

# Cook & Omai



The Cult of the South Seas

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Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg (1740–1812)

*A Man of New Zealand* 1785

watercolour; 31.2 x 18.5 cm

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are held in the collections of the National Library of Australia.

# Foreword

In 2001, Australia is marking the centenary of Federation and the National Library of Australia is celebrating 100 years collecting, preserving and interpreting the history of Australia and the Asia–Pacific region. From its beginnings in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library in Melbourne in 1901, the National Library has gathered together extraordinary resources for research and reference, through the acquisition of major formed collections, gifts from private benefactors, and numerous purchases.

As we celebrate both Australia's and the Library's history, it seems appropriate that we should revisit the moment before the establishment of the British colony, New South Wales, in 1788. This collection of essays explores that moment through one man's journey from his home in Tahiti to London in the 1770s. Omai's story offers us new insights into the significance of Cook's three Pacific voyages and the world in which they took place.

This publication complements the exhibition *Cook & Omai: The Cult of the South Seas*, developed in association with the Humanities Research Centre at The Australian National University. The exhibition draws strongly on the collections of the National Library of Australia and, together with these informative and intriguing essays, reveals something of Omai's impact on the European imagination. I am delighted that the Library has been able to collaborate with some of Australia's leading historians in taking a fresh look at both the Library's collections and the events leading up to the European settlement of Australia.



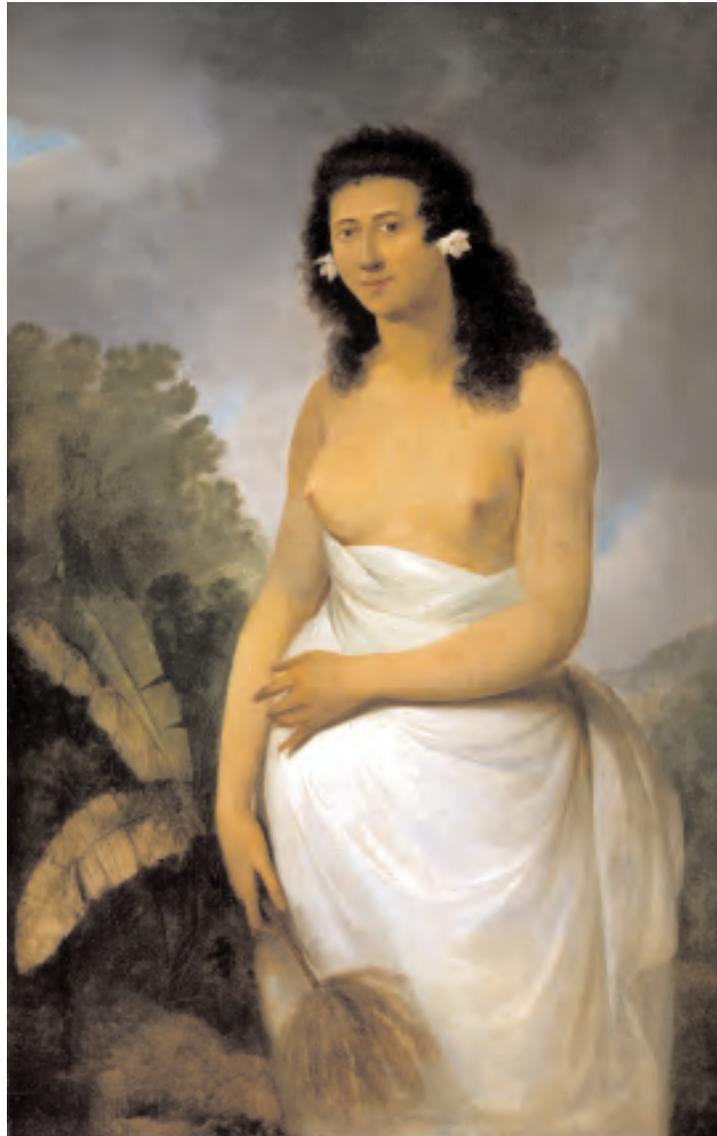
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William Hodges (1744–1797), *View from Point Venus, Island of Otaheite* c.1774  
oil on canvas; 29.2 x 39.4 cm

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John Webber (1752–1793), [*A Portrait of Poedua*] c.1782  
oil on canvas; 144.7 x 93.5 cm

# The Cult of the South Seas

*Michelle Hetherington*

At a time when much of Europe was inaccessible to the traveller and when even the routes between major cities were fraught with danger, European explorers set sail to discover the true nature of the world and its people. Initially without simple and effective means of determining their longitude, they often carried twice the complement of sailors necessary, so as to have sufficient crew alive at the end of the voyage. These voyagers were motivated by a complex set of often-contradictory desires. Territorial ambitions coexisted with the hunger for more souls to convert to Christianity. The desire for knowledge of other peoples often resulted in the disruption and destruction of these same peoples and their societies. At the very heart of these enterprises was the desire to find evidence of the origins of human civilisation, the basis from which their own society had self-evidently progressed so far.

The cultural assumptions these voyagers carried with them, including a belief in their own superiority, and therefore their right to claim the land and resources of non-Europeans, tended to prevent too great a sense of fellow feeling with newly discovered peoples developing. And what, after all, was the point of sailing half the globe only to find an image of

oneself? Certainly the audience back in Europe, for the published accounts of these world voyages, expected tales of difference, tales that would throw their own culture into high relief. However, an unlooked for and often disturbing aspect of these tales of difference was the pressure they exerted on old certainties, including the biblical description of the creation of the world.

One such account, detailing British voyages of discovery into the Pacific, was edited by John Hawkesworth and published in 1773.<sup>1</sup> Hawkesworth's *Account* raised so many unsettling questions about the true nature of society that he was widely attacked in newspapers, journals and pamphlets for his 'immoral' book. The resulting furore was blamed for sending the *Account's* now notorious editor to an early grave six months later. The following year, in 1774, one of the two ships sent with Captain James Cook on his second Pacific voyage arrived back in England. Public interest in their discoveries was at something of a fever pitch. Having spent the last two years sailing in the Pacific, HMS *Adventure* had more tales to add to those disclosed in the published account of Cook's first voyage, and in addition, proof as to the accuracy of those tales. For among her crew, the *Adventure* carried

the first Pacific Islander to reach British shores. He had been enrolled as a supernumerary under the name of Tetuby Homey, was commonly called Jack by his shipmates, and would become widely known as Omai. Embodying the recent history of European expansion into the Pacific—literally carrying the scars of first contact—Omai would also come to represent a considerably older tradition of Western thought as the very personification of the Noble Savage.

Omai—more properly Mai, as O signifies 'it is'—was born on the island of Raiatea into the second rank of



Samuel William Reynolds, engraver (1773–1835)  
after Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792)  
*Sir Joseph Banks, Bart.*, London: Hodgson, Boys & Graves, 1834  
mezzotint; plate mark 12.9 x 9.9 cm

society, a landowning class. Above him were the *ari'i*, from whom the rulers were drawn, and below him a landless class. Little is known about his earliest years, but around 1763, when he may have been about ten years old, Raiatea was invaded by the men of Borabora. His father was killed and Omai fled with family members to Tahiti. In 1767 Captain Wallis and the crew of HMS *Dolphin* became the first Europeans to discover Tahiti. Tobias Furneaux (then a second lieutenant) claimed Tahiti for the British Crown and named it King George's Island, but it was only on the following day, when every canoe had been destroyed, that the Tahitians sued for peace. Omai was among the women and children gathered on 'One Tree Hill' who were wounded by cannon shot as the British crushed the Islanders' resistance to their arrival.

Less than a year later, in 1768, two French ships, the *Boudeuse* and the *Etoile* also called at Tahiti. The commander of that expedition, Comte Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, drew up an Act of Possession and named the island Nouvelle Cythère, after the Peloponnesian Island of Kithira near which Aphrodite was said to have risen from the sea. The following year in 1769, Lieutenant James Cook sailed the *Endeavour* into Port Royal Harbour (later known as Matavai Bay) on a mission to observe the transit of Venus. Tahiti had been selected as the base for the observation as a result of Wallis' favourable report on the friendliness of the Islanders. In addition to her naval crew, the *Endeavour* carried a scientific complement, including, and largely financed by, Joseph Banks. Like Bougainville before him, Banks decided to carry back to Europe a 'specimen' of this newly discovered society.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately his choice, the priest Tupia, preceded by his servant Tayeto, died of disease contracted at Batavia, along with numerous members of the *Endeavour's* crew.

In 1773 Cook returned to Tahiti, this time with the *Resolution* and the *Adventure*. He was told that another ship had visited the island in his absence, commanded by one 'Opeppe'. Cook reported that Tahiti was in a much less flourishing state, which he attributed to the pressures created by visiting ships on the food supply, and destructive wars among the Islanders. He could also have listed the effects of diseases introduced from Europe, such as syphilis. Omai, who had witnessed first-hand the power of the Europeans, expressed a wish to accompany the ships back to England. He was reputedly keen to obtain guns from the British 'Chiefs' with which to kill the men of Borabora (Pora Pora) and reclaim his land.

Omai's brief life then, had been lived against a backdrop of intense and sustained competition and intervention by European interests, both intellectual and commercial. But what of that other European empire—the realm of Western intellectual tradition—in which he also had a role to play? In this arena the ground had been well prepared over many years for Omai's arrival. Debate as to the true nature of humankind had exercised philosophers for generations, with one influential text on the subject, Tacitus' *Germanii*, dating back to the Classical period. Classical and medieval conventions regarding the Golden Age and the Earthly Paradise—and upon which notions of an original and uncorrupted human nature were based—were given new life by the reports of explorers of the New World.

From the Renaissance on, empirical philosophers attempting to apply a more scientific approach to the study of humankind, used the accounts of explorers such as Columbus, Vespucci, De Quiros and Dampier as the 'evidence' on which to base their deductions. It was hoped that the impressive advances in knowledge of the physical world attributed to this

method might be reproduced in the humanities. Ironically, because of the flawed nature of the accounts, this new scientific approach tended to suffer the shortcomings which had earlier led to the rejection of the old approach, of venerating received knowledge and authority. Untroubled by notions of cultural relativity or objectivity, the voyagers' reports of new peoples and societies reflected their own values, beliefs and expectations. While perplexed by behaviours for which they had no explanation, travellers tended to grasp eagerly at any apparent parallels with their own



James Caldwell, engraver (1739–1820)  
after William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*Omai*, London: Wm. Strahan & Thos. Cadell, 1 February 1777  
engraving, plate mark 30 x 25 cm

societies, reading in them evidence of 'universal' values, common to all humanity.

A regular theme of the travel accounts, particularly among the many fictional utopias and dystopias that were accepted as part of the genre, was that many 'savage' people, while lacking the luxuries and sophistications of the West, were nonetheless happier and more virtuous for being 'closer to nature'. The idealised representative of these societies was the Noble Savage, defined as 'any free and wild being who draws directly from nature virtues which raise doubts about the value of civilisation'.<sup>3</sup> Largely a literary convention of particular use for satirising one's own society, the Noble Savage nonetheless influenced and informed the expectations of both those who travelled the world and those who stayed home and read about it. However, the extent to which the concept of the Noble Savage was embraced bore a direct relation to one's class and education.

A perfect example of this relation is found in the account of Cook's first voyage. Cook, intelligent and highly capable but not overly burdened by formal education, appreciated the obliging temperaments of the Tahitians and their abundant food resources in particular. He also saw the Islanders as incorrigible thieves and liars, and found their sexual licence a little disturbing. Hawkesworth, a professional man of letters and well versed in the conventions of the Noble Savage, transformed Cook's views into the statement: 'These people have a knowledge of right and wrong from the mere dictates of natural conscience.'<sup>4</sup>

The most enthusiastic first-hand accounts of the Tahitians belong to Bougainville and Banks, both members of the upper classes. Both writers drew on their knowledge of the classics to provide descriptive metaphors for Tahiti. In recounting a scene onboard

ship shortly after the French arrived, Bougainville writes:

In spite of all our precautions, a young girl came on board, and placed herself upon the quarter deck, near one of the hatchways, which was open in order to give air to those who were heaving the capstan below it. The girl carelessly dropt the cloth, which covered her, and appeared to the eyes of all beholders, such as Venus shewed herself to the Phrygian shepherd, having indeed the celestial form of that goddess.<sup>5</sup>

Joseph Banks, in his 'Thoughts on the Manners of the Women of Otaheite', wrote:

Except in the article of Complexion in which our European Ladies certainly excell all inhabitants of the Torrid Zone I have no where seen such Elegant women as those of Otaheite. Such the Grecians were from whose model the Venus of the Medici's was copied. Undistorted by bandages, nature has full liberty (of) the growing form in whatever direction she pleases and amply does she repay this indulgence in producing such forms as exist here only in marble or canvas nay, such as might even defy the imitation of the Chizzel of a Phidias or the Pencil of an Apelles.<sup>6</sup>

As Cook's actual journal was not widely available until the twentieth century, it was with the accounts of Bougainville, and Hawkesworth—who had been given access to Banks' journal in compiling his *Account*—that literate members of European society informed themselves of both conditions in the Pacific and the latest advances in the search for the true nature of humankind. Thus when Omai disembarked from the *Adventure*, he was transformed from dispossessed



Unknown artist, *Tabitiens Presenting Fruits to Bougainville Attended by His Officers* 1768?  
pencil and watercolour; 9.2 x 6.9 cm

Islander and spare sailor into an incarnation of the Noble Savage. Within days, he was presented to the King and Queen at Kew, and being found to behave with a natural propriety and grace (as readers of Hawkesworth's *Account* would have expected), was then lionised by Polite Society.

In the two years Omai was to stay in Britain, he would meet 'the best people', dine ten times with the Royal Society, travel and botanise with Joseph Banks, stay at Hinchinbrooke with Lord Sandwich and retinue, visit the theatre and also run up considerable tailor's bills. He was not, as numerous critics would later rail, instructed in the Christian religion, nor was

he instructed in 'useful' arts with which to impress and improve his fellow Islanders upon his return.

But while Omai's genteel behaviour may have gratified the expectations of the philosophical, revelations about his homeland raised disturbing questions for the broader society. Tahiti was often presented as a version of the Earthly Paradise. Indeed, the Tahitians were reputed to be free from the necessity enjoined on the rest of humankind of earning their bread by the sweat of their brows. Similarly, the Islanders seemed untroubled by notions of sexual shame. If this really were a version of paradise, a glimpse of a pre-lapsarian world, what then was one to make of the reports of practices such as



John Keyes Sherwin, engraver (1751–1790), after John Webber (1752–1793), *A Dance in Otaheite*  
London: 1784, engraving; plate mark 26.5 x 41 cm

infanticide and human sacrifice? Were these things 'natural' and therefore good?

If one adopted the idea that the Tahitians were 'good children of nature', what then of the havoc wrought amongst them by the introduction of European diseases. How could Europeans pride themselves on their role as 'civilisers' of the world, if they destroyed the happiness of the peoples with whom they came in contact? The anxieties for those of strong Christian belief were profound, and would lead to the establishment of the London Missionary Society in 1795 and the evangelisation of the Pacific thereafter.

By 1776, with Omai's moment of fame beginning to fade, plans were made for his return, which would involve James Cook in his third and fatal Pacific voyage. However, long after he had sailed from Britain, Omai's presence would be found in popular literature, art, theatre and philosophical discussion, a continuing focus for European concerns about the nature of humankind and the world—and their own place at the apex of civilised behaviour—rather than a source of accurate information.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> John Hawkesworth (1715?–1773), *An Account of the Voyages Undertaken by Order of His Present Majesty, for Making Discoveries in*

*the Southern Hemisphere, and Successively Performed by Commodore Byron, Captain Wallis, Captain Carteret, and Captain Cook, in the Dolphin, the Swallow, and the Endeavour: Drawn up from the Journals Which were Kept by the Several Commanders and from the Papers of Joseph Banks, Esq./by John Hawkesworth ...* London: Printed for W. Strahan and T. Cadell ... , 1773.

<sup>2</sup> On leaving Tahiti, Bougainville recounts that he was pressed by the local ruler (Ereti) to take a man back to Europe with him. Aotourou arrived in Paris in March 1769 and stayed till March 1770 before setting out with Marion Du Fresne for the Pacific. Aotourou never reached home; he contracted smallpox and died off the coast of Madagascar in November 1770. See Comte Louis-Antoine de Bougainville (1729–1811), *A Voyage Round the World: Performed by Order of His Most Christian Majesty, in the Years 1766, 1767, 1768, and 1769*, translated from the French by J.R. Forster. Da Capo Press, Amsterdam, 1967, p. 241.

<sup>3</sup> Hoxie Neale Fairchild, *The Noble Savage: A Study in Romantic Naturalism*. New York: Russell, 1961, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> As quoted in Fairchild, *ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>5</sup> Bougainville, *op. cit.*, pp. 218–219.

<sup>6</sup> Banks' manuscript, National Library of Australia (MS 9). Punctuation was not one of Banks' strengths.



