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Aftermath: Britons' Responses to News of the Death of Captain James Cook

WHEN CAPTAIN JAMES COOK was killed at Kealakekua Bay on the island of Hawai'i on February 14, 1779 (fig. 1), Captain Charles Clerke succeeded him as commander of the expedition. Although Clerke himself was "far gone with the consumption," he took HMS *Resolution* and HMS *Discovery* north again into the Arctic Sea, continuing the search for a passage across the top of America that Cook had begun the year before. Once again, as summer waned, the explorers were driven from the Arctic Sea by winter's advance, without having found that northeast passage. This time, knowing that neither ships nor sailors could survive another year of voyaging, Clerke gave orders to sail for home, by way of Asia's ports. On August 21, 1779, lookouts sighted the coast of Kamchatka. The next day Captain Clerke died, killed by tuberculosis.

On June 8, 1779, while still in the northern sea, Clerke had written to the Lords of the Admiralty in London, telling them of the tragedy at Kealakekua. Later, in August, Lieutenant John Gore, Clerke's successor as commander of the expedition, entrusted this letter, and a packet of others, to Russian officials at Petropavlovsk, Kamchatka's only town. There, too, he entrusted the wasted body of Charles Clerke to Kamchatka's cold earth.

Clerke's letter, carried across the breadth of Siberia and Russia to Saint Petersburg, arrived at the Admiralty in London on Janu-

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FIG. 1. "The Death of Captain Cook." An engraving after John Webber's painting of the affray. Figures of people engraved by F. Bartolozzi, R.A., landscape by W. Byrne (London, January 4, 1787), by J. Webber . . . and W. Byrne). (BPBM photo collection.)

ary 10, 1780. Phillips Stevens, Secretary to the Admiralty, hastened with the news to the First Lord, the Earl of Sandwich, Captain Cook's powerful patron in Britain's naval establishment.

Later that day, Lord Sandwich wrote a hurried note to Sir Joseph Banks, who, in 1768–1770, had accompanied Captain Cook during his first voyage of exploration in the Pacific Ocean: "Dear Sir: what is uppermost in our mind allways must come out first, poor Captain Cooke is no more. . . ." ¹

The next day, January 11, 1780, *The London Gazette* published the news to England and the world, along with "many tributes to the heroic explorer and his manifold accomplishments." Also, *The Gazette* reported in that same issue, "His Majesty [George III], who had already the highest opinion of Captain Cook, shed tears, when Lord Sandwich informed him of his death, and immediately ordered a pension of £300 per annum for his widow."

In this detail, *The Gazette* was somewhat in error: Mrs. Cook was granted a pension of £250 per annum, and each of her three sons received £25 per year.

Five years later, in September 1785, King George III awarded Cook the honor of a coat of arms, but not a posthumous title to go with it. This is the last coat of arms ever bestowed in Great Britain for "personal service to the sovereign." The motto on the coat of arms, the whole of which was approved by the College of Arms, reads: "Nil intentatum reliquit," which may be translated, "He left nothing unattempted." On the crest above appears "an arm bowed, in the uniform of a captain of the Royal Navy . . . bearing the Union Jack." Behind this assemblage is a legend: "Circa Orbem," meaning "Around the World."²

The waves of shock, and of sorrow and other emotions, too, radiated out from London, passing through all of Great Britain and across the channel to the continent. Soon, from far and near, came letters of condolence, written by rulers of Europe's great nations as well as by lesser folk. On February 8, 1780, *The Gazette* told its readers:

The Empress of Russia Catherine the Great expressed a most deep Concern at the Loss of Captain Cook. She was the more sensibly affected from her very partial regard to his merits; and when she

was informed of the Hospitality shown by the Russian Government at Kamtschatka to Captain Clerke, she said no subjects in her Dominions could show too much Friendship for the Survivors of Captain Cook.

