

M A Y A D E R E N ' S L A S T
S C R I P T



M A Y A D E R E N

Edited and Introduced by Jamie James

Although she never made a film that ran longer than fifteen minutes, Maya Deren is a legend of the American cinema whose legacy appears likely to endure as long as those of Hollywood filmmakers who are household names. Meshes of the Afternoon (1943), her first film, made in collaboration with her husband, the Czech director Alexander Hammid, is often described as the most widely viewed American experimental film. Shot in silent black-and-white 16mm at the couple's bungalow in Los Angeles, this intensely poetic dream quest, set in the wandering mind of a woman played by Deren herself, established her as the country's most prominent experimental filmmaker. When Deren and Hammid moved to New York, their studio apartment on Morton Street in Greenwich Village was a weekly salon where European surrealists and Dadaists in exile mingled with the American avant-garde. Deren's circle at various times included John Cage, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Philip Lamantia, Roberto Matta, James Merrill, Anaïs Nin, Isamu Noguchi, and Dylan Thomas; many of them acted in her films.

In February 1946, Deren hired the Provincetown Playhouse on MacDougal Street, where Eugene O'Neill had staged his earliest plays, to present a program of her films. It sold out night after night;

befitting a legend, reports of her screening-cum-lecture attained the proportions of a Sacre du printemps. The films aroused excitement and controversy, but the main attraction was Deren herself, a passionate, eloquent advocate for film art. She argued that cinema could be a fine art like chamber music or poetry, and in order to achieve this potential it must escape the control of the commercial film industry. She repeated the program at college campuses and other venues across the country. The experimental filmmaker Harry Smith described the effect of Deren's first appearance in San Francisco: "Her movies hit like thunderbolts and sent everybody to the nearest pawn shops to get a Bell & Howell." Maya Deren not only inspired a generation of experimental filmmakers, she also laid the foundation for the contemporary indie film movement.

Her exotic beauty and magnetic personality expanded awareness of avant-garde film for the first time beyond the confines of artists' studios and galleries. Esquire published a feature about her, presenting her as a sort of beatnik babe, which concluded with her famous quip, "I make my pictures for what Hollywood spends on lipstick." In 1947, Meshes of the Afternoon won the Grand Prix Internationale at Cannes, and Deren was awarded the first Guggenheim fellowship for creative filmmaking. Then, like many fine artists riding the crest of fame, she abruptly charted a radical change in course.

She had applied for the Guggenheim to finance a trip to Haiti to film voodoo ritual dance, after she met Gregory Bateson at a lecture in which he screened short archival films that he and his wife, Margaret Mead, had shot of village life in Bali. Deren conceived an ambitious new project, a "cross-cultural fugue" that would integrate footage from Bateson and Mead's Bali films with her own footage of American children playing hopscotch and other games and the new film from Haiti. Recently divorced from Hammid, she began a love affair with Bateson, which brought an end to his marriage to Mead. She and Bateson planned to marry and go on a working honeymoon in Haiti, but Bateson got cold feet and Deren sailed to Haiti on her own.

Within days of her arrival, she plunged into a loverlike relationship with the country and its magic religion that dominated the rest of her life. In four voyages to Haiti over the course of seven years, she shot hundreds of hours of possession rituals, which she also partici-

pated in. The cross-cultural fugue long forgotten, she intended to edit the footage into a magnum opus uniting the two passions of her life, which would define a new genre situated on an undiscovered frontier between ethnography and art. Deren never completed the film, but through the patronage of Joseph Campbell she published Divine Horsemen, a detailed survey of voodoo, which remains one of the best studies of the religion, read by Haitians and cited by scholars.

Deren's obsession with voodoo, for such it was, distracted her from producing more art films like Meshes of the Afternoon. After her second trip to Haiti, in 1949, until her death in 1961, she completed just one film, The Very Eye of Night, a visionary piece that situated ballet dancers from the Metropolitan Opera against a starry sky, made in collaboration with the British choreographer Antony Tudor. She finished the film in 1954, but it was not released until four years later. The experimental film community, which she had been instrumental in creating, gave it mostly hostile reviews. Critics denounced it as crude and amateurish in execution, forgetful that Deren's defiant rejection of slick production values was essential to her aesthetic.

