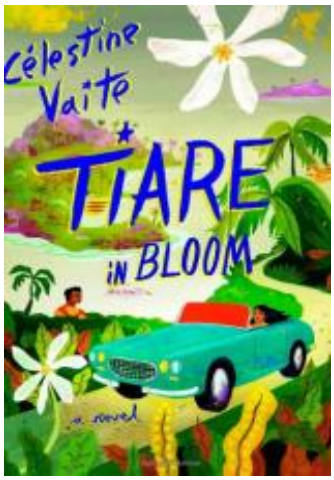
Tiare In Bloom

by Célestine Vaite



About the Book

Now that Materena is a big success with her radio talk show, the word on the Island is that she won't be bothering with Pito much longer. The children are all grown up and gone, so what use does she have for him anyway? Pito has heard the whispers around town, but he's not worried: He's still the man for Materena. They're married now, after all.

But he can't help noticing the changes in Materena. She's spending more and more time at the radio station and with her girlfriends instead of coming home to cook for Pito. And why does a Tahitian woman need to know how to drive, anyway? He tries to shrug it off, but when Materena doesn't come home after a night of dancing, Pito has had enough! OK, so his gut is a bit tautau, and he's not a big superstar like his wife, but how is he supposed fix things with Materena when she doesn't even give him a chance?

Luckily for Pito, his opportunity comes when Tiare, a three-month-old baby girl, is left on their doorstep with nothing but the clothes on her back and a birth certificate declaring "father unknown." According to Tiare's great aunt the baby's father is Materena and Pito's eldest son, Tamatoa. But with Tamatoa away on military service and Materena busy at work, it's up to Pito to care for the new bundle of joy.

Discussion Guide

1. Tiare in Bloom is a novel built around relationships ? between husbands and wives, fathers and children, family members near and far, and friends. Which relationship did you find the most compelling? Were any reminiscent of the relationships in your life?

2. We watch many men transform and mature throughout the novel. Can you identify a turning point for each male character? What made Tamatoa take responsibility for his daughter, or Ati reclaim his life? Why did it take a grandchild to make Pito see the error of his ways?

3. Tiare, the author tells us, is Tahiti's national flower. What is the significance of Tamatoa's daughter's being named Tiare? Why do you think the author chose the title **Tiare in Bloom**?

4. How would you describe the author's writing style? Did you find anything striking or unusual about the way the story unfolds? Can you think of any moments in the book where the voice is deceptively simple?

5. Tiare in Bloom is told from both Materena's and Pito's point of view. Talk about the differences and similarities in each character's attitude and voice. How do Pito's chats with his male friends differ from Materena's conversations with the women on her radio show? Whom do you identify with more?

6. At one point in the novel, Materena and her friends confess the crazy things they've done for love ? dyed their hair blond, walked twenty kilometers to see a man, sneaked out of a bedroom window at night, given up a favorite pastime. What's the craziest thing you've done for love? Was it worth it?

7. What lessons do you draw from Pito in the novel? And from Materena? Think of these characters in terms of both their individual qualities and the ideals they represent.

8. In the chapter "Breathing like you want," Materena speaks about what it means to be a Tahitian. Did you find any of these things surprising or, in your opinion, particular to a Tahitian way of life? Are these qualities you had expected Materena to point out? How would you describe your heritage or culture?

9. What do secondary characters such as Leilani, Ati, and Lily bring to the story? What do you think the author is hoping to show through each of these characters?

10. What did you know about Tahiti before reading **Tiare in Bloom**? How does the novel change or shape your understanding of Tahitian culture?

Author Bio

I came into the world in Tahiti, the first child of Hitiura Vaite and a French man who went back to his country after military service. My childhood in Faa'a, in a big extended family with hundreds of aunties, uncles, cousins and elders was typical Catholic Tahitian style. Posters of Jesus-Christ adorning walls along with magnificent quilts, statues of the Virgin Mary Understanding Woman glowing in the dark, mass on Sunday, breadfruit diet (barbecued, baked, in a stew, breadfruit full stop and be grateful), traditions, superstitions. And of course story-telling, the core of Tahitian culture for hundreds of years.

But I discovered reading at eight years old and was instantly hooked. Three years later, I was devouring French classics which my mother, single mother of four children and professional cleaner with a vision, bought at the second hand store.

Story-telling was still part of my life though, my aunties made sure of it. Set to become the first indigenous lawyer after winning a scholarship at the prestigious Anne Marie Javouhey College in Papeete, love/lust came my way in the form of an Australian surfer with a good looking face and nice manners. M plan to study in France, much to my mother's disappointment, radically changed. I will be a teacher instead and have children. At twenty two years old, I left my island to follow my Australian husband, the father of my two children, back to his country. I've been in Australia for almost twenty years now and have written three novels about the lives and loves of an extended Tahitian family from Faa'a. And I **will** be buried home. My sisters often joke that it is because I want my grandiose State funeral with the President of French Polynesia and the ministers present but they know the truth. Even my four beautiful children do. Faa'a is where I belong. In my heart, my soul, my head, my blood vessels. Since becoming an avid reader, my reading has gone through several stages. At eleven, I was hooked on the works of Balzac, Zola, Dostoievski. Novels thicker than the bible with pages and pages of description and countless characters coming in and out (brothers, sisters, cousins?), but I had all the time in the world for family sagas! Eight years later, a mother and uni student with very limited reading time, thick novels were out. I wanted to be entertained, fast, in between studying, breastfeeding, washing etc. I fell in love with Guy De Maupassant's short stories. He is a master of short stories and shows a deep knowledge of human nature whether he writes about paysans, courtesans, barons, abandoned children. By the time I moved to Australia at the age of 22 to follow my husband, the father of my two children, Guy de Maupassant was still my hero, but I felt that to survive in this foreign country, I best master the English language. So for about two years, I was a magazine reader. Mostly women's magazine such as New Idea, Woman's Day, and Women's Weekly with lots of recipes and cleaning tricks. As I grew confident, I started reading poems by Australian writer Banjo Patterson, short stories by Roald Dahl, and novels with short chapters - **The Color Purple** (Alice Walker),**Fried Green Tomatoes** (Annie Flagg.) Later, much more confident and missing my big extended family, I searched for novels about families and other cultures. **The Joy Luck Club** (Amy Tan), **Like Water For Chocolate** (Laura Esquivel), **The Color Of Water** (James Mc Bride), **Once Were Warriors** (Alan Duff), **Hannah's daughters** (Marianne Fredriksson) I'm still hooked on novels that give me an insight into another culture. I just can't get enough of them! I love the unusual way the characters speak, the settings, the family stories. **A kiss from Maddalena** (Christopher Castellani), **The Almond Picker** (Simonetta Agnello Hornby), **Mao's Last Dancer** (Li Cunxin), **Falling Leaves** (Adeline Yen Mah)

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