵⁹

Some Australian travellers found faults with French colonialism, such as Nossiter, who regarded Tahiti as ‘an island that Britain should never have allowed France to possess’.⁶⁰ However, this was a minority view, as French Polynesia was too distant from Australia to be of strategic interest. This attitude also reflected the reality of French rule in Tahiti, which allowed trade to be dominated by foreign enterprises and which had limited influence over the Island’s development.⁶¹ When Stock questioned a British resident, he replied that he preferred French rule because ‘they leave you alone’. Stock likened the act of providing Australia and New Zealand with mandates to ‘giving a kid something to play with. He’s bound to break it’.⁶² Conversely, Nossiter judged French rule to be inferior because it failed to acknowledge racial hierarchies:

In justice to the British I must say they fall for native women less than do men of other nations, for the pride of race and caste is more strongly embedded in the British character and it is that aloofness from coloured races that makes the British the best colonizers. Not that the British despise the natives, far from that ... but the British simply do not mix with the natives, except, of course, in isolated cases ... A native or half-breed of good circumstances is treated by the French as an equal and for this reason they do not look upon the Frenchman as a superior being.⁶³

Australians were surprised by Tahiti’s racial diversity, with Safroni-Middleton observing a population of ‘all kinds of half-castes’.⁶⁴ Specifically, Australians found the prevalence of Chinese people most surprising and disturbing. In 1911, when the number of French citizens in Papeete was 2,153, the Chinese numbered 975; by 1917, this number

58 Villiers, *Cruise of the Conrad*, 292; Baume, *I Lived These Years*, 43.

59 George Meudell, *The Pleasant Career of a Spendthrift* (London: Routledge, 1929), 145.

60 Nossiter, *Southward Ho!*, 130. See also Pearse, *A Windjammer* Prentice, 13.

61 Newbury, *Tahiti Nui*, 227, 315.

62 Stock, *The Cruise of the Dream Ship*, 193.

63 Nossiter, *Southward Ho!*, 139–40.

64 Safroni-Middleton, *Sailor and Beachcomber*, 148.

increased to 2,481.⁶⁵ The Chinese were economically well entrenched and freely intermarried with Polynesians. Pearse wrote, 'It is a pity that the Chinese and other races are interbreeding'.⁶⁶ Nossiter observed that the 'Chinaman' owned most of the businesses in Papeete, and that this threatened to 'dominate this land if his march is not stopped'. He argued that the desire for expensive European clothes drove Tahitian women to 'drift to the Chinaman', and thus that 'the pure Tahitian is doomed'.⁶⁷ Other nationalities resided in Tahiti, but it was the prominence of the Chinese nationality that challenged Australian notions of a racially pure and uncorrupted paradise.

Although Australians were disappointed by the supposedly corrupted Tahitian ideal, they continued to believe that a utopia could be found in the vicinity and sought more isolated Islands within French Polynesia and the Cook Island group. These Islands possessed the Polynesian traits that travellers desired: they were isolated enough to discourage tourists, yet reasonably accessible from the major stopovers of Tahiti and Rarotonga. For those with access to a small yacht or charter, the Marquesas Islands were 'extraordinarily beautiful', wrote Mabel Stock. Meudell recommended them to so-called 'real travellers'.⁶⁸ Rarotonga was also popular because it was relatively unknown and isolated. Nossiter argued, 'To me it is more beautiful than Tahiti and Bora Bora, whose charms are much exaggerated', with Pearse concluding that 'although Tahiti is supposed to be the loveliest island, I think Rarotonga is better'.⁶⁹ In Nossiter's case, British colonialism in Rarotonga provided a familiar reassurance. He remarked, 'What a contrast the Government of this island presents in comparison to the Marquesas and Society Islands!'⁷⁰

Utopian Dreaming

In addition to steamship tourists, for whom Tahiti was an exotic point of transit, were Australians who were attracted to the Pacific by the promise of a more permanent escape. For them, the alluring Pacific Islands were

65 Newbury, *Tahiti Nui*, 271.

66 Pearse, *A Windjammer* Prentice, 134.

67 Nossiter, *Southward Ho!*, 141.

68 Stock, *The Log of a Woman Wanderer*, 110; Meudell, *The Pleasant Career of a Spendthrift*, 145.

69 Nossiter, *Southward Ho!*, 160; Pearse, *A Windjammer* Prentice, 133.

70 Nossiter, *Southward Ho!*, 162.

more familiar than the harsh and uninviting Australian outback.⁷¹ They were also isolated from the social conventions of civil society in Europe, the US and Australia. Although there were many Islands to choose from, and lucrative incentives to move to Melanesia, the more distant Islands of Polynesia proved to be a popular attraction, especially for a band of wanderers, vagabonds, artists and idealists. Their accounts distanced them from the fleeting observations of tourists and displayed a closer interaction with Islanders and a more earnest endeavour to embrace and understand Island life.