The avant-garde viewed Deren's fascination with voodoo as a tragic error, if not a betrayal. Unable to complete her Haiti film or raise funds for new projects, she lived in the Morton Street apartment in poverty with Teiji Ito, a Japanese composer she had met in 1950, when he was fifteen years old. Deren now seemed to put more energy into advancing Ito's career than her own. Her circle had expanded to include Haitian immigrants and visitors, with whom she could share her religious beliefs. She was slowly fading into irrelevance, yet she remained steadfast in her devotion to the cause of film art until her death of a brain hemorrhage, at the age of forty-four.

When I was researching the life of Maya Deren for my book The Glamour of Strangeness, her final years proved to be the most elusive period. She had all but disappeared from published journals, and her personal papers, which are now archived at Boston University, dwindled to pathetic letters begging loans from friends and extensions from creditors. (Of course, the dearth of manuscripts in

the archive is not conclusive evidence that she was not writing creatively; a void tells us exactly nothing.)

Moreover, virtually no research into this period of her life by academics or other scholars has been published. The study of the life and work of Maya Deren has been both blessed and cursed by one of the most extraordinary biographical undertakings in the history of cinema studies. The Legend of Maya Deren, by Vèvè Clark, Millicent Hodson, and Catrina Neiman, published by Anthology Film Archives, was conceived as a documentary biography, incorporating extensive selections from her journals and correspondence with many facsimiles of the original documents. The volumes covering Deren's life from her birth in 1917 to 1947 were published in 1985 and 1988, amounting to nearly a thousand pages. The text of the books describing the years 1947 to 1954 were completed at the same time and set up in type, but, astonishingly, they remain unpublished. The final volume, devoted to Deren's life from 1954 until her death, is unfinished, owing to the death of its principal author, Vèvè Clark, in 2007.

The prestige of The Legend of Maya Deren and the comprehensive scope of its research have discouraged other writers from undertaking a formal biography. Her final years, particularly, hold little interest for cinema scholars, for Deren was no longer producing films. But it would be incorrect to say that her creative career in film had ceased: it has always been known that near the end of her life, Deren wrote the voiceover narration for Maeva: Portrait of a Tahitian Girl, a film directed by Umberto Bonsignori. To summarize the scant information available about it in encyclopedic indexes of cinema compiled by the American Film Institute and others:

Maeva is a standard tropical melodrama, filmed on location in Tahiti, about the degradation and redemption of a young woman in a small fishing village who yearns for a more exciting life. After a sailor rapes her, Maeva leaves the village for the port town, where she becomes a European painter's model. She commences a series of love affairs with foreign men, and in the denouement she returns to her village, where she meets a young fisherman and marries him. Bonsignori, an Italian journalist who immigrated to the United States after World War II, shot the movie in silent black-and-white 16mm film. He hired Deren to write a voiceover narration for a superimposed soundtrack; Teiji Ito composed the music.

Technically primitive by the industry standards of its day, Maeva never had a commercial release. When he failed to find a distributor, Bonsignori tried to market the film as a sexploitation picture with the title Pagan Hellcat, despite the lack of any explicit sex scenes. Yet Bonsignori, who was Venetian by birth, screened his film hors-concours at the Venice Film Festival, which led to a good review in Variety, published one month before Deren's death. Gene Moskowitz, the newspaper's European correspondent, singled out her voiceover narration for special praise, writing that it "points up the revelations and inner feelings and moods of the girl" and creates "a stream of consciousness effect which blends with the imagery." Maeva was Bonsignori's only movie. After a stint as a writer at MGM, he earned a Ph.D. from UCLA at the age of fifty and became a professor of communications at William Paterson University, in Wayne, New Jersey.

It is easy to understand why film scholars have never taken any notice of Maeva: it sounds like an embarrassment, hackwork that Deren undertook for the money. The thought of their Maya writing the script for a movie peddled with the title Pagan Hellcat was horrifying. Yet that unturned stone troubled me. Gene Moskowitz's description of Deren's script intrigued me. I had to see the film for myself.