In all this public recounting of responses from the great ones of Europe, no one mentioned the feelings of Cook's widow, 38 years old at the time, or of the three young sons who survived him. Perhaps beautiful Elizabeth Cook, always an exceedingly private person, wished to be unnoticed. Certainly, as the wife of a roving explorer, she was prepared for such a sudden end to his life. With a sigh, perhaps even with a tear, she put away forever the needlework she had planned as a loving surprise against the time of her husband's return.

As a curiosity from his second voyage into the Pacific, he had brought her a roll of tapa, "bark cloth," from Tahiti. A heavy stuff, in thickness and color it resembled unbleached linen. And yet the astonished eye soon discovered that it was not a woven fabric but a beaten one, still bearing the impress of the maker's mallet.

Mrs. Cook cut this exotic material into long pieces shaped to the fit of her husband's torso, intending to assemble them into a waistcoat for him to wear at court, "when he would be presented to the king." The waistcoat could not be plain and unadorned, of course, in that era of splendid dress and opulent decoration. She began to embroider the long side panels, working a design both delicate and graceful, so restrained as to be almost austere. She knew her husband's simple tastes, no doubt because they were her own. A slender line of narrow silver braid, near the panels' inner edges, served as a kind of stem, about which she entwined a running garland of tiny embroidered flowers, done in silk thread of subtle hues—yellow, green, blue, pink, red, white. At certain places, such as on the wide flaps to the shallow pockets, she enhanced the glitter of the silver braid with tiny metallic sequins of graduated sizes. The stitchery of this artful work is so minute as to be almost invisible. The silver has become somewhat tarnished in 200 years, but the little flowers still keep their soft colors. Of all the 900 items among the "Artificial Curiosities" that were exhib-

ited at the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum in 1978, to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Europeans' landing in Hawai'i, this one was the most saddening—and the one most likely to convince us that Captain Cook was not a legend but a man.³

Perhaps Elizabeth Cook's three sons did not find much reason for grief, because they scarcely knew their father. He had been away from home for most of their lives, upon one voyage or another. We can suspect, however, that Mrs. Cook, even though she was left for years on end without the company of her husband, knew deeper griefs. She had borne six children to her wandering mariner since their marriage in 1762. In 1780, three of those children were dead, taken in infancy, each while its father was at sea. In October of 1780, that year of misfortunes, she would lose a fourth child, Nathaniel, a midshipman, drowned during a hurricane that sank a number of British warships near Jamaica in the Caribbean. Both of her remaining sons, James and Hugh, would be dead by 1794. Hugh, "a fine tall youth," went to Cambridge University to study for the church, caught a "violent fever," died, aged 17, on December 21, 1793. Little more than one month later, James, age 30, died—probably murdered—near Portsmouth, on January 25, 1794. Not surprisingly, Mrs. Cook collapsed then and remained ill for many months. But, strong in body and in spirit, she recovered eventually, and, childless, mateless, almost kinless, she survived her husband for 56 years.⁴

In England in 1780, upon hearing the sad news of Cook's death in far-off Owyhee, many a Briton took up quill and ink to pour out grief or rage in letters to friends, or in poems soon to be published in newspapers, pamphlets, and books. Thus did Miss Charlotte Beverley cry England's woe:

Alas! He's dead! each sorrowing chief replies,
To his blest mem'ry let the altars rise;
Gay Flora bring thy flow'rs of brightest bloom,
We rear to COOK a sacred tomb. . . .

But unlike many a maiden-poet seized by the universal grief, maenad Miss Beverley rushed on to demand a terrible retribution:

. . . Descend Nemesis! and in wrath divine,
 Punish the horrid wretches for their crime.
 Roll! thunders roll! and skies upon them pour,
 The greatest plagues that vengeance has in store.
 Britons arise! and animated save
 The fame of COOK from drear oblivion's grave. . . .⁵

Poor naive Miss Beverley! Had she but known how her prayers were being answered by wrathful Nemesis, she would have fallen to the floor in a penitent's swoon. Unknown to her, and to everyone else at the time, the explorers bore in themselves the seeds of their own vengeful plagues. And already the hapless Hawaiians were beginning upon the long slide toward extinction that would be the dreadful consequence of their contact with those emissaries of civilization.