Part of the attraction of French Polynesia was the difficult voyage and the long distances to be traversed, which presented an irresistible challenge to those seeking the road less travelled. Pearse, Stock, Nossiter and Villiers described in detail the romance of sailing to their own schedule in the 1920s and 1930s, their accounts tinged with a nostalgia for the sailing culture that was being lost to the steamship. Sailing resisted the trend towards modernisation and, in doing so, was perceived to be closer to nature and to a more idyllic past, in the same way that Polynesia was. Images of sailing ships anchored in peaceful harbours were popular in travel accounts for this nostalgic purpose (see Figure 12). As Stock noted in his book, *Cruise of the Dream Ship*:

You begin to see how the average sailor-man feels in 'polite society', and your heart goes out to him. 'How's the wind?' Ah, of course, it makes no difference to this smoke-belching machine that bears you at thirteen knots, and according to schedule towards civilization.⁷²

The nostalgia felt for sailing symbolised the wider search for a more authentic way of life, one away from the constraints of modern urban society. This sentiment was prompted by a moral disillusionment that followed World War I, as well as by economic depressions, a growing urban middle class and cultural maturity in Australia in the 1920s and 1930s. This is evident in the targeted advertising of *BP Magazine*, which directly addressed 'the busy city man seeking a few weeks' respite for his tired brain from the hurry and bustle and strain of modern high pressure of commercial life', as well as the 'squatter' and the 'mining man'.⁷³

71 Max Quanchi, 'Contrary Images: Photographing the New Pacific in *Walkabout Magazine*', *Journal of Australian Studies* 27, no. 79 (2003): 76, 78, doi.org/10.1080/14443050309387889.

72 Stock, *The Cruise of the Dream Ship*, 132.

73 Burns, Philip & Company, Limited, *BP Magazine* 1, no. 1 (December 1928): 9.

WALKABOUT

The title has an "age-old" background and signifies a racial characteristic of the Australian aboriginal who is always on the move. And so, month by month, through the medium of pen and picture, this journal will take you on a great "walkabout" through a new and fascinating world below the Equator.

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Memories of Moorea

An impression of an unforgettable night on this loveliest of Pacific Isles, one of the Society Islands, of which Tahiti is the best known

By ERIC RAMSDEN

FROM the Yacht Club in Papeete, where in the old days Prince Hinoi lounged, one can see Moorea, lovely Moorea, across the strait, silhouetted against the sunset. Nothing lovelier can possibly be imagined as the clouds flame behind the castellated pinnacles—every peak, every crag, famous in story and in song.

It seems like some enchanted island, something unreal, yet sufficiently close to touch—a fairy isle, maybe inhabited by a fairy people. Something fantastically weird that had arisen from the fastnesses of the sea; something, too, that would disappear just as mysteriously as it had reared heavenwards. I had seen Moorea in the early dawn as we steamed along her palm-fringed shore. The morning sun with his revealing fingers had clothed with green and gold and ochre each scintillating peak, and gently

removed the wisps of mist ascending from the valleys, hundreds of feet below.

I had seen Moorea at sunset from Punaauia, on the western side of Tahiti. In the immediate foreground was the lagoon, mirroring a thousand delicate pastel shades, its surface occasionally rippled by the leaping of a fish. On the reef, past the golden Path of Tane that led into the heart of the sun, men were fishing—slim, bronzed figures etched against the amethyst outline of Moorea's rugged mountains. Away in the distance, too far to be heard, a launch, laden with tuna for the morrow's market in Papeete, "phut-phutted" its way back to harbour.

It was here that the coco-nut palms, feathery things of unforgettable grace, leapt down from the foothills to greet the sea. Along the shore a fire crackled, ready for the fish caught that

11

Figure 12: Memories of Moorea.

Source: Eric Ramsden, 'Memories of Moorea', *Walkabout* 1, no. 8 (1 June 1935): 11. Image courtesy of the Australian National Travel Association.

Reports of utopian settlements frequently appeared in Australian newspapers throughout the twentieth century, as they imagined an escape from life's hardships. Utopian experiments reached a high point in American, European and Australian literature in the 1890s. In Australia, drought, depression, labour unrest and socialist ideology drove this utopian dreaming.⁷⁴ Tropical islands were a popular location because they promised isolation from civilisation and its temptations, a natural abundance that fostered a carefree lifestyle and a pleasant climate that encouraged nakedness. 'There is a fascination in remoteness', as Beatrice Grimshaw argued.⁷⁵ Uninhabited islands, such as those along the Queensland coast, or islands that did not have indigenous inhabitants, such as Pitcairn, Norfolk and Lord Howe, were preferred.⁷⁶ However, the utopian dream had its faults, as one anonymous author warned:

The 'comic-opera' simple life, as you may live it now in Tahiti, Bali, or Capri, is very much simpler than trying to discover Utopia on primitive islands. After all, it is very unpleasant to revert to the primitive. In theory it sounds all right, but so few can be nicely, and picturesquely, primitive. The search for the perfect island is really but part of the universal search for happiness.⁷⁷

The isolation of French Polynesia made it a popular choice for both Americans and Australians. One famous attempt to travel to the region was by Ernest Darling (also known as the 'nature man'), who left the US to pursue a life close to nature in Tahiti in the 1900s.⁷⁸ According to a 1912 article in the *Daily Herald*, Darling lived 'on berries', was naked and discarded 'all the institutions of civilisation'. His existence was admired: 'The ideal wife, the ideal life, and ideal work are now awaiting any man who cares to follow the example of Mr John Darling'.⁷⁹ Australian couple, Mr and Mrs Briggs, also made a highly publicised attempt to establish an 'International Goodwill Settlement' at Nukuhiva, in the Marquesas Islands, in the 1930s. The media hype quickly disappeared when the couple's yacht failed to sail beyond the Bass Strait.⁸⁰

74 Bill Metcalf, *From Utopian Dreaming to Communal Reality: Cooperative Lifestyles in Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1995), 18–19.

75 Grimshaw, *In the Strange South Seas*, 29.

76 For example, see 'A South Sea Utopia', *Wagga Wagga Advertiser*, 7 December 1901, 2, nla.gov.au/nla.news-article101857168.

77 'The Universal Need for "Escape"', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 October 1939, 4, nla.gov.au/nla.news-article17639412.

