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## DENIS DIDEROT

*Supplement to Bougainville's VOYAGE*

1772

*Like all educated Europeans of the time, Diderot read avidly in the travel literature. He regarded much of it as biased against non-Europeans, and he was wise enough to know that writers build their biases into what they see abroad. Yet as a would-be traveler, Diderot was at a distinct disadvantage: He hated to travel. Even so, with much complaining, he finally did make his way to the Dutch republic and Russia.*

*In the turbulent 1750s, when his Encyclopédie set off a firestorm of controversy, Diderot and his friends took to writing essays and reviews for the privately circulated, handwritten Correspondance littéraire. Diderot reviewed a voyage book by Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, who, after traveling around the world, published his account in 1771. It told a remarkable fable about sexual liberty among the Tahitians. In this selection, which Diderot wrote in 1772 but which was not published until 1796, he imagined an encounter with the Tahitians. The Supplement reveals Diderot's deep antagonism toward conquest and exploitation and toward the repressive morality he associated with Christian European societies. Although modern critics might charge that he presents a purely mythical portrayal of the Tahitians and glories in a system of sexual liberty that centers on men, the piece's daring at the time far outweighs its limitations. Diderot no doubt saw Bougainville's Voyage as the possible start of an entire reorganization of social mores, and some kind of reform of French laws and institutions lay at the heart of his Supplement. So outrageous was the Supplement, however, that some critics saw it as working out in moral and fictive practice the sexual license and sadism advocated by Diderot's infamous contemporary the marquis de Sade. Little wonder that during Diderot's lifetime, only his closest friends had the privilege of reading the Supplement.*

*In Bougainville's account of Tahiti, an old man stands apart and watches the proceedings with disapproval. This figure ignited Diderot's*

Denis Diderot, *Supplement to Bougainville's Voyage* by Jacques Barzun (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 187-92, 194-207, 210-11, 213.

*imagination, and in the first part of the document, the man delivers a scathing indictment of conquest and slavery (a reflection of Diderot's own feelings). This oration is followed by an exchange between a European chaplain and another Tahitian, Orou. The dialogue allows Diderot to examine the hypocrisy of European mores regarding marriage, sexual freedom, and religion. Note that in this selection, the Tahitians clearly regard the Europeans as inferior in most respects.*

## THE OLD MAN'S FAREWELL

He was the father of a numerous family. At the time of the Europeans' arrival, he cast upon them a look that was filled with scorn, though it revealed no surprise, no alarm and no curiosity. They approached him; he turned his back on them and retired into his hut. His thoughts were only too well revealed by his silence and his air of concern, for in the privacy of his thoughts he groaned inwardly over the happy days of his people, now gone forever. At the moment of Bougainville's departure, when all the natives ran swarming onto the beach, tugging at his clothing and throwing their arms around his companions and weeping, the old man stepped forward and solemnly spoke:

"Weep, wretched Tahitians, weep—but rather for the arrival than for the departure of these wicked and grasping men! The day will come when you will know them for what they are. Someday they will return, bearing in one hand that piece of wood you see suspended from this one's belt and in the other the piece of steel that hangs at the side of his companion. They will load you with chains, slit your throats and enslave you to their follies and vices. Someday you will be slaves to them, you will be as corrupt, as vile, as wretched as they are. But I have this consolation—my life is drawing to its close, and I shall not see the calamity that I foretell. O Tahitians, O my friends! You have the means of warding off a terrible fate, but I would die before I would advise you to make use of it. Let them leave, and let them live."

Then, turning to Bougainville, he went on: "And you, leader of these brigands who obey you, take your vessel swiftly from our shores. We are innocent and happy, and you can only spoil our happiness. We follow the pure instinct of nature, and you have tried to efface her imprint from our hearts. Here all things are for all, and you have preached to us I know not what distinctions between mine and thine. Our women and girls we possess in common; you have shared this privilege with us, and your coming has awakened in them a frenzy

they have never known before. They have become mad in your arms; you have become ferocious in theirs. They have begun to hate one another; you have cut one another's throats for them, and they have come home to us stained with your blood.