John Webber (1752–1793), *A View in Matavai, Otaheite*  
London: J. Webber, 1 February 1787, engraving, plate mark 29.3 x 43 cm  
aquatint by Marie Catherina Prestel (1747–1794)

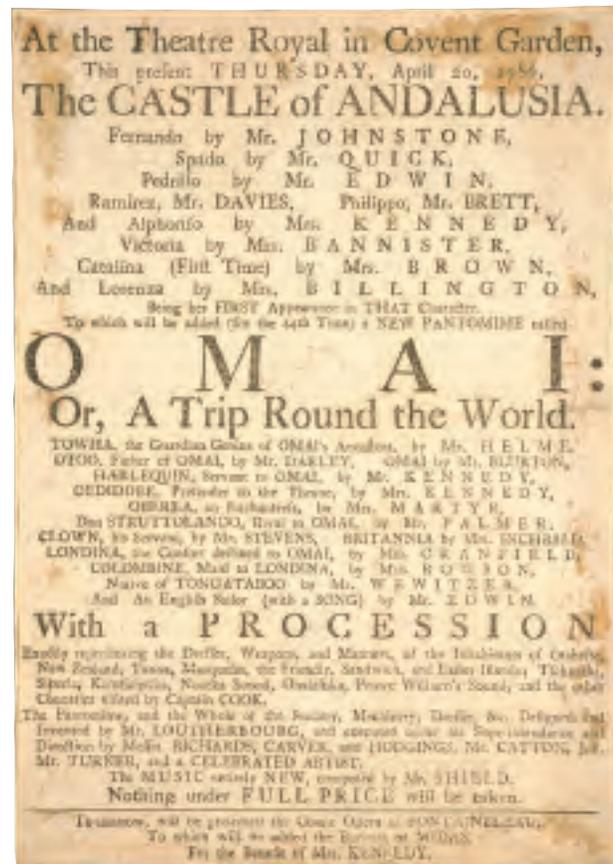
# Spectacles of Knowledge: OMAI as Ethnographic Travelogue

Iain McCalman

People have always visited museums to be entertained as much as instructed: even the most sober of these institutions has usually had to combine pedagogy with some measure of showmanship. Conversely, the theatre and related forms of popular spectacle have increasingly relished the role of teacher. Anyone in Britain around the time of the First Fleet, who wanted to learn about the fashionably exotic cultures of the South Seas, would have been wise to visit the myriad 'shows' of London.

Located mainly around Leicester Square, most of these exhibitions and spectacles aimed to entertain and instruct mixed audiences of men, women and children in exchange for a fee. Pseudo-scholarly methods of display, such as descriptive taxonomies, were often combined with innovative visual and mechanical marvels designed to impart a sense of wonder.

When the young German novelist Sophie von la Roche visited London in September 1786, eager to learn about the South Seas, one of her earliest actions was to scan through the long lists of spectacles featured in the daily papers.<sup>1</sup> The region was still very much in fashion. The official Admiralty account of Cook's fatal third voyage had been published only two years earlier in 1784. A *Voyage to the Pacific Ocean* had quickly gone



[Playbill for the 44th performance of Omai, or, A trip around the World]

20 April 1786

23.3 x 16.2 cm

into three editions, many reprints and numerous serialisations. Sophie von la Roche's appetite may have been freshly whetted by an edition in German, which appeared in 1786.<sup>2</sup>

Von la Roche began her quest on 7 September with a visit to the British Museum in Bloomsbury, which had



Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg (1740–1812)  
*Nootka or King G. Sound* 1785, watercolour; 31 x 19 cm

been opened free to the public in 1759. Having told the librarian that she wanted to see the South Seas collection donated by that 'excellent man', Captain Cook, she was entranced at the range of objects on display, especially by an exquisite garment woven out of tiny red feathers that had belonged to the Otaheite 'King'.<sup>3</sup> The following day at a cost of 2/6 she located a still 'vaster' Pacific collection at Sir Ashton Lever's Holiphusikon Museum in Leicester Square.<sup>4</sup> Its Cook voyage objects were so numerous that they merited their own special gallery, and so tangible that they included the grisly heads of two cannibal warriors.<sup>5</sup> Here and elsewhere von la Roche was struck by the way that the English conjoined science and commercial showmanship.<sup>6</sup> Around the corner in Covent Garden a few days later, she viewed the personal South Seas collection of naturalist George Forster. The same precinct also provided her with the most entertaining of this swarm of spectacles, the 'jolly' pantomime.<sup>7</sup>

A hybrid genre with no real modern equivalent, the pantomime encompassed farce, topical satire, mime, song, dance, baroque allegory, romance, commedia dell'arte improvisation, theatrical tableaux and 'special effects' performance. The most talked about production out of Covent Garden Theatre in that year made a special point of its naturalistic knowledge content. *OMAI: Or, A Trip Round the World*, which had opened in December 1785, was manager Thomas Harris' bid to usurp the reputation of rival theatre Drury Lane as a venue for spectacle. Deliberately intended as the greatest blockbuster pantomime of the eighteenth century, *OMAI* gathered the combined production talents of set designer and special effects expert Philippe de Louthembourg, playwright John O'Keeffe, musical composer William Shield and scene painter John Webber, plus at least four other 'artistic

gentlemen'. De Louthembourg led this team and was most responsible for imbuing *OMAI's* farcical plot with a powerful overlay of geographic and ethnographic realism. A member of both the French and English art academies, the Alsatian-born painter had by 1786 already produced lavish set designs for 30 London pantomimes. Over the previous 14 years he had revolutionised the dreary staging traditions of the London theatre. De Louthembourg possessed a landscape painter's talent for rendering vivid naturalistic scenes, combined with an engineer's understanding of the mechanics of illusion, including, depth of field, clockwork movement, realistic automata, and dynamic light and sound effects.<sup>8</sup>

The *Times* report on Boxing Day 1785 left its readers in no doubt that *OMAI* and de Louthembourg had broken fresh ground. The reviewer thought it rare for a pantomime to offer its audiences such lasting 'utility':

It may be considered a beautiful illustration of *Cook's Voyages*—an illustration of importance to the mature mind of an adult, and delightful to the tender capacity of an infant. The scenery is infinitely beyond any design or paintings the stage has ever displayed. To the rational mind what can be more entertaining than to contemplate prospects of countries in their natural colours and tints—to bring into living action, the customs and manners of distant nations! To see exact representations of their buildings, marine vessels, arms, manufactures, sacrifices and dresses?<sup>9</sup>

The newspaper reported that de Louthembourg had consulted Commander Phillip on naval matters and had employed John Webber, artist on the third Cook voyage, to advise on 'native' costumes and to paint occasional scenes. Judging from a sales catalogue compiled after de Louthembourg's death, Webber may

also have sold his old friend some original examples of 'Otaheitea dresses'.<sup>10</sup>

Historians have tended to echo the opinion of the *Times* reviewer on the subject of the pantomime's scenic authenticity. In a pioneering article of 1936 William Huse argued that each individual travel scene of the pantomime was based scrupulously on individual plates



Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg (1740–1812)  
*Obereyau* [i.e. *Oberea*] *Enchantress* 1785, watercolour, 32.2 x 20.2 cm

from Webber, with occasional supplementation from William Hodge's illustrations of the second Cook voyage. Huse also listed similar sources for all of de Louthembourg's Polynesian costumes (the original drawings of these are in the National Library of Australia).<sup>11</sup>

Even if we discount that the original Webber/Hodges drawings are in themselves highly mediated representations of reality, de Louthembourg did not in fact translate these drawings into faithfully equivalent set designs. Rather, he treated the voyage plates as a rich menu of possibilities from which he could construct dramatic and hybrid tableaux. His famous pantomime scene of the habitations of the Kamtschatka Balagans, for example, can be reconstructed through the detailed reports of a newspaper critic, through set descriptions on the original script, and through an original model maquette, which survives in the Victoria and Albert Museum.<sup>12</sup> Close comparison with Webber's plates shows that de Louthembourg actually blended elements from Nootka Sound and Oonalashka, that is, from the Asiatic and American segments of the third voyage. Such examples can be multiplied many times.<sup>13</sup>

We should not be surprised at this. De Louthembourg was a painter drawn powerfully to the aesthetic of the sublime. This is partly what made him a pioneer of romantic art. Many of his celebrated scenes in *OMAI*, such as the king's burial, the war canoes and the enchantress, were selected and embellished for their gothic frisson. Indeed, complaints from early critics that de Louthembourg had overused sublime effects forced substantial changes to both the script and set. In order to lighten the pantomime's mood, a new role was created for the prominent comedian, Delpini, and a machinery expert from France was hired to introduce

humorous mechanical effects.<sup>14</sup> De Louthembourg's use of whirlpools, waterfalls, shipwrecks, fires and storms at sea was deliberately intended to display his genius as a special effects magician. He took pride in being able to simulate and extend nature's elemental dynamism using technological and pictorial illusion. Both as a painter and scene designer, he saw himself as a specialist in *trompe l'oeil*, someone able to generate realistic appearances by means of visual trickery and other modes of artistic *legerdemain*. Fascination with illusion lies at the heart of all de Louthembourg's art.<sup>15</sup>

We need also to appreciate the paradox that de Louthembourg, the trained engineer and technologist, was a devout believer in magic, necromancy and the supernatural. He possessed one of the most extensive occult libraries of the day and was a lifelong seeker after the philosopher's stone for transmuting gold and the universal elixir for ensuring eternal youth. In 1786 he actually contracted the alchemical charlatan, Count Cagliostro, to undertake a rejuvenation of himself and his young wife, Lucy, on a Swiss mountaintop.<sup>16</sup> Theories of the alchemical transmutation of matter underlie the colouration and themes that de Louthembourg deployed within both his academic and popular art.

How then, do we assess the impact of the pantomime on those mixed audiences who attended its 70 performances of 1785–1786? Of course, we cannot be certain how audiences of two centuries ago processed *OMAI*'s multiple messages. But we do know that newspaper critics valued the pantomime, primarily, because it enabled them to soak up Enlightenment knowledge in an entertaining form. To use a more contemporary parlance, they felt they had undertaken a 'virtual' voyage in the South Seas. Time and again reviewers praised *OMAI* in the language of empiricism, calling it 'a living history' or

'a school for the history of man'. De Louthembourg would have seen this as a testimony to the effectiveness of the illusion.

Does it matter whether audiences of a popular pantomime were really receiving accurate geographical and ethnographic information about Mai and the Pacific peoples? With his usual acuity, Greg Dening has suggested that pantomime's juxtaposition of techniques of naturalistic illusion with a fantastical

magical plot probably enhanced its reality effects.<sup>17</sup> De Louthembourg's spectacular travelogue inserted viewers into a framework of Enlightenment empiricism with its well-known love of measuring, categorising and constructing social laws. Attendees of *OMAI* were being exposed to a type of pseudo-realism disguised as entertainment. One likely consequence is that they took the pantomime much more seriously than usual; whether or not consciously, fun and farce were



John Cleveley (c.1745–1786), *Morea [i.e. Moorea] One of the Friendly Islands in the South Seas, 1777*  
watercolour; 51.3 x 69 cm

transformed into serious knowledge. This in turn—we may speculate—helped to make the grandiose patriotic and imperial sentiments that issued from the mouths of the actors, who represented Mai and his kin, more plausible. Within this frothy, romping spectacle the seeds of the ethnographic cinema of the future were being germinated. The sometimes-insidious consequences of such pseudo-realism—as Roland Barthes has warned—are present with us still.<sup>18</sup>

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Clare Williams (ed.), *Sophie in London, 1786, Being the Diary of Sophie von la Roche*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1933, p. 95.
- <sup>2</sup> M.K. Beddie, *Bibliography of Captain James Cook, RN, FRS*. Sydney: Trustees of the Public Library of New South Wales, Mitchell Library, 1970, pp. 298–309.

<sup>3</sup> Williams, op. cit., pp. 109–110.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press, 1978, p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Williams, op. cit., pp. 114, 118, 120–122, 141.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

<sup>8</sup> John O’Keeffe, *Recollections of the Life of John O’Keeffe*. 2 vols. London: Colburn, 1826, vol. 2, pp. 114–115; Christopher Baugh, *Theatre in Focus: Garrick and de Louthembourg*. Cambridge, UK, and Alexandria, Virginia: Chadwyck-Healy, 1990, pp. 24–35; Frederick Burwick, ‘Romantic Drama: From Optics to Illusion’, in Stuart Peterfreund (ed.), *Literature and Science: Theory and Practice*. Michigan: North Eastern University Press, 1990, pp. 167–173.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Ralph Gilmore Allen, *The stage spectacles of Philip James de Louthembourg*. Dissertation, Yale, 1960;



William Woollett, engraver (1735–1785), after William Hodges (1744–1797), *The Fleet of Otabeite Assembled at Oparee* London: Wm. Strahan & Thos. Cadell, 1 February 1777, engraving; plate mark 24.7 x 39.5 cm

Ann Arbor, Michigan: Michigan University Microfilms, 1960, pp. 274–275. *The Rambler*, January 1786, likewise stressed that the materials had been drawn from 'authentic sources' and that 'the landscapes, scenery, dresses, character and manners ... we may depend are truly depicted'.

<sup>10</sup> *A Catalogue of All the Valuable Drawings, Sketches, Sea Views and Studies. Of that Celebrated Artist Philip James de Loutherbourg, esq.* RA. London: Peter Coxe, 18 June 1812. The prefatory observations, written by his friends William Henry Pyne and Edwin Landseer, also stressed his commitment to scientific precision, including his special knowledge of 'Oriental Costume', see pp. 4–5.

<sup>11</sup> William Huse, 'A Noble Savage on the Stage', *Modern Philology*, vol. 32, February 1936: 303–316.

<sup>12</sup> *London Chronicle for 1785*, 20–22 December 1785: 595–596.

<sup>13</sup> Allen, op. cit., pp. 288–290. He shows that de Loutherbourg has borrowed from Webber's plates 78, 48 and 52 in the account of Cook's third voyage, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean*.

<sup>14</sup> Allen, op. cit., pp. 270–272.

<sup>15</sup> Pyne and Landseer, 'Observations', *A Catalogue of All the Valuable Drawings ...*, op.cit., pp. 5–6; William Henry Pyne, *Wine and Walnuts*. 2 vols. London: Colburn, 1823, vol. 1, pp. 281–303; Rüdiger Joppien (ed.), *Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg, RA, 1740–1812*. Kenwood: Iveah Bequest, 1973, passim.

<sup>16</sup> Iain McCalman, 'Mystagogues of Revolution: Cagliostro, de Loutherbourg and Romantic London', in James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin (eds), *Romantic Metropolis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming-December 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Greg Denning, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language: Passion, Power and Theatre on the Bounty*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 269–271.

<sup>18</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Lost Continent' and 'The Great Family of Man', in *Mythologies*. St Albans: Paladin, 1973, pp. 94–96, 100–102.



Philippe Jacques de Louterbourg (1740–1812), *Dancer, Otaite* 1785  
watercolour; 31.3 x 20.3 cm

# Comedy in the OMAI Pantomime

Christa Knellwolf

At Christmas 1785, the Theatre-Royal in Covent Garden produced the pantomime *OMAI: Or, A Trip Round the World*. Performed in sumptuous costumes, with scenery designed by Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg, and accompanied by the music of William Shield, John O’Keeffe’s libretto was a feast for the senses, which surpassed the expectations of an audience accustomed to the most exquisite dramatic art.<sup>1</sup>

The pantomime, a popular dramatic form which combined text, music and visual spectacle, and which followed on from another play, had become a theatrical event by the late eighteenth century. The first performance of *OMAI* followed *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* and the audience is said to have been so impatient for *OMAI* that it paid little attention to the main drama of the evening.<sup>2</sup> In terms of form, the pantomime was derived from the Italian *commedia dell’arte*, which had originally emerged in sixteenth-century Italy.<sup>3</sup> Arlequino or Harlequin, as he was to be known in English, became its unchallenged hero. The dramatic action of the harlequinade, or pantomime, was inspired by the caprices of an untamed sexuality and chiefly consisted of bawdy parodies of courtship rituals and farcical duels between a number of rivals.<sup>4</sup>

The idea of having Omai as the central hero of a pantomime came from David Garrick, one of London’s most celebrated actors of the eighteenth century. He proposed to revive the idea of the pantomime *Arlequin Sauvage* (first staged in Paris in 1721) in which an indigenous Harlequin unsparingly ridicules the follies and depraved customs of a civilised nation.<sup>5</sup> Garrick’s original plan was discarded. No overt satire of British culture was attempted and Omai, the exotic stranger, was given no scope to express himself as a native of Tahiti. The pantomime disregards all historical facts and portrays an idealised encounter between the British Empire and the Tahitians when it argues that Omai’s reason for coming to London was that of wooing a British maid. The laughter aroused by the conventions peculiar to pantomime, however, powerfully challenges the claim that this particular pantomime shows how effectively ‘Cook’s example’ had humanised the ‘new-found world’.<sup>6</sup>

Because he operates within the conventions of the harlequinade, Omai cannot be reduced to a mere spectacle of exotic otherness. The reason for this is that Harlequin and his ilk ridicule unsparingly the representatives of wealth and power. The *OMAI* pantomime, then, concentrates its interest on the

relationship between Britain and the inhabitants of the islands discovered by Cook. An absolutely intriguing feature concerns the resemblance between Omai, the central hero, and Harlequin, his servant. The libretto describes his costume as follows: The idea of his dress was taken from Cook's Voyages, where it is said that Omai, to make himself fine on his introduction to a Chief, dressed



Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg (1740–1812)  
*Otoo, King of Otaheite* 1785  
watercolour; 31.2 x 19.2 cm

himself with a piece of the habit of each country he had seen in his several voyages.<sup>7</sup> It thus projects him as a geographic motley, as opposed to the traditional motley that provokes laughter because he is stitched together with the cast-off rags of his social superiors.

Omai mimics Harlequin's behaviour. The fact that he does not take over his role, but instead serves as his double, makes the understanding of foreign identity problematic. Omai not only adopts the conventional behaviour of Harlequin; he also resembles him in terms of skin colour. The question of why Harlequin has a black facial mask is largely a matter of speculation but it is certain that from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, he was invariably played with a black mask.<sup>8</sup> When we search through the drawings of de Louthembourg, however, we are struck by the absence of a design for Harlequin's costume. While this may come across as an unfortunate omission, it also reminds us that it was not necessary because everybody knew what Harlequin looked like. On the other hand, Harlequin is also the intrinsically unfathomable jester, thus accounting for the audience's uncanny familiarity with him. When Omai is cast as his double, the duplicitous nature of Harlequin also clings to Omai, demanding that the audience should acknowledge its inability to understand who he is and what he stands for.