78 Ahrens, Lindstrom and Paisley, *Across the World with the Johnsons*, 30.

79 'An Ideal Wife', *Daily Herald*, 16 March 1912, 13, nla.gov.au/nla.news-article105221614.

80 'Modern Utopia Planned by Tasmanians', *Sunday Times*, 31 July 1938, 17, nla.gov.au/nla.news-article58987760.

Writers and artists formed the majority of the Australian travellers who attempted to live a utopian existence in Tahiti and Polynesia. Nine left behind detailed records of their experiences, which offered greater insight into their personal struggles than the short and observational tourist accounts. The remoteness of Tahiti offered these travellers the promises of escaping the 'repressiveness of civilised life' and of crossing conventional sexual, racial and gendered boundaries (as famous artists like Stevenson and Gauguin had tried to accomplish).⁸¹ The experiences of Australian travellers often mirrored these artists, their romantic ideals and their disappointment with the reality of living in the Pacific. Arnold Safroni-Middleton and Sydney Walter Powell were two prolific writers whose works offer insights about this struggle.

Arnold Safroni-Middleton (1873–1950) was a writer, poet, musician, composer and self-styled vagabond who wandered Australia and the Pacific Islands during the late 1880s and 1890s. Following his early travels, he returned to England and became a successful writer, publishing five travel books: *Sailor and Beachcomber* (1915), *A Vagabond's Odyssey* (1916), *Wine-Dark Seas and Tropic Skies* (1918), *South Sea Foam* (1919) and the autobiography, *In the Green Leaf* (1950). His books were a collection of anecdotes, fictional tales and reminiscences that were often written in the style of a sailor's yarn and that were thematically dominated by a romantic nostalgia for a primitive paradise. He also wrote poetry and romance and mystery novels that contained Pacific settings.

Safroni-Middleton's experience was typical of those Australians who blended realism and the imaginary to create an exaggerated and romanticised account of the Pacific. He frequently admitted that his reminiscences were nostalgic and idealistic, describing one book as a 'frank autobiographical romance'.⁸² What he failed to acknowledge in his texts was how World War I shaped his reminiscences as he wrote them in England. Claiming inspiration from his personal encounters with Stevenson and Joseph Conrad, Safroni-Middleton was a bohemian who cherished artistic expression and rejected the 'analytical conclusions' of science books.⁸³ He regarded Islander myths as 'poetic babblings of the children of nature' and ships' crews as 'true sea-poets'. His own memories, he argued, 'become tinged with that indefinable glamour, that something

81 Daws, *A Dream of Islands*, 256.

82 Safroni-Middleton, *Tropic Shadows*, 7.

83 Safroni-Middleton, *In the Green Leaf*, 72.

which men call poetry'.⁸⁴ The influence of sailors is evident in the style of his texts, which resembles a selection of yarns that is sometimes loosely organised in chronological order, but that also blends myths (both Islander and European), fictional tales and personal experience.

Safroni-Middleton was critical of the corruption that civilisation caused in the Pacific, which he described as 'immense vandalism'; he frequently alluded to an ancient lost empire, the 'past splendour of the South Sea Rome' or 'the never-to-be South Sea Empire'.⁸⁵ Of all the Islands, Samoa was where he spent most of his time, and he believed it was the ideal Polynesian paradise. Yet he also admired the old beachcombers and traders who he met in the Islands—'those old-time semi-embalmed sea-apostles of ancient "salt-junk"'—and the role that they played in his 'boyish contemplations over the great world of romance that I had thought existed beyond undiscovered seas'.⁸⁶

Safroni-Middleton was well aware of stories involving interracial romance. He wrote that he often mixed with sailors and traders who drunkenly shared their stories of sexual exploits. He was also highly critical of the missionaries who he believed frequently 'succumbed [sic]' to women while they wrote pious accounts at home.⁸⁷ Many of the women that Safroni-Middleton described conformed to the stereotypical alluring female:

One of them, she is one of many, wears almost nothing, the curved, thick lips in her wide mouth murmur forth alluring Samoan speech. Her girth is enormous, and her brown bosom heaves with simulated professional passion, like a wave on the treacherous deep dark ocean of sensuality—whereon so often travelling men are shipwrecked. Her eyes are large, the pupils widely encircled with white, and warm with the sunlight gleam of downright wickedness; she has been taught her art in the vast university of experience with white men in the foremost ranks of civilisation's pioneer tramp.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Safroni-Middleton, *South Sea Foam*, vii, 53.

⁸⁵ Safroni-Middleton, *Tropic Shadows*, 13; Safroni-Middleton, *Wine-Dark Seas and Tropic Skies*, 81.

⁸⁶ Safroni-Middleton, *In the Green Leaf*, 7, 74.

⁸⁷ Safroni-Middleton, *In the Green Leaf*, 76.

⁸⁸ Arnold Safroni-Middleton, *A Vagabond's Odyssey: Being Further Reminiscences of a Wandering Sailor, Troubadour in Many Lands* (London: Grant Richards, 1916), 59.