"We are free—but see where you have driven into our earth the symbol of our future servitude. You are neither a god nor a devil—by what right, then, do you enslave people? Orou! You who understand the speech of these men, tell every one of us, as you have told me, what they have written on that strip of metal—'This land belongs to us.' This land belongs to you! And why? Because you set foot in it? If some day a Tahitian should land on your shores, and if he should engrave on one of your stones or on the bark of one of your trees 'This land belongs to the people of Tahiti,' what would you think? You are stronger than we are! And what does that signify? When one of our lads carried off some of the miserable trinkets with which your ship is loaded, what an uproar you made, and what revenge you took! And at that very moment you were plotting, in the depths of your hearts, to steal a whole country! You are not slaves; you would suffer death rather than be enslaved, yet you want to make slaves of us! Do you believe, then, that the Tahitian does not know how to die in defense of his liberty? This Tahitian, whom you want to treat as a chattel, as a dumb animal—this Tahitian is your brother. You are both children of Nature—what right do you have over him that he does not have over you?

"You came; did we attack you? Did we plunder your vessel? Did we seize you and expose you to the arrows of our enemies? Did we force you to work in the fields alongside our beasts of burden? We respected our own image in you. Leave us our own customs, which are wiser and more decent than yours. We have no wish to barter what you call our ignorance for your useless knowledge. We possess already all that is good or necessary for our existence. Do we merit your scorn because we have not been able to create superfluous wants for ourselves? When we are hungry, we have something to eat; when we are cold, we have clothing to put on. You have been in our huts—what is lacking there, in your opinion? You are welcome to drive yourselves as hard as you please in pursuit of what you call the comforts of life, but allow sensible people to stop when they see they have nothing to gain but imaginary benefits from the continuation of their painful labors. If you persuade us to go beyond the bounds of strict necessity, when shall we come to the end of our labor? When shall we have time for enjoyment? We have reduced our daily and yearly labors to the least possible amount, because to us nothing seemed more desirable than leisure. Go and

bestir yourselves in your own country; there you may torment yourselves as much as you like; but leave us in peace, and do not fill our heads with a hankering after your false needs and imaginary virtues. Look at these men—see how healthy, straight and strong they are. See these women—how straight, healthy, fresh and lovely they are. Take this bow in your hands—it is my own—and call one, two, three, four of your comrades to help you try to bend it. I can bend it myself. I work the soil, I climb mountains, I make my way through the dense forest, and I can run four leagues on the plain in less than an hour. Your young comrades have been hard put to it to keep up with me, and yet I have passed my ninetieth year. . . .

“Woe to this island! Woe to all the Tahitians now living, and to all those yet to be born, woe from the day of your arrival! We used to know but one disease, the one to which all men, all animals and all plants are subject—old age. But you have brought us a new one: you have infected our blood. We shall perhaps be compelled to exterminate with our own hands some of our young girls, some of our women, some of our children, those who have lain with your women, those who have lain with your men. Our fields will be spattered with the foul blood that has passed from your veins into ours. Or else our children, condemned to die, will nourish and perpetuate the evil disease that you have given their fathers and mothers, transmitting it forever to their descendants. Wretched men! You will bear the guilt either of the ravages that will follow your baneful caresses or of the murders we must commit to arrest the progress of the poison! You speak of crime! Can you conceive of a greater crime than the one you have committed? How do they punish, in your country, the man who has killed his neighbor? Death by the headsman’s ax! How do you punish the man who has poisoned his neighbor? Burning at the stake! Compare the second crime with your own, and then tell us, you prisoner of whole nations, what tortures you deserve!

“But a little while ago, the young Tahitian girl blissfully abandoned herself to the embraces of a Tahitian youth and awaited impatiently the day when her mother, authorized to do so by her having reached the age of puberty, would remove her veil and uncover her breasts. She was proud of her ability to excite men’s desires, to attract the amorous looks of strangers, of her own relatives, of her own brothers. In our presence, without shame, in the center of a throng of innocent Tahitians who danced and played the flute, she accepted the caresses of the young man whom her young heart and the secret promptings of her senses had marked out for her. The notion of crime and the fear

of disease have come among us only with your coming. Now our enjoyments, formerly so sweet, are attended with guilt and terror. That man in black, who stands near to you and listens to me, has spoken to our young men, and I know not what he has said to our young girls, but our youths are hesitant and our girls blush. Creep away into the dark forest, if you wish, with the perverse companion of your pleasures, but allow the good, simple Tahitians to reproduce themselves without shame under the open sky and in broad daylight.