Over the centuries, Harlequin had of course undergone some changes, but he retained the role of exposing crude human instincts, particularly in figures of authority and learning. His characteristic gestures of revealing the pretensions of civilisation were strongly linked to his appearance, which was so familiar, precisely because, it was so utterly strange. When Omai acts alongside Harlequin—their faces similarly blackened by the help of mask and make-up—he acquires Harlequin's uncanny power to play with make-believe.

The *OMAI* pantomime paints an idyllic-escapist picture of both exotic and European worlds, and utilises laughter as a backdrop to an insistent sense of magic. Indeed, the first scene takes place in a temple or burial place in Tahiti—referred to as Otaheite—where Otoo, Omai’s father, implores the spirits of his ancestors to establish Omai on the throne. In an idyllic scene of pastoral harmony between human and superhuman characters, his sacrifice is received with favour and Towha, the guardian genius of Omai’s ancestors, appears—in the guise of a chief mourner—to grant the request.

While the significance of ancestral worship is an authentic feature of Tahitian culture and dramatises the accounts given both by Cook and the record ascribed to Omai, the successful invocation of Towha is a theatrical convention, inspired by the mythologies of the Pacific. Throughout there is a playful tension between accepting that Omai comes from a place which possesses secret powers and the underlying notion that this is no more than a story which is acted out, with all the potentials of theatrical make-believe. However, the realm of the imagination is by no means dismissed as an idle toy. Or rather, the pantomime illustrates the importance of the imagination for coming to terms with the historical significance of Cook’s discoveries. In this sense, the dramatic tension is not simply between a real and an imagined world, but between a world of the imagination and a reality, which had become strange. The pantomime, therefore, plays with the boundaries between reality and make-believe in an attempt to make sense of the new knowledge gained by Cook’s journeys of exploration.

The narrative circles around Omai and describes the successful union between Omai and Londina (and of their servants Harlequin and Colombine) and of Omai’s subsequent accession to the throne. Omai comes to

London to find his beloved Londina. He finds her, but is chased all round the world by his rival, Don Struttolando, until he finally returns to Tahiti. Omai’s comic flight, which acts out a complete tour of the world, turns into a dazzling pageant of the costumes worn in the foreign places, which had been discovered by Cook.

The pantomime’s finale invites the audience to pay tribute to the memory of Cook. An English Captain



William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*Otoo, King of Otaheite [i.e. Tahiti], August? 1773*  
chalk drawing; 54 x 37.8 cm

represents the British Empire, and Oberea—despoiled of her historical role as Queen of Tahiti and featuring as enchantress-protectress of Omai's rival for the throne—bows before the Captain as a sign that she welcomes the British presence in the Pacific. After he has installed Omai as the rightful ruler, the English Captain delivers an emotionally charged epilogue which insists that the peaceful outcome of the conflict was only possible because of Cook's efforts in teaching 'mankind how to live'.

A grand painting of Cook's apotheosis descends while the Captain and a chorus of Indians repeats the following lines as a recurring theme:

Mourn, Owhyee's fatal shore,  
For Cook, our great Orono, is no more!



after F. Maggiotto  
*Columbine, Harlequin, and a Venetian* (detail)  
reproduced from *The Italian Comedy* by Pierre Duchartre  
London, Sydney: G.G. Harrap, 1929

Owhyee—that is Hawaii—is the place where Cook was killed in a bitter conflict with the Islanders when the skills of negotiation, for which he was famous, failed him. The manner of Cook's death thus symbolised a moment of defeat, and exposed the meaninglessness of the civilisation, which Cook had supposedly brought to countless far-off lands. When the pantomime appeals to the 'chiefs of the ocean' to share in the mourning of Cook, however, it rewrites the story of his end and tries to erase the blemish from his authority posthumously. The eulogising speech by the English Captain refers to Cook as 'our great Orono', the title with which the Islanders honoured him, and which means a demigod, or hero. The all-embracing 'our' in 'our great Orono' appears to wipe out ethnic difference, or indeed utilises the indigenous hero-worship in order to bypass prevailing Christian doctrine, so that Cook could literally turn into an immortal demigod.

The fact that Omai is portrayed as a *commedia dell'arte* hero endears him to the audience and ensures that he receives their sympathy. They will undoubtedly laugh at the idea that he should lose his talisman and have to seek the assistance of a Justice of the Peace in order to receive it back. An important feature of the pantomime is also that in the colourful company of an old Water-Cress Woman, who claims to be his good fairy and a Raffling Toy-Shop-Man who hawks trinkets, cosmetic washes and quack-medicines, Omai does not come across as the odd one out. Not only does he mingle with the bohemian characters of the fairground; he also acquires their carnivalesque right to challenge hierarchies. By inhabiting an analogous role as Harlequin, therefore, Omai is not simply stared at as a curiosity but he gains the power of subverting expectations and conventions. This pantomime—

however strongly it differs from Garrick's original ideas—may have tried to subsume Omai into a celebration of Cook and, by extension, the British Empire. Omai's place among the commedia dell'arte characters, however, also makes him into a subversive presence who challenges the finale's statement concerning Britain's civilising influence on the Pacific.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For the text of the pantomime, see John O'Keeffe, *OMAI: Or, A Trip Round the World*, in *The Plays of John O'Keeffe*. Vol. 2. Ed. and intro. Frederick M. Link. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1981.)
- <sup>2</sup> For a report of the context of the first performance of *OMAI*, see E.H. McCormick, *Omai: Pacific Envoy* (Auckland: Auckland University Press/Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 313–320). For a review and detailed description of the individual scenes of the pantomime, see *The London Chronicle* (20–22 December, 1785). For a discussion of the generic conventions of pantomime, see Daniel Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element: The English Pantomime 1806–1836* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969).
- <sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the origins and history of commedia dell'arte, see Winifred Smith, *The Commedia dell'Arte* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964). See also Kenneth Richards and Laura Richards, *The Commedia dell'Arte: A Documentary History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell for The Shakespeare Head Press, 1990).
- <sup>4</sup> For a historical discussion of the harlequinade, see Allardyce Nicoll, *The World of Harlequin: A Critical Study of the Commedia dell'Arte* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).
- <sup>5</sup> For a discussion of Louis François de la Drevetière Delisle's pantomime *Arlequin Sauvage*, see Gilbert Chinard, *L'Amérique et le Rêve Exotique dans la Littérature Française au XVIIIe et au XIXe Siècle* (Paris: Librairie E. Droz, 1934, pp. 226–232). Compare Benjamin Bissell, *The American Indian in English Literature of the Eighteenth Century* (Archon Books, 1968), pp. 130–133.
- <sup>6</sup> Compare the overt claims in both the first and last scenes of O'Keeffe, *op. cit.*, pp. 4 and 23.
- <sup>7</sup> See the description included in the list of characters, in O'Keeffe, *op. cit.*
- <sup>8</sup> Ulrike Reiss argues that Harlequin has his origin in the medieval understanding of the devil; see, *Harlequin: Eine Ausstellung im Oesterreichischen Theatermuseum* (Wien: Hermann Böhlau, 1984). Other speculations concerning his black face can be found in Pierre Louis Duchartre, *The Italian Comedy: The Improvisations, Scenarios, Lives, Attributes, Portrait, and Masks of the Illustrious Characters of the Commedia dell'Arte* (Trans. Randolph T. Weaver. London: George G. Harrap, 1929, pp. 123ff). See also Thelma Niklaus, *Harlequin Phoenix or The Rise and Fall of a Bergamask Rogue*. (London: The Bodley Head, 1956.)



Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792)  
*Omai* 1775–76  
oil on canvas; 236 x 146 cm  
From the Castle Howard Collection

# Images of Mai

*Caroline Turner*

The pencil drawing of the face of Mai, or Omai, done from life by the illustrious English portrait painter Sir Joshua Reynolds and held in the National Library of Australia, is the best physical likeness of Mai that exists. As we observe the face across more than two centuries we see a young, undoubtedly Polynesian man with a broad nose and sensual mouth, eyes directed towards some unseen object, perhaps dreaming of his return to his home.

Mai's objective in coming to England was not only adventure (and it was a courageous venture since neither of those who had previously gone with the Europeans, Aoutourou with Bougainville nor Tupaia with Cook, had returned alive), nor simply to improve his status among his fellow countrymen. What he intended, in embarking on this amazing journey, was to obtain the means to repel the invaders of his island, Raiatea, from which he had been exiled as a child. From his face we can see why Mai was a favourite in England, for his open and even ingenuous gaze reflects something of the calm demeanour and good nature, which he showed to his hosts while there. His popularity in England is well documented with many commentators noting his 'natural' good manners, especially in his attentions to ladies, that he attended banquets but never drank to

excess, and learned to ride, play chess and cards. Young and adaptable and coming from a highly socially stratified Polynesian society, he was able to conform to English society in a way that perhaps the proud priest, Tupaia, his mentor, would not have done had he survived the voyage to England with Cook.<sup>1</sup>

The pencil drawing is a study for a larger portrait painted by Reynolds in 1775 or 1776. The latter full-length portrait, showing Mai barefoot, wearing a robe and turban yet in a stance which conveys aristocratic authority, was exhibited by Reynolds at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1776. It was described by contemporaries who knew Mai as 'a strong likeness' and as depicting the subject 'Omiah' (as he was also known) '... in the habit of his country'.<sup>2</sup> The painting has always been considered one of Reynolds' finest portraits and an important painting in eighteenth century British art. Professor Joseph Burke writes: 'for a memorable moment the classical and romantic tendencies of the eighteenth century are fused in perfect reconciliation, so that the picture becomes a kind of summation'.<sup>3</sup>

The painting was later engraved by Johann Jacobé and thus widely circulated.<sup>4</sup> The fact of the engraving may indicate why Reynolds made the portrait because,

as Nicholas Penny, curator of a major Reynolds retrospective suggests, there were occasions when Reynolds may have done a portrait of someone famous: for example, the writer Laurence Sterne or an actress such as Kitty Fisher, for the purpose of an engraving being produced to satisfy public curiosity and interest.<sup>5</sup> The painting of Mai does not seem to have been commissioned (although it is possible Sir Joseph Banks, a close associate of Reynolds, may have suggested it) because it was still in Reynolds' studio in 1796.



Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792)  
*Omai of the Friendly Isles* 1774?  
pencil drawing; 26.5 x 20 cm

This was not Reynolds' only painting of representatives of other races. He painted South Asian and African servants in his portraits of British colonial magnates; and in the early 1770s undertook two studies of a young black man and in the mid-1770s of a young Chinese Wang-Y-Tong. These are, however, more informal portraits with none of the patrician poise and presence he gave Mai in the finished painting.<sup>6</sup>

The Reynolds drawing of Mai is important in its own right as a fine work of art and for its revelation of the subject but also as a rare example of Reynolds' preliminary drawings. The artist seldom did preliminary drawings, preferring to work in oils directly onto canvas. An oil sketch of Mai by Reynolds exists in the Yale University Collection, but the finished painting is much closer to the pencil drawing, and it may be that Reynolds did the oil sketch first and, unsatisfied with the results, turned to the pencil to achieve a closer likeness. Another oil sketch by Reynolds, sometimes called a portrait of 'Omai', with the subject wearing a pink turban adorned with a crescent, seems to be one of the studies mentioned above of a young man of African origin done prior to Mai's arrival in England.

Reynolds was one of the most sought after portraitists of his day and his clientele were the rich, the aristocratic and the famous. In the same Royal Academy exhibition in which the Mai portrait was shown, was Reynolds' identical size painting of a young woman, Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, an 'Empress of fashion' among the aristocratic younger set. Reynolds' intention in portraits was not to 'copy' nature (nor is he known for his psychological insights into character) but to create a picture which would win respect in its own right. Forced to earn his living as a portrait painter, he was, as Penny points out,



William Parry (1742–1791)  
*Sir Joseph Banks with Omai, the Otabeitan Chief, and Doctor Daniel Solander* 1775–1776  
oil on canvas; 147.5 x 147.5 cm  
Private Collection, by kind permission of Nevill Keating Pictures Ltd

an ambitious man who wanted to raise the status of painting in England. His portraits could, as contemporaries conceded, combine truth with fiction, realism with imagination in depicting a subject.

The works by Reynolds were not the only portraits of Mai done in England. Almost immediately on his arrival, an illustration appeared alongside an article in the London magazine of 1774, which depicted Mai wearing a flowing robe with his right hand extended to show the tattoos and holding a wooden headrest—perhaps a symbol of rank—a pose remarkably similar to Reynolds' later portrait which, however, omits the headrest.<sup>7</sup> A contemporary print of Mai being presented by Sir Joseph Banks to the King and Queen, which occurred very soon after his arrival, also shows him wearing the robe but carrying a triangular shaped hat.<sup>8</sup> In 1774 the painter Nathaniel Dance did a drawing which was later engraved by Bartolozzi.<sup>9</sup> In these depictions, he is also wearing a robe and carrying the headrest and also a feather whisk. A further painting, this time with Banks and the Swedish scientist Dr Daniel Solander, by William Parry, a one-time student of Reynolds, was probably painted in 1776. Here Mai wears a robe almost identical to the Reynolds robe. In all these depictions except for the Reynolds painting, Mai has his black hair loose and flowing over his shoulders.

The Parry painting is historically important in showing three key protagonists of South Seas scientific exploration, for Banks and Solander had accompanied Cook's first voyage. If Mai is not quite being portrayed as an ethnographic specimen, then certainly he is seen very much as Banks' protégé. Nevertheless, the painting is given a different dimension by the fact that Mai turns his head to look at the audience, emphasising his individuality and humanity. In the Reynolds

painting the tattoos on the hand of Mai are prominent, but are missing in the Parry painting. From the suggestive pose, Banks indicating Mai's hand, it may be, as one scholar has noted, that the tattoos were painted in top glazes of colour and have been accidentally cleaned off in restorations in the past.<sup>10</sup> While in the visual depictions of Mai in England he was always shown wearing a robe, in fact while there, it seems he adopted European dress. From his return voyage with Cook to Huahine he is shown in a number of works by Webber wearing European dress.

The question of dress is a significant one because it helps unlock something of the personality of the subject as well as images of the exotic in England at the time. The white robe that Mai wears in the Reynolds painting has variously been described by art historians as a Roman toga, Oriental, African, and even as fancy dress. Nicholas Penny calls the painting Reynolds' only portrait of a man in classical costume, and David Mannings states that 'Omai wears an entirely imaginary garment and a turban, which gives him a vaguely Indian appearance'.<sup>11</sup> Leonard Bell has argued that the various literary and visual depictions of Mai, including the Reynolds painting of Mai in the 'grand manner', are the product of the minds of those who met him and that, in the case of this portrait, the image was Reynolds' creation and Mai was 'clay in Reynolds' hands'.<sup>12</sup> Commentators on the painting have almost invariably attributed the costume to either Reynolds' imagination or Reynolds making the subject more 'exotic'. Adding to the tendency of historians to see the painting as orientalising the subject are the slightly mysterious location and the rather romanticised landscape with palms, the bare feet and the turban. The display of the tattoos on his hand can be seen as emphasising the exotic, though not the oriental.<sup>13</sup>

A number of historians of the Pacific, however, agree that Mai's garments in the Reynolds painting are, in reality, within the normal range of Tahitian dress.<sup>14</sup> A remarkably similar turban is seen in drawings made in Polynesia by Hodges.<sup>15</sup> Pacific historians believe the drape and thickness of the cloth and particularly the sash and turban are *tapa* (cloth made of bark). White tapa was, as Mai well knew, an indication of high rank. It is probable that Mai brought tapa with him; he might have obtained it from Banks or he could have used European cloth worn in a similar fashion or mixed with tapa to look like a Polynesian robe. While Banks could have suggested the wearing of the robe when he took charge of Mai's English debut and meeting with the King, equally Mai must have felt it was appropriate to pose as both exotic and highborn, especially in a meeting with the King. The robe, and particularly the extra cloth in the Reynolds portrait, may have been intended by Mai to enhance his claim to be of the aristocratic, high-ranking *ari'i*. Thus it seems that far from the robe necessarily originating in some conception of Reynolds of wanting to make his subject more exotic, Mai would have had as strong an idea of how he wished to be portrayed as some of Reynolds' high-ranking English clients, who had their clothes delivered to the studio. That the costume and pose suited both artist and subject seems unquestionable.

The Reynolds painting is highly revealing on two counts. First, it presents the assured place that Mai had won for himself, at least temporarily, in English society—to be painted by one of the outstanding portrait painters of the day and exhibited along with a painting of the Duchess of Devonshire at the Royal Academy. Second, it almost without question reveals a willing participation on the part of Mai in a masquerade of identity. This portrait portrays him as he

wanted to be portrayed—a high-ranking member of his own society with an assured place in that society—a rank it seems that he was not, in reality, able to claim and a place which subsequent events would prove the young adventurer was not able to achieve, despite all the attempts of his English sponsors to leave him settled and secure.