In his accounts, Safroni-Middleton portrayed Polynesian women as active seductresses and emphasised his own youthful innocence. He claimed that Samoan girls were 'born flirts' who 'longed for the romantic white youth'.⁸⁹ When staying with a sailor in Apia, Safroni-Middleton was supposedly seduced by the sailor's Samoan wife, who 'made violent love to me'.⁹⁰ In another encounter, a Samoan woman with whom he fell in love, Papoo, left him because the novelty of dating a white man had diminished.⁹¹

Safroni-Middleton's stories of romance also reveal the common racial prejudices of that time. He frequently noted 'all kinds of half-castes' who lived in the Islands during his travels and was critical of non-European races (e.g. Indian, Chinese and Malay). In Tahiti, he observed that:

The varied offspring of men from many lands, the half-caste children of white traders, Chinese mongrels, Polynesian niggers, descendants of wandering, adventurous viciousness, mixed up with the outcasts of civilisation, and more often than quite enough the puny offspring of touring American and German missionaries, and English too.⁹²

In another text, he criticised foreign sailors who left children behind so that they could return to their families in Europe.⁹³ Although this suggests that Safroni-Middleton perceived this as the irresponsible corruption of Tahitian racial purity, his fictional and actual romances encouraged interracial liaisons. Like most fictional romances that are set in the Pacific, Safroni-Middleton represented the mixed-race woman as desirable ('she was the most English-looking South Sea Island girl I ever saw') and described the ideal life as being married to a 'native' woman.⁹⁴ This desire for the 'half-caste' was amplified in Tahiti, which was considered 'a country where the colour line is indefinite, where West comes nearer to meeting East than possibly in any other part of the world'.⁹⁵ Few acknowledged the reality, as M Kathleen Woodburn did in 1944, that 'the life of the half-caste is a continual internal war'.⁹⁶

89 Safroni-Middleton, *A Vagabond's Odyssey*, 79.

90 Safroni-Middleton, *Sailor and Beachcomber*, 142.

91 Safroni-Middleton, *Sailor and Beachcomber*, 67.

92 Safroni-Middleton, *Sailor and Beachcomber*, 57.

93 Safroni-Middleton, *Sailor and Beachcomber*, 118.

94 Safroni-Middleton, *Sailor and Beachcomber*, 217.

95 This was according to a book review of Sydney Walter Powell's novel, *Tetua*: 'The Book World: Reviews', *The Mercury*, 30 October 1926, 15, nla.gov.au/nla.news-article29464188.

96 Woodburn, *Backwash of Empire*, 107.

In practice, Safroni-Middleton failed to maintain a permanent relationship or a relationship that was at least more than a sexual exchange. He offered many reasons—such as women being unwilling or unable to leave, his own preference to remain a wanderer or having love stolen by another, as had happened in the case of a Maori woman that he had desired (Hine-e-moa). Instead, Safroni-Middleton seemed to have found happiness only in imagined relationships. These fantasies permeated his travel accounts, such as in the *Wine-Dark Seas and Tropic Skies*: a large portion of the book was dedicated to the fictional tragedy of Waylao, a 16-year-old girl of mixed Marquesan and European ancestry. Safroni-Middleton coveted Waylao, who was portrayed as ‘the dusky heroine of a romantic South Sea novel’, though she was never within reach, much like in his other romances. The incomplete nature of these encounters highlights the problematic nature of Safroni-Middleton’s ‘reminiscences’ and the reluctance to transgress the boundaries of European convention beyond a fictional and imagined space. This response was shared by other travellers and readers who preferred fictional romances to reality. For example, Michael Sturma argued that popular notions of the HMS *Bounty* mutineers tended to focus on the idyllic nature of their love affairs with Tahitian women; these notions overlooked the realities of married life once the men had settled on Pitcairn Island and the inevitable conflicts that arose between sailors and their Islander wives.⁹⁷

Sydney Walter Powell (1878–1952), like Safroni-Middleton, was also a wanderer and writer, as well as more vocally Australian. Best known for his descriptions of World War I, Powell’s fiction and poetry about South Africa and the Pacific Islands have been overlooked. Born in England and raised in South Africa, Powell then moved to Australia to work various jobs there before joining the artillery. His posting to Thursday Island sparked his interest in the Pacific Islands, and he began writing for *The Bulletin*. He visited Tahiti before serving in World War I, which became the subject of his two published travel accounts, *Adventures of a Wanderer* (1928) and *A South Sea Diary* (1942), and the subject of an unpublished autobiography, *Each to His Taste*. Each text provides a different perspective of Powell’s journey to Tahiti from New Zealand in 1908 and his short residence there, followed by his return trip in 1916 to the Tuamotu Group in French Polynesia. Despite adamantly stating in his introduction to

97 Michael Sturma, *South Sea Maidens: Western Fantasy and Sexual Politics in the South Pacific* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 52.

Adventures of a Wanderer that 'this book is not fiction', 'never inventing nor falsifying', his second and third texts contain inconsistent dates, reasons for leaving and his relationships with women in Europe and Tahiti.

Powell's experience as a writer shaped his journey and the subsequent texts that he wrote. Like Safroni-Middleton, he also drew inspiration from Robert Louis Stevenson, observing at Rarotonga 'the sight of which from the sea answered perfectly to the descriptions of South Sea writers. I felt that Stevenson's lyricism was justified'.⁹⁸ *A South Sea Diary* was not intended to be a diary 'in the literal sense', Powell wrote, and it is unclear whether sections were written after the time of his travel, which could explain certain inconsistencies in the content of each text.⁹⁹ He also explicitly described the difficulties that he faced in finding work as a writer, his change in perspective over time and the writing technique itself. In regard to the importance of using active dialogue in text, he wrote:

Treat a thing as completely past and the indistinctiveness of the past begins to descend on it; the dissolution of the past has already commenced. Hold it in the present ... it preserves the present's vividness. And no record is worth a damn that is not vivid. It is the one essential virtue of a diary, which lives in the day-to-day present.¹⁰⁰