Miss Anna Seward, her *Monody on the Death of Major André* still fresh in the nation's affection, wrote an *Elegy on Captain Cook* soon after news of his death plunged Britain into mourning.⁶ Probably better than most poems evoked by the melancholy event, it drew Doctor Samuel Johnson's praise and enough appreciation from "animated Britons" to achieve four editions between 1780 and 1784.

Stalwart men, too, were moved to poesy. "A Sea Officer," later identified as Captain Sir Alexander Schomberg, wrote *An Ode to the Memory of Captain James Cook of His Majesty's Navy*, which introduced a masculine voice—and rather a modern note—into the chorus of furies:

No more he'll wing the flying sail,
 The vast Abyss of Ocean to explore;
 Expecting Nations shall bewail
 The SON OF SCIENCE, now no more!

And are no Limits then prescribed to Man?
 How far, ye Sons of Adam, will ye go?
 A mighty Maze! a never-ceasing Plan,
 "A god-like attribute it is to KNOW."

Hang on high the wondrous Story,
 Record of the Hero's Glory.

Sons of Care! his toils relate,
 Envy not, but IMITATE!⁷

Resolution and *Discovery* returned to the Royal Navy's yards at Deptford on October 6, 1780, after a voyage of four years, three months, and two days. In accordance with established regulations, Admiralty clerks impounded the adventurers' logs and journals for use in preparing an official account of the expedition; paid off sailors and officers; and released them to enjoy for a while the comforts of the homeland. Without Captain Cook's austere person to restrain them, nor remembrance of his fate to warn them, nor the sober entries in his journal to contradict them, their vivid yarns, related in taverns or in drawing rooms (and always embellished in the retelling) helped Britons to assuage their waning grief over the loss of the great explorer. Graphic in description and loving in detail, these tales contributed one more delectable chapter to the growing myth about life and lust in the South Sea Isles. Beyond all doubt, they proclaimed, with the islands of Hawai'i one more province had been added to Europe's chart of Paradise.⁸

Inevitably, Britons' genuine sorrow for Captain Cook gave way before a rush to exploit his discoveries. Toby jugs, crude plaques, hasty prints showing his face or figure in one imagined scene or another, crowded the shops of London and Britain's provincial towns. Commemorative medals in gold or silver or bronze were struck by the Royal Society. Badly designed by an inept artist, they did not draw praise for the art of the time. But a splendid cameo portrait-bust by John Flaxman appeared in 1784, cast in blue jasper by Josiah Wedgwood. This alone more than made up for the vulgarity of the other mementoes.

Once again, as after his first two voyages, in an effusion of Polynesian mania, London's versifiers, playwrights, composers, and dancing masters, drawing more upon fancy than upon knowledge, produced a spate of epics, odes, and elegies, gaudy pantomimes, dramatic spectacles, and grand ballets, in which the brave deeds and gory murder of Captain Cook were the dominant themes.

Painters, engravers, limners of scenery, devisers of stage

effects, and costumers created a whole new set of images with which to “hang on high the wond’rous story”—and with them fixed forever Europeans’ vision of Polynesia.

Painters took up their brushes to produce large canvases that depicted the Death of Captain Cook. Not always works of art, these were never truthful in detail. How could they be? F. Jukes, for example, caring naught for accuracy, set the battle scene not below the grim cliffs of Kealakekua but in a bay in Tahiti, probably because the distant pinnacled green mountains there (as painted by William Hodges) were more beautiful than was Mauna Loa’s stony flank. Jukes, and all the others, too, put into their compositions feather helmets, feather capes, and weapons that may have been Polynesian yet certainly were not always Hawaiian. But no matter. Artists (like novelists) have every right to rearrange nature to please their visions. And the artists of England did so with wonderfully dramatic effect, filling their big canvases with the tumult of conflict and sudden rage. And always, of course, with the splendidly nude bodies of warriors, handsome men in the excesses of violence. The Enlightenment’s new idea of the Noble Savage appealed too much to romantic Europeans for them to give it up, either then or later, even after, as at Kealakekua, he showed himself more savage than they liked.