Francesco Bartolozzi (1727–1815)  
 after Nathaniel Dance (1735–1811)  
*Omai, a Native of Ulaietea, Brought into England in the Year 1774*  
 by Tobias Furneaux  
 London: Publish'd according to Act of Parlt., 25 October 1774  
 engraving; plate mark 54.5 x 33 cm

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792), *Omai of the Friendly Isles* (1774?), pencil drawing, 26.5 x 20 cm. National Library of Australia (T2711 NK9670). The date given, of possibly 1774, seems less likely than a later date of 1775 or 1776. Mai was not, of course, from the Friendly Isles but from Raiatea.
- <sup>2</sup> Algernon Graves and William Vine Cronin, *A History of the Work of Sir Joshua Reynolds*. 4 vols. London, 1899–1901, vol. 2, p. 708.
- <sup>3</sup> Quoted by David Mannings in Nicholas Penny (ed.), *Reynolds* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson/Royal Academy of Art, 1986), p. 272. The oil by Reynolds has for a number of years been in the Castle Howard Collection, Yorkshire, after it was bought by Frederick, Fifth Earl of Carlisle in 1796.
- <sup>4</sup> Johann Jacobé, engraver (1733–1797), *Omai, a Native of the Island of Ulitetea [i.e. Ulitetea]*, mezzotint, plate mark 63 x 38.4 cm. London: John Boydell, 1 September, 1780. National Library of Australia (U6876 NK4832).
- <sup>5</sup> See Penny, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
- <sup>6</sup> David Mannings (ed.), *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue of His Paintings, Plates*. New Haven and London: The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art/Yale University Press, 2000. I am grateful to Guillard Sutherland for access to the plates to sight these images.
- <sup>7</sup> Page, engraver, *Omiab, a Native of Otabeite, Brought to England by Capt. Fournieux [i.e. Fumeaux]*, engraving, plate mark 19 x 11.5 cm. [London]: London mage [i.e. magazine], August, 1774. National Library of Australia (S6538A). An engraving after a Hodges drawing done on the voyage also depicted Mai.
- <sup>8</sup> Unknown engraver, *Omiab the Indian from Otabeite Presented to Their Majesties at Kew by Mr Banks & Dr Solander, July 17, 1774*, engraving, 11.1 x 13.9 cm. [London: 1774?]. National Library of Australia (U5390 NK10666).
- <sup>9</sup> Francesco Bartolozzi (1727–1815), after Nathaniel Dance (1735–1811), *Omai, a Native of Ulaietea, Brought into England in the Year 1774 by Tobias Fumeaux*, engraving, plate mark 54.5 x 33 cm. [London]: Published as the Act directs, 25 October 1774. National Library of Australia (U6879 NK327).
- <sup>10</sup> William Parry (1742–1791), *Sir Joseph Banks with Omai, the Otabeitan Chief, and Doctor Daniel Solander 1775–1776*, oil on canvas, 147.5 x 147.5 cm. Private Collection. As with Reynolds' engagement books for the same period, those of Parry are also missing for these years but there seems reason to see a connection in the two works since Parry was a former student of Reynolds. Banks was certainly involved in the Dance drawing being engraved by Bartolozzi. The Parry painting went to a private collection in Wales (where Parry's family came from). Joseph Banks wears a sombre dark suit while Solander is seated at a table wearing a red coat and yellow waistcoat. I am grateful to Nevill Keating Pictures Ltd on behalf of a Private Collection, UK, for information on this painting. For the important suggestion that the tattoos may have once been there I am grateful for information supplied by Angela Nevill.
- <sup>11</sup> Penny, *op. cit.*, p. 25, and Mannings, *op. cit.*, p. 272. Scholars of Reynolds' work agree his aim with costumes was deliberately to make them as unspecific as possible to avoid painting rapidly changing fashions. There are also accounts of Reynolds asking subjects to try on a variety of costumes. Similarly, while he had stock poses (and the Omai painting corresponds to poses in other full-length aristocratic portraits) he also was sometimes inspired by the moment to produce an unusual pose. His most relaxed and intimate portraits are of friends or actresses rather than the aristocracy who were his patrons: for example, the charming informal pose of the actress Mrs Abington as 'Miss Prue' in the Mellon Collection at Yale.
- <sup>12</sup> Leonard Bell, 'Picturing Omai', in James Ross, Linda Gill and Stuart McRae (eds), *Writing, a New Country: A Collection of Essays Presented to E.H. McCormick in his 88th Year*. Auckland: J. Ross, 1993, pp. 140–151.
- <sup>13</sup> Harriet Guest in 'Curiously Marked: Tattooing, Masculinity,

and Nationality in Eighteenth-Century British Perceptions of the South Pacific', in John Barrell (ed.), *Painting and Politics of Culture: New Essays in British Art, 1700–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 101–134), notes the similarity to South Seas costumes from Parkinson's Voyage as well as conceptions of oriental and classical drapery, and draws an important distinction between the oriental and the exotic. She sees Reynolds' emphasis on displaying Mai's tattooed hand as a 'distinction that demarcates the spectacular exoticism of the Tahitian's stance from the patrician authority it might also seem to indicate' (p. 111). Nevertheless, this adding of the tattoos would not have disturbed Mai.

<sup>14</sup> I am grateful to Bronwen Douglas for pointing out the references below and for the information in the text on Tahitian dress. See Cook's *Voyage of the Endeavour* (ed. Beaglehole. Cambridge: The Hakluyt Society at the university press, 1968), pp.125–126, and Sydney Parkinson's *A Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas* (London: Printed for Stanfield Parkinson, 1773), p. 14, for a Tahitian dressed in a similar way but without the extra cloth wrapped around him, which

Cook attributes to 'some of the better sort such as can afford it, but more especially the women'. Mai could have mixed patterned or other European cloth with tapa, as Pacific Islanders were known to be adventurous in appropriating fashion.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, the red chalk drawing of *Potatow* by William Hodges in the Mitchell Library Collection. Reynolds' portrait was not the only Tahitian work exhibited at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1776, as there were two Tahiti paintings as well as landscapes of New Zealand by Hodges, and William Parry may have exhibited a fanciful work on the Chief Mourner of Otaheiti, which must have been based on the work of artists from the voyages. Parry did not exhibit his own portrait of Mai in the exhibition. Also exhibited was probably a Webber portrait of Cook, but not the portrait recently acquired by the National Portrait Gallery of Australia. It is ironic that one of England's greatest navigators was portrayed by a little known artist, while the young Polynesian was portrayed as an aristocrat by perhaps the finest portrait painter of his day.



John Cleveley (c.1745–1786), *A View of Matavai Bay* 1780?  
watercolour; 50.7 x 69.8 cm

# Omai's Things

Harriet Guest

In 1789, Hester Thrale Piozzi received news of Omai's death, and heard reports of the part his possessions played in the fighting between the Islanders of Raiatea and Huahine. Writing to a friend, she recalled that 'poor Omai ... was no small favourite of mine', and added, more sardonically: 'Two Islands quarrelling for the Possession of a German Organ and Puppet Show—Omai's best and most valuable Effects as I remember—would make an Excellent Subject for a mock Heroic Poem ...'.<sup>1</sup> Her sentimental recollection of Omai, whom she had entertained during his stay in London, rapidly hardens into disdain, as he and the Islanders in general become infected with the littleness and triviality of the European toys she believes they value so highly.

The possessions with which Omai returned to the South Pacific, most of which seem to have been chosen for him and not by him, included the things Piozzi mentions—a barrel organ, and a collection of miniature figures (of soldiers, animals, coaches and so forth), which it was imagined he could use in his attempts to describe European life.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Omai was endowed with an assortment of fireworks, portraits of the king and queen and, perhaps, of Cook; an illustrated Bible; a jack-in-a-box; handkerchiefs printed

with the map of England and Wales; two drums; and a suit of armour. Joseph Banks presented him with an

An Account of the Bills for Omai <sup>MS. 9/2</sup>	
Taylor's Bill	66-10-0
Linnen Drapers Bill	20-0-0
Hoovers	5-16-0
Hoovers	7-7-0
Hatters	3-5-6
A Box for his Clothes	0-6-6
Two Buttons	4-0-0
Two Prints of King & Queen	2-11-6
Two Maps	19-8-4
Seaman's Bill	20-7-7
Wine Merchant's Bill	12-4-0
Two Toys	3-7-6
Books	18-2-4
	<u>182-8-3</u>
Omai's Bills	46-16-3
	<u>228-4-0</u>

Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820), Papers 1745–1820  
An account of the bills for Omai  
manuscript list, 22.5 x 18.5 cm

electrical machine. As if to confirm him in, or at least remind him of European ways of life, he was provided with cooking and eating utensils, iron tools and a few bits of furniture, as well as linen clothes for himself and for gifts—and he had other trading goods. He was also endowed with some livestock and poultry, and seeds for a garden. Before Cook's ships departed he acquired



Valentine Green, engraver (1739–1813)  
after Johann Zoffany (1733–1810)  
*John Montagu, Earl of Sandwich, Viscount Hinchingbrook,*  
*First Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty*  
London: Valentine Green, 30 August 1774  
mezzotint; plate mark 50.4 x 35.3 cm

a compass, globes, sea charts and maps, as well as some guns, powder and shot. When a site had been selected, the ships' carpenters built Omai a European-style house designed 'to contain his valuables, which would by no means have been secure in one of his own country'.<sup>3</sup>

An account of Omai published in 1774, during his stay in England, praised him as an exemplary hero of philosophical curiosity, venturing beyond familiar seas 'resolved to die, or know the truth for himself'.<sup>4</sup> For most commentators, however, whatever might on his arrival have seemed heroic or admirable about Omai, was rapidly tainted, primarily as a result of his association with Joseph Banks and his friends (who were responsible for looking after him). David Samwell, the surgeon to the third voyage, thought that Omai initially seemed willing and able to learn, but Banks' circle 'have made him more of the fine Gentlemen than anything else', and taught him 'nothing ... but to play at cards, at which he is very expert'.<sup>5</sup> William Bligh lamented that Omai had 'been led into Idleness and Dissipation as soon as he arrived in Europe'.<sup>6</sup>

Those who lamented the nature of the education Omai received during his stay in England saw confirmation of its frivolity and wastefulness in the apparently random repertoire of his possessions. George Forster complained that Omai had been returned without knowledge, skills, or 'articles of real use' to his people or to himself.<sup>7</sup> The 'editor' of the satirical poem, *Omiab's Farewell* (1776), remarked that 'OMIAH is now returning to his native isle, fraught by royal order with squibs, crackers, and a various assortment of fireworks, to show to the wild untutored Indian the great superiority of an enlightened Christian prince'.<sup>8</sup> The satirist points to what is clearly and repeatedly implied in accounts of Omai—the sense that the failure

to return him, freighted with either some religious instruction or some useful knowledge, both belittles him and reveals inadequacies in British culture; shortcomings that might hinder British imperial ambition.

Omai seems to have hoped that his extraordinary experiences would improve his status at home, but the accounts of Europeans who accompanied him, or who visited the Islands subsequently, do not indicate any change in his position.<sup>9</sup> On his return to the Islands in the *Bounty*, Bligh heard that Omai's firepower had briefly increased his consequence, but that he had not 'gained any possessions or ... higher rank than we left him in'.<sup>10</sup> Omai's European acquisitions, however, did possess a prestige distinct from that of their owner. The missionary William Ellis reported, nearly half a century later, that: 'The spot where Mai's house stood is still called Beritani, or Britain, by the inhabitants of Huahine', and parts of Omai's armour were displayed on a house built on the spot. Ellis added that, 'a few of the trinkets, such as a jack-in-a-box ... were preserved with care by one of the principal chiefs, who ... considered them great curiosities, and exhibited them, as a mark of his condescension, to particular favourites'.<sup>11</sup> Most accounts of Omai's return suggest that he was largely ignored or even unrecognised until 'knowledge of his riches' had been spread, but his possessions seemed to have been imbued with lasting value because of their exotic British associations.<sup>12</sup>

The suit of armour had been given to Omai by the Earl of Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, who had it made for him by the artificers of the Tower of London. Sandwich had been at pains to impress Omai during his stay in England. Omai had visited Sandwich's country house, Hinchingsbrooke, in Huntingdonshire, where the Islander was reported to have been 'entertained in the most magnificent manner, and where

the neighbouring gentlemen vied with each other in varying his diversions, in order to raise his ideas of the splendor and gaiety of this country'.<sup>13</sup> Sandwich also entertained Omai with a tour of the dockyard at Chatham. Omai was taken on board HMS *Victory*, and the newspapers offered the gratifying report that 'his



*Omai's Public Entry on His First Landing at Otabeite, in Journal of Captain Cook's Last Voyage to the Pacific Ocean on Discovery*  
London: Printed for E. Newbery, 1781

joy was amazing at seeing so large a ship'.<sup>14</sup> Clothed in Sandwich's final gesture of generosity, Omai seems briefly to be possessed by his things—to become British, like the spot where Ellis later saw the armour hanging. The Britishness he acquires is not, perhaps, the kind his patrons had intended.

In the unauthorised *Journal* of John Rickman, the only text in which Omai's return seems to make much of a splash, he is represented in a parodic impersonation of British imperial identity. Rickman writes of the astonishment of the Islanders when Cook and Omai ride out on horseback:

Omai, to excite their admiration the more, was dressed cap-a-pee in a suit of armour ... and was mounted and caparisoned with his sword and pike, like St. George going to kill the dragon, whom he exactly represented; only that Omai had pistols in his holsters, of which the poor saint knew not the use. Omai, however, made good use of his arms, and when the crowd became clamorous, and troublesome, he every now and then pulled out a pistol and fired it among them, which never failed to send them scampering away.<sup>15</sup>

A central feature of Cook's characterisation as a distinctively modern hero was the notion of his humanity, manifested notably in his reputed reluctance to use firearms: 'Not a gun ... was ever wantonly or unnecessarily fired by his order'.<sup>16</sup> Samwell concluded gloomily that Omai seemed incapable of profiting from the situation his European possessions placed him in: 'notwithstanding the admonitions he had to the contrary, he employed much of his time in acting the part of a merry Andrew, parading about in ludicrous Masks & different Dresses to the great admiration of the Rabble'.<sup>17</sup>

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Hester Thrale Piozzi to Samuel Lysons, 8 July 1789, in Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (eds), *The Piozzi Letters: Correspondence of Hester Lynch Piozzi, 1784–1821 (formerly Mrs. Thrale)*. 6 vols. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989, vol. 1, p. 298. Thrale seems to have heard a version of the report from the *Lady Penrhyn*. See E.H. McCormick, *Omai: Pacific Envoy* (Auckland: Auckland University Press/Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 267.
- <sup>2</sup> The astronomer William Bayly commented on Omai's outfitting for his return that 'Omi [sic] being a man of pleasure neglected to inspect into his own Affairs but left it entirely to other people'. Those other people, Bayly thought, 'used him exceeding ill'. See J.C. Beaglehole (ed.), *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery. Volume 3: The Voyage of the Resolution and the Discovery, 1776–1780*. 2 parts. (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1967, part 1, p. 193n2.)
- <sup>3</sup> William Ellis, *An Authentic Narrative of a Voyage Performed by Captain Cook and Captain Clerke, in His Majesty's Ships Resolution and Discovery*. 2 vols. London: Robinson, 1782, vol. 1, p. 147. See McCormick, op. cit., pp. 180, 255.
- <sup>4</sup> Apyrexia, 'Genuine Account of Omiah', *London Magazine*, August, 1774.
- <sup>5</sup> Beaglehole, op. cit., part 2, pp. 1514–15.
- <sup>6</sup> Douglas Oliver, *Return to Tabiti: Bligh's Second Breadfruit Voyage*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988, p. 227.
- <sup>7</sup> George Forster, *A Voyage Round the World, Performed in His Britannic Majesty's Ships the Resolution and Adventure, in the Years 1772, 1773, 1774 and 1775*. London: Printed for G. White, J. Robson, P. Elmsly and G. Robinson, 1777, quoted in McCormick, op. cit., pp. 297, 299.
- <sup>8</sup> *Omiah's Farewell: Inscribed to the Ladies of London*. London: Kearsley, 1776, Preface, p. iv.
- <sup>9</sup> See Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, 2nd edition. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, p. 82.
- <sup>10</sup> Oliver, op. cit., p. 228.
- <sup>11</sup> William Ellis, *Polynesian Researches* (1829), quoted in McCormick, op. cit., p. 293.

- <sup>12</sup> Beaglehole, op. cit., part 1, p. 193. The Europeans only seem to see the degree of interest and sentiment, which they had clearly expected to be widespread in the reunion of Omai with his sister. See Cook's account (Beaglehole, op. cit.), part 1, pp. 192–193, 213, and Samwell's journal (Beaglehole, op. cit.), part 2, pp. 1052–53. On value created by association, see Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), ch. 3.
- <sup>13</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, Historical Chronicle for 1 September 1774. See McCormick, op. cit., p. 180.

- <sup>14</sup> *The General Evening Post*, London, 10–13 June, 1775.
- <sup>15</sup> [John Rickman], *Journal of Captain Cook's Last Voyage to the Pacific Ocean on Discovery: Performed in the years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779 ...* London: Printed for E. Newbery, 1781, pp. 133–134. National Library of Australia (NK 5094).
- <sup>16</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, review of *A Voyage Towards the South Pole*, 1777. See also Bernard Smith, 'Cook's Posthumous Reputation', in *Imagining the Pacific: In the Wake of the Cook Voyages* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 227.
- <sup>17</sup> Beaglehole, op. cit., part 2, p. 1062.



[Samples of tapa cloth mounted in a book entitled: *Patterns of South Sea Cloth*] 1769–1779? album of Tapa cloth samples, 5 x 9.8 cm or smaller



John Hamilton Mortimer (1741–1779), [*Captain James Cook, Sir Joseph Banks, Lord Sandwich, and Two Others*] 1771?  
oil on canvas; 120 x 166 cm

# The Art of Ventriloquism: European Imagination and the Pacific

Alexander Cook

When Captain Cook's crew returned from their second voyage to the Pacific with the Tahitian warrior Omai, they could hardly have anticipated the stir it would cause across Europe. Omai was discussed by scientists and philosophers, introduced to all the best circles and written about in everything from poetry to pornography. He proved a lightning rod for the expression of sentiments and anxieties regarding imperialism, civilisation and human nature. The artistic and literary legacy of Omai's encounter with Europe provides a fascinating insight into a culture in a moment of transition, when old certainties were collapsing and new ones were not yet formed.

Omai arrived in England at a time when European interest in the world beyond its borders was burgeoning. As explorers traversed the globe in search of scientific knowledge and commercial advantage, a popular fascination with the unfamiliar and 'the exotic' reached new heights. Almost every year a traveller would return from remote parts, peddling fantastical tales for the entertainment and education of an eager public. Their stories were grist to the mill of moralists and savants who used them to bolster elaborate theories of human nature and history. Newspapers fostered such debates and disseminated

them to a wider audience. The story of Europe's ambivalent fascination with Omai needs to be understood in this context. He was not the first exotic visitor to London—the tradition of collecting human 'specimens' for public display had been alive, at least since the time of Henry VII—yet Omai was to become the most popular of them all.