Powell was initially 'exultant' about being in a foreign environment and considered Tahiti 'the land of my dreams'.¹⁰¹ He gradually realised that the Tahitian ideal that he expected to experience was to be found outside busy Papeete. He preferred to reside in the village, which he considered a more authentic way of life: 'I don't care for merely visiting places: I want intimacy or nothing. I hate tourism of any sort.'¹⁰² At times, his life appears ideal—especially in his second text, in which he describes purchasing a coconut plantation in a Tahitian rural village, building a house, establishing himself in the community and falling in love. He wrote, 'I have never been anywhere where my instincts had such freedom, my diversity so much satisfaction, where I felt so much a harmony'.¹⁰³ This freedom was also espoused by the Tahitians themselves, whom he admired for their sense of equality and respect. However, he was also disappointed

98 Powell, *Adventures of a Wanderer*, 132.

99 Powell, *A South Sea Diary*, 7.

100 Powell, *A South Sea Diary*, 62.

101 Powell, *Adventures of a Wanderer*, 134.

102 Powell, *A South Sea Diary*, 47.

103 Powell, *A South Sea Diary*, 40.

with colonial influence. He observed 'the corrupting power of money on a primitive people', referring to 'illusions' of paradise, and ultimately moved to the outer Tuamotu group because Tahiti was too 'sophisticated and Europeanised'.¹⁰⁴ Contracting elephantiasis was another blow to his utopian dreams.

Powell's travel accounts were less prone to fictional embellishments than Safroni-Middleton's. This was acknowledged in an Australian book review, which commended his knowledge as being 'of a more intimate and familiar kind'.¹⁰⁵ His intimate relationship with a Tahitian woman offered insights into the practicalities of interracial romance and into what was permissible in society at the time. Inconsistencies in the details between the three accounts, most notably the omission of his Tahitian wife, Tehiva, in his first and last works, cast some doubt regarding the accuracy of his recollections. The reason for omitting Tehiva is unclear—perhaps it was due to Powell's changing readerships, as the first book was published in 1928 and the second in 1942, when attitudes to cross-cultural romance may have been more conciliatory. The final work was an unpublished manuscript and may have been intended as an authoritative biography rather than as a work for public consumption (so Tehiva may have thus been a fictional character).

As an Island resident, Powell provided more detailed observations about Islander women and their roles and responsibilities within the family and in society. He provided them with a greater agency than other authors did, noting how during his residence as a guest of a chief in Tahiti, he observed the wife and housemaids talking to the chief freely, treating him 'with respect but without servility'.¹⁰⁶ He realised that their notion of modesty was different, though 'his [Tahitians'] sense of it is strong enough to make him charge us with immodesty'.¹⁰⁷ He distinguished his relationship as being different from other interracial romances, noting that an association with foreign sailors was of the utmost degradation and that although many girls went to Papeete in search of men, it was for better social prospects rather than for pleasure. Prostitution was not desirable.¹⁰⁸

104 Powell, *A South Sea Diary*, 33, 81; Powell, 'Each to His Taste', 188.

105 'Books in Brief', *The West Australian*, 25 August 1928, 5, nla.gov.au/nla.news-article32218170.

106 Powell, *Adventures of a Wanderer*, 147.

107 Powell, *Adventures of a Wanderer*, 167.

108 Powell, *A South Sea Diary*, 24, 28.

Powell's description of marriage in Tahiti departed from conventional narratives of interracial romance. He wrote that his attraction to Tehiva was primarily based on her personality rather than her appearance and that she was not a 'craving of the hour', nor 'an appetite to be indulged and done with'. Similarly, Tehiva was serious, and her affection was not easily offered: 'I knew that she was no *bulabula* girl, and I had learned that girls in Tahiti are not to be got for the mere asking'.¹⁰⁹ He elaborated further on the morality of women:

In Tahiti the moral code may be called easy, but this gives a latitude of choice which makes a girl more particular than she could otherwise afford to be. And the girls of Tahiti have quite pronounced tastes ... for I had learned a little already of Tahitian psychology.¹¹⁰

This idea was reinforced by his visit to Rarotonga, a place that he considered inferior due to the regulations that prohibited mixed marriage: 'As a result, there was far more promiscuity here than in Tahiti and relations between white and brown were furtive instead of frank'.¹¹¹ In *South Sea Diary*, he described his daily life of living in a bamboo-thatched hut, with a native oven, selling just enough copra to cover his living costs. Powell and Tehiva's relationship appeared to be equal, with Powell writing that work was shared equally between them, that 'no man is above cooking the dinner' and that Tehiva's 'natural intelligence' was as high as his.¹¹²

Powell's adaptation to Tahitian life had its limitations. In some cases, he refused to eat without cutlery: 'My European blood revolted at doing this habitually'.¹¹³ When meeting an elderly English resident whose marriage had failed (named Tioti or George), Powell reflected on his own marriage. He much preferred his informal partnership with Tehiva, criticising the formal marriage arrangements that were required in Europe. He also noted the limitations of having children in the Islands:

I am intelligent enough to see that the children of a Tahitian mother must be Tahitian, unless the father has exceptional strength of character ... I think that every marriage of this kind

109 Powell, *A South Sea Diary*, 15.

110 Powell, *A South Sea Diary*, 15.

111 Powell, *A South Sea Diary*, 66.

112 Powell, *A South Sea Diary*, 13–14.

113 Powell, *A South Sea Diary*, 18.

where there are children must be a disappointment, even in those rare cases where the dominating character of the father has left its indelible stamp, for it is never so strong as he would wish it be.¹¹⁴

Occasional references suggest that Powell's relationships were not always functioning smoothly either. In his first account, he admitted that one relationship in Tahiti had already failed and that, after trying to relocate to the Tuamotu group as a trader, he realised 'the extent of my ignorance of her', when Tehiva was opposed to being away from her home for too long.¹¹⁵