I began my search for Maeva at Anthology Film Archive, which presented the last known screening of the film in April 1977, but they had no record of the current whereabouts of that print of the film or any other. Then I inquired at the country's other major film archives and libraries, which had no evidence of the film's existence. I wrote to the Deren scholars who had helped me with my research; I enlisted the aid of a friend, a film producer who had apprenticed with Alexander Hammid: no one had a clue. To all intents and purposes, or rather within the limits of my research, Maeva was a lost film.

When I was about ready to give up, I found a street address for the director's granddaughter, Cindy Bonsignori, at the massage business she owns in St. Petersburg, Florida, where Umberto lived in retirement until his death in 2007. I mailed her a letter from the post office in Lombok, Indonesia, where I live, feeling as though I had cast a message in a bottle into the Bali Sea. Two months later I received a letter from her. She wrote that her grandfather had kept the reels of the master negative of Maeva under his bed until his death. Following his instructions, she threw out the negative and

every other vestige of the film, putting it on the curbside with the household garbage. A few hours later she repented of the decision and went back to retrieve the material before the trash collector arrived, but it was gone.

In her letter, Cindy offered to post a notice on the bulletin board of the retirement community where Umberto had lived, asking if anyone who might have taken the film still had it. It seemed hopeless, but then, so had my letter to her. Sure enough, after another two-month interval, she wrote me again. An elderly couple in Kentucky, previously Umberto's neighbors, who happened to be in St. Petersburg on a visit and saw the notice, had written to say that among the paraphernalia they found on the curb was a VHS videotape that Bonsignori had made of the film, which they sent her. Cindy had a digital transfer made and mailed a DVD to me.

Maeva is not a sophisticated work of filmmaking, but Maya Deren had nothing to be ashamed of by being associated with it. Alberto Baldecchi's photography of Tahiti before the advent of mass tourism is competent, even gorgeous in passages, and the amateur Polynesian actors are fine, particularly Tumata Teuiiau in the title role. Teiji Ito's music, scored for exotic percussion, bamboo flute, and conch, is exciting and completely original in the context of its era. The music mirrors the film's action and mood precisely, in some scenes moment by moment. *Maeva's* principal flaw is its scenario, which borrows nearly every element from generic melodrama. For that reason, it paints an obviously inauthentic picture of Tahitian life. In a scene at a nightclub, *Maeva* gets into a hair-pulling tussle with a rival for one of her lovers that mimics a saloon catfight in a mediocre Western. The scenes of *Maeva* posing for a famous French painter are a late, feeble echo of the legend of Gauguin in Tahiti, a staple of twentieth-century tropical narratives.

Nonetheless, it is clear on a first viewing why Deren was attracted to the project. The fact that it was shot in black and white without sync sound, probably the main reason the movie never found a distributor, would have appealed to her. The assignment provided her with an opportunity to return to the central intention of *Meshes of the Afternoon*, to articulate the inner life of a young woman. The most remarkable thing about the narration is simply the fact that that's what it is: Deren was an accomplished writer, but in her films words are banished; the experience is entirely visual. Yet in *Maeva*,

she accepted Bonsignori's conventional storytelling approach on its own terms and infused it with motivation and narrative complexity through an extended monologue that takes place in the mind of the protagonist. Several passages, such as those describing Maeva's anxiety as she awaits the arrival of the beloved, echo language in Deren's private journals in Haiti.

The film's exotic setting links it obliquely with Deren's life in Haiti, yet she shrewdly avoids any ethnographic elements. The story's situations are trite, perhaps, but the concept may be expressed positively: they are universal. The film presents first love, the loss of virginity, fascination with an exotic culture, jealousy, regret, and resignation to one's fate, plausibly viewed through the eyes of a simple village woman. In her script, Deren may not finally overcome the film's limitations, but she embraces the serious themes she had been charged to express imaginatively, and she does so with dignity; with what artistic success the reader may judge from my lightly edited transcription of the narration in the finished film.

