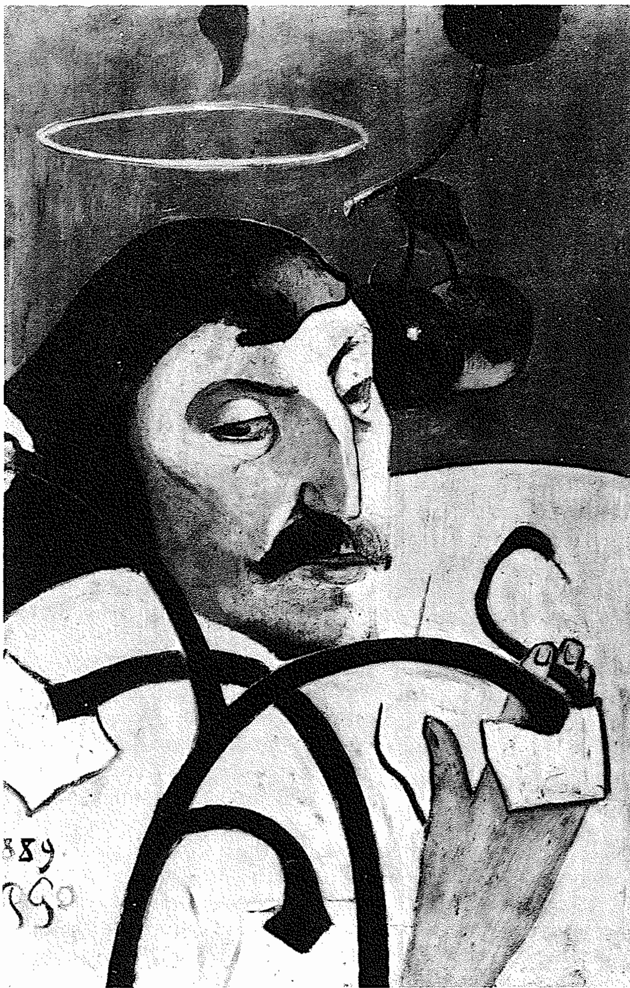
Gauguin: The Artist as 'Savage'



Self-Portrait *(1814) by Paul Gauguin. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Chester Dale Collection.*

The great canvases of Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) hang in the world's major museums—the Louvre, the Tate, New York's Metropolitan, Washington's National Gallery. His sculptures, ceramics, watercolors, and other works are in collections in cities as diverse as Moscow and Manchester, Stockholm and Indianapolis. Last year an 1894 Gauguin woodcut, *Te Faruru—Ici On Fait L'Amour,* sold for $28,500; an early (1886) oil brought $75,000; a small fan-shaped watercolor he did in Tahiti in 1892 sold for $77,500. In 1976 a major oil on canvas, *Nature morte à l'estampe japonaise,* painted in 1889, went for $1.4 million. Gauguin's early paintings belong with those of the French impressionists, whose work he himself collected when he was an affluent Parisian stockbroker. They were shown in the last impressionist exhibition in Paris in 1886. But his growing interest in primitive sculpture and in Romanesque and Oriental (particularly Japanese) art led him to abandon impressionism for "synthetism," as he abandoned Europe and his family for the South Seas. The paintings Gauguin did after 1891 were unlike anything the West had seen; they were among the chief precursors of non-naturalistic 20th-century art. As he painted, Gauguin wrote—prodigiously. Excerpts from a revealing new collection of his letters, notes, books, and journalism—*The Writings of a Savage* (1978)—appear below, following a brief introduction.

A SUNDAY PAINTER'S STORY

The symbolist poet and art critic Charles Morice, his collaborator on *Noa Noa,* published a biography of him. Numerous studies of his early paintings and his later, more characteristic post-impressionist work, as well as monographs on his ceramics, his ideas, and his travels, are available. There have been collections of his letters to his Danish wife, Mette, and to his friend and fellow artist, Georges-Daniel de Monfried. During his lifetime and after his death, various versions of his journals and his accounts of South Sea life and mythology appeared in France. His son Pola wrote a memoir, *My Father, Paul Gauguin.* Yet the *Encyclopedia Britannica* flatly (and rightly) states: "There is no definitive biography of Paul Gauguin."

