

Douglas Oliver, *Return to Tahiti: Bligh's Second Breadfruit Voyage*.
Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988. Pp. xx, 281, illus., figures, bibliography, index. US\$40.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Hugh Laracy, University of Auckland

Douglas Oliver is an eminent anthropologist whose corpus of work is distinguished by, among other virtues, its author's awareness of historical processes and his close knowledge of historical sources. For Oliver, the author of the most widely known history of the Pacific Islands (first published in 1951), history and anthropology are tools to be used together in analyzing societies and events. They are not discrete bodies of knowledge. They are complementary, not alternatives.

Oliver's *Return to Tahiti* is clearly the product of a mind not inhibited by conventional academic boundaries. It is imaginatively conceived, handsomely presented, and deals with a significant yet hitherto largely unexplored incident in Tahitian history. Yet for all that, it is a less satisfactory work than its author probably would have hoped for, or his readers would have expected.

The core of the work is a reproduction of William Bligh's journal of his second, and this time successful, visit to Tahiti in 1792 to obtain breadfruit plants for the West Indies. As a historical record and as a repository of firsthand observations on the Tahitians the journal is a valuable one, and Oliver has done well in bringing it to light. However, his method of presentation is an impediment to any clear appreciation of the document as a whole. The standard editorial technique would have been to have a long introduction describing the journal and the events it chronicles, followed by the annotated text of the journal itself. Instead, acting more as author than editor, Oliver has attempted to present a detailed story of the visit in a continuous text compiled from various sources.

He follows the structure of the journal but Bligh's entry for each day is then supplemented with the corresponding entries from the journals of his companions and is copiously glossed with material supplied by other observers and commentators, including, of course, Oliver himself. The provenance of material is identified by the use of a distinctive typeface for each source. *Return to Tahiti* is a brave experiment in literary form, but it does not work very well; the journals of Bligh and of his third mate, George Tobin, are broken up in the word-mass of the text while the narrative remains episodic and the various typefaces are confusing.

Even so, fortunately, these are not damning faults. They may make the book difficult to follow but do not negate its usefulness. The substance is sound, it is the arrangement that is problematic. Besides, there

is one delightful feature that elevates the whole volume, namely the illustrations. These are twenty-seven watercolors, landscapes by Tobin, most of them here reproduced in color for the first time. For *Return to Tahiti*, as for his many works, there is, then, good reason to say "Thanks, Doug" and mean it.