Maya Deren's narration for Maeva: Portrait of a Tahitian Girl is read by Adrienne la Joie, a Tahitian actress with a musical yet heavy Overseas French accent, which is occasionally difficult to understand. When a single word is unclear, I interpolate a word that makes sense, enclosed in brackets; in a few cases, I silently omit sentences that are too difficult to make out. I have also corrected grammatical faults that seemed likely to have been introduced by the reader. I cut two short scenes that nearly duplicate previous events, repetitions imposed by Bonsignori's montage. Otherwise, the text is complete. Passages in italics describe the scene action; Deren's narration, which follows, is set in roman type. The film begins with lyrical establishing shots of the island of Tahiti at day's end; then Maeva speaks.

Sometimes it seems to me as if this is the edge of the world, and that there is nothing real beyond these lagoons, where Uira and I fish together. But they *are* real, the ships and their cargoes of men who come and look and go away. Why do they come? Tahiti is so small. There is no place to go except around and around, or away. One would travel so far only to find something very precious, or to see something very strange. But what is strange about us?

Maeva makes her first appearance as a girl approximately twelve years old, wearing a white shift, cutting banana leaves and performing other domestic chores, which are described by the narration. She meets Kiro, a boy her age wearing a floral-print pareo, repairing a fishnet, who helps her gather breadfruit with a pole picker.

How can it be strange, when – well, how could it be any different than I can remember? It just happens. Like learning the things a *vahine* must know if she is to keep a good house. Who showed me which banana leaf to pick to build a fire for breakfast? I cannot remember. It seems to me I always knew. And how [proud] I felt when I was sent alone to pick breadfruit for the family meal, so I had an excuse to go to Kiro for help. How serious he was, so little and yet already like . . . well, like an elder, as if he was only doing the proper neighborly thing. I am sure he kept watching me, for he came as soon as he saw the breadfruit was too high for me. Then he passed over the fruit on the lower branches, to show how good he was at getting the high ones, with a just-so twist of the pole. In a short time he could bring down enough to last for a whole day. And then the afternoon was free, and we could spend it together, doing other things.

Maeva and Kiro fish for shrimp with bamboo spears, walking softly through a shallow stream in the forest.

Don't push the water, or the shrimp will know. You will see. Step so carefully that even the water will not know you are there. Did Kiro take me along to teach me how to find shrimp? Or was it to let me see how skillful he was, how he never missed with his spear? A little of both, I think, also so that we would be walking together, as if I were his *vahine*. What did I think it meant, to be a *vahine*? I do not remember what I thought it would be. I used to pretend that it was not little shrimp we were getting but large fish, like an older couple. We never spoke much, but I think he was pretending the same thing in his mind, too. How serious he was, how careful, as if he had so many responsibilities, and knew all the things one must know: like, if the water runs cold, it meant that the rain had already fallen in the mountains and would soon come down, and we should turn back.

Children play in the surf as a ship sails away: Kiro and his family have left, moving to another island. At home, Maeva makes a picture of the ship with white pebbles on a board.

Was I unhappy? It seems to me that it was less exciting after that, and the breadfruit was never as rich, and the mangoes as sweet, as when Kiro had picked them. Oh, surely I must have missed him. That was when I first knew that I lived on a small island, where one could only go around and around, or away, as the men did on their ships.

Maeva, now an adolescent, walks through the jungle to the port. Eating a mango that has fallen to the ground, she gazes at a cargo ship. She walks through the town window-shopping, attracting the stares of men.

Yes, it was after that that ships became more and more important to me, for what they took away and for what they brought. How many excuses I invented to walk into town, to see what the ships brought. How exciting it was to look at all the things in the stores. Sometimes I would buy something, just to be able to further imagine the place it came from. I went more and more often to look; and then, one day, I began to feel that I was being looked at. I could feel the eyes on me, but I did not know what to do, or whether to look back, and how. If I could only understand what it was that they were looking at. Was there something strange about me?