“What more noble or more wholesome feelings could you put in the place of the ones we have nurtured in them and by which they live? When they think the time has come to enrich the nation and the family with a new citizen, they glorify the occasion. They eat in order to live and grow; they grow in order that they may multiply, and in that they see neither vice nor shame. Listen to the consequences of your crimes. Scarcely had you shown yourselves among our people than they became thieves. Scarcely had you set foot upon our soil than it began to reek of blood. You killed the Tahitian who ran to greet you, crying ‘*Taïo*—friend!’ And why did you kill him? Because he was tempted by the glitter of your little serpent’s eggs. He gave you his fruit; he offered you his wife and daughter; he gave you his hut to live in—and you killed him for taking a handful of those little glass beads without asking your permission. And the others? At the sound of your murderous weapons they fled to the hills. But you should know that had it not been for me they would soon have come down again to destroy you. Oh, why did I appease their anger? Why did I calm their fury? Why do I still restrain them, even at this moment? I do not know, for you surely have no claim to pity. Your own soul is hard and will never feel any.

“You and your men have gone where you pleased, wandered over the whole island; you have been respected; you have enjoyed everything: no barrier nor refusal has been placed in your path. You have been invited into our homes; you have sat down at our tables; our people have spread before you the abundance of our land. If you wanted one of our young women, her mother presented her to you all naked, unless she was one of those who are not yet old enough to have the privilege of showing their faces and breasts. Thus you have enjoyed possession of these tender sacrificial victims to the duty of hospitality. For the girl and for you we have strewn the ground with leaves and flowers, the musicians have put their instruments in tune; nothing has troubled the sweetness nor interfered with the freedom of her caresses and yours. We chanted the hymn, the one that urges you to be a man, that urges our child to be a woman, a compliant and voluptuous woman. We danced around your couch. Yet you had hardly

left this girl's embrace, having experienced in her arms the sweetest intoxication, than you killed her brother, her friend, or perhaps her father.

"And you have done worse still—look yonder at that enclosure, bristling with arrows, with weapons that heretofore have threatened only our foes—see them now turned against our own children. Look now upon the unhappy companions of your pleasures! See their sorrow! See the distress of their fathers and the despair of their mothers! That is where they are condemned to die at our hands or from the disease you gave them. So leave this place, unless your cruel eyes delight in the spectacle of death! Go! And may the guilty sea, that spared your lives when you came here, now absolve itself and avenge our wrongs by swallowing you up on your homeward way! And you, Tahitians, go back to your huts, go indoors, all of you, so that these unworthy strangers, as they depart, may hear nothing but the growling of the waves and may see nothing but the white spray dashing in fury on a desert coast!"

He finished speaking, and in an instant the throng of natives disappeared. A vast silence reigned over the whole extent of the island, and nothing was to be heard but the dry whistling of the wind and the dull pounding of the waves along the whole length of the coast. It was as though the winds and waters had heard the old man's voice and obeyed him.

*B:* Well, what do you think of that?

*A:* The oration strikes me as forceful enough, but in the midst of so much that is unmistakably abrupt and savage I seem to detect a few European ideas and turns of phrase.

*B:* You must remember that it is a translation from Tahitian into Spanish and from Spanish into French. The previous night, the old man made a visit to Orou, the one to whom he appealed while speaking, in whose family the knowledge of Spanish had been preserved for several generations. Orou wrote down the old man's harangue in Spanish, and Bougainville had a copy of it in his hand while the old man was speaking. . . .

### CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE CHAPLAIN AND OROU

*B:* When the members of Bougainville's expedition were shared out among the native families, the ship's chaplain fell to the lot of Orou. The Tahitian and the chaplain were men of about the same age, that is, about thirty-five years old. At that time, Orou's family consisted



of his wife and three daughters, who were called Asto, Palli and Thia. The women undressed their guest, washed his face, hands and feet, and put before him a wholesome though frugal meal. When he was about to go to bed, Orou, who had stepped outside with his family, reappeared and presented to him his wife and three girls—all naked as Eve—and said to him:

“You are young and healthy and you have just had a good supper. He who sleeps alone sleeps badly; at night a man needs a woman at his side. Here is my wife and here are my daughters. Choose whichever one pleases you most, but if you would like to do me a favor, you will give your preference to my youngest girl, who has not yet any children.”