Some painters, notably F. Jukes, John Clevely, and George Carter, did portray Captain Cook as the heroic personification of the superior Anglo-Saxon race, cool and calm and just, facing his attackers boldly, or fearlessly turning his back toward them the while, with uplifted arm, he commanded his marines not to fire upon the massed warriors about to destroy him. Others, like Johann Zoffany (perhaps the best artist of all), painted him as mortal and fallen, his face taut with pain and disbelief, as warriors bending over him thrust home the daggers made from gifts of British iron.

Apotheosis could not be denied England’s acclaimed hero. The deification that Christians refused him in life was most readily accorded in death by many British engravers, who recognized a profitable theme when they saw it in other men’s canvases. They wafted Captain Cook up into the empyrean, propped him on a couch of clouds, surrounded him with classical divinities, muses,

genii, cherubim, putti, garlands of oak leaves and chaplets of laurels, not to mention other evidences of safe arrival among the immortals (figs. 2 and 3). One such engraving, done by an artisan named Wouvermann, “after a design by P. J. Louthembourg, R.A.,” shows the poor captain, almost in the very moment of his spirit’s departure from the all too human body. Smoke from marines’ muskets and ships’ cannon still lies thick upon the



FIG. 2. “The Apotheosis of Captain Cook.” Engraving by J. Wouverman, from a design by P. J. Louthembourg, R.A. (London, January 20, 1794, by J. Thane). (BPBM photo collection.)



FIG. 3 "Neptune Raising Captain Cook to Immortality, a Genius crowning him with a Wreath of Oak leaves, and Fame introducing him to History. . ." Engraving by J. Neagles, ornamentalions by W. Granger, from a design by H. Ramberg (London, c. 1798). (BPBM photo collection.)

waters of Kealakekua Bay. But high above—as he perches more awkwardly upon the hovering cloud than ever he did upon the scaffolding of the oracle tower in the *heiau* (place of worship) of Hiki ‘au, during those mystifying ceremonies of welcome when (as Christian defamers cried in scandal) he allowed the heathen to worship him as a god—a winged genius introduces him to History. This genius, blowing upon a long trumpet held in one hand, with the other places upon Cook’s head a wreath of oak leaves. History sits enthroned, as the captain’s eidolon, leaning upon his right hand, rests at her feet. Seeming somewhat surprised by this sudden transmogrification, he looks down in sorrow upon the bay below and raises his left arm in a gesture of farewell to the comrades he has left behind. Needless to say, History wears the face and raiment of Britannia. And Britain’s bannered shield supports her throne.⁹

Melodrama, too, had its day. The artless, attractive, and unclad sunbrowned people of the Pacific appeared upon Europe’s stages, in the persons of pallid *haole* (Caucasian) actors garbed either in the simple robes of classic Greeks and austere Romans, or in fantasias of feathers, frills, and furbelows that excited the admiration of ladies in those centers of fashion and heated the passions of the bloods who kept them.

Then, as later, pantomimes were favorite entertainments for Englishmen and the specialty of London’s showmen. “Omai: or, A Trip Around the World,” the pantomime John O’Keefe staged at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, for the Christmas season of 1785, surpassed anything ever presented before that time. It opened on December 20, ran for 50 record-breaking performances, and set a standard for “theatrical realism” for 20 years to come.

The plot was absurd, but costumes, scenery, and lighting effects were sensational. Neither effort nor expense were spared to make them as realistic as possible. Philippe J. de Louthembourg, London’s foremost designer for the stage, consulted the best sources available—the published engravings based upon sketches “done from Nature” by William Hodges, the artist who accompanied Cook on his second expedition to the Pacific, and by John Webber, draughtsman-artist on the third voyage.¹⁰