At home again, Maeva contemplates her reflection in the mirror. She loosens her pigtails and brushes out her long hair.

I was pretty. I'm sure I was pretty. But what was it that they saw, that I could not see in the mirror? Something that made them quiet, as if they were listening to something. Was it because of their looking that I began to feel strange? The way the air feels when a hurricane is on the way.

Maeva rides her bicycle through the town. A tough-looking white sailor sees her and hops on his own bicycle and follows her home, where he spies on her. After speaking briefly to her friend, Maeva mounts her bicycle again and rides into the jungle for a swim in a pond overhung by dense foliage.

It got heavier and heavier. I rode here and there, like some silly chicken running here and there before a storm. But it was all inside, and I felt foolish and confused. I was embarrassed to speak of it to anyone, even Tieuru, so I went off by myself again. Was it only to me that the air seemed so heavy? I felt I had to wash away the heat, and the weight of it, in the cool water.

After her swim, the sailor jumps out of the bushes and overpowers her. He rapes her. Maeva's violation is presented by close-ups of contorted faces and clenching hands; the consummation of the act is represented by the violent shaking of the boughs of a bush she grasps, which gradually subsides to stillness. Fade to black. Maeva slowly walks her bicycle home, where she sits quietly by herself.

Everything has changed. Everything has changed. But nobody sees it. How can they not see it in me? No, nothing has changed. Then why does it feel so different? Why didn't I run sooner, or fight harder? Why did I stand there until it was too late? What I could not understand, and still cannot: I must have hated him, but I cannot remember that so well. I must have told myself that that's the way it comes to so many other girls, the first time. I think deep down I was almost glad it was over. Now I know. I said to myself, Now I know. What did I think I knew then that I did not know before? The storm had passed. The pressure that made me run and run was gone, and I felt so tired.

High waves crash on the beach as a group of villagers haul in their fishnets. Maeva is not among them; she and a female friend fish by themselves, apart from the group.

Sometimes the great storm wave blows the water out of the pools, and they lie still and empty until the sea running beneath them slowly fills them again from below. It was like that for me for a long time. I do not remember what I was thinking, only that I did not want to go anywhere, I did not even want to go fishing with the others. I went fishing only with Aropa. It was as if I was waiting for something, I don't know what. Something that was going to be for me, not for everyone.

A dignified, gray-haired Frenchman, an artist, sketches a drawing of Maeva while she is fishing. Cut to him drawing her in his studio, where she poses with a large hibiscus flower tucked behind her ear.

I met Monsieur Cresse through Aropa, but I probably would have met him sooner or later anyway, because he was so well known. Still, it was lucky for me to meet him just then. He was quiet and gentle, and how nice it was to feel that he would not . . . well, make problems. I wonder, what will happen to all those pictures? They did not seem beautiful to me, but perhaps the

Westerners liked them. How strange it was to think that someone somewhere might be looking at a painting of me right now.

A friend of Cresse's visits the studio, a dashing Frenchman in the prime of life, a sea captain with a fine mustache, who smokes a pipe.

How can a person, by just being there, change everything, just like that? I think that even on that first afternoon, I knew that something would happen with Pierre. It made me so uneasy to sit there so still, all arranged for being looked at – my hair, the flowers, the dress – and to keep sitting there, even when he was not looking at me. I felt a little ashamed, and then angry. I suppose I could have told Monsieur Cresse that I preferred not to pose when he had visitors, but it would have been difficult to explain why, because I didn't know myself. Besides, I suspected that Pierre was playing a game.

On a break, Maeva lies on the beach, wearing a bikini. Pierre and two other Western men cruise by in a motor launch. She swims out halfway to the boat and waves at them. Pierre waves back.

Anyway, I was curious about Western men, and I decided to make friends with him.

I began to think of him more and more often, and I would watch for him. Maybe I was too eager, maybe he made it that way by being indifferent at first.

In the studio, Maeva poses in the nude. She and Pierre stare at each other intently, until he loses his nerve and leaves.

Well, that day it was he who lost control of the game!