In part his 'success' was due to the novelty of the Pacific Ocean and its peoples for European 'armchair' explorers. More specifically, it was due to the carefully cultivated public interest in the Cook voyages and to the allure of Tahiti and its people. The latter's supposed life of abundance, ease and sexual freedom had quickly attained a quasi-mythic status from the time of the European discovery of Tahiti in 1767 by Captain Samuel Wallis. The French explorer Louis de Bougainville, inflamed matters with his lyrical descriptions of Tahiti as '*La Nouvelle Cythere*' and 'the true Utopia'. He suggested that 'legislators and philosophers should go there to see as an established fact what they had not even dreamed of—a thronging populace of handsome men and beautiful women living together in health, plenty, and ordered amity'.<sup>1</sup> Bougainville's report inspired his compatriot Denis Diderot to write a controversial *Supplement à la Voyage de Bougainville* in which he used a

local Tahitian, Orou, as his mouthpiece, to lament the European proscription of pleasure in favour of a life-denying morality.<sup>2</sup> It would prove the first of many acts of cross-cultural ventriloquism when it came to the European imagination of the Pacific. Even Cook, a more sober observer than Bougainville, found it difficult not to exult in Tahiti on his arrival in 1769. With one eye on Rousseau and the other on biblical myth he recorded in his journal:

These people may almost be said to be exempt from the curse of our fore fathers; scarcely can it be said that they earn their bread with the sweat of their brow, benevolent nature hath not only supply'd them with necessarys but with abundance of superfluities.<sup>3</sup>

The tendency to view the Pacific and its people through this philosophical lens can be seen in the work of Cook's voyage artists, particularly William Hodges and John Webber. Even the bare landscapes or the ethnographic portraits frequently suggest a compulsion to invest the Indigenous people and their island world with a symbolic connection to Eden, to Arcadia, or to purgatory. The suggestiveness of voyage art in this regard was invariably increased in the transposition to print media for publication.

Despite limited efforts by Cook and members of his crew to put Tahiti in a more prosaic light during subsequent voyages, much of the gloss and the prurient interest remained. We find clear traces of it in the public reception of Omai and in the debates concerning his merits and his failings. An extraordinary number of observers seemed anxious to define him, to categorise him, and to situate themselves in relation to their conclusions. It was a hobby pursued at least as much by those who had never met him, as by those who had.

Among those who did meet him, and who queued to meet him, we can include an extraordinary list of British notables from the second half of the eighteenth century. After an introduction from Sir Joseph Banks and the eminent naturalist Daniel Solander, Omai dined on at least ten occasions with the Royal Society, King George III took a personal interest in him, and he was feted widely in aristocratic circles. The young Fanny Burney, whose brother had accompanied Cook on his second expedition, took great pleasure in reporting in her diary that Omai had 'an understanding far superior to the common race of *us cultivated gentry*'. Omai, like Tahiti in the eyes of the explorers, was all too frequently transformed into an object lesson on the relative merits of 'civilised' and 'natural man'. He also served as a tool in the private social duels of high society: for example, to the end of his days, Samuel Johnson took a glib pleasure in jibing Giuseppi Baretto on his ignominious defeat at chess by the Polynesian.

These contemporary European accounts reveal something of the world into which Omai had entered and the role he was invited to play. Yet the real evidence of Omai's impact on the collective imagination of Europeans lies in the cultural outpouring he inspired in the public sphere. The most striking aspect of this assortment of texts and images is the diversity of the views expressed. We find competing representations of Omai as a 'noble savage', unspoiled by civilisation, or as an unredeemed and unredeemable barbarian. The playwright and actor David Garrick, wrote to George Coleman of his plans to make 'a farce upon the follies & fashions of ye times', and suggested 'Omiiah was to be my Arlequin Sauvage—a fine character to give our fine folks a genteel dressing'. Omai would indeed become the subject of a pantomime ten years later, although John O'Keeffe would script it and Omai

would be diverted from the subversive role of Harlequin to that of the romantic hero.

In the intervening period a host of other writers took up Garrick's suggestion and used Omai as a whip with which to lash the vices of Europe. They wrote pamphlets and poems in his voice. Sometimes the naive observer, sometimes the knowing sage, he proved an ideal commentator to highlight the hypocrisy and absurdity of the metropolitan culture. In one such work, published around 1780, the anonymous author began in the voice of Omai: 'after thanking you for the powder, shot, gun, crackers, sword, feathers, and watch, let me thank you also for my conversion to Christianity ...'.<sup>4</sup>

This sarcastic allusion to the 'benefits' Omai derived from his time in England was followed with a savage attack on Methodism, the doctrine of original sin, and the corruption of the Admiralty. The epistle concludes with a 'lament' for the death of Cook:

... who was certainly very cruelly and inhumanly butchered, for nothing more than ordering his crew to fire on a banditti of naked savages, who seemed to look as if they had a right to the country in which he found them.<sup>5</sup>

The possibilities for satire were endless. In 1789, the editor of *The Loiterer* claimed to have found Omai's



William Byrne, engraver (1743–1805), after William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*View in the Island of Pines*, London: Published as the Act directs, 16 July 1776, engraving; plate mark 22.6 x 38.9 cm

journal from his time in England. In it, the Islander advanced a Tahiti-centric view of history, replete with a complex argument based on linguistic etymology. Europeans were descended from the sailors of a large war canoe that had been blown off course. Their sickly complexion and physical degeneration were clearly the results of a harsh climate and poor diet.

Omai's popularity with women elicited prurient commentary on the tastes for the exotic exhibited by 'the weaker sex'. In a piece published in 1777, the author advanced a proposal for an inter-ethnic eugenics program:

Than shall perfection crown each noble heart,  
When southern passions mix with northern art ...<sup>6</sup>



John Webber (1752–1793), *View on a Coast, with Upright Rocks Making a Cave* c.1780  
oil on canvas; 35.8 x 44.2 cm

Yet the narrator gives the game away by simultaneously professing to champion the introduction of infanticide, and the sub-text is rather more prudish than radical.<sup>7</sup>

A more serious argument for cultural blending, and a more substantial contribution to the 'Omai cycle', was the work of an eminent French theologian, *Narrations d'Omai*.<sup>8</sup> His pretend autobiography of the Polynesian was in fact a monumental, four-volume treatise, combining ethnography of the Pacific with an outline for a utopian society. It was an ambitious yet highly eccentric attempt to mix the best of Tahitian and European traditions with the political theory of the Enlightenment. Its hero was Omai the legislator and philosopher, a highly Europeanised defender of his

people against European cupidity. It epitomises both the philosophical importance attributed to exploration literature during the period and the narcissism with which so many educated Europeans gazed at themselves in the mirror of the Pacific.

Amid all the babble of gossip and impersonation that dominates the historical record of Omai, the great tragedy is the absence of Omai's voice. We are left peering at a series of purpose-built portraits, wondering about the model. We know that he was an outsider in Tahiti, a refugee from Ulietea (Raiatea). We know that his primary motive in agreeing to

accompany the voyagers was to gain British aid in a project to reclaim his homeland and avenge his family. He returned to this theme repeatedly in his interactions with Cook, Lord Sandwich and George III. Yet we know little else. Even his name, as it has come down to us, is a misunderstanding. The shreds of surviving evidence suggest that Omai's life after his return was probably not a happy one. He may have found himself caught between two worlds, with no proper place in either. Perhaps his ambitions for revenge made him a disruptive influence. His countrymen told later sailors he died early of an unknown disease.

Even with the gaps, Omai's story is remarkable. He stood quietly at the centre of raging debates over a bewildering range of social, political and metaphysical issues. He travelled across the world, saw things his compatriots had never seen and, after five years abroad, returned to tell the tale—to his own people, if not to us. We can only speculate what his version might have been.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Written in L.A. de Bougainville, *Voyage Autour du Monde par la Fregate du Roi la Boudeuse, et la Flute l'Etoile, en 1766, 1767, 1768 and 1769* (Paris: Chez Saillant and Nyon, 1771). For an early English edition see *A Voyage Round the World* (London: Nourse and Davies, 1772). Quotation cited in E.H. McCormick, *Omai: Pacific Envoy* (Auckland: Auckland University Press/Oxford University Press, 1977), p.16.
- <sup>2</sup> See Denis Diderot, *Supplement au Voyage de Bougainville, ou, Dialogues Entre A et B sur l'Inconvenient d'Attacher des Idees Marales a Certaines Actions Physiques qui n'en Comportent Pas*. Paris: Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Francaise, 1921.
- <sup>3</sup> Written by Cook on his first visit to Tahiti on board the *Endeavour*.

Quote taken from A. Grenfell Price (ed.), *The Explorations of Captain James Cook in the Pacific as Told by Selections of his Own Journals, 1768–1779* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1969), p.35.

- <sup>4</sup> See *A Letter from Omai to the Right Honourable the Earl of \*\*\*\*\**, *Late-Lord of the —: In Which ... is Fairly and Irrefragably Stated the Nature of Original Sin: Together with a Proposal for Planting Christianity in the Islands of the Pacific Ocean* (London: Printed for J. Bell at the British Library, [1780?]). In reality, no attempt was ever made to convert Omai, though this was a matter of some public controversy. For a contemporary view on this issue, see George Forster, *A Voyage Round the World, Performed in His Britannic Majesty's Ships the Resolution and Adventure, in the Years 1772, 1773, 1774 and 1775* (Dublin: W. Whitestone, 1777), and the response by William Wales.
- <sup>5</sup> A similar anti-imperial theme was explored at greater length in *The Injured Islanders, Or, The Influence of Art Upon the Happiness of Nature* (London: Printed for J. Murray, 1779. In this work, attributed to Gerald Fitz-Gerald, the author impersonates the infamous deposed 'Queen Oberea' to mourn the passing of an age of innocence and harmony in the wake of European exploration ('For Europe's crimes with Europe's commerce spread').
- <sup>6</sup> See William Preston (1753–1807), *Seventeen Hundred and Seventy-seven, Or, A Picture of the Manners and Character of the Age. In a Poetical Epistle from a Lady of Quality*. London: Printed for T. Evans, 1777.
- <sup>7</sup> Many did, however, find the whole Tahiti myth enormously titillating. James Perry (1756–1821), the author of the ribald pamphlet *Mimosa: Or, The Sensitive Plant, A Poem. Dedicated to Mr Banks, and Addressed to Kitt Frederick, Dutchess of Queensberry, Elect* (London: W. Sandwich, 1779.) wrote an ode to the penis and to Tahitian sexuality in a language of sniggering suggestion and heavy innuendo.
- <sup>8</sup> See Guillaume Andre Rene Baston, *Narrations d'Omai, Insulaire de la Mer du Sud, Ami et Compagnon de Voyage du Capitaine Cook*, Vol.1. à Rouen: & à Paris: Chez le Boucher le jeune ..., Chez Buisson, 1790.



Unknown artist, *A Man of the Sandwich Islands with His Helmet* 1830?  
watercolour; 75 x 51 cm

# Mai, the Other Beyond the Exotic Stranger

Paul Turnbull

To date, the story of Mai has been told largely in ways that illuminate what the Age of Enlightenment made of the peoples of Oceania. But there is another story, that of Mai as he figures in the records of voyagers and histories preserved by Maohi over successive generations. That history, briefly sketched here, suggests that we would do well to see that while Mai may have entranced the European imagination, he was not its captive. He had his own dreams.

Noble Savage, philosopher, lover, clown—Mai was all these things and more to the patrician Britons amongst whom he lived. The story of his adventures with British patrician society is entangled within the play of the European imagination in the Age of Enlightenment. It is imbricated in the construability of the Maohi peoples of the Society Islands as exotic beings, whose life-ways and customs were more natural, virtuous, and pleasurable than those of Europe. In obvious and subtle ways, the presence of Mai challenged the received wisdom of the eighteenth century about the individual and society.

The story of Mai is also the story of the proud eldest son of a *manabune* or landowning dynasty on the island of Raiatea.<sup>1</sup> An embittered political refugee, Mai fed

polite London society's hunger for the exotic, but he did so knowingly, strategically, with a view to returning to his homeland to regain the land and power he believed were rightly his.<sup>2</sup>

In European eyes, the Indigenous world of Mai may have seemed exotic, but in one critical respect it was no different to Europe: Maohi polities in the Society Islands were equally dynamic, equally subject to change. When, in 1767, Samuel Wallis arrived at Tahiti aboard HMS *Dolphin*, the Society Islands had then experienced religious and political upheavals as long-lasting and as dramatic in their consequences as those determining the histories of the three kingdoms of the British Isles, from the outbreak of civil war in the 1640s until the revolution of 1688.

By the time of Wallis' arrival, the cult of the war god Oro had become well established on Tahiti and the neighbouring isle of Moorea.<sup>3</sup> Originating on the westerly island of Raiatea, the cult probably gained its earliest Tahitian converts during the reign of the paramount Raiatean chief, Tamatoa II, some time between 1650 and 1700.<sup>4</sup> Oro worship subsequently became a potent force in the politics of the easterly islands of the Society Islands after the conquest of Raiatea and Tahaa by the Hau Fa'nau, the most powerful

tribal polity of the island of Borabora. This invasion probably occurred some time in the early 1760s, as one episode in a lengthy history of inter-dynastic warfare.<sup>5</sup>

Oro continued to be worshipped at the great Taputapuatea *marae* at Opoa on Raiatea, but the power of the district's sacred chief and priests was greatly reduced. According to tradition, the god's sacred image and red feather girdle were brought to Tahiti, and a centre of religious knowledge established shortly afterwards at Haapape, by an Opoan priest-chiefess, Toa-te-manava.<sup>6</sup>

The rise of the Oro cult on Tahiti was intimately connected with dynastic ambitions which arose in the

wake of changes in political fortune and new alliances which were formed after the triumph of the Hau Fa'naui. On the Leeward and Windward islands, strategic marriages took place between leading chiefly families. Dynasties sought to legitimate their titles through consecrating familial alliances before Oro. Strong links were maintained between the spiritual centre at Haapape and Opoa on Raiatea.<sup>7</sup>

Oro worshippers placed great faith in prophecy. As William Ellis, the early nineteenth-century missionary and ethnographer, was to remark of the great Taputapuatea *marae*: it was the birthplace of the war god, and among 'the most celebrated oracles of the people'.<sup>8</sup>



William Byrne, engraver (1743–1805), after John Webber (1752–1793), *The Body of Tee, a Chief, as Preserved after Death, in Otabeiite* London: 1784, engraving; plate mark 26 x 40.5 cm

One important prophecy in circulation prior to the upheavals on Raiatea concerned the destruction of an ancient Tamanu tree, which grew inside the precincts of the Taptapuatea *marae*. One version of the prophecy spoke of the coming of a whirlwind that would leave only the bare and broken trunk. Another foretold its felling by enemy warriors.<sup>9</sup> These elements of the prophecy were interpreted by chiefly worshippers of Oro as having been fulfilled by the events on Raiatea.

However, there was more to the prophecy: it also predicted that the destruction of the tree would be accompanied by the appearance of glorious offspring of the god Te Tumu and Atea, his daughter-wife, strangers who would appear in a canoe without an outrigger. There are some indications that what was believed to be heralded were the embodiment in human form of Tane, god of all beautiful things.<sup>10</sup>

These prophetic utterances may have had mundane origins, in early encounters with European vessels. In 1722 three ships commanded by Jacob Roggeveen, the Dutch navigator, had entered the Tuamoto atolls, one of which was wrecked on the windward side of the atoll of Takapoto. Five men deserted and may have repaired the vessel well enough to reach the island of Anna. Iron cannon were still visible on Takapoto in the 1830s. John Byron, who reached the Tuamoto atolls in June 1765, landed at Takaroa, and found the carved head of a Dutch long-boat's rudder, hammered iron and well-worn tools. He later wrote that the inhabitants seemed 'prodigiously fond of iron'.<sup>11</sup>

In time, the news of these encounters reached Tahiti, and in view of this it is tempting to speculate whether the introduction of iron was connected with the pre-eminence in subsequent Maohi prophesying given to Tane, the god-protector of men with special knowledge—such as seafarers and canoe builders.

Further, there is the intriguing question of how the prophecies may have influenced Maohi responses to subsequent European arrivals, with their wondrous canoes and worked iron.<sup>12</sup>

Suggestions can only be tentative, but journals such as those kept by James Cook and Joseph Banks on the *Endeavour* voyage of 1768–1771 suggest that Maohi actively sought to account for and engage with these strangers in terms of their own cosmology and prophetic traditions.

The determination of Mai to journey to England can likewise be understood in the context of the



Henry Stubble (fl.1785–1791), [*Portrait of Samuel Wallis*] c.1785  
watercolour and pencil, oval image, 13.6 x 11 cm



John Webber (1752–1793), *A Chief of the Sandwich Islands* 1787  
oil on canvas; 147.3 x 114.4 cm

politico-religious changes which arose from the Hau Fa'naui of Borabora's conquest of Raiatea.

Mai was from Raiatea. His father had been dispossessed and may have been killed in the struggle with the Hau Fa'naui. Mai, for all his deference and willingness to oblige the curiosity of polite English society, was determined to return to Raiatea. He sought to gain power through his friendship with the Europeans, thus to regain his ancestral birthright.

Mai boarded the *Adventure* soon after Cook's second expedition anchored off Huahine in September 1773, and quickly made it clear that he intended to sail to the voyagers' homeland. Tobias Furneaux, captain of the *Adventure*, was keen that Mai should visit England. Cook, before long, had his doubts.