In contrast to Safroni-Middleton, a self-styled vagabond who was reluctant to settle in one spot, Powell was opposed to the temporary tourist, as well as eager to make a new permanent life in Tahiti. His works demonstrate empathy for the people and a deeper understanding and appreciation of their culture and traditions (e.g. his comparison of adoption in Europe and Tahiti). His relationship with Tehiva was crucial to this appreciation, as he had explained in his concluding chapter of *South Sea Diary*; he had ultimately decided to leave the Island after her death. It was also a relationship that could never be shared with another European woman:

I would not live here with a European woman; she alone would be enough to separate me from the life in which I now participate; having no natural link with the people, we should become a foreign body; and I would not live here under such conditions. Unless you are merged in the life about you, you cannot realise your own life. You must yield yourself up unconditionally in order to possess yourself.¹¹⁶

Many other travellers shared Powell's aversion to white women in the Pacific Islands. Not only does this reflect the tensions between European male and female travellers abroad, but it also highlights the overwhelming dominance of masculine narratives of the Pacific in Australian travel writing, along with the frequently silent, or discreet, female voice.

114 Powell, *A South Sea Diary*, 49.

115 Powell, *A South Sea Diary*, 74.

116 Powell, *A South Sea Diary*, 54.

'Damned Civilised Women'

Travelling to the region was a male-dominated activity at this time, which was encouraged by the remoteness and perceived savagery of the Islands and by the rudimentary berths provided for females aboard ships until the 1920s. Female travellers frequently encountered social resistance or hostility in their acceptance onboard.¹¹⁷ They were criticised for spoiling the romanticised ideal, as one male artist in Tahiti exclaimed: 'You damned civilized women oughtn't to be allowed in the place, spoiling everything!'¹¹⁸ Women were also considered vulnerable and were criticised by both men and other women for travelling unaccompanied. Mabel Stock, a British traveller, argued that the Pacific Islands were 'too uncivilised and out of the world for a young girl to be happy in'.¹¹⁹ The works of Claudia Knapman and Angela Woollacott have drawn attention to a broad spectrum of Pacific Island representations that have been authored by Australian women. They range from representations that reinforced the masculine colonial gaze to those that advocated for a modern Australian woman and a more nuanced depiction of Pacific women.¹²⁰ Studies of public figures, Annette Kellerman and Osa Johnson, who travelled the Pacific in the early twentieth century, have revealed how both women used their bodies to transgress gender and race boundaries. An Australian actress and aquatic performer, Kellerman was ambiguously portrayed as exotic and foreign, while Johnson, an American documentary filmmaker, presented herself as both a Pacific explorer and a devoted wife and mother. This flexibility allowed both women to express 'the values of freedom, emancipation, and non-conformity', which were consistent with the 'Modern Girl' of the 1920–1950s.¹²¹ Like Kellerman and Johnson, female travel writers were aware of the social conventions that they were expected to fulfil, not only while they were travelling but also in the accounts that they wrote.

117 Margaret Jolly, 'Colonizing Women: The Maternal Body and Empire', in *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*, ed. Sneja Marina Gunew and Anna Yeatman (New York: Routledge, 1994), 106, doi.org/10.4324/9780429039010-7.

118 As reported by Elinor Mordaunt, *The Venture Book*, 108.

119 Stock, *The Log of a Woman Wanderer*, 144.

120 Claudia Knapman, *White Women in Fiji 1835–1930: The Ruin of Empire?* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 6; Claudia Knapman, 'Western Women's Travel Writing About the Pacific Islands', *Pacific Studies* 20, no. 2 (1997): 31–51; Woollacott, "All This Is the Empire, I Told Myself"; Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London*; Angela Woollacott, *Race and the Modern Exotic: Three 'Australian' Women on Global Display* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2011).

121 Ahrens, Lindstrom and Paisley, *Across the World with the Johnsons*, 94–5; Woollacott, *Race and the Modern Exotic*, 39.

Laura Olcelli's study of Australian–Italian travel writing suggests that this ambiguous position of women reflects a tension between the 'old' and 'new world'.¹²² European men popularly regarded women as being the 'ruin of empires' because they were perceived to incite sexual jealousy and racial hostility within the Pacific Islands.¹²³ Elinor Mordaunt, a professional Australian travel writer, was keenly aware of her delicate position during her travels in the Pacific. She simultaneously rallied against the 'altogether mistaken ideas people have about the women of the Victorian age!' and cautiously observed that 'manners are, like morals, the merest matter of latitude and longitude'.¹²⁴ Her travel accounts, among others, illustrate how women were adept at presenting ambiguous and diverse personas to serve a wide-ranging audience.

Mordaunt was one of only 15 Australian women who wrote about their Pacific travels between 1880 and 1941, and she was second in fame only to Grimshaw. This group of Australian women was drawn from diverse social and economic backgrounds: six were tourists, two were professional writers, three were a painter, war nurse and delegate for the Institute of Pacific Relations, and three accompanied their husbands.¹²⁵ Born in England, Elinor Mordaunt lived with her newborn son, Godfrey, in Melbourne from 1903 to 1909, after a failed marriage. Fiercely independent, she refused offers of help and scraped together a living on her earnings from sewing, painting, decorating and briefly editing a women's monthly magazine. In 1909, she and her son left for England, and she continued writing to support herself. She published over 40 volumes of mainly novels and short stories. Following an around-the-world trip for the London *Daily Mail* in 1923 at the age of 51, she finally earned a reputation as a travel writer, publishing *The Venture Book* and *The Further Venture Book* in 1926, as well as the autobiography, *Sinabada*, in 1937.