The chronology is clear enough. He was born in Paris on June 7, 1848, to a journalist from Orléans and his half-French, half Peruvian-Creole wife, and christened Eugène-Henri-

Paul Gauguin. When he was three years old, the family fled France following the coup d'état in which Louis Napoleon, who as president of the Republic could not succeed himself, was declared Emperor Napoleon III. Paul's father, a political refugee, died en route to Peru. The boy, his sister, and their mother—the mother he was to idolize all his life as a primitive Eve, "with small India-rubber fingers"—stayed with relatives in Lima for four years.

They then returned to Orléans, where Paul went to school until, at age 17, in 1865, he joined the merchant marine. In 1871 his guardian procured a position in a Paris stock brokerage firm for him. Over the next 11 years, the young Gauguin worked hard and enriched himself by way of astute speculations. Under the tutelage of his guardian, he acquired an interest in art and became a Sunday painter.

In 1873, he met and promptly married a beautiful Danish girl, Mette Sophie Gad, whom he happened to sit beside in a boarding house near the stock exchange. Soon the couple had five children, and by 1880 the successful young stockbroker also was the proud possessor of paintings by Manet, Renoir, Monet, Cézanne, Pissaro, Daumier, and other masters. He cherished them both as works of art and as investments.

Then in 1883 the Paris stock market crashed. Abruptly, Paul Gauguin decided to give up his financial career and "paint every day." Already he had advanced from being a Sunday painter to one who spent whole weekends and holidays painting with Pissaro and Cézanne. But his works did not sell. Not surprisingly, his wife, though she loved him and respected his talents, found his decision hard to take.

She persuaded him to move for a time to Copenhagen to live with her family. This move proved disastrous. Gauguin's early work, unappreciated in Paris except by a few friends and dealers like Theo van Gogh, brother of the painter Vincent, was despised in Denmark. The marriage fell apart, though for a long time neither he nor Mette seemed to realize with what finality. From then on, to the end of his life, Gauguin lived for art and in penury.

In late 1885 he was in Paris, in 1886–88 at Pont-Aven and Le Pouldu in Brittany, and in the autumn of 1888 at Arles in Provence, with Vincent van Gogh. During this period he also journeyed to Panama and to Martinique, for the first time consummating his love for the tropics, which he saw as a product of his "savage" (Peruvian) blood.

Running Away

In 1891, after three years of much contradictory romanticizing in letters to Mette and many other correspondents about whether he would settle in Martinique, on an island off Panama, in Madagascar, or in the South Seas, Gauguin again left France for Tahiti. There he lived, painting and writing furiously, until 1893, when he returned to Paris to exhibit his startling canvases.

In 1895, in his own words, he "ran away" once more to live for another six years in Tahiti. In 1901 he fled a final time from what he saw as the encroachments of civilization on his paradise in the countryside outside Papeete, the capital of Tahiti. In his last "savage Eden"—the Marquesas Islands—despite his poverty and increasing illness, he painted, wrote, and (as he had on Tahiti) stayed in almost constant trouble with the French authorities over his involve-

ment with "native" causes. He died at Atuana in the Marquesas on May 8, 1903.

In 1974 a book, *The Writings of a Savage: Paul Gauguin,* edited by a noted French critic, Daniel Guérin, appeared in France. An English translation, with an introduction by Wayne Andersen, professor of art history and architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was published in the United States earlier this year.

"Gauguin had literary pretensions, I suspect," writes Andersen. Certainly the artist made as much of an effort to "package" his more elaborate writings as he did to find galleries, sponsors, and buyers for his paintings. This tendency had unfortunate results in *Noa Noa,* his famed idyllic account of life in Tahiti, which exists in three versions, one published as recently as 1954.