“Omai” treated audiences to scenic representations of almost every place that Cook’s expeditions had visited in the Pacific hemisphere, from Tongatabu to Alaska. It enthralled Londoners with visual effects: soft moonlight on tropic strands o’erhung with feathery palms; the moon, balefully red, in prophetic eclipse; showers of hail and violent storms at sea; Kamchatka’s snow-covered rocks; towering, glittering, ice-islands; a Tahitian temple by moonlight. In the climactic scene, “the great bay of Otaheite at sunset,” a “Procession of Nations” crowded the boards with actors garbed as natives of the Cook, Society, and Sandwich Islands, Easter Island, Kamchatka, Unalaska, Nootka, and Prince William’s Sound. The “splendourous spectacle” ended with an affecting choral tribute to Captain Cook, sung by “an English captain and sailors,” while a huge portrait of Britain’s lamented hero was “slowly lowered to the floor of the stage.”¹¹

Frenchmen were given their chance at instruction and catharsis in October 1788, when *Le Théâtre de l’ Ambigu-Comique* in Paris presented “*La Mort du Capitaine Cook*,” a pantomime in four acts by Jean François Mussot, a gentleman of many talents who preferred to be called M. Arnould. In 1789, Covent Garden produced an English version of this extravaganza, announcing it as “The Death of Captain Cook: A Grand Serious-Pantomimic-Ballet, in Three Parts. As now exhibiting in Paris to uncommon Applause, with the original French Music, New Scenery, Machinery, and other Decorations.” While it was playing to “universal applause” in London, road companies took the show to Dublin, Limerick, Hull, and probably to other cities in Britain’s provinces.¹²

This production, as sensational in staging and costuming as “Omai” had been, and even more preposterous in plot, was set on the island of “O-Why-e,” complete with looming, brooding volcano. In this grandfather of all dramas about the Pacific, M. Arnould determined for all time the pattern according to which Western playwrights (and confectioners of cinema scenarios) have created both plots and characters which purport to tell the truth about Polynesia.

In the ordained Arcadian setting, with moonlight and without it, true love is sorely tried. For his intervention in behalf of the

devoted lovers, noble Captain Cook is killed by the villain spurned in his suit for the heroine's body. Naturally, when, in the last scene, sorrowing English sailors bear on stage the corpse of their murdered captain and gently lay it upon the altar stones of a heathen temple, the volcano erupts, "spectacularly and continuously." The united lovers, Emai and Oki, "plunged into profound distress, their eyes bathed in tears, slowly draw near and, in the silence of the temple, gaze upon him for a few moments in intense sorrow." As village natives perform a solemn funeral dance in honor of the slain captain, and the volcano roars a counterpoint of wrath, the curtain falls.¹³

Such were the ways in which light-minded Europeans learned about the perils of Polynesia. But not all Europeans were romantics who, even as they shed a tear for England's fallen captain, ignored the proofs that Death was man's constant companion in Polynesia, just as he was in Europe.

Long before the Admiralty's authorized version of the narrative of Cook's last voyage could be published (it finally appeared in 1784), people on both sides of the Atlantic had the chance to read four hastily written personal accounts printed in defiance of regulations, without any justification save their authors' scramble for money and eagerness for fame.

The first of these books, published in Mannheim, Germany, in 1781, was written in his native German by Heinrich Zimmerman, who had served as a seaman aboard HMS *Discovery*. The second, published anonymously in London that same year, is attributed to John Rickman, Second Lieutenant aboard the expedition's ships. Undeterred by such bad examples, William Ellis, who had been a surgeon's mate on *Discovery*, brought out his "Authentic Narrative" in London in 1782. The last of these dishonest ventures, printed in 1783 in Hartford, Connecticut, was the work of John Ledyard, who had been Corporal of Marines aboard *Resolution*.

When the expedition sailed from Plymouth in July 1776, Ledyard was one of the five American colonials aboard the ships who still regarded themselves as Englishmen. When the expedition returned in 1780, the five were surprised to find themselves citizens of 13 rebellious colonies claiming to be a new nation.

Although he had served his commander well and honorably, Ledyard was not over-fond of Captain Cook, alive or dead. As an American in 1780, he felt even less loyalty toward George III and his Lords of the Admiralty. Newly promoted to sergeant, Ledyard was sent to America in 1782 and promptly deserted His Majesty's marines. Writing a book that was expressly forbidden by the Admiralty came easily to an adventurer who by nature was something of a rebel against more than Britain's king.