The mother said: “Poor girl! I don’t hold it against her. It’s no fault of hers.”

The chaplain replied that his religion, his holy orders, his moral standards and his sense of decency all prevented him from accepting Orou’s invitation.

Orou answered: “I don’t know what this thing is that you call ‘religion,’ but I can only have a low opinion of it because it forbids you to partake of an innocent pleasure to which Nature, the sovereign mistress of us all, invites everybody. It seems to prevent you from bringing one of your fellow creatures into the world, from doing a favor asked of you by a father, a mother and their children, from repaying the kindness of a host, and from enriching a nation by giving it an additional citizen. I don’t know what it is that you call ‘holy orders,’ but your chief duty is to be a man and to show gratitude. I am not asking you to take my moral standards back with you to your own country, but Orou, your host and your friend, begs you merely to lend yourself to the morality of Tahiti. Is our moral code a better or a worse one than your own? This is an easy question to answer. Does the country you were born in have more people than it can support? If it does, then your morals are neither better nor worse than ours. Or can it feed more people than it now has? Then our morals are better than yours. As for the sense of propriety that leads you to object to my proposal, that I understand, and I freely admit that I am in the wrong. I ask your pardon. I cannot ask you to do anything that might harm your health; if you are too tired, you should by all means go to sleep at once. But I hope that you will not persist in disappointing us. Look at the distress you have caused to appear on the faces of these four women—they are afraid you have noticed some defect in them that arouses your distaste. But even if

that were so, would it not be possible for you to do a good deed and have the pleasure of honoring one of my daughters in the sight of her sisters and friends? Come, be generous!"

*The Chaplain:* You don't understand—it's not that. They are all four of them equally beautiful. But there is my religion! My holy orders!

*Orou:* They are mine and I offer them to you; they are all of age and they give themselves to you. However clear a conscience may be demanded of you by this thing 'religion,' or by those 'holy orders' of yours, you need have no scruples about accepting these women. I am making no abuse of my paternal authority, and you may be sure that I recognize and respect the rights of individuals to their own persons.

At this point in his account, the truthful chaplain has to admit that up to that moment Providence had never exposed him to such strong temptation. He was young, he was excited, he was in torment. He turned his eyes away from the four lovely suppliants, then let his gaze wander back to them again. He lifted his hands and his countenance to Heaven. Thia, the youngest of the three girls, threw her arms around his knees and said to him: "Stranger, do not disappoint my father and mother. Do not disappoint me! Honor me in this hut and among my own family! Raise me to the dignity enjoyed by my sisters, for they make fun of me. Asto, my eldest sister, already has three children; Palli, the second oldest of us, has two; and Thia has none! Stranger, good stranger, do not reject me! Make me a mother! Give me a child whom I can someday lead by the hand as he walks at my side, to be seen by all Tahiti—a little one to nurse at my breast nine months from now, a child of whom I can be proud, and who will be part of my dowry when I go from my father's hut into that of another. Perhaps I shall be more fortunate with you than I have been with our Tahitian young men. If you will only grant me this favor, I will never forget you; I will bless you all my life; I will write your name on my arm and on that of my child; we will always pronounce it with joy; and when you leave this shore, my prayers will go with you across the seas all the way to your own country."

The poor chaplain records that she pressed his hands, that she fastened her eyes on his with the most expressive and touching gaze, that she wept, that her father, mother and sisters went out, leaving him alone with her, and that despite his repetition of "But there is my religion and my holy orders," he awoke the next morning to find the young girl lying at his side. She overwhelmed him

with more caresses, and when her father, mother and sisters came in, she called upon them to add their gratitude to hers.

Asto and Palli, who had left the room briefly, soon returned bearing native food, drink and fruits. They embraced their sister and wished her good fortune. They all ate breakfast together; then when Orou was left alone with the chaplain, he said to him: "I see that my daughter is pleased with you, and I thank you. But would you be good enough to tell me the meaning of this word 'religion' which you have spoken so frequently and so mournfully?"

After considering for a moment what to say, the chaplain replied: "Who made your hut and all the furnishings in it?"

*Orou:* I did.

*The Chaplain:* Well, we believe that this world and everything in it is the work of a maker.

*Orou:* Then he must have hands and feet, and a head.

*The Chaplain:* No.