Maeva naps on a chaise longue. Pierre enters the garden gate and looks for her. When he finds her, he watches her sleep. She awakens and smiles at him. When he moves his face near hers, she lies passively, waiting for his kiss; then she abruptly runs away.

Did he think I did not notice that he came more and more often to the studio, even in the high heat of the siesta hour? I think I had even been dreaming of him. I was so pleased that he had finally come directly to me. And then . . . what a strange girl I was! The fear came, because the heat and the eyes, they felt just like that first time. Why did I just stay there and wait for it to happen again? I think if he had not kissed me first, it would have happened the same way. No one had ever kissed me before. Yes, it was that kiss, so strange, that gave me time, or did something that

changed my fear into anger and fight. What did that kiss mean? What did Western women do, when men did that?

Maeva and Aropa ride bicycles along the coast road into the town.

I was not happy there anymore after that. Although I did not think of Pierre with gladness, I began to feel after all that there were things to know about, to see, to do, even on this small island. Yes, that was what pushed me out of the studio and back to the harbor, the waterfront, to be at the very edge of Tahiti, where it touches the large outside world. I wanted to be there, where the ships bring pieces of that outside world. How fascinating it was to me then.

Maeva is a guest on a day cruise aboard Pierre's ship. The guests are mostly middle-aged Western men and young Tahitian women, who dance to Polynesian music.

Oh, the excitement of that first time, to be going on such a boat with the tourists! We were only going to Moorea, but I felt as if we were setting out for a long journey of adventure. I thought – I don't know what, that something extraordinary might happen at any moment with these strangers. Did I expect them to do some strange new dance for us, which would fit their bodies better than our dances? Or did it seem exciting because I knew it was Pierre's boat?

Pierre spends much of his time on the bridge, but at sunset, he seeks out Maeva and talks to her in a dark corner on the deck.

All the time, I had been watching for him. Had he been watching for me too? Maybe he finally decided that I was ready to be his vahine. How proud I was to have been chosen by the captain of the ship, who could have any of the other girls if he wanted them.

Maeva returns to her home in the village. Pierre comes to stay with her there; the two go for a swim in a pond in the forest.

My parents were proud too. They helped me fix up a house. I didn't want to live in his hotel. To me, to be a vahine still meant a garden and flowers and all the things I had pretended so long ago, when Kiro and I were children. It was even a little like that sometimes. We played like children, we teased and screamed, just for pleasure. Ah, how pleasant it was at first! But we never worked together. Was that what was wrong from the beginning that made it end the way it did? Is that always the trouble, the reason they

never stay and never take us with them? Even in those happy days, I felt strange, to be so separated from what he did.

Maeva rides her bicycle to the port, to watch him at work on his ship.

Why did I never tell him that I followed him to town to watch him on his boat, as if just by being there I could be a part of it? Was I trying to learn how to help him by watching, as if it were a simple canoe? Oh, how I wanted him to need me.

At home, Maeva sews. She and Pierre wander through the garden before he sets off on a voyage. She tucks a flower behind his ear before he leaves.

While I worked on the quilt for him to take on his journeys, as if that were a way of sending myself with him, I would wonder how it was with Western women, what they did with their men. Even in the happiest time, when I knew he was only going to nearby islands and would be back soon, still, when the boat left, I always felt it was for other worlds. I even knew that one day he would sail away. I was ready for that. Almost all of them did, sail away to that other world.

Maeva rides to the port to watch Pierre and sees him chatting with a pretty Tahitian woman. The woman takes the flower from Pierre's ear and tucks it behind her own.

But Poia – that was still *my* world. She was the one, with her flirting. But why did he let her take the flower, the flower I had given him, to make the rendezvous promise?

Maeva tosses and turns in bed. At last Pierre shows up, drunk, with the flower again behind his ear. He falls into bed and passes out.

No, no, I misunderstood, I thought. It didn't mean anything. His trip took longer than he thought. I said to myself, that is why he is not home. But it was the same flower I had given him. They had been together. They must have been together in the café, since he was so drunk. Everyone will know that she has taken my [man] from me.