During the time that *Resolution* and *Adventure* lay off Huahine, Cook met with several groups of *manabune* for whom dynastic war had meant loss of land and power, who implored Cook to help them overthrow their Borabora overlords. Others, however, had profited from change: Ori, guardian of Teri'itaria, the young *ari'i maro una*, or pre-eminent titleholder, on the island of Huahine, quickly came to hear of these meetings and was rowed out to Cook. He stressed that peace on Huahine was secured only by the alliance he had forged with Puni the most powerful titleholder on Borabora, by virtue of his lineage and purification of his title by the god Oro.<sup>13</sup>

Cook had no wish to be drawn into local rivalries, and he directed his anger against Mai, whom he came to regard as 'dark, ugly and a downright blackguard'.<sup>14</sup> He would not have Mai travel to England and use his 'friendship' with the voyagers to provoke war on his return. But admiralty regulations and the informal but strictly observed codes of behaviour amongst naval

officers, meant that Cook could not stop Furneaux, as captain of the *Adventure*, leaving the islands with Mai.

Mai was to return to the Society Islands with Cook's third expedition, which sailed in June 1776. His time amongst the quality of England had not softened his desire for revenge on the Boraboreans and repossession of his ancestral land. As James King, the second lieutenant on the *Resolution*, recalled, Mai, 'would never listen to any other mode of settling than that of violent possession of his father's land'.<sup>15</sup>

On the voyage homewards Mai did all that he could to persuade Cook to take him to Raiatea, with the Europeans supplying the force to secure his ancestral land. Cook, however, was determined to avoid any chance of war with the Hau Fa'naui and their allies.

By the time Cook arrived, peace on Huahine hung by a thread. Ori had been deposed as guardian of Teri'itari and had fled to Raiatea, where he enjoyed the protection of Puni. The regency had been assumed by Tehaapapa, a high-ranking priestess descended from rival dynasties on Tahiti and Huahine, Moorea.<sup>16</sup>

Cook soon learnt of the fall of Ori, and saw his best option was to settle Mai on Huahine, and so met with the island's *ari'i* (principal chiefs), secured Mai a dwelling and land, and sought through an elaborate series of ceremonies, in which Cook wore dress uniform and Mai wore a helmet and breastplate of armour adorned with six red feather plumes from the sacred frigate bird, to make clear that the Europeans would protect his new property.<sup>17</sup> This was much less than Mai had planned for, but it was now the only way he could secure at least some power, and so keep alive his scheme to repossess his lands on Raiatea.

After Cook's departure, Mai exploited his friendship with the great navigator to ally himself with Moohono, a Huahine *ari'i* or possibly high priest of Oro, whose

daughter was the wife of Mato, the father of Teri'itaria. Moohono is said to have prepared over a long period of time for war, placing a *rabui* (restriction) on the gathering or exchange of food, and assembling a large war fleet. At length battle took place near Hooroto, a small island on the outer reefs off the coast of Taha'a. Moohono and most of the Huahinian chiefs with whom he was allied were killed, as were

many Boraborean *ari'i*. This disastrous battle also consolidated the rule of Puni, the great Borabora titleholder.<sup>18</sup>

Tradition suggests that Mai had a major role in the conflict, supplying several muskets he had been given by Cook. He is said to have survived the battle, only to die, possibly of disease, some time late in 1779, the same year as Cook himself.<sup>19</sup>



Francis Jukes (1746–1812), after John Cleveley (c.1745–1786)  
*View of Huabeine, One of the Society Islands in the South Seas*  
London: Thomas Martyn, 26 May 1787, aquatint; sheet 51 x 66.5 cm

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The nature of manahune status in Maohi society is discussed at length by Douglas Oliver, *Ancient Tahiti*, vol. 2 (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974), pp. 750–753, 765–769.
- <sup>2</sup> William Ellis, *Polynesian Researches during a Residence of Nearly Six Years in the South Seas*. Vol. 2. London: Fisher, Son & Jackson, 1829, p. 91.
- <sup>3</sup> Alain Babadzan explores the Oro cult in depth in his *Les Dépouilles des Dieux. Essai sur la Religion Tahitienne à l'Époque de la Découverte*. Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1993, pp. 221–334.
- <sup>4</sup> Oliver, op. cit., pp. 1047–48.
- <sup>5</sup> In August 1774, Daniel Solander told two of his correspondents of having learnt from Mai that the conquest had occurred 'about 12 years ago'. John Cawte Beaglehole (ed.), *The Voyage of the Resolution and Adventure, 1772–1775*. (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1961) p. 949.
- <sup>5</sup> H.A.H. Driessen, 'Outriggerless Canoes and Glorious Beings: Pre-contact Prophecies in the Society Islands', *Journal of Pacific History*, vol. 17, 1982: 4–5.
- <sup>7</sup> Colin Newbury (ed.), *The History of the Tahitian Mission, 1799–1830*. Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1961, pp. xxxvi–ii.
- <sup>8</sup> Ellis, op. cit., p. 234.
- <sup>9</sup> Driessen, op. cit., pp. 6–7.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 11–13.
- <sup>11</sup> Byron, cited in Driessen, *ibid.*, p. 18.
- <sup>12</sup> On this point see Driessen, *ibid.*, pp. 16–17.
- <sup>13</sup> Beaglehole, op. cit., p. 221.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 428.
- <sup>15</sup> Beaglehole, op. cit., part 2, pp. 1386–87.
- <sup>16</sup> Hank Driessen, *Opoan connexions: An exploration of the early post-contact history of the Leewards Islands*. BA Honours thesis, La Trobe University, 1977, p. 20.
- <sup>17</sup> Beaglehole, op. cit., part 1, pp. 233–234.
- <sup>18</sup> Driessen, op. cit., pp. 22–24.
- <sup>19</sup> William Bligh, *The Mutiny on Board HMS Bounty*. New York: Airmont, 1965, p. 92.



*Captain Wallis Attacked in the Dolphin by the Otabitians*  
casein and paint on canvas attached to a wooden frame; 184 x 219.2 cm  
Courtesy of the Australian National Maritime Museum

# Ó Mai! This is Mai: A Masque of a Sort

Greg Dening

## Prologue

*Matavai, Tabiti, 21 June 1767*

From the hill with one tree, the 'Floating Island' looked small and distant. Here at least they felt safe from the smoke and thunder of what was being thrown at them from the 'Canoe without Outriggers'—they did not yet have a name for the Strangers' ship. Mai's wounds of yesterday were still open and sore, despite the salves his master, Tupaia the Priest, applied.

Yesterday had been all death and mystery. They could not count those killed by the Strangers—as many as a flock of birds, a shoal of fish', they said. The Strangers' violence, they knew, was not requited by tokens of human sacrifice—plantain branches—thrown into the sea.

Yesterday they watched as the Strangers danced in front of a pole with a red wrap flying from it. They heard speech as unintelligible as their own priest's chants. Only Tupaia seemed to know what it meant. During the night he had taken the red wrap down, planning to take it to his temple, Taputapuatea, 'Sacrifices from Abroad'. This morning Mai and Tupaia's people marched in procession towards the beach and the canoes to do so. But the Strangers started their thunder from afar again and killed more processionists. Then they destroyed all 80 canoes on

the beach. The procession, now in disarray, stampeded to the top of Tahaara and its lone tree. Perhaps they would be too far away for the Strangers to kill them. No sooner were they there than there was a cloud of smoke from the 'Floating Island', followed by thunder. A round black object splattered at their feet. Then another bounced through their ranks.

That day Mai knew his world had changed, and the Strangers had changed it. Already he, along with Tupaia, was a refugee to Tahiti. They had both been driven from the sacred island of Raiatea by the Pora Poran god-chief, Puri [Puni]. Now Mai knew that there was a power in their islands greater even than Puri's.

## Scene I

*Fare, Huahine, 7 September 1773*

Mai is a dead man walking, a human sacrifice not yet sacrificed, in the pool of victims to be offered to the god-chief when the occasion arises. Mai had cursed Puri, the Pora Pora god-chief who had taken Mai's and Tupaia's land. Tupaia was gone these six years. 'Toote' (James Cook) had taken him. Now Toote is back again with the news that Tupaia is dead.

Mai is a refugee now at Huahine. Toote's assistant vessel, the *Adventure*, visits Fare, its principal harbour.

Tobias Furneaux is the *Adventure's* Captain. It was Furneaux who had raised the English flag and danced in front of it with his soldiers at Matavai in the days when Mai was wounded. Mai can tell him how Tupaia had taken that flag and sewn it into the symbol of sovereignty in all Tahiti, a red feather *maro*, or loin-wrap.

Mai asks Furneaux if he can be taken to see King George, as Tupaia, too, had wanted. Furneaux agrees, even if Toote is not so enthusiastic. In token of his new status, Mai gets a new name. He appears on the *Adventure's* rolls as 'Tetuby Homey Huahine, Society Islands, 22, AB'.

The rest of the able seamen, whose AB rating has

been more vigorously earned, are inclined to give 'Tetuby Homey Huahine AB' a hard time. The only possessions Mai has are some *tapa* cloth and his wooden headrest (*iri*), a symbol, in his eyes at least, of his social status. Mai sleeps with his headrest on the floor of the Captain's cabin.

In the *Adventure's* small Great Cabin, Mai makes friends with James Burney, son of Charles Burney, the music master, brother of Fanny Burney, the writer. James tries to exchange languages, English/Tahitian, and to have him unlearn some of the naughtier language that the other ABs try to teach him.



G.T. Boulton, *View of the House or Shed, Called Tupaow [i.e. Tupaupau] in Otateite, under Which the Dead Are Deposited ...* 1789  
sepia wash drawing; 27.8 x 36.5 cm

The *Adventure's* visit to New Zealand at Totara-nui in Queen Charlotte's Sound is a disaster. Ten of her crew are killed and, the English believe, eaten by the Maori. Mai is no great help in the crisis. The Maori cry out for Tupaia. Tupaia is famous all over New Zealand from Toote's visit there in the *Endeavour*. They even have a mourning chant for him, which James Burney transcribes. 'Ahee matte away Tupaya!' (*Aki mate aue Tupaia!*—Departed, dead, alas Tupaia!).

The Maori are a little snobbish about Mai's social status and middle-ranked nobility. They ignore him. In return, Mai is a little more than snobbish about Maori savagery. As a potential human sacrifice,

Mai knows from earlier that he would be 'eaten' ritually and with propriety. He has no time for Maori eating victims without etiquette.

## Scene II

*Scarborough, Yorkshire, August 1775*

Each day, each week, each month has been a triumph. The English in their mansions, in their salons and at their tables have looked at him differently compared to the English in their Great Cabins or on the beaches of his island. Now their admiring, rather than domineering, gaze gives him confidence. Mai has a



John Webber (1752–1793), *View in Queen Charlotte's Sound, New Zealand*  
London: J. Webber, 1 October 1790, hand-coloured soft-ground etching; plate mark 32.6 x 45cm

keen, sharp eye, too. He catches the functions of gestures and the manners in a look.

Mai is a great mimic, a cultural thespian. Good enough, anyway, to stop the superior sort of laughter that arises when he is not quite getting things right. He is mirror to his English hosts' civilities—courtesy, simplicity, carefulness. If he cannot read words on a page, he can read meanings in postures, status in things, gender and social relations in the spacings of a group.

The English are not greatly interested in Mai's own native skills. But away from London and in the company of 'Opano' (Joseph Banks), he is happy to 'do' 'native' things, like cooking. Here is Opano writing about it: 'Omai dressed three dishes for dinner yesterday [in a dug-out earthen oven] and so well was his cooking liked that he is desired to cook again today not out of curiosity but for the real desire of eating meat so dress'd: he succeeds most prodigiously: so much natural politeness I never saw in any man: wherever he goes he makes friends and has not I believe as yet a foe.'

For Mai, the happiest trip of all is one made with Opano, in the summer of 1775, to a place near Tooté's birthplace, Whitby, and Scarborough. They make their way north of York in Opano's huge broad-wheeled wagon, which carries all Opano's storage for his botanical research. Mai's companions are two boys. One is George Colman, son of the Reverend Sir John Colman, an antiquarian with whom Mai has dined ten times at the Royal Philosopher's Club. Mai calls all Georges, including King George III, 'Tosh'. The English are amused by it. The trip north is slow. Nothing botanically unusual is passed—not even a thistle, someone complains—without someone jumping out of the wagon to collect it. Mai participates in an archaeological dig, makes a disastrous attempt to mount

a horse by way of the tail, goes grouse shooting. Well, bird-shooting. Mai's definition of grouse includes 'dunghill cocks, barn-door geese and ducks in the pond'.

At Scarborough Mai has his greatest English triumph. He goes swimming. Swimming, for the English, at this time at least, is a calculated quiet immersion. Devotees keep frogs in basins by their ponds so that they can imitate the frogs' peaceful leg and arm movements. The noise, splash, exuberance and out-of-water arm movements of the South Sea Islander are a matter of wonder and apprehension.

There are many horse-drawn bathing wagons on the beach at Scarborough. Mai ignores them and enters the sea freely as if it is his own. He invites young Tosh to ride his back and for nearly an hour takes him far out into the North Sea. Tosh's description of this experience is a gentle, sweet memory:

I was upon the point of making my maiden plunge, from a bathing-machine, into the briny flood, when Omai appear'd wading before me. The coast of Scarborough having an eastern aspect, the early sunbeams shot their lustre upon the tawny Priest, and heighten'd the cutaneous gloss which he had recently received from the water; he look'd like a specimen of pale moving mahogany, highly varnish'd; not only varnish', indeed, but curiously veneer'd; for, from his hips, and the small of his back, downwards, he was tallow'd with striped arches, broad and black, by means of a sharp shell, or a fish's tooth, imbued with an indelible dye, according to the fashion of his country. He hail'd me with the salutation of Tosh, which was his pronunciation of George, and utter'd certain sounds approaching the articulation of—'back'—'swim'—'I'—'me'—'carry'—'you', and he constantly cried 'Tosh not afraid'; but Tosh *was* afraid—and plaguily frighten'd indeed, that's the plain truth.

### Scene III

*Fare, Huahine, 13 October 1777*

There he is: Mai in full body armour on the front of his double-canoe, *Royal George*. The *Royal Tosh*, as he no doubt would have called it, is aflutter with flags and pennants, some a little tangled because the canoe nearly overturned in the passage through the reef into Fare Harbour on Huahine. Captain Mai is in charge. Tooté in the *Resolution* follows him to anchor.

Tooté is on a fatal last voyage that will end with his death in Hawai'i. He has not had a happy voyage. Whatever sufferance and patience he earlier had with crews and Islanders has long gone across ten years of Pacific

voyaging. He was savagely violent beyond prudence (and morality, his officers thought) at every island they visited—flogging, taking hostages, cutting off ears, killing, destroying property. Having to deliver Mai home safely to his island hasn't lessened his tensions. But he is doing so by personal instructions of King Tosh himself.

Mai's two-year sojourn in 'Bretannee' has come to an end with the possibility that Tooté, on his third voyage to discover a Northwest Passage, can take him home. Mai was not sad to go. We don't know whether his sharp ear had caught the mockery in the laughter that his antics were beginning to arouse. We do know that he had a mission—to return home and, with his wealth and knowledge, to drive off the Pora Poran invaders of



Samuel Middiman, engraver (1750–1831), after John Webber (1752–1793), *An Offering before Capt. Cook in the Sandwich Islands* London: 1784, hand-coloured engraving; plate mark 26 x 41 cm

his land. He still has to learn what every returning migrant learns: how much a stranger his beach crossing has made him.

Mai's wealth is extravagant and absurd. The *Resolution* is stuffed with it—drums, a hand-organ, a jack-in-the-box, an 'electrifying machine', regiments of lead soldiers, dolls, globes and maps, dishes, swords, muskets, pistols, ball-gowns, livery, flags. And a white stallion. And a monkey (who would come to the unlikely end of falling out of a coconut tree).

However, Mai also has an eye for the relative value of his wealth. He traded much of it in Tonga for red feathers. That gave him a bankroll of red feathers for political trading in Tahiti. He spent the last leg of his voyage home sewing a red feather *maro*. Maybe his delusions of grandeur were more deluded than we know. Maybe he was sewing a new symbol of sovereignty in Tahiti, just as his master Tupaia had done.

King Tosh promised Mai that he would have a Bretanee house built for him on his island; a two-storey house, Mai thought. Tooté had the ship's carpenters build the house—from engravings of it, it looks to have an attic at least!—on the foreshore at Fare.

Mai gives Tooté a lesson in the proprieties of landing in a foreign place. Tupaia had given Tooté the same lesson at his first landing at Raiatea. Gifts have to be made to the priests and sacrifices to the gods. Proper gestures have to be made in sacred places. Tooté has these lessons in mind as he sails on from Huahine to Hawai'i, after leaving Mai to his fate. In Hawai'i, Tooté is prepared to enter into the spirit of native sacredness in ways he has never done before. It is an irony that scandalised his own men, missionaries and some later historians.

## Epilogue

*Huahine, May 1780*

Mai returns home. He finds that other Tahitians have also been abroad and returned. The Spaniards had taken several to South America. The gloss on his own travels is tarnished. Mai also finds that his stories of King Tosh's greatness only offend the sense of greatness of those at home. He finds that nothing he brings from Bretanee serves to raise him in social status in any way. He finds that politics and power are a home-grown thing.

Mai's passion to get back his own lands remains. For two years he fights insignificant battles on Huahine. He has his muskets and, of course, his white stallion. He is dead before he is 30. Not in battle. A fever that swells and closes his throat kills him. *Hotate* the Tahitians call it.

Then it was, that his old enemies stole all that he had brought back. His Bretanee house survived a bit better. A native house was built over and around it. Perhaps, Mai would have been pleased that something of his had thus been raised to museum status.

## Postscript

There is one relic of Mai still to be seen. It is the headrest that he took to England. It was acquired for the Tahiti Museum in recent years from the Furneaux family, for £80 000.