*Orou:* Where is his dwelling place?

*The Chaplain:* Everywhere.

*Orou:* In this place too?

*The Chaplain:* In this place, too.

*Orou:* But we have never seen him.

*The Chaplain:* He cannot be seen.

*Orou:* He sounds to me like a father that doesn't care very much for his children. He must be an old man, because he must be at least as old as the things he made.

*The Chaplain:* No, he never grows old. He spoke to our ancestors and gave them laws; he prescribed to them the way in which he wishes to be honored; he ordained that certain actions are good, and others he forbade them to do as being evil.

*Orou:* I see. And one of these evil actions which he has forbidden is that of a man who goes to bed with a woman or girl. But in that case, why did he make two sexes?

*The Chaplain:* In order that they might come together—but only when certain conditions are satisfied and only after certain initial ceremonies have been performed. By virtue of these ceremonies one man belongs to one woman and only to her; one woman belongs to one man and only to him.

*Orou:* For their whole lives?

*The Chaplain:* For their whole lives.

*Orou:* So that if it should happen that a woman should go to bed with some man who was not her husband, or some man should go to bed

with a woman that was not his wife . . . but that could never happen, because the workman would know what was going on, and since he doesn't like that sort of thing, he wouldn't let it occur.

*The Chaplain:* No. He lets them do as they will, and they sin against the law of God (for that is the name by which we call the great workman) and against the law of the country; they commit a crime.

*Orou:* I should be sorry to give offense by anything I might say, but if you don't mind, I'll tell you what I think.

*The Chaplain:* Go ahead.

*Orou:* I find these strange precepts contrary to nature, and contrary to reason. I think they are admirably calculated to increase the number of crimes and to give endless annoyance to the old workman—who made everything without hands, head or tools, who is everywhere but can be seen nowhere, who exists today and tomorrow but grows not a day older, who gives commands and is not obeyed, who can prevent what he dislikes but fails to do so. His commands are contrary to nature because they assume that a thinking being, one that has feelings and a sense of freedom, can be the property of another being like himself. On what could such a right of ownership be founded? Do you not see that in your country you have confused things that have no feelings, thoughts, desires or wills—things one takes or leaves, keeps or sells, without them suffering or complaining—with things that can neither be bought nor sold, which have freedom, volition, and desires of their own, which have the ability to give or to withhold themselves for a moment or forever, which suffer and complain? These latter things can never be treated like a trader's stock of goods unless one forgets what their true character is and does violence to nature. Furthermore, your laws seem to me to be contrary to the general order of things. For in truth is there anything so senseless as a precept that forbids us to heed the changing impulses that are inherent in our being, or commands that require a degree of constancy which is not possible, that violate the liberty of both male and female by chaining them perpetually to one another? Is there anything more unreasonable than this perfect fidelity that would restrict us, for the enjoyment of pleasures so capricious, to a single partner, than an oath of immutability taken by two individuals made of flesh and blood under a sky that is not the same for a moment, in a cavern that threatens to collapse upon them, at the foot of a cliff that is crumbling into dust, under a tree that is withering, on a bench of stone that is being worn away? Take my word for it, you have reduced human beings to a worse condition than that of the animals.

I don't know what your great workman is, but I am very happy that he never spoke to our forefathers, and I hope that he never speaks to our children, for if he does, he may tell them the same foolishness, and they may be foolish enough to believe it. Yesterday, as we were having supper, you told us all about your "magistrates" and "priests." I do not know who these characters are whom you call magistrates and priests and who have the authority to govern your conduct—but tell me, are they really masters of good and evil? Can they transform justice into injustice and contrariwise? Is it within their power to attach the name of "good" to harmful actions or the name of "evil" to harmless or useful deeds? One can hardly think so, because in that case there would no longer be any difference between true and false, between good and bad, between beautiful and ugly—only such differences as it pleased your great workman, your magistrates or your priests to define as such. You would then have to change your ideas and behavior from one moment to the next. One day you would be told, on behalf of one of your three masters, "Kill," and in all good conscience you would be obliged to kill. Another day they might say, "Steal," and you would be bound to steal. Or: "Do not eat of this fruit," and would not dare to eat of it; "I forbid you to eat this vegetable or this meat," and you would be careful never to touch them. There is not a single good thing they could not forbid you to enjoy, and no wickedness they could not order you to commit. And where would you be if your three masters, disagreeing among themselves, took it into their heads to permit, enjoin and forbid you to do the same thing, as I am sure must occasionally happen? Then, in order to please your priest, you would have to get yourself into hot water with the magistrate; to satisfy the magistrate, you would have to risk the displeasure of the great workman; and to make yourself agreeable to the great workman, you would have to fly in the face of your own nature. And do you know what will finally happen? You will come to despise all three, and you will be neither man nor citizen nor pious believer; you will be nothing at all; you will be at odds with all the authorities, at odds with yourself, malicious, disturbed by your own conscience, persecuted by your witless masters, and miserable, as you were yesterday evening when I offered you my wife and daughters and you could only wail, "What about my religion? What about my holy orders?" Would you like to know what is good and what is bad in all times and places? Pay close attention to the nature of things and actions, to your relations with your fellow creatures, to the effect of your behavior on your own well-being and on the general