Maeva fishes with a spear in the same stream where she and Kiro had fished.

Perhaps it was nothing. I will make it nothing by pretending as if nothing happened. I will make him happy by finding those little shrimp he enjoys so much. I will not turn back, even when the

water runs cold and the rains come. He will see. He will see that I work harder for his pleasure than she could.

In the afternoon, Maeva again restlessly turns in her bed.

After the rains, the water still hung in the air, and the heat was worse. I could smell the shrimp spoiling in the basket. The air was so heavy, I couldn't breathe. Was I sleepless because I cared so much, or was it just the hot wet air? Or did I want him to find me that way, sleepless, so that he could try to console me? A hundred times I thought I heard him coming, but it was only a bird, or some animal, or a twig breaking. With each moment it was harder to tell myself that there was nothing; but so much did I hope that that was so, I could not give up that hope without going to find out. I had to know.

Maeva walks into town, to the hotel where Pierre stayed before he came to live with her. Maeva creeps stealthily up the stairs and peeps through the latticework of his window. She turns away and runs downstairs. Cut to the port, where a large cruise ship, the Tahitien, is docking, welcomed by traditional dancers on the wharf. As the passengers and sailors disembark, they mingle happily with the Tahitians.

How could it have been? What would have happened if just the next day the *Tahitien* had not arrived on its maiden voyage? It was all the festivities, the flowers, and everybody out dancing that made me remember why I had begun going down to the harbor in the first place. This is what I had somehow expected from Pierre. What is the good of a Western man if he does not bring these good things of Western life with him? The quiet, boring night: we do not have to import that to Tahiti.

Tourists from the ship, wearing leis, enter a crowded café where a Tahitian band is playing and customers dance.

I did not even have time to think of Pierre. Well, hardly, but I was not angry at him anymore. But when I saw Poia in the café, all my rage came out.

Maeva leaps on her rival, knocking over a table. The women wrestle on the floor, but the band plays on. Cut to Maeva gathering fruit in her garden. Pierre, returned from his voyage, comes to her and tries to kiss her, but she shrugs him away.

I did not really care if he came after that. When I pictured him in my mind, I did not see him as a strong captain. Even when I saw

him, his face looked different to me. I saw him as a weak, silly rooster who could be set running by any chicken.

The party at the café is winding down. Maeva dances with a drunk tourist, as Pierre watches jealously. He leaves, and Maeva follows at a distance, but when he angrily gestures for her to come to him, she walks away. Pierre catches up with her and takes her hand. In the morning she awakens, alone in the bed. She watches Pierre shave.

Sometimes I would awaken in our bed in the morning, but I did not remember coming home. I knew that Pierre had found me and brought me home, but I was not grateful for that. I could not understand why he kept bringing me home. Now I think I know: he wanted me more, just because I no longer desired him. That was the game he played so much from the beginning: Did he think I was playing it too? He looked ugly to me now. I could not remember why I had ever desired him.

Pierre's ship sails out of the harbor. Cut to Maeva at the café, enjoying herself with different Western men, drinking and dancing.

I was glad when it was over. After he sailed, I burned the quilt I had made for him and changed the house. Like after the first time, so now I felt I had gone through to the other side of a storm. Now I knew clearly that even on this small island there were two different worlds. It was exciting to realize this, to know that just by turning down certain streets and passing through certain doors, one could enter a way of life as different as if one sailed away. I was meeting men from all over the world, France, Italy, Australia, America. It was a little like traveling myself. Some were just pleasant, and some I liked more than that.

Maeva gets into a brawl with another bar girl. The owner pulls her away and deposits her in an empty seat opposite Guido, a serious-looking man her own age.

Mostly, I had a good time, but more and more I would have fights with the other girls, just because I had no one man and had to protect my position myself. Sometimes it seemed like everyone was pushing me back and down, into the island. Guido's gentleness was like a drink of cool water over my strange, hot anger. He was different from all the others. The way he watched me sometimes, it was not desire, but something closer, I think, to what the Europeans call love.