None of those potboilers was good as literature or authentic in details. But all of them did convey to an attentive public some sense of the South Sea's lovely scattered isles and a clear picture of the sexual freedom their inhabitants enjoyed—and shared with visiting sailors.

At last, in June 1784, the Admiralty's official account appeared. Entitled *Voyage to the Pacific Ocean . . . for Making Discoveries in the Northern Hemisphere*, it gave eager readers three handsome quarto volumes of elegant text and an Atlas of Illustrations full of useful maps and fascinating engravings depicting exotic people and places. The first edition was sold out in three days, at four and a half guineas the set. Two further issues were released in 1785. The Admiralty decreed that half of the profits of those issues would be granted to Mrs. Cook and her two sons; a fourth to Captain King's heirs; one eighth to Captain Clerke's solicitors to pay his debts; and the last eighth (less than a hundred guineas) to William Bligh, who had been master aboard HMS *Resolution*. Beaglehole estimated that "the Cook share certainly amounted to over £2000." But Nicol, the publisher, claimed that had the Admiralty not sold the books at cost and instead had charged the market rate, "the profits would have brought in £12,000."¹⁴

The official account included a dedication to Captain Cook. Although its author's name did not appear in the book, literate Londoners knew that he was the Honorable John Forbes, an Admiral of the Fleet. A sonorous example of the rhythmic and beautiful style used by writers of that era, it filled three pages in the first quarto volume. It began with a forthright declaration, that more than 200 subsequent years of history have given us no reason to change:

TO THE MEMORY OF
CAPTAIN JAMES COOK

The ablest and most renowned navigator this or any
other country hath produced.

Admiral Sir Hugh Palliser—who, as a young naval officer, had been the first to recognize the merits of youthful James Cook—raised a monument to his famous protege on his own estate, Vache Park, near Chalfont St. Giles in Buckinghamshire. Upon the four faces of a white marble obelisk, topped by a globe representing the world, Palliser caused to be engraved every last word of Admiral Forbes' admiring dedication. (Today, we are told, Vache Park is the site of the offices of the British National Coal Board, and the monument to Cook sits "forlorn and neglected in a storehouse. . . . There is talk of selling it to Australia.")¹⁵

Later, much later, citizens of Whitby, the port town in Yorkshire in which young James Cook became acquainted with the sea, raised a simpler monument to its most famous son:

For the lasting memory of a great Yorkshire seaman this bronze has been cast, and is left in the keeping of Whitby, the birthplace of those good ships that bore him on his enterprises, brought him to glory, and left him at rest.¹⁶

London's merchants and traders read with intense interest the official account's descriptions of the coasts of northwestern America, just as they had examined, with expert attention, the pelts of American otters, seals, beavers, and other animals that the expedition's crews had brought home in 1780.

Within two years of 1784, certain of those enterprising merchants equipped two ships, *King George* and *Queen Charlotte*, and chose for their commanders men who had sailed with Captain Cook—Nathaniel Portlock and George Dixon. The pair of vessels, in large part because of the qualities of their captains, made the first successful mercantile voyages between Northwest America and the China coast, thereby inaugurating the great era of commerce in the Pacific and the years of "the China trade."

Yet, among the readers of that official account were some people who did not praise the fallen captain for his great achievements. Professional Christians in Great Britain and in the United States of America were shocked by what they found so openly revealed in the hasty illegal books and by what they read between the lines of the official narrative when at last it appeared. As circumspect as that tried to be, so carefully distilled from all those impounded logs and journals by Doctor William Douglas, Canon of Windsor and Saint Paul's, disapproving readers could no longer doubt the sailors' tavern tales or the testimony of Rickman, Ellis, and Ledyard. Many a clucking Protestant stay-at-home turned upon Captain Cook in outrage, berating him personally for failing to prevent "immoral congress" between Christendom's clean young sons and Polynesia's salacious women. And they were absolutely scandalized by his "sinful pride," his heinous "sacrilege," in permitting himself to be worshipped as a god at Kealakekua. Their wrath was exceeded only by that which they attributed to their jealous Jehovah. Remembering His first commandment, those puritans declared that Captain Cook died at Kealakekua because Jehovah smote him down for his sins, most of all for the sin of pride.