welfare. You are mad if you believe that there is anything in the universe, high or low, that can add or subtract from the laws of nature. Her eternal will is that good shall be chosen rather than evil, and the general welfare rather than the individual's well-being. You may decree the opposite, but you will not be obeyed. By threats, punishment and guilt you can make more wretches and rascals, make more depraved consciences and more corrupted characters. People will no longer know what they ought or ought not to do. They will feel guilty when they are doing nothing wrong and proud of themselves in the midst of crime; they will have lost the North Star that should guide their course. Give me an honest answer: in spite of the express commands of your three legislators, do the young men in your country never go to bed with a young woman without having received permission?

*The Chaplain:* I would be lying if I said they never do.

*Orou:* And the women, once they have sworn an oath to belong to only one husband, do they never give themselves to another man?

*The Chaplain:* Nothing happens more often.

*Orou:* And are your legislators severe in handing out punishment to such disobedient people, or are they not? If they are, then they are wild animals who make war against nature; if they are not severe, they are fools who risk bringing their authority into contempt by issuing futile prohibitions.

*The Chaplain:* The guilty ones, if they escape the rigor of the laws, are punished by public opinion.

*Orou:* That's like saying that justice is done by means of the whole nation's lack of common sense, and that public folly is the substitute for law.

*The Chaplain:* A girl who has lost her honor cannot find a husband.

*Orou:* Lost her honor! And for what cause?

*The Chaplain:* An unfaithful woman is more or less despised.

*Orou:* Despised! Why should that be?

*The Chaplain:* And the young man is called a cowardly seducer.

*Orou:* Coward? Seducer? Why that?

*The Chaplain:* The father and mother and their dishonored child are desolate. An erring husband is called a libertine; a husband who has been betrayed shares the shame of his wife.

*Orou:* What monstrous foolishness you're talking! And still you must be holding something back, because when people take it upon themselves to rearrange all ideas of justice and propriety to suit their own whims, to apply or remove the names of things in a completely arbitrary manner, to associate the ideas of good and evil

with certain actions or to dissociate them for no reason save caprice—then of course people will blame each other, accuse each other, suspect each other, tyrannize, become jealous and envious, deceive and wound one another, conceal, dissimulate, and spy on one another, catch each other out, quarrel and tell lies. Girls will deceive their parents, husbands their wives and wives their husbands. Unmarried girls—yes, I am sure of it—unmarried girls will suffocate their babies; suspicious fathers will neglect or show contempt for their own rightful children; mothers will abandon their infants and leave them to the mercy of fate. Crime and debauchery will appear in every imaginable shape and form. I see all that as plainly as if I had lived among you. The things are so because they must be so, and your society, whose well-ordered ways your chief boasts to you about, can't be anything but a swarm of hypocrites who secretly trample the laws under foot, or a multitude of wretched beings who serve as instruments for inflicting willing torture upon themselves; or imbeciles in whom prejudice has utterly silenced the voice of nature, or ill-fashioned creatures in whom nature cannot claim her rights.

*The Chaplain:* That is a close likeness. But do you never marry?

*Orou:* Oh yes, we marry.

*The Chaplain:* Well, how does it work?

*Orou:* It consists only of an agreement to occupy the same hut and to sleep in the same bed for so long as both partners find the arrangement good.

*The Chaplain:* And when they find it bad?

*Orou:* Then they separate.

*The Chaplain:* But what becomes of the children?