## Notes on Contributors

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GREG DENING is Adjunct Professor at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, Australian National University. He 'adjuncts' by conducting national and international postgraduate workshops on the creative imagination in the presentation of knowledge. His own creative imagination is to be found in such books as *Islands and Beaches*, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language*, *The Death of William Gooch*, *Performances* and *Readings/Writings*.

HARRIET GUEST is a Director of the Centre for Eighteenth Century Studies, and senior lecturer in the Department of English and Related Literature, at the University of York. She is an editor of Johann Reinhold

Forster's *Observations Made During a Voyage Round the World* (Honolulu: Hawai'i University Press, 1996), and author of *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750–1810* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000).

MICHELLE HETHERINGTON is the curator of *Cook & Omai: The Cult of the South Seas* in association with the Humanities Research Centre. She has a strong interest in eighteenth century European exploration of the Pacific and has curated a number of major exhibitions for the National Library including *Paradise Possessed: The Rex Nan Kivell Collection*, *Follow the Sun: Australian Travel Posters* and *The World Upside Down: Australia 1788–1830*.

CHRISTA KNELLWOLF is a Fellow in the Humanities Research Centre at The Australian National University. She has taught at the University of Zürich and has been a Research Fellow at Cardiff University in Wales. Author of *A Contradiction Still: Representations of Women in the Poetry of Alexander Pope* (1998) and coeditor (with Christopher Norris) of *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, volume 9 (2001), she is now writing a history of the cultural reception of the scientific revolution in England. She has contributed articles to books and journals on the early modern period and on feminist history.

IAIN McCALMAN is a specialist in eighteenth-century British and European history and has a particular interest in popular culture and low life. He is Director of the Humanities Research Centre of The Australian National University, Canberra, and author of *Radical Underworld: Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795–1840*. He is the general editor of *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age, British Culture 1776–1832* published in 1999.

PAUL TURNBULL is a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research at The Australian National University. He is well known for his research on the history of racial science, and the theory and practice of making history in multimedia. He is currently director

of the South Seas Project, a collaborative research venture between the National Library of Australia and the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, which will see the creation of web-based information on eighteenth-century Pacific voyaging.

CAROLINE TURNER is Deputy Director of the Humanities Research Centre at The Australian National University. Prior to joining the HRC in January 2000 she spent 20 years as an art museum professional. She has organised a number of major exhibitions for Australia, including *Toulouse Lautrec: Prints and Posters* from the Bibliothèque Nationale, *Matisse* and three Asia-Pacific Triennial exhibitions of contemporary art.

## Exhibition List of Works

All works listed belong to the National Library of Australia unless otherwise noted.

Victor-Jean Adam (1801–1866)  
*Taiti, voyage de Cook* 1823  
wash drawing; 19.6 x 14.7 cm  
T2942 T2943 T2946 NK10168/1

Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820)  
Papers 1745–1820  
An account of the bills for Oediddee  
manuscript list; 22.5 x 18.5 cm  
MS9/8

Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820)  
Papers 1745–1820  
An account of the bills for Omai  
manuscript list; 22.5 x 18.5 cm  
MS9/6

Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820)  
Papers 1745–1820  
Expenses incurred on account of Mr. Omai  
in the course of the year 1775  
manuscript list; 31.4 x 20 cm  
MS9/10

Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820)  
Papers 1745–1820  
Expenses incurred on account of Mr. Omai  
in the course of the year 1776  
manuscript list; 31.8 x 19.8 cm  
MS9/11

Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820)  
Papers 1745–1820

Hints offered to the consideration of  
Captain Cook 1768  
Letter from James Douglas, 14th Earl of  
Morton to James Cook; 23.1 x 18.4 cm  
MS9/113a

Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820)  
Papers 1745–1820  
Memorandum 1774  
Letter from Sarah Banks, describing  
Omai; 18.3 x 30.2 cm  
MS9/32d

Sir Joseph Banks (1743–1820)  
Papers 1745–1820  
Things intended for Omai  
manuscript list; 22.5 x 18.5 cm  
MS9/14

Francesco Bartolozzi (1727–1815)  
after Robert Smirke (1752–1845)  
*The Cession of the District of Matavai in the  
Island of Otaheite to Captain James Wilson for  
the Use of the Missionaries*  
London: Published for the benefit of the  
Missionary Society by W. Jeffryes, 179-?  
hand-coloured aquatint;  
plate mark 60 x 78 cm  
U5359 NK2028

Francesco Bartolozzi (1727–1815)  
after Nathaniel Dance (1735–1811)  
*Omai, a Native of Ulaietea, Brought into England  
in the Year 1774 by Tobias Furneaux*  
London: Publish'd according to Act of  
Parlt., 25 October 1774

engraving; plate mark 54.5 x 33 cm  
U6879 NK327

Francesco Bartolozzi (1727–1815)  
after Giovanni Battista Cipriani  
(1727–1785)  
after Sydney Parkinson (1745?–1771)  
*[A View of the Inside of a House in the Island of  
Ulaietea, with the Representation of a Dance to  
the Music of the Country]*  
London: 1773  
engraving; plate mark 21.2 x 30.1 cm  
S1691

James Basire, engraver (1730–1802)  
after William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*The Landing at Mallicolo, One of the New Hebrides*  
London: Wm. Strahan & Thos. Cadell, 1777  
engraving; plate mark 28.5 x 49 cm  
S1717

Guillaume André René Baston  
*Narrations d'Omai, Insulaire de la Mer du Sud,  
Ami et Compagnon de Voyage du Capitaine Cook*  
Vol. 1  
à Rouen: & à Paris: Chez Le Boucher le  
jeune ...; Chez Buisson, 1790  
NK2983

George Baxter (1804–1867)  
*The Massacre of the Lamented Missionary the  
Rev. J. Williams and Mr Harris*  
London: G. Baxter, 1841  
Baxter print; 21.4 x 32 cm  
U5330 NK540

Jacques Nicolas Bellin (1703–1772)  
*Carte réduite des mers comprises entre l'Asie et l'Amérique apelées par les navigateurs Mer du Sud ou Mer Pacifique pour servir aux vaisseaux du Roi*  
Paris: Dépôt des Cartes, Plans et Journeaux de la Marine, 1756  
coloured map; 55 x 83 cm  
NK6968

Comte Louis-Antoine de Bougainville (1729–1811)  
*A Voyage round the World. Performed by Order of His Most Christian Majesty, in the Years 1766, 1767, 1768, and 1769 by Lewis de Bougainville ... Commodore of the Expedition in the Frigate La Boudeuse, and the Store-ship L'Etoile,* translated from the French by John Reinhold Forster, F.A.S.  
Dublin: Printed for J. Exshaw; H. Saunders; J. Potts; W. Sleater; D. Chamberlaine; E. Lynch; J. Williams; R. Moncrieff; T. Walker; and C. Jenkins, 1772  
ROBINSON 37

G. T. Boulton  
*View of Matavia [i.e. Matavai] Bay in Otaheite, Taken from One Tree Hill, Which Tree Is a Species of the Erythrina* 1789  
sepia wash drawing; 28 x 36 cm  
T2807 NK185

G. T. Boulton  
*View of the House or Shed, Called Tupapow [i.e. Tupapau] in Otaheite, under Which the Dead Are Deposited ...* 1789  
sepia wash drawing; 27.8 x 36.5 cm  
T2808 NK186

James Burney (1750–1821)  
*Journal* 1772–1773  
manuscript journal; 32.5 x 41.5 cm  
MS3244

William Byrne, engraver (1743–1805)  
after John Webber (1752–1793)  
*The Body of Tee, a Chief, as Preserved after Death, in Otaheite*  
London: 1784

engraving; plate mark 26 x 40.5 cm  
U1241 NK10975/1

William Byrne, engraver (1743–1805)  
after John Webber (1752–1793)  
*A View at Anamooka*  
London: 1784  
engraving; plate mark 26.5 x 53 cm  
S1086

William Byrne, engraver (1743–1805)  
after William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*View in the Island of Pines*  
London: Published as the Act directs, 16 July 1776  
engraving; plate mark 22.6 x 38.9 cm  
S1723

James Caldwell, engraver (1739–1820)  
after William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*Omai*  
London: Wm. Strahan & Thos. Cadell, 1 February 1777  
engraving; plate mark 30 x 25 cm  
S1704

Jean-Gabriel Charvet, designer (1750–1829)  
Joseph Dufour, manufacturer (1757–1827)  
Panel from *Les Sauvages de la mer Pacifique* 1805

woodblock, printed in colour, from multiple blocks; 204.5 x 222.0 cm  
Purchased from admission charges 1982–83  
National Gallery of Australia

John Cleveley (c.1745–1786)  
*Morea [i.e. Moorea] One of the Friendly Islands in the South Seas, 1777*  
watercolour; 51.3 x 69 cm  
T2810 NK2847

John Cleveley (c.1745–1786)  
*A View of Matavai Bay* 1780?  
watercolour; 50.7 x 69.8 cm  
T2809 NK2846

Joseph Collyer, engraver (1748–1827)  
after John Russell (1745–1806)  
*Sir Joseph Banks, Bart., President of the Royal Society*  
London: Published as the Act directs, 4 June 1789  
stipple engraving;  
oval image 10.4 x 8.1 cm  
U6269 NK1375

Cook, James Capt. – Relics  
Card case in oxidised silver and tortoiseshell, 7 x 10.8 cm  
Depicts 'Mort du capitaine Cook, 16(?) février 1779', after John Webber  
Dixson Library, State Library of New South Wales  
DR19

Cook, James Capt. – Relics  
Waist coat of Tahiti cloth embroidered by Mrs Cook for him to wear at court, had he returned from the third voyage  
tapa cloth  
Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales  
R198

James Cook (1728–1779)  
*Journal of H.M.S. Endeavour* 1768–1772  
MS1

James Cook (1728–1779)  
*A Voyage towards the South Pole, and round the World: Performed in His Majesty's Ships the Resolution and Adventure, in the Years 1772, 1773, 1774, and 1775* Vol. 2  
London: Printed for W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1777  
RBq CLI3442

A. Courcell  
*Mr Fisher as Terebooo, King of the Island of Owhyhee, in the Death of Captain Cook*  
London: G. Creed, 21 September 1818  
hand-coloured etching; 20.7 x 17.7 cm  
U7225 NK1705

John Courtenay (1741–1816)  
*An Epistle (Moral and Philosophical) from an Officer at Otabeite to Lady Gr\*s\*\*n\*r: with Notes, Critical and Historical by the Author of the Rape of Pomona*  
London: Printed for T. Evans ... , 1774  
SRp 827.6 C863ep

William Cowper (1731–1800)  
*The Task: A Poem, in Six Books*  
London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1785  
RB DNS 5991

Claude-Mathieu Fessard, engraver (b.1740)  
after John Webber (1752–1793)  
*Mort tragique du capitaine Cook, le 15 février, 1779, sur la côte d'Owhy-bee, l'une des Isles Sandwich, découverte par ce navigateur*  
Paris: 178-?  
engraving; 28.4 x 32.5 cm  
U1190 NK6565

Gerald Fitz-Gerald (1739?–1819)  
*The Injured Islanders, or, The Influence of Art upon the Happiness of Nature*  
London: Printed for J. Murray, 1779  
NK591

James Gillray (1757–1815)  
*The Great South Sea Caterpillar, Transform'd into a Bath Butterfly*  
London: Hannah Humphrey, 4 July 1795  
hand-coloured etching;  
plate mark 34.5 x 24.8 cm  
U7220 NK1603

Thomas Gosse (1765–1844)  
*Transplanting of the Bread-fruit-trees from Otabeite*  
London: Thomas Gosse, 1 September 1796  
hand-coloured mezzotint;  
sheet 52.4 x 60.6 cm  
U83 NK2010

Valentine Green, engraver (1739–1813)  
after Johann Zoffany (1733–1810)  
*John Montagu, Earl of Sandwich, Viscount Hinchingbrook, First Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty*  
London: Valentine Green, 30 August 1774

mezzotint; plate mark 50.4 x 35.3 cm  
U7553 NK275

Charles Grignion, engraver (1717–1810)  
after Samuel Wale (d.1786)  
*A Chief and Other Natives of O-Tabeitee Visiting Captn. Cook in His Second Voyage to the Southern Hemisphere*  
London: Alex. Hogg, 1782  
engraving ; 28 x 17 cm  
S3514

John Hall, engraver (1739–1797)  
[*Captain Samuel Wallis of HMS Dolphin Being Received by the Queen of Otabeite, July 1767*]  
London: 1773?  
engraving; plate mark 23.8 x 33 cm  
S1675

John Hawkesworth (1715?–1773)  
*An Account of the Voyages Undertaken by the Order of His Present Majesty, for Making Discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere ...*  
Vol. 2  
London: Printed for W. Strahan and T. Cadell ... , 1773  
FERG7243

John Hawkesworth (1715?–1773)  
Letters 1771–1773  
Letter from Lord Sandwich to Dr Burney manuscript; 23 x 36.2 cm  
MS332/5

after John Hawkesworth (1715?–1773)  
*New Discoveries Concerning the World and Its Inhabitants ...*  
London: Printed for J. Johnson ... , 1778  
NK2982

attributed to William Hayley  
(1745–1820)  
*Otabeite: A Poem*  
London: 1774  
RB MISC 1865

William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*Ice Islands with the Resolution and Adventure* 1772–73

watercolour; 36.7 x 54.6 cm  
Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales  
PXD11 f.28

William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*Man of New Caledonia* May 1773  
crayon drawing; 54.4 x 37 cm  
R754

William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*A Man of Tabiti with Long Hair*  
August 1773?  
chalk drawing; 54.7 x 37.5 cm  
R756

William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*Man of Tanna* August 1774?  
chalk and pencil; 54.3 x 37.1 cm  
R752

William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*Maori Man with Bushy Hair* May 1773  
chalk drawing; 54.4 x 37.5 cm  
R751

William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*Oedidee, Otabeite* c.1775  
chalk drawing; 54.4 x 38 cm  
R742

William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*Old Man of Amsterdam* October 1773  
chalk drawing; 54.5 x 36.9 cm  
R753

William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*Old Maori Man with a Grey Beard*  
May 1773  
chalk drawing; 54.2 x 37.9 cm  
R749

William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*Otabeite* c.1773  
watercolour; 37.5 x 54.5 cm  
T1922 NK6575

William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*Otoo, King of Otabeite [i.e. Tabiti]*

- August? 1773  
chalk drawing; 54 x 37.8 cm  
R755
- William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*Portrait of a Maori Chieftain* October 1773  
chalk drawing; 54.3 x 37.4 cm  
R747
- William Hodges (1744–1797)  
[*Portrait of Tynai-mai, Princess of Raiatea*]  
c.1773  
chalk drawing; 54.3 x 37.2 cm  
R739
- William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*The Resolution and Adventure 4 Jan 1773  
Taking in Ice for Water. Lat 61.S.*  
wash and watercolour; 38 x 54.5 cm  
Mitchell Library, State Library of New  
South Wales  
PXD11 f.26
- William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*A Tahitian Man with a White Beard* August?  
1773  
chalk drawing; 54.2 x 37.2 cm  
R748
- William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*Tongatabu or Amsterdam* October 1773  
watercolour; 37.5 x 54.5 cm  
T1924 NK143
- William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*View from Point Venus, Island of Otabeite*  
c.1774  
oil on canvas; 29.2 x 39.4 cm  
R8849
- William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*Woman and Child of Tanna* August? 1774  
chalk drawing; 54.2 x 37.3 cm  
R745
- William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*Woman of New Zealand* c.1774  
chalk drawing; 54.4 x 37.4 cm  
R740
- Johann Jacobé, engraver (1733–1797)  
after Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792)  
*Omai, a Native of the Island of Ulitea [i.e. Ulitea]*  
London: John Boydell, 1 September 1780  
mezzotint; plate mark 63 x 38.4 cm  
U6876 NK4832
- Francis Jukes (1746–1812)  
after John Cleveley (c.1745–1786)  
*View of Huabeine, One of the Society Islands in  
the South Seas*  
London: Thomas Martyn, 26 May 1787  
aquatint; sheet 51 x 66.5 cm  
S4572
- James King  
*A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean: Undertaken,  
by the Command of His Majesty, for Making  
Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere ... :  
Performed under the Direction of Captains Cook,  
Clerke, and Gore in His Majesty's Ships the  
Resolution and Discovery: In the Years 1776,  
1777, 1778, 1779, and 1780* Vol. 3  
London: Printed by W. and A. Strahan  
for G. Nicol and T. Cadell, 1784  
FERG7238
- Ivan Fedorovich Kruzenshtern  
(1770–1846)  
*Puteshestvie Vokrug Svieta*  
Sanktpeterburg: Morskaia Tipografiia,  
1809–1813  
atlas; 64 cm  
MAP Ra 258
- [Kuru pendants?] 18--?  
pounamu (greenstone);  
12.5 x 1.6 cm and 11 x 1.1 cm  
A40010090
- J. Laroque  
[*Plates from: Encyclopaedie des voyages  
by Jacques Grasset de Saint-Sauveur*]  
Paris: Jacques Grasset de Saint-Sauveur,  
1796?  
6 hand-coloured engravings with  
aquatint; plate mark 20.8 x 14.4 cm or  
smaller  
U7451–U7456
- Daniel Lerpinière, engraver (1745–1785)  
after William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*Family in Dusky Bay, New Zealand*  
London: Wm. Strahan & Thos. Cadell,  
1 February 1777  
engraving; plate mark 25.3 x 38 cm  
U1195 NK3502
- Guillaume de L'Isle (1675–1726)  
*Hemisphere meridional pour voir plus  
distinctement les terres Australes*  
Paris: Chez l'Auteur, 1782  
hand-coloured map; 44.3 cm diameter  
on a sheet 52 x 52.5 cm  
NK1540
- Philippe Jacques de Loucherbourg  
(1740–1812)  
*Chief Mourner Otabaite* 1785  
watercolour; 31.4 x 18.9 cm  
R145
- Philippe Jacques de Loucherbourg  
(1740–1812)  
*Dancer* 1785  
watercolour; 31.2 x 18.6 cm  
R149
- Philippe Jacques de Loucherbourg  
(1740–1812)  
*Dancer, Otabaite* 1785  
watercolour; 31.3 x 20.3 cm  
R148
- Philippe Jacques de Loucherbourg  
(1740–1812)  
*A Man of New Zealand* 1785  
watercolour; 31.2 x 18.5 cm  
R150
- Philippe Jacques de Loucherbourg  
(1740–1812)  
*Nootka or King G. Sound* 1785  
watercolour; 31 x 19 cm  
R154
- Philippe Jacques de Loucherbourg  
(1740–1812)  
*Obereyau [i.e. Oberea] Enchantress* 1785

watercolour; 32.2 x 20.2 cm  
R143

Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg  
(1740–1812)  
*Otoo, King of Otabaite* 1785  
watercolour; 31.2 x 19.2 cm  
R144

Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg  
(1740–1812)  
*The Present Woman of Otebeite* 1785  
watercolour; 31.7 x 19.7 cm  
R147

Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg  
(1740–1812)  
*Prophet's Dress* 1785?  
watercolour; 22 x 18.3 cm  
R10283

Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg  
(1740–1812)  
*Toha* 1785  
watercolour; 32.3 x 20 cm  
R142

Maori war cleaver 18--?  
bone patu; 31.5 x 14 cm  
A40005690

Samuel Middiman, engraver  
(1750–1831)  
after John Webber (1752–1793)  
*An Offering before Capt. Cook in the Sandwich  
Islands*  
London: 1784  
hand-coloured engraving;  
plate mark 26 x 41 cm  
U1182 NK5630

Samuel Middiman, engraver  
(1750–1831)  
after Sydney Parkinson (1745?–1771)  
*Venus Fort, Erected by the Endeavour's People to  
Secure Themselves during the Observation of the  
Transit of Venus at Otabeite*  
London: Stanfield Parkinson, 1773  
engraving; 18.6 x 24.5 cm  
U3047 NK2140/A

John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich  
(1718–1792)  
Papers 1771–1784  
Letter from James King; 23.2 x 37.6 cm  
MS7218/29

John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich  
(1718–1792)  
Papers 1771–1784  
Letter from John Hawkesworth; 20.1 x 18 cm  
MS7218/1

John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich  
(1718–1792)  
Papers 1771–1784  
Letter outlining musical practices in the  
Pacific; 22.5 x 37 cm  
MS7218/32 (ii)

John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich  
(1718–1792)  
Papers 1771–1784  
[List of illustrations for inclusion in the  
publication of Cook's 3rd Pacific Voyage];  
32.3 x 39.8 cm  
MS7218/12 (ii)

John Hamilton Mortimer (1741–1779)  
[*Captain James Cook, Sir Joseph Banks, Lord  
Sandwich, and Two Others*] 1771?  
oil on canvas; 120 x 166 cm  
R10630

Page, engraver  
*Omiab, a Native of Otabeite, Brought to  
England by Capt. Fourneaux [i.e. Furneaux]*  
London: London mage [i.e. magazine],  
August 1774  
engraving; plate mark 19 x 11.5 cm  
S6538A

William Parry (1742–1791)  
*Sir Joseph Banks with Omai, the Otabeitan  
Chief, and Doctor Daniel Solander*  
1775–1776  
oil on canvas; 147.5 x 147.5 cm  
Private Collection, by kind permission of  
Nevill Keating Pictures Ltd

James Perry (1756–1821)  
*Mimosa: or, The Sensitive Plant; a Poem.  
Dedicated to Mr. Banks, and Addressed to Kitt  
Frederick, Dutchess of Queensberry, Elect*  
London: W. Sandwich, 1779  
RB 827.6 MIM

Antoine Phelippeaux, engraver  
(1767–c.1830)  
after Jacques Grasset de Saint-Sauveur  
(1757–1810)  
*Tableau des découvertes du capne. Cook & de la  
Pérouse*  
Paris: chez l'auteur, Bordeaux: chez le  
Cne. S. Sauveur  
l'an 7 de la République Française [1798  
or 1799]  
hand-coloured engraving; 45.5 x 53.1 cm  
S3539

[Piece of 'corduroy' made from the bark  
of native trees to replace clothing on  
Capt. Cook's second voyage] 1773  
tapa cloth; 15.2 x 5.8 cm irregular shape  
A40008320 NK7431/B

C. Pignatari (fl.1760–1770)  
*Omai, Otaïtiano Condotta in Inghilterra  
Venice?: 1794?*  
engraving; plate mark 20 x 15.4 cm  
U3045 NK11277

[Playbill for the 44th performance of  
*Omai, or, A trip around the World*]  
20 April 1786  
23.3 x 16.2 cm  
S6538B

William Preston (1753–1807)  
*Seventeen Hundred and Seventy-seven, or,  
A Picture of the Manners and Character of the  
Age. in a Poetical Epistle from a Lady of Quality*  
London: Printed for T. Evans, 1777  
SRp 821.6 P942ev

Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792)  
*Omai of the Friendly Isles* 1774?  
pencil drawing; 26.5 x 20 cm  
T2711 NK9670

Samuel William Reynolds, engraver  
(1773–1835)  
after Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792)  
*Sir Joseph Banks, Bart.*  
London: Hodgson, Boys & Graves, 1834  
mezzotint; plate mark 12.9 x 9.9 cm  
U6304 NK1715

attributed to John Rickman  
*Journal of Captain Cook's Last Voyage to the  
Pacific Ocean on Discovery: Performed in the  
Years 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779, Illustrated with  
Cuts, and a Chart, Shewing the Tracts of the  
Ships Employed in This Expedition. Faithfully  
Narrated from the Original MS*  
London: Printed for E. Newbery, 1781  
NK5094

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778)  
*A Discourse upon the Origin and Foundation of  
the Inequality among Mankind*  
London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1761  
RB Ec 6211

[Samoan fan] 18--?  
bamboo and reed; 44.6 x 21 cm  
A40005100 NK10469

[Samoan fly whisk] 18--?  
fibre; 46 x 5 cm  
A40005100 NK10469

[Sample of tapa cloth said to be brought  
back by Alex Hood, Master's Mate,  
HMS *Resolution*, 1772-1775] 1774?  
plant fibre and pigment;  
349 x 61.5 cm  
A40005038 NK2276

[Samples of tapa cloth mounted in a  
book entitled: *Patterns of South Sea Cloth*]  
1769–1779?  
album of tapa cloth samples; 5 x 9.8 cm  
or smaller  
A40007308 NK10696

David Samwell (1751–1798)  
*A Narrative of the Death of Captain James Cook.  
To Which Are Added Some Particulars, Concerning  
His Life and Character. And Observations*

*Respecting the Introduction of the Venereal Disease  
into the Sandwich Islands*  
London: Printed for G.G.J. and  
J. Robinson ... , 1786  
NK35

attributed to John Scott-Waring  
*An Epistle from Oberea, Queen of Otabeite,  
to Joseph Banks, Esq.* 3rd edition  
London: Printed for J. Almon, 1774  
SR 827.6 E64ep-3

William Sharp, engraver (1749–1824)  
after John Webber (1752–1793)  
*A Night Dance by Men in Hapae*  
London: 1784  
engraving; plate mark 27 x 41.8 cm  
U1245 NK10975/5

John Keyes Sherwin, engraver  
(1751–1790)  
after John Webber (1752–1793)  
*A Dance in Otabeite*  
London: 1784  
engraving; plate mark 26.5 x 41 cm  
U1244 NK10975/4

John Keyes Sherwin, engraver (1751–1790)  
after William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*The Landing at Erramanga One of the New  
Hebrides*  
London: Wm. Strahan & Thos. Cadell,  
1 February 1777  
engraving; plate mark 28.8 x 48.5 cm  
S1719

John Keyes Sherwin, engraver (1751–1790)  
after William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*The Landing at Middleburgh, One of the  
Friendly Isles*  
London: Wm. Strahan, Thos. Cadell,  
1 February 1777  
engraving; plate mark 27.5 x 51.5 cm  
S1707

John Keyes Sherwin, engraver (1751–1790)  
after William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*The Landing at Tanna One of the New Hebrides*  
London: Wm. Strahan & Thos. Cadell,  
1 February 1777

engraving; 23.5 x 47.3 cm  
S1720

William Shield (1748–1829)  
*A Short Account of the New Pantomime Called  
Omai, or, A Trip round the World: Performed at  
the Theatre-Royal in Covent-Garden: with the  
Recitatives, Airs, Duets, Trios, and Chorusses,  
and a Description of the Procession, the  
Pantomime and the Whole of the Scenery  
Designed and Invented by Mr. Louthembourg; the  
Words Written by Mr. O'Keeffe, and the  
Musick Composed by Mr. Shields [i.e. Shield]*  
London: Printed for T. Cadell ... , 1785  
NK915

John Raphael Smith, engraver (1752–1812)  
after Benjamin West (1738–1820)  
*Mr Banks*  
London: S. Hooper, J.R. Smith,  
15 April 1773  
mezzotint; 62 x 38 cm  
S7817

Henry Stubble (fl.1785–1791)  
[*Portrait of Samuel Wallis*] c.1785  
watercolour and pencil; oval image  
13.6 x 11 cm  
R10685

Charles Tomkins, engraver (1750–1810)  
after Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792)  
[*Society of Dilettanti*]  
London: H. Graves, 182-?  
mezzotint; 16.9 x 13 cm  
U6293 NK5779

Unknown artist  
*A Man of the Sandwich Islands with His Helmet*  
1830?  
watercolour; 75 x 51 cm.  
T3334 NK1224/1

Unknown artist  
*The Natives of Otabeite Attacking Captn.  
Wallis the First Discoverer of That Island*  
c.1767  
watercolour; 33 x 41 cm  
T2786 NK147

Unknown artist  
[Original drawing for the Baxter print,  
*The Massacre of the Lamented Missionary,*  
*The Rev J. Williams, at Erromanga in the*  
*South Sea*] 1841?  
pen and watercolour drawing; 25.8 x  
36.4 cm  
T2930 NK150

Unknown artist  
*Potatow chef de Tahiti* 178-  
pencil and crayon; 24.6 x 17.6 cm  
T2923 NK236

Unknown artist  
[*Six Studies of Tabitians and a Tabitian Drum*]  
c.1772  
pencil drawing; 19.6 x 31.8 cm  
R7219

Unknown artist  
*Tabitians Presenting Fruits to Bougainville*  
*Attended by His Officers* 1768?  
pencil and watercolour; 9.2 x 6.9 cm  
T2996 NK5066

Unknown artists  
Hawai'i  
*Cape* late 18th century  
Tiwi feathers (from the scarlet honey  
creeper) overlaid by long tail-feathers of  
red and white tropical birds and black  
cock feathers  
Australian Museum

Unknown artists  
Potoki, North Island, Aotearoa/New Zealand  
*Cloak*  
kaka and pigeon feathers on a flax fibre  
backing  
Australian Museum

Unknown artists  
Hawai'i  
*Mahioli* (helmet) late 18th century  
plaited wickerwork of 'ie'ie vine  
Australian Museum

Unknown artists  
Tahiti, Society Islands

*Taumi* (gorget) late 18th century  
pigeon feathers, shark teeth, dog hair,  
pearl shell on a backing of sennitt  
(coconut fibre) and sticks  
Australian Museum

Unknown author  
*An Epistle from Mr. Banks, Voyager, Monster-*  
*bunter, and Amoroso, to Oberea, Queen of*  
*Otaheite* 2nd edition  
London?: Printed at Batavia for Jacobus  
Opano, 1774  
NK618

Unknown author  
*A Letter from Omai, to the Right Honourable the*  
*Earl of \*\*\*\*\*; Late - Lord of the -: in Which ...*  
*Is Fairly and Irrefragably Stated the Nature of*  
*Original Sin: Together with a Proposal for*  
*Planting Christianity in the Islands of the*  
*Pacific Ocean*  
London: Printed for J. Bell at the British  
Library, 1780?  
SRp 827.6 L651et

Unknown author  
*Omai: Playbills and Criticisms, 1785-6*  
London: 1779-1833  
Account of the new pantomime called  
*Omai or A Trip around the World* pp. 595  
and 596 of the London Chronicle 1785  
NK893

Unknown author  
*Omiab's Farewell: Inscribed to the Ladies of*  
*London*  
London: Printed for G. Kearsley, 1776  
SRq 821.6 O55mi

Unknown author  
*The South Sea Islander: Containing Many*  
*Interesting Facts Relative to the Former and*  
*Present State of Society in the Island of Otaheite*  
New York: W.B. Gilley, 1820  
F799

Unknown engraver  
*The Botanic Macaroni*  
London: M. Darly, 14 November 1772

etching; plate mark 17.8 x 12.6 cm  
U6305 NK5003

Unknown engraver  
*Dance of the Friendly Islands, in the Presence of*  
*the Queen, Time*  
London: J. Stockdale, 15 April 1800  
engraving; plate mark 13.8 x 22.8 cm  
U6794 NK11080

Unknown engraver  
*The King and Queen of the Sandwich Islands,*  
*and Suite, at Covent Garden Theatre*  
London: 1824  
engraving; 9.1 x 13 cm  
U7421 NK2158

Unknown engraver  
*Omiab the Indian from Otaheite Presented to*  
*Their Majesties at Kew by Mr Banks & Dr Solander,*  
*July 17, 1774*  
London: 1774?  
engraving; 11.1 x 13.9 cm  
U5390 NK10666

Unknown engraver  
*Ontbaal van Kapitein Cook op het Eiland Hapae*  
Leyden: 1795?  
engraving; plate mark 24.5 x 38.7 cm  
S1730

Unknown engraver  
*The Queen of Otaheite Taking Leave of Capn. Wallis*  
London?: 179-?  
engraving; 15.2 x 9.8 cm  
S3531

Unknown engraver  
*A Representation of the Attack of Capt. Wallis*  
*in the Dolphin by the Natives of Otaheite*  
London: 1773  
engraving; plate mark 23 x 31.2 cm  
S3496

Unknown maker  
*Tewbatewba* (a Maori battle-axe) with  
carved, shell-inlaid handle 176-?  
bone and shell; 102.2 cm long  
A40003604

Samuel Wallis (1728–1795)  
*Otabeite [i.e. Tabiti] or King Georges Island*  
c.1767  
pen and wash drawing; 28.7 x 44 cm  
T1915 NK31/3

John Webber (1752–1793)  
*Captain James Cook RN* 1782  
oil on canvas; 114 x 91 cm  
National Portrait Gallery

John Webber (1752–1793)  
*A Chief of the Sandwich Islands* 1787  
oil on canvas; 147.3 x 114.4 cm  
T265 NK1

John Webber (1752–1793)  
*Death of Captain Cook*  
oil on canvas; 85.6 x 122 cm  
Dixson Gallery, State Library of New  
South Wales  
DG 26

John Webber (1752–1793)  
*[A Portrait of Poedua]* c.1782  
oil on canvas; 144.7 x 93.5 cm  
T520 NK5192

John Webber (1752–1793)  
*A View in Matavai, Otabeite*  
London: J. Webber, 1 February 1787  
engraving; plate mark 29.3 x 43 cm  
aquatint by Marie Catherina Prestel  
(1747–1794)  
U1181 NK467/C

John Webber (1752–1793)  
*View on a Coast, with Upright Rocks Making a  
Cave* c.1780  
oil on canvas; 35.8 x 44.2 cm  
T505 NK6795

John Webber (1752–1793)  
*Wabeiadooa, Chief of Obeitepeba, Lying in State*  
London: J. Webber, 1 July 1789  
hand-coloured soft-ground etching;  
plate mark 32.4 x 44.5 cm  
U1452 NK11057

Josiah Wedgwood & Sons  
[Plaque of Captain James Cook] c.1936  
jasper plaque; oval image 13 x 10 cm  
A4000547X

Josiah Wedgwood & Sons  
[Plaque of Daniel Solander] c.1936  
jasper plaque; oval image 16.1 x 13 cm  
A40005496

Josiah Wedgwood & Sons  
[Plaque of Sir Joseph Banks] c.1936  
jasper plaque; oval image 18.5 x 15.5 cm  
A40005488

Whipcord  
*The Fly Catching Macaroni*  
London: M. Darly, 12 July 1772  
etching; plate mark 17.6 x 12.3 cm  
U6303 NK5004

William Woollett, engraver (1735–1785)  
after William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*The Fleet of Otabeite Assembled at Oparee*  
London: Wm. Strahan & Thos. Cadell,  
1 February 1777  
engraving; plate mark 24.7 x 39.5 cm  
S1715

William Woollett, engraver (1735–1785)  
after John Webber (1752–1793)  
*A Human Sacrifice in a Morai in Otabeite*  
London: 1784  
engraving; plate mark 29 x 49 cm  
U1242 NK10975/2

William Woollett, engraver (1735–1785)  
after William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*Monuments in Easter Island*  
London: Wm. Strahan & Thos. Cadell,  
1 February 1777  
engraving; plate mark 24 x 39 cm  
S1711

William Woollett, engraver (1735–1785)  
after William Hodges (1744–1797)  
*A Touparow with a Corpse on It, Attended by  
the Chief Mourner in His Habit of Ceremony*  
London: Wm. Strahan & Thos. Cadell,  
1 February 1777  
engraving; plate mark 24 x 39 cm  
U1443 NK11041



The journey of one man across half the world, from his home in Tahiti to 1770s London and then back again, provides us with a key to understanding the significance of Cook's three Pacific voyages and the cultural milieu in which they took place. Mai, better known as Omai, was discussed by scientists and philosophers, introduced to all the best circles and written about in everything from poetry to pornography. The legacy of Omai's encounter with Europe reveals a culture in a moment of transition, when old certainties were collapsing and new ones were yet to form.