British poet William Cowper may not have been the first pious Christian to entertain this charitable opinion, but he certainly helped to spread it about in letters and in conversation. On October 9, 1784, only four months after the official account appeared in London's bookstores, Cowper wrote to his friend, Reverend John Newton:

. . . No observation however forced itself upon me with more violence than one, that I could not help make on the death of Captain Cook. God is a jealous God, and at Owhyhee the poor man was content to be worshipped. From that moment, the remarkable interposition of Providence in his favor was converted into an opposition that thwarted his purposes. . . . Nothing in short but blunder and mistake attended him, till he fell breathless into the water, and then all was smooth again. The world indeed will not notice or see that the dispensation bore evident marks of divine displeasure; but a mind, I think, in any degree spiritual cannot overlook them. . . . though a stock of stone may be worshipped

blameless, a baptized man may not. He knows what he does, and, by suffering such honors to be paid him, incurs the guilt of sacrilege. . . .¹⁷

Disapproving as he was, at least Cowper felt a degree of sympathy for Cook as vengeful Jehovah's victim. Calvinist Americans, much more rigorous in their dogma, much less inclined to be charitable toward either free thinkers or damned Englishmen, made of Cook a more sinister monster than Cowper ever imagined him.

By 1800, after several captains who followed Cook into the Pacific had returned to write accounts of their voyages, the moralists sitting at home could see what was happening to "the friendly islanders" in consequence of their acquaintance with visiting Europeans. One of those critics—a reverend who preferred to remain anonymous—was much kinder in his judgments and far more sensible in his opinions than were most of his contemporaries. He lamented the fate of Hawaiians "who were contaminated with the venereal disease, of which great numbers had already died. Cruel memorial of the British name! the first book of Civilization to the Barbarians of the South Seas!" But he was perceptive enough to understand a fact about all Polynesians that very few Europeans had recognized as yet: ". . . many of their diseases are of European extraction: nay, the natives remark, that with every ship they received a cargo of new diseases. . . ."¹⁸ Miss Beverley's curse was being fulfilled.

As the years passed, and mere facts of life were buried under the sermons of preachers determined to drive the moral home, Cook became to New Englanders a terrible example of a presumptuous man who was broken for his pride. This concept of Cook as Evil Incarnate was transmitted to Hawaiians through some of the Congregationalist missionaries whom New England sent to the Sandwich Islands in 1820 and thereafter. Until then, the few Hawaiians who remembered Cook had held him in esteem. But by the late 1830s, when many Natives had been converted to the new faith in the new and possessive God, the punitive Puritan doctrine prevailed. Reverend Sheldon Dibble, who taught Hawaiian students in the missionary high school at

Lahainaluna, Maui, seems to have harbored a fanatical hatred for the stricken captain. Consumptive in body and even sicker in mind, Dibble influenced his students beyond the limits of reason. Among those impressionable listeners were two young men who would become Hawai'i's foremost Native historians, David Malo and Samuel Kamakau. When Dibble had finished brainwashing them, they considered Captain Cook just about the sole author of all of Hawai'i's misfortunes.