*Orou:* Oh, stranger! That last question of yours finally reveals to me the last depths of your country's wretchedness. Let me tell you, my friend, that the birth of a child is always a happy event, and its death is an occasion for weeping and sorrow. A child is a precious thing because it will grow up to be a man or a woman. Therefore we take infinitely better care of our children than of our plants and animals. The birth of a child is the occasion for public celebration and a source of joy for its entire family. For the hut it means an increase in wealth, while for the nation it signifies additional strength. It means another pair of hands and arms for Tahiti—we see in the newborn baby a future farmer, fisherman, hunter, soldier, husband or father. When a woman goes from her husband's hut back to that of her family, she takes with her all the children she

brought with her as her dowry; those born during the marriage are divided equally between the two spouses, and care is taken to give each an equal number of boys and girls whenever possible.

*The Chaplain:* But children are a burden for many years before they are old enough to make themselves useful.

*Orou:* We set aside for them and for the support of the aged one part in six of all our harvests; wherever the child goes, this support follows him. And so, you see, the larger the family a Tahitian has, the richer he is.

*The Chaplain:* One part in six!

*Orou:* Yes. It's a dependable method for encouraging the growth of population, for promoting respect for our old people and for safeguarding the welfare of our children.

*The Chaplain:* And does it ever happen that a couple who have separated decide to live together again?

*Orou:* Oh, yes. It happens fairly often. Also, the shortest time any marriage can last is one month.

*The Chaplain:* Assuming, of course, that the wife is not with child, for in that case, wouldn't the marriage have to last at least nine months?

*Orou:* Not at all. The child keeps the name of its mother's husband at the time it was conceived, and its paternity, like its means of support, follows it wherever it goes.

*The Chaplain:* You spoke about the children that a wife brings to her husband as dowry.

*Orou:* To be sure. Take my eldest daughter, who has three children. They are able to walk, they are healthy and attractive, and they promise to be strong when they are grown up. If she should take it into her head to get married, she would take them along, for they belong to her, and her husband would be extremely happy to have them in his hut. He would think all the better of his wife if she were carrying still a fourth child at the time of her wedding.

*The Chaplain:* His child?

*Orou:* His or another's. The more children our young women have had, the more desirable they are as wives. The stronger and lustier our young men are, the richer they become. Therefore, careful as we are to protect our young girls from male advances, and our young boys from intercourse with women, before they reach sexual maturity, once they have passed the age of puberty we exhort them all the more strongly to have as many children as possible. You probably haven't fully realized what an important service you will



have rendered my daughter Thia if you have succeeded in getting her with child. Her mother will no longer plague her every month by saying, "But, Thia, what is the matter with you? You never get pregnant, and here you are nineteen years old. You should have had at least a couple of babies by this time, and you have none. Who is going to look after you in your old age if you throw away your youth in this way? Thia, I begin to think there is something wrong with you, some defect that puts men off. Find out what it is, my child, and correct it if you can. At your age, I was already three times a mother!"

*The Chaplain:* What precautions do you take to safeguard your boys and girls before they reach maturity?

*Orou:* That's the main object of our children's education within the family circle, and it's the main important point in our code of public morality. Our boys, until the age of twenty-two, that is for two to three years after they reach maturity, must wear a long tunic that covers their bodies completely, and they must wear a little chain around their loins. Before they reach nubile age, our girls would not dare to go out without white veils. The two misdeeds of taking off one's chain or of raising one's veil are rarely met with, because we teach our children at a very early age what harmful results will ensue. But when the proper time comes—when the male has attained his full strength, when the principal indication of virility lasts for a sufficient time, and when we are confirmed in our judgment by the quality and by the frequent emission of the seminal fluid—and when the young girl seems wilted and suffers from boredom, when she seems mature enough to feel passion, to inspire it and to satisfy it, then the father unfastens his son's chain and cuts the nail on the middle finger of the boy's right hand. The mother removes her daughter's veil. The young man can now ask a woman for her favors or be asked by her to grant his. The girl may walk about freely in public places with her face and breast uncovered; she may accept or reject men's caresses. All we do is to point out in advance to the boy certain girls and to the girl certain boys that they might well choose as partners. The day when a boy or girl is emancipated is a gala holiday. In the case of a girl, the young men assemble the night before around her hut and the air is filled all night long with singing and the sound of musical instruments. When the sun has risen, she is led by her father and mother into an enclosure where dancing is going on and where games of wrestling, running and jumping are in progress. A naked man is paraded in front of her, allowing her to examine his body from all aspects and in all sorts of attitudes. For a young man's

initiation, the young girls do the honors of the occasion by letting him look at the nude female body unadorned and unconcealed. The remainder of the ceremony is enacted on a bed of leaves, just as you saw it on your arrival here. At sunset the girl returns to her parents' hut or else moves to the hut of the young man she has chosen and remains there as long as she pleases.