Guido and Maeva kiss beneath a palm tree, they swim in the lagoon, they lie quietly together in bed, as Guido reads to her from a pile of handwritten letters.

He was not content to know me as I was there, at that moment. He wanted more. Like the day he found the letters I had received from men, mostly fellows who had stopped in Tahiti. They wrote in many languages, in German, Spanish, Italian; but I could only read French. Guido knew so many languages, and he read the letters aloud to me. At first it was as if to tease me, and I didn't want him to read letters from other men, but no one had ever cared about me except what they knew, at that moment. I was glad he was interested, even though he teased me. As he read, they were speaking *his* words. He became all the men.

Maeva serves Guido breakfast.

This was so much more how I had once, long ago, imagined it would be to be a vahine. It was as if knowing me better than any other man, he possessed me more. I wanted him to know more and more about me. I told him almost everything I could remember. It was like making love, to make oneself so known.

Guido fills a hypodermic needle with serum; Maeva is alarmed at first, but after he explains it to her, she allows him to give her an injection in the hip. He asks her to give him a shot, but she is afraid and refuses. Later, they lie together, kissing passionately.

He tried to share his life with me too. He was on a medical research project about special cases in our part of the world. He explained to me about injections. I wish I could have brought myself to do what he wanted, something we would have done together. Probably he has such a woman now. What does she look like? Does he read her letters too? What do they talk about? Maybe they do not talk, because they know about each other. Perhaps only strangers talk, to explain what they do not know together.

Maeva is back at the café, alone and sad, even when a joyous, frenetic dance is performed around her.

Did I feel for Guido what the Europeans call love? Or was I sad because when he left I knew that even when I had been with him, I had never really become a part of the Western world? The ships did not really bring it here; it was still out there, where they came from and would always return.

Maeva walks alone through coconut groves. She returns to her village, where her parents receive her quietly.

I was almost glad when the dry season came. I thought that they might need me at home; it gave me an excuse, a reason to go. I had almost forgotten that anyone could need me. Walking home, I would have been happy, except that it reminded me of that time long ago, when I was afraid that everyone could see the change in me. I knew that I had stayed away too long, and that I came home empty-handed and alone. Yet I felt that they had been waiting for me, that they knew from the beginning that I would come back after I learned: although Tahiti is small, it is still larger than its harbor life, which is not even a world but a small space between two worlds.

Maeva paddles a canoe across the lagoon, fishing alone, and meets Uira, a well-built fisherman from a nearby island who looks a few years younger than she, skin-diving off his own canoe. Aerial shot of their two canoes returning to shore. Cut to a shot of Maeva and Uira going to fish in a single canoe: she paddles, while he spears the fish.

How frightened I was that I would not be able to work well with Uira, that all the talking and talking of the Europeans had made me deaf to the silent speech by which, like fish hunting together in the deep, we would know each other's heart. How glad I was to see that they had not changed me, that we could work well together, because I could know as if I felt it what he needed me to do. But I could not know everything he thought. I knew he [was going] to the July dances to find himself a vahine, but he said nothing to me at first. All that evening I wondered whether he was waiting to make sure that I was best for him, or if he already knew of someone else and was waiting to see if she would be there, ready to be chosen. Perhaps he was wondering the same about me.

Maeva dances with the women, Uira with the men, in an exuberant traditional ceremony.

Why do Westerners always want to dance *with* you? How much more exciting it was to dance *for* Uira, and to know that he was dancing for me. That was the way we chose each other, knowing we would go well together – in all things.

At sunset, the two lovers stroll on the beach, then paddle across the lagoon in their canoe.

Sometimes, I wish we talked together more, as the Europeans did. But if we are quiet, that is because nothing needs to be said. We know each other, about each other, more than words could ever say. Although it is only to a nearby island, he knows that he is the first to take me with him, away from my world into his. He even knows about my time in the waterfront cafés, but he is not jealous. He knows that in spite of all the lovemaking, those men are less real even than ghosts. They left nothing real behind. They are like figures in a dream. So how could they have touched me, or changed me? I know that for them I am also no more real than a sometimes figure in their own, private dreaming.