Kamakau, an expert in resounding vilification, and more bitter as an aging man than ever he was as a student at Lahainaluna, expressed the opinion of many Hawaiians about Cook in 1867:

. . . He had been but a short time in Hawaii when God punished him for his sins. It was not the fault of the Hawaiian people that they held him sacred and paid him honor as a god. . . . But because he killed the people he was killed by them without mercy, and his entrails were used to rope off the arena, and the palms of his hands used for fly swatters at a cock fight. Such is the end of the transgressor. The seeds that he planted here have sprouted, grown, and become the parents of others that have caused the decrease of the native population of these islands. Such are gonorrhoea, and other social diseases; prostitution; the illusion of his being a god which led to worship of him; fleas and mosquitoes; epidemics. All of these things have led to changes in the air which we breathe; the coming of things which weaken the body; changes in plant life; changes in religion; changes in the art of healing; and changes in the laws by which the land is governed.¹⁹

Because they are even more ignorant about their history than was Kamakau, most adults who have been born and raised in Hawai'i still keep this opinion of Captain Cook. But time is rescuing him from such abuse. Today, not many of Hawai'i's younger people know anything at all about him. They are finding other scapegoats for their elders' faults.

A few militant Hawaiians, revisionists all—yearning after an idealized past that is more imagined than real, ignoring all the hard facts of this cruel world's history—still carry on in the manner of Kamakau.

Fortunately, these peculiar attitudes of Hawai'i's residents are not shared by people in other parts of the world. Since 1780, more

than 200 monuments have been raised to him in many countries, and countless tributes have been offered by people who—whether or not they are Britons—honor his character and respect his achievements. The greatest of these tributes was created only during the 1950s and 1960s by a transplanted Briton, so to speak—J. C. Beaglehole. He lived in Wellington, New Zealand, on one of the islands Cook surveyed and described, but his intellect roamed across the whole earth in the cause of Captain Cook. He edited all the journals and logs written by Cook and by all the literate men who accompanied him upon those three voyages of exploration throughout the Pacific. In themselves, those editings—and Beaglehole's valuable commentaries and annotations upon them—would be memorial enough. But he capped them with the definitive biography of Captain Cook, an account of his life and deeds that no one in the future is likely to surpass.

As Beaglehole approached the end of his writing of that biography, he lifted his thoughts from the ships and the men who sailed them, and from the myriad details of their voyages and their discoveries, to consider Captain Cook's place in history. In the very last paragraph of the biography, Beaglehole wrote his answer to this inquiry. It is as beautiful as it is unexpected in that place:

There are statues and inscriptions; but Geography and Navigation are his memorials. We may find others for ourselves, if we would indulge in sentiment. There are the words of John Elliott, who sailed in the *Resolution* in 1772 at the age of fourteen. . . . 'I did receive my Chart &c with my name *Elliotts Chart and Ships Track*, written on it, in his own hand, and which writing I venerate to this day, and never look at Without feeling the deepest regret at the melancholy loss of so great a Man.' There are the words of the New Zealand chief Te Horeta, the ancient hook-nosed warrior with much blood on his hands, who had been an excited small boy at Mercury Bay when the *Endeavour* called there in 1769. There was one supreme man in that ship, who did not talk much, but looked well into everything, and was good to small boys; and Te Horeta would repeat the Maori saying . . . a veritable man is not hid among many. Such things; Geography and Navigation; and if we wish for more, an ocean is enough, where the waves fall on innumerable reefs, and a great wind blows from the south-east with the revolving world.²⁰

NOTES

- ¹ J. C. Beaglehole, *The Life of Captain James Cook* (Stanford: Stanford U P, 1974) 689-90.
- ² Beaglehole, *Life of Captain James Cook* 696.
- ³ Adrienne L. Kaeppler, *Artificial Curiosities* (Honolulu: BPBM, 1978), fig. 221: 130; fig. 618: 282.
- ⁴ Beaglehole, *Life of Captain James Cook* 693-4.
- ⁵ Charlotte Beverley, *Verses on the Death of Captain Cook* (Hull: E. Foster, 1792) 106-8.
- ⁶ Bernard Smith, *European Vision in the South Pacific, 1768-1850* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1960) 85.
- ⁷ Alexander Schomberg, *An Ode to the Memory of Captain James Cook* (Dublin: Wm. Hallhead, 1780) 17, 20, and 23.
- ⁸ Smith, *European Vision* 81-2.
- ⁹ Kaeppler, *Artificial Curiosities*, fig. 27: 29.
- ¹⁰ Smith, *European Vision* 80-1.
- ¹¹ Smith, *European Vision