122 Olcelli, *Questions of Authority*.

123 Knapman, *White Women in Fiji*, 6; Knapman, 'Western Women's Travel Writing About the Pacific Islands'.

124 Mordaunt, *The Venture Book*, 195.

125 This group includes Florence Bond, Hannah Chewings, Alice Combes, May Cook, Caroline David, Beatrice Grimshaw, Doris Hayball, A Jamieson, Rosa Kirkcaldie, Aletta Lewis, Janet Mitchell, Elinor Mordaunt, Harriet Ponder, Betty Freeman and M Kathleen Woodburn. Out of these women, three wrote diaries and three followed their scientist, missionary and overseer husbands. Other well-known Australian females who travelled the Pacific include the missionaries Florence Coombe and Florence Young, actress Annette Kellerman and editor Judy Tudor.

Mordaunt was as enamoured with Tahiti as Safroni-Middleton and Powell were, writing that it had excelled all her expectations. Dreaming and writing from the veranda of a boarding house in Papeete, Mordaunt used conventional tropes of natural beauty, childlike innocence, timelessness and a carefree life to describe Tahiti. 'Love and langour' were 'the keynote to Tahiti', she argued.¹²⁶ Islander women were part of this ideal, and her observations resonated with the romanticised images of the 'half-caste': 'a tall, deep-breasted creature with great dark eyes swimming with passion, love, and melancholy'.¹²⁷ Although Mordaunt admired several male chiefs that she had encountered, they were not portrayed as alluring or sexual (nor were any other European men). This may have been due to her mature age and the social conventions that regulated the relationships between white women and Islander men. Jolly also identified this trend in the work of Grimshaw, whom she argued had adopted the white male gaze, had eroticised and exoticised females and rarely had objectified men.¹²⁸

As a white woman, Mordaunt was privileged to access some of the Island customs that were reserved for male guests. She also witnessed the domestic spaces within villages and the women who inhabited them, was allowed to drink kava, had titles bestowed upon her and was hosted by various chiefs.¹²⁹ During one such occasion, she reflected on her ambiguous status as a white woman:

He [the chief] is very polite to me, very punctilious about helping me first, but I wonder what he really thinks about civilized women, for even his own wife never eats with him.¹³⁰

Similarly, painter Aletta Lewis recognised the confusion that she had created for the Samoan community with whom she stayed as they debated what rank and status she would occupy, being unmarried, white and female. However, gender could also be advantageous. In Mordaunt's case, she could have close interactions with women, bathe or sleep in areas that were prohibited to men and help with domestic duties and other activities, such as making *tapa*.¹³¹ She often recorded her conversations with women, an act that distinguished her accounts from other male perspectives that rarely mentioned women, except for their physical appearance.

¹²⁶ Mordaunt, *The Venture Book*, 78.

¹²⁷ Mordaunt, *The Venture Book*, 75.

¹²⁸ Jolly, 'From Point Venus to Bali Ha'i', 110.

¹²⁹ Mordaunt, *The Venture Book*, 189; Elinor Mordaunt, *Sinabada* (London: Michael Joseph, 1937), 246.

¹³⁰ Mordaunt, *The Venture Book*, 281.

¹³¹ Mordaunt, *The Venture Book*, 97, 189.

Mordaunt's insights into domestic life in the Pacific Islands resonate with other Australian female travellers—many of whom had closer access to Islander women and their families and who wrote more detailed descriptions of them. Caroline David accompanied her husband on a coral-boring expedition to Funafuti in 1897 and made extensive observations of daily life in the village, with her chapters titled 'food and cooking' and 'clothes and plants' and the inclusion of English translations of local myths. Like Mordaunt, David was independent and critical of what she perceived to be the poor treatment of women in the Islands, noting that women did most of the work in the village and making nuanced observations about the behaviour of females.¹³² Although she still used colonial rhetoric to describe the people, she became very attached to the village, adopting a 'native mother', Tufaina, and 'native daughter', Naina.¹³³

Similarly, Helen Cato described her domestic responsibilities as a missionary's wife: teaching, cooking, gardening, cleaning and offering medical advice. Writing in 1947, her account reflects the changing gender values of the time:

A woman's place, we are told, is in the kitchen. It is not surprising that this particular kitchen window, so situated, is like a peephole upon life. It commands a grandstand view of many little dramas played out in Richmond from day to day, dramas of which the *marama* (lady) is the only witness.¹³⁴

For Woodburn, who also wrote in the 1940s, living in the Islands made her grateful for the relative freedom that she possessed in Australia:

Erromanga [sic] is a man's world into which the vexed question of woman's suffrage has not as yet entered. They are the heavy draught workers, and apparently content to remain so. Children, clothes, gardens, drudgery of all kinds, that is the woman's share.¹³⁵

In some cases, women fulfilled the traditional gender role that was expected of them. Although representing herself as independent of her husband, Caroline David published her account under the name 'Mrs Edgeworth David'. This was not an unusual convention at the time. Jolly has demonstrated how women were not simply victims of male myths, but

132 Mrs Edgeworth David, *Funafuti, or, Three Months on a Coral Island: An Unscientific Account of a Scientific Expedition* (London: John Murray, 1899), 35–6.

133 Edgeworth David, *Funafuti*, 133.

134 Helen D Cato, *The House on the Hill* (Melbourne: Book Depot, 1947), 15.

135 Woodburn, *Backwash of Empire*, 153.

how they also contributed to male myths, naming Grimshaw as one who entrenched gender roles.¹³⁶ Betty Freeman, who grew up on a Colonial Sugar Refinery plantation in Fiji in the 1920s, described the part that her mother played in maintaining social etiquette and British customs. She organised social outings and activities with the European residents and passed down her knowledge of good manners to her daughter:

A successful hostess needed discretion when arranging bridging tables. Standard of play had to be considered and it was crucial to know whether a coolness existed or worse, if any two were daggers drawn. Homemade delicacies ... were nibbled all the afternoon but alcoholic refreshment never offered before sundown.¹³⁷

Penny Russell argued that maintaining these protocols was important when living in a foreign environment and that the task usually fell to women.¹³⁸

Representing herself as an adventurer and social outcast in her books, Mordaunt was opposed in principle to the 'people who go to the same English seaside resort every summer of their lives'.¹³⁹ She considered herself a recluse ('there is nothing on earth that I desire so little as human companionship'), yet headstrong and willing to confront anyone who offended her, no matter their status.¹⁴⁰ She also chose the path less travelled, preferring to travel by trading schooner rather than by liner, to live in boarding houses and to traverse up river in canoes and inland on horseback. Her account resonates with other famous Pacific adventurers, such as Australian Grimshaw and American Osa Johnson. Like these women, Mordaunt projected her ambivalent identity as a woman who challenged gender conventions, as well as one who yet maintained a sense of decorum. For example, she was careful to avoid bathing naked or publicly undressing, and she was conscious of transgressing Victorian sensibilities in the Pacific:

I wonder what on earth the other guests would think of me if they could see me now, without shoes or stockings, my wet hair dripping down my back. Or if they could have seen me eating pork and chicken with my fingers.¹⁴¹

136 Jolly, 'From Point Venus to Bali Ha'i', 108.

137 Freeman, *Fiji—Memory Hold the Door*, 43.

138 Russell, *Savage or Civilised?*, 212.

139 Mordaunt, *The Venture Book*, v.

140 Mordaunt, *The Venture Book*, 20.

141 Mordaunt, *The Venture Book*, 186.

Figure 13: How a Lady Travels on Ocean Island.

Source: Thomas J McMahon, *Pacific Islands Illustrated* (Sydney: McCarron, Stewart and Co., 1910). Image courtesy of the Barr Smith Library, the University of Adelaide.

Images of women abroad compounded this ambiguity. Because female authors were conscious of not offending the sensibilities of readers at home, they rarely appeared in their own photographs and focused instead on the ethnographic subject. The practicalities of female travel in the Pacific were often left to the readers' imaginations. When women did appear in photographs, they were dressed and positioned in a manner that was appropriate to Victorian values (see Figure 13).

In her account, Mordaunt expressed the challenge of 'one's own quick readaptation' during travel and the 'difficulty there is in preserving any kind of fixed standard'.¹⁴² She encountered other Europeans on the way that she considered amoral and corrupted in contrast to the hospitable Islanders and began to question her own identity, 'wondering if this was, indeed, I'.¹⁴³ Throughout the text, her self-identification is unclear and, at times, contradicted Victorian principles and societal constraints; however, she also compared herself to other English travellers and referred to England as home. Lewis also recorded a similar experience, although her youthful account highlighted a willingness to abandon her European

¹⁴² Mordaunt, *The Venture Book*, ix.

¹⁴³ Mordaunt, *The Venture Book*, xii.

qualities completely. Lewis lived in American Samoa for eight months in 1929 as a painter, first in Tutuila and later on some of the outlying Islands of the Manua Group. During this time, she passionately embraced Islander culture, rejecting the tourist trade and American society in Pago Pago that made her feel 'caged in'.¹⁴⁴ Her artwork that was published in her travel account reinforced her admiration of the Samoans and her disapproval of foreign tourism. She appears to have been sincere in her admiration of Samoans and in her willingness to be a part of the community: 'I had come to respect him so sincerely that I had quite forgotten the division that lay between his experiences and mine, and his race and mine'.¹⁴⁵ However, despite her best attempts, her self-understanding remained ambivalent, and she wrote that 'the Samoan and the *palagi* [European] attitudes were at war inside me, and I felt oddly traitorous to both'.¹⁴⁶

The ambivalent identities that were expressed by Mordaunt and Lewis resonate with other studies of female travellers in the Pacific that emphasised the diverse experiences of women abroad. Although not every account challenged European gender conventions and Polynesian stereotypes, it is important to consider these sources within the context of an overwhelmingly masculine narrative of the Pacific Islands. As an isolated and remote region far from the Australian mainland, Polynesia was a suitable location for Australian travellers to negotiate and transgress the social, racial, sexual and gendered expectations of European 'civilisation'. Not only did this geographical distance encourage Australian visions of a paradise or utopia, it also contributed to the perpetuation of standardised tropes that described these imagined isles. Australian perceptions of Polynesia (and specifically of Tahiti) closely resembled conventional European narratives of the region. However, unlike other regions in the Pacific, Polynesia remained largely unchanged within the broader Australian imagination. Despite a growing awareness of the fragility of this Polynesian paradise, popular stereotypes persisted in Australian travel writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Australians continued to travel to Tahiti in search of Polynesian promises, ignoring the travel accounts that repeatedly expressed the travellers' disappointment when they faced the realities of colonial impact.

144 Lewis, *They Call Them Savages*, 76.

145 Lewis, *They Call Them Savages*, 109.

146 Lewis, *They Call Them Savages*, 252.

The experiences of travellers like Safroni-Middleton and Powell highlight the difficulties that Australians encountered when trying to satisfy their idyllic visions of Polynesia. These few travellers who attempted to escape the constraints of civilisation permanently recorded their struggle of reconciling their expectations with reality. These travellers also represented the dominant masculine narrative that shaped Australian perceptions of the Pacific Islands. A more careful reading of the often-understated female voice in Australian travel writing can offer a more nuanced perspective of Australian notions of gender roles and relationships in the Pacific Islands.

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