*The Chaplain:* But is this celebration a marriage ceremony or is it not?

*Orou:* Well, as you have said . . .

*The Chaplain:* [With such customs] how can she know who the father of her child is?

*Orou:* How could she not know? With us the same rule that applies to marriage applies also to love affairs—each lasts at least from one moon to the next.

*The Chaplain:* And is the rule strictly observed?

*Orou:* You can judge for yourself. First, the interval between two moons isn't long, but when it appears that two men have well-founded claims to be the father of a child, it no longer belongs to the mother.

*The Chaplain:* To whom does it belong?

*Orou:* To whichever of the two men the mother chooses to give it.

This is the only right she has, and since a child is an object of both interest and value, you can understand that among us loose women are rare and that our young men keep away from them.

*The Chaplain:* Then you do have a few licentious women? That makes me feel better.

*Orou:* Yes, we have some, and more than one kind—but that is another subject. When one of our girls gets pregnant, she is twice as pleased with herself if the child's father is a handsome, well-built, brave, intelligent, industrious young man, because she has reason to hope that the child will inherit its father's good qualities. The only thing a girl would be ashamed of would be a bad choice. You have no idea how much store we set by good health, beauty, strength, industry and courage; you have no notion what a tendency there is, even without our having to pay any particular attention to it, for good physical inheritance to be passed on from generation to generation among us. You are a person who has traveled in all sorts of countries—tell me if you have seen anywhere else so many handsome men and beautiful women as in Tahiti. Look at me. What do you think of me? Well, there are ten thousand men on this island who are taller than I am and just as strong; but there is none braver, and for that reason mothers very often point me out to their girls as a good father for their children.

*The Chaplain:* And out of all these children you have sired outside your own hut, how many fall to your share?

*Orou:* Every fourth, be it a boy or a girl. You see, we have developed a kind of circulation of men, women and children—that is, of able-bodied workers of all ages and occupations—which is much more important than trade in foodstuffs (which are only the products of human labor) in your country. . . .

*The Chaplain:* So far as I can see, jealousy is practically unknown here in Tahiti. But tenderness between husband and wife, and maternal love, which are strong, beautiful emotions—if they exist here at all, they must be fairly lukewarm.

*Orou:* We have put in their place another impulse, which is more universal, powerful and lasting—self-interest. Examine your conscience in all candor, put aside the hypocritical parade of virtue which is always on the lips of your companions, though not in their hearts, and tell me if there is anywhere on the face of the earth a man who, if he were not held back by shame, would not prefer to lose his child—a husband who would not prefer to lose his wife—rather than lose his fortune and all the amenities of life? You may be sure that if ever a man can be led to care as much about his fellow men as he does about his own bed, his own health, his leisure, his house, his harvests or his fields, he can be depended upon to do his utmost to look out for the well-being of other people. Then you will see him shedding tears over the bed of a sick child or taking care of a mother when she is ill. Then you will find fruitful women, nubile girls and handsome young men highly regarded. Then you will find a great deal of attention paid to the education of the young, because the nation grows stronger with their growth, and suffers a material loss if their well-being is impaired.

*The Chaplain:* I am afraid there is some reason in what this savage says. The poor peasant of our European lands wears out his wife in order to spare his horse, lets his child die without help and calls the veterinary to look after his ox. . . .

The good chaplain tells us that he spent the rest of the day wandering about the island, visiting a number of huts, and that in the evening, after supper, the father and mother begged him to go to bed with Palli, the second eldest daughter. She offered herself in the same undress as Thia's, and he tells us that several times during the night he cried out, "My religion! My holy orders!" The third night he suffered the same guilty torments in the arms of Asto, the eldest, and the fourth night, not to be unfair, he devoted to his hostess. . . .