Gauguin allowed Charles Morice, who helped him assemble the book, to overburden the first version with Morice's own poetry. Worse, Gauguin included in the manuscript an extract from his earlier illustrated notebook, *Ancient Maori Religions.* All would have been well if the legends thus twice told by Gauguin, and so masterfully depicted in several of his Tahitian paintings, had not been lifted word for word from *Voyages aux îles du grand océan,* published in 1837 by Jacques-Antoine Moerenhout, U.S. consul-general to Oceania.*

To read Gauguin's steady stream of letters, notes, and critical essays, as well as his more formal published works, and even his plagiarisms, is to take a new measure of this complex man. "His powerful personality," Daniel Guérin writes, "greatly exceeded the resources of his art, prodigious though his palette, pencil, knife, and chisel were. It is impossible to grasp him fully without having some acquaintance with his written work."

Greedy for experience, for sensation, for comprehension, he yet once wrote that he had to will himself "to want to want." So devoted to his friends and to his families (European and Polynesian) that he was unable to disentangle himself without remorse from their demands, yet so devoted to his inner vision that he could not let human affection cloud its tropic colors, he emerges in his own words as "too savage a man to live a civilized life, too civilized to be a happy savage."

*Oceania, a term no longer much in use, embraces Australia, New Zealand, New Guinea, and the islands of the Pacific, as far north as Hawaii.

IN HIS OWN WORDS

His burning desire to understand everything about painting led Gauguin to look at the work of other artists with an especially keen eye. Rembrandt was "an awesome lion who dared everything," but his Night Watch *was "on an inferior level," the sort "the masters 'do' as crowd pleasers." Raphael in* The School of Athens, *wrote Gauguin, committed "the most incomprehensible errors of construction" and yet "the effect is right. (You bet it is.)" Many of his comments*

were in letters to a fellow artist and former business colleague, Emile Schuffenecker, who remained a stockbroker and also a lifelong friend of Gauguin. In the first (1885) letter of several excerpted below, Gauguin, then in Copenhagen, had asked Schuffenecker to send him a photograph of Eugene Delacroix's Wreck of Don Juan, *"if it doesn't cost too much."*

Delacroix's drawing always reminds me of the strong, supple movements of a tiger. When you look at that superb animal you never know where the muscles are attached, and the contortions of a paw are an image of the impossible, yet they are real. Similarly, the way Delacroix draws arms and shoulders, they always turn around in the most extravagant way, which reasoning tells us is impossible, yet they express the reality of passion.

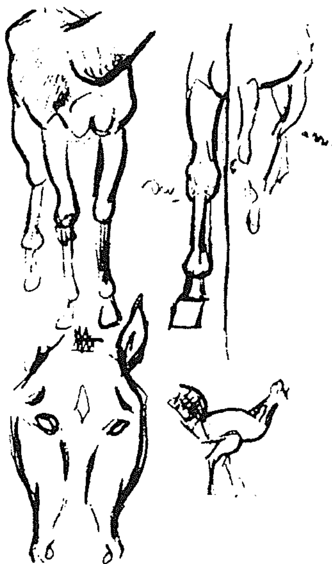
In his *Wreck of Don Juan* the boat is the breath of a mighty monster. . . . All those starving people in the middle of that sinister ocean. Everything disappears behind their hunger. . . . The boat is a plaything that was never built in any seaport. No sailor, Monsieur Delacroix, but at the same time what a poet.

In another age Rembrandt's genius made people believe they saw color . . . . Velázquez, Delacroix, Manet did beautiful color work, but the only direct feelings their masterpieces give come from the drawing. They drew with colors. Delacroix thought he was fighting in favor of color, whereas, on the contrary, he was helping drawing to dominate.

The impressionists studied color, and color alone, as a decorative effect, but they did so without freedom, remaining bound by the shackles of verisimilitude. For them there is no such thing as a landscape that has been dreamed, created from nothing. They looked, and they saw, harmoniously, but without any goal: they did not build their edifice on a sturdy foundation of reasoning as to why feelings are perceived through color.

They focused their efforts around the eye, not in the mysterious center of thought, [but] some of them, such as Claude Monet, achieved real masterpieces of harmony.

[Today everybody has] a preference for some specific color. Paul does not like blue, Henri hates green (spinach!), Eugène is afraid of red, Jacques feels sick when he sees yellow. Confronted with these four critics a painter does not know how to account for himself; timidly he tries to say a few words about observation of colors in nature. [Then] as easily as you let out a fart in order to



Study of Horses, *Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam.* © *S.P.A.D.E.M., 1978.*

get rid of someone who's a pain in the neck, Cézanne says, with his accent from the Midi: "A kilo of green is greener than half a kilo." Everyone laughs: He's crazy! The craziest person is not the one you think. His words have a meaning other than their literal meaning, and why should he explain their rational meaning to people who laugh?

The photography of colors will tell us the truth. What truth? The real color of a sky, of a tree, of all of materialized nature? What then is the real color of a centaur, or a minotaur, or a chimera, of Venus or Jupiter?

One of the painters whose use of color Gauguin praised was Vincent van Gogh. It was not until 1894, six years after the tragic events of their stay together in Arles, that Gauguin set down his vivid recollection of what happened during those two hectic months that ended when van Gogh cut off his ear and gave it to a prostitute. During his second stay in Oceania, Gauguin wrote:

I went to Arles to join Vincent van Gogh after he had asked me a number of times to come. He said he wanted to found the Atelier du Midi, and I would be its leader. This poor Dutchman was all ardor and enthusiasm.

When the two of us were together in Arles, both of us insane, and constantly at war over beautiful colors, I adored red; where could I find a perfect vermilion? . . . He loved yellow, did good Vincent, the painter from Holland. Gleams of sunlight warming his soul, which detested fog. A craving for warmth. . . . Taking his yellowest brush, [he] wrote on the suddenly purple wall:

Je suis sain d'esprit
*Je suis Saint-Esprit.**

It is surely a coincidence that during my lifetime, several men who have frequently been in my company and conversed with me have gone crazy. This is true of the two van Gogh brothers, and some people have, either maliciously or naively, blamed their insanity on me. Doubtless [there are those who] can have a greater or lesser degree of influence on their friends, but that's a far cry from causing them to go mad.

We worked hard, especially Vincent. But between two human beings, he and myself, the one like a volcano and the other boiling, too, but inwardly, there was a battle in store, so to speak.

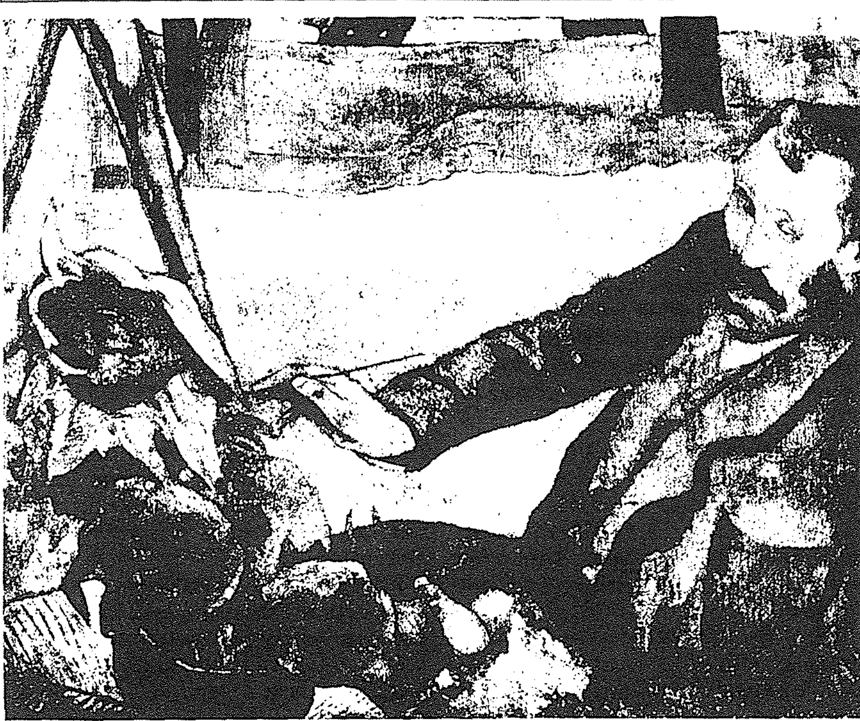
First of all, everything was in such a mess that I was shocked. The paint box was barely big enough to contain all the tubes that had been squeezed but never capped, and yet, in spite of the chaos and the mess, his canvases glowed; so did his words. Daudet, de Goncourt, the Bible were burning up this Dutchman's brain.

Despite my efforts to discern some logical reason for his critical views, I was unable to account for all the contradictions between his painting and his opinions. For instance, he profoundly hated Ingres, Degas was his despair, and Cézanne was nothing but a humbug.

How long did we stay together? I have completely forgotten. Although the catastrophe happened very quickly, and although I'd begun to work feverishly, that period seemed like a century to me.

Unbeknownst to the public, two men accomplished in that time a colossal amount of work, useful to

*"I am of sound mind, I am the Holy Ghost."



Portrait of Vincent Van Gogh Painting Sunflowers. © *S.P.A.D.E.M., 1978.*

both of them.* Perhaps to others as well? Some things bear fruit.

. . . Toward the end of my stay, Vincent became excessively abrupt and noisy, then silent. . . . I decided to do a portrait of him in the act of painting the still life he liked so much, sunflowers. When the portrait was finished, he said to me: "That is me, all right, but me gone mad."

. . . All the rest is already known, and there would be no point in discussing it but for the extreme suffering of a man in a madhouse who regained his reason every month enough to understand his condition and, in a frenzy, paint those admirable pictures of his.

The last letter I received was written from Auvers, near Pontoise. He told me he was forced to recognize that a cure was impossible. "Dear Master" (the only time he ever used

*Between late October and late December 1888, in Arles, Gauguin is known to have produced 17 paintings or drawings, as compared with approximately 40 during the preceding eight months he spent in Brittany. In addition to the portrait, *Van Gogh Painting Sunflowers*, these included such works as *Landscape with Farm Building and Cypresses, The Alyscamps, The Alyscamps (End of the Avenue), Woman in the Hay with Pigs, Washerwoman, Arlésienne,* and a vanished still life described in notes by van Gogh as being of a "white linen tablecloth, with an orange pumpkin and apples set out on this cloth, and a yellow foreground and background." Van Gogh produced some 25 works, closely matching Gauguin's rate of production during the first 10 months of 1888. These included: *The Sower, Old Yew Tree, Falling Leaves in the Alyscamps Avenue* and *The Alscamps* (two versions of each), *The Red Vineyard, Brothel Scene, Arlésienne* (after Gauguin's study), and *The Chair of Gauguin.*

that word), "it is more worthy, after having known you and caused you some sorrow, to die in a sound state of mind than in a degrading state."

And he shot himself in the belly, and it was not until several hours later that, lying in his bed and smoking his pipe, he died, with his mind fully alert, with love for his art, without hatred for mankind.

During his second, final stay in Oceania, Gauguin also wrote a bitter screed against Denmark and the character of his Danish wife. It appeared in the book Avant et Après, *published after the artist's death but produced for the most part during his last months in the Marquesas.*

I hate Denmark—its climate and its inhabitants—profoundly.

Oh, there are some good things in Denmark, that is undeniable. In Denmark they do a lot for education, science, and especially medicine. The hospital in Copenhagen can be considered one of the handsomest establishments of its kind, because of its size and above all for its cleanliness, which is first-class.

Let's pay that much tribute to them, especially since aside from that I can't see any but negative things. I beg your pardon, I was about to forget one thing: The houses are admirably built and equipped either to keep out the cold or for ventilation in summer, and the city is pretty. I must also add that receptions in Denmark are generally held in the dining room, where one eats admirably, [and] the system of getting engaged is a good thing in that it doesn't commit you to anything (people change fiancés the way they change handkerchiefs). It has every appearance of love, liberty, and morality. The mantle of engagement covers everything. You can fool around with "going-almost-all-the-way-but-not-quite," which has the advantage, for both parties, of teaching them not to be careless and get into trouble. With each engagement the bird loses a lot of little feathers that grow back without anybody noticing. Very practical, the Danes. Have a taste, but don't get too enthusiastic, or you might regret it. Remember that the Danish woman is the most practical woman there is. Don't get me wrong: It's a small country, so they have to be prudent. Even the children are taught to say: "Papa, we've got to have some dough; otherwise my poor father, you're out on your ear." I've known such cases.

In those scales of theirs up north, the biggest heart in the world cannot outweigh a coin worth a hundred sous. Before you are married everything is nice and cozy, but afterward, watch out, brother; things turn to vinegar.

In Ibsen's play *An Enemy of the People,* the wife becomes (but only at the end) worthy of her husband. As commonplace and self-centered as the great majority of people, if not more so, all her life long, she has just one minute that melts all the ice of the north that she has in her.

I know another enemy of the people whose wife not only did not follow her husband but, what's more, brought up the children so well that they do not know their father; and that father, who is still in the land of wolves, has never heard a voice murmur in his ear: "Dear Father." If he leaves anything to inherit when he dies, they'll be there, all right.

After leaving his family behind in Copenhagen, however, Gauguin at first wrote often to Mette, sometimes tenderly, sometimes with heavy sarcasm. Many of the letters lamented his failure to gain recognition as an artist. In others he boasted of his triumphs. The most peculiar are those to her and to other correspondents in which he describes his constantly changing and astonishingly impractical plans for setting himself up in a tropical painter's paradise.

To Mette. My reputation as an artist grows bigger every day but meanwhile I sometimes go three days at a stretch without eating, which destroys not only my health but also my energy. The latter I want to recover and then I'm going to Panama to live like a savage. I know a little island (Tobago) in the Pacific, a league out to sea from Panama; it is almost uninhabited, free and fertile. I'll take along my colors and my brushes and find new strength far away from people.

I will still have to suffer from the absence of my family but I will no longer have to live this beggarly life which disgusts me.

—April 1887, Paris

To Émile Bernard. I have put in many applications to go to Tonkin. . . .

—November 1889, Le Pouldu

To Mette. May the day come (soon perhaps) when I'll flee to the woods on an island in Oceania, there to live on ecstasy, calm, and art, with a new family by my side, far from this European scramble for money. There, in Tahiti, in the silence of the beautiful tropical nights, I will be . . . free at last, without financial worries and able to love, sing, and die. . . .

—February 1890, Paris

To Émile Bernard. My mind is made up: I am going to Madagascar.

-April 1890, Paris

To Émile Bernard. What I want to do there is found the Studio of the Tropics. With the money I'll have I can buy a native hut, like the ones you saw at the Universal Exposition. Made of wood and clay, thatched over (near a town, yet in the country). We'll have a cow, hens, and fruit—the main items in our diet—and after a while we'll be living without any expenses at all.

Out there, having a woman is compulsory, so to speak, which will give me a model every day. And I guarantee you that a Madagascan woman has just as much heart as any Frenchwoman and is far less calculating.

—June 1890, Le Pouldu

To Odilon Redon. My mind is made up, and since I've been in Brittany I've altered my decision somewhat. Even Madagascar is too near the civilized world; I shall go to Tahiti and I hope to end my days there. I judge that my art, which you like, is only a seedling thus far, and out there I hope to cultivate it for my own pleasure in its primitive and savage state.

—September 1890, Le Pouldu

To Mette [*en route to Oceania, May 1891*]. Is my family thinking of me? I hope so. Will I, now and then, receive some news out there in Tahiti? Not necessarily on a letter-for-letter basis. But I hope that I will not always be a pariah. I am eager to get settled and start working.

In July 1891, Gauguin wrote to Mette from his long-sought Eden, which he believed he had found in Tahiti.

Twenty days have already gone by since I arrived, and I have already seen so many new things that my mind is in a whirl. It will be some time yet before I can do a good painting. I am going about it gradually by studying a little each day. . . . I am writing you in the evening. This silence at night in Tahiti is even stranger than the other things. Here and there, a large dry leaf falls but does not give an impression of noise. It's more like a rustling in the mind. The natives go about at night barefoot and silent. Always this silence. I understand why those individuals can remain seated for hours, days at a time, without saying a word, and look melancholically at the sky. I feel all of this is going to overwhelm me and I am now wonderfully at rest.

It seems to me that all the turmoil that is life in Europe no longer exists and that tomorrow will always be the same, and so on until the end. Don't let this make you think I am selfish and that I'm abandoning you. But let me live like this for a while. Those who heap blame on me don't know everything there is in an artist's innermost being, and why should they try to impose on us duties similar to theirs? We don't impose ours on them.

Paul Gauguin. Offerings of Gratitude (Maruru). *(c. 1891–93). Woodcut, on end-grain boxwood, printed in black, 8 11/16 x 14". Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Lillie B. Bliss Collection.*

Back in France in 1893, Gauguin wrote to Mette thanking her for her suggestion that he come to Denmark but said he would be "tied down all winter." He reported that the show of his Tahitian works in Paris "did not actually achieve the result that was expected of it" but was nonetheless "a very great success, artistically speaking"—arousing "fury and jealousy." He also said that "a book on my trip is causing me a lot of work." This was Noa Noa, *adapted and excerpted in brief below. The title, he told an interviewer for* L'Echo de Paris *in May 1895, shortly before he left again for the South Seas, "in Tahitian, means fragrant. It will embody the scent that Tahiti gives off."*

"You want a wife?"

"Yes."

"If you like I'll give you one. She is my daughter."

"Is she young?"

"*Eha* (Yes)."

"Is she pretty?"

"*Eha.*"

"Is she healthy?"

"*Eha.*"

"All right, go and fetch her."

She was gone for a quarter of an hour, and while they were bringing in the meal of *maioré,* wild bananas, and some shrimp, the old woman came back, followed by a tall girl carrying a little bundle in her hand.

. . . Her charming face seemed to me different from the faces of the other girls I had seen on the island so far, and her hair grew thick as the bush and slightly frizzy. In the sunlight an orgy of chromes. I learned that she came from the Tonga Islands.

When she had sat down near me I asked her some questions.

"You're not afraid of me?"

"*Aita* (No)."

"Do you want to live in my hut forever?"

"*Eha.*"

"You've never been sick?"

"*Aita.*"

That was all. . . . This girl, a child of about 13, charmed me and frightened me: what was going on in her soul? In mine, blushing and hesitation, for this contract had been so

Sketches from Noa-Noa. *© S.P.A.D.E.M., 1978.*

hastily concluded and signed, and I was almost an old man.

Perhaps the mother had ordered her to come, had discussed the deal at home. And yet this tall child displayed the proud independence of the whole race, the serenity of a praise-worthy thing.

I took my horse and mounted. The girl followed behind; the mother, a man, and two young women, her aunts, she said, also followed. We came back to Taravao, nine kilometers from Faaone.

A kilometer farther I was told: *"Parahi teie* (Live here)."

I dismounted and entered a large, very cleanly kept house. . . . A rather young couple, graceful as could be, lived there, and the girl sat down next to [the woman] whom she introduced to me [as her mother]. Silence. We took turns drinking cool water as if it was an offering, then the young mother, moved, with tears in her eyes, asked me: "Are you good?"

Having examined my conscience, I answered, somewhat disturbed: "Yes."

"You will make my daughter happy?"

"Yes."

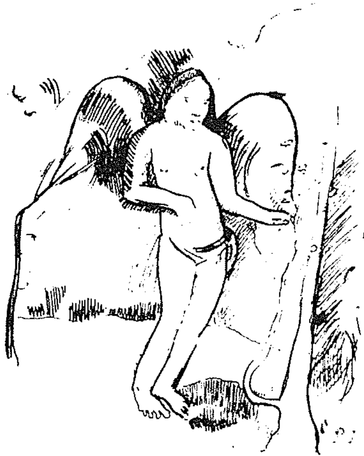
"In one week she must come back. If she is not happy she will leave you."

This matter of the two mothers worried me. I asked the old woman who had offered me her daughter: "Why did you lie to me?"

"The other woman is also her mother, her foster mother."

In what seemed a day, an hour, the week was up. Tehamana asked if she could go to see her mother in Faaone. I had promised.

She left and very sadly I installed her in the public vehicle with a few piasters in her handkerchief to pay



Tahitian Angel. © *S.P.A.D.E.M., 1978.*

for the ride and give her father some rum.

Several days later she came back. I set to work again and bliss followed upon bliss.

Each day, at dawn, the light in my home was radiant. The gold of Tehamana's face bathed everything around it. . . .

Conversations about how things are done in Europe, about God, about the gods. I teach her, she teaches me.

For about two weeks the flies, scarce until then, had been appearing in great numbers and become unbearable. And all the Maoris rejoiced. The bonito and the tuna were going to come in from the open sea. And the people began to check their lines and hooks.

The day came when they launched two large dugout canoes attached to each other; in the front there was a very long pole that could be raised up quickly, with two ropes reaching to the back. By this means, once the

Noa-Noa *(Title of the manuscript).* © *S.P.A.D.E.M., 1978.*

fish has bitten, it is immediately lifted out of the water and brought into the boat.

When I asked why they didn't let a long line down into the tunafish hole, they answered that it was a sacred place. The god of the sea resides there.

The captain of the boat chose a man to throw the hook out of the canoe. For some time not one tuna was willing to bite. Another man was called. This time a superb fish bit, making the pole bend.

My turn came; I was chosen. In a few minutes we caught a large tuna: a few blows with a stick on its head and the animal, shuddering in its death agony, shook the countless fiery spangles of its mirror-like body.

A second time fortune was with us: The Frenchman certainly brought good luck! They all shouted that I was a good man and I conceitedly did not contradict them. We continued fishing until evening.

When the supply of small fish used for bait was exhausted, the horizon was ablaze with the reddening sun. We made ready to return. Ten magnificent tuna overloaded the canoe.

While all was being put in order, I asked one young boy why there had been all that laughter and those whispers when my two tuna were being brought into the canoe. He refused to explain it to me but I insisted. So he told me that when the fish is caught by the hook in the lower jaw, this means that your *vahine* has been unfaithful while you have been away fishing. I smiled, incredulous. And we came back.

A thousand questions. Things that had occurred during the fishing. Came time to go to bed. One question was eating me up. What was the use? What good would it do?

At last I asked it: "Have you been a good girl?"

"E(ha)."

"And was your lover today a good one?"

"Aita. I didn't have a lover."

"You lie. The fish spoke."

Over Tehamana's face came a look I had never seen before. Softly she closed the door and prayed out loud. "Keep me from coming under the spell of bad behavior."

When she had finished she came up to me with resignation and said, tears in her eyes: "You must beat me, strike me many times."

Beautiful golden flower, fragrant with Tahitian *noa noa*, whom I adored both as an artist and as a man.

"Strike me, I tell you, otherwise you will be angry for a long time and you'll get sick."

I kissed her. . . . It was a night of tropical sweetness. And morning came, radiant.

My mother-in-law brought us some fresh coconuts.

She looked questioningly at Tehamana. She knew.

How much of the personal romance described in Noa Noa *was real? How much a product of the painter-writer's powerful imagination? Whatever the truth, the Paradise Regained on Gauguin's second trip to Oceania, though he continued to idealize and celebrate it in words, watercolors, and oils, soon turned to Paradise Lost. Sick, miserable, out of funds, in constant hot water with the gendarmerie for his scandalous behavior and with the priests for his attacks on the Catholic religion, Gauguin toward the end wrote despairingly to Georges-Daniel de Monfried, perhaps the most faithful of all his old friends:*

Without a dealer, without anyone to find me a year's supply of grub, what's to become of me? I don't see any way out except Death, which solves all problems. My trip to Tahiti was a mad adventure, but sad and miserable it has turned out to be.

Since my paintings are unsalable, let them go on being unsalable. A time will come when people will think I am a myth, or rather something the newspapers have made up. And they will say, "Where are those paintings?" The fact is that there are not even 50 of them in collections in France.

If I have done beautiful things, nothing will tarnish them; if what I've done is s---, then why go and gild it, why lie to people about the quality of the goods? In any case, society will not be able to reproach me for having taken a lot of money out of its pocket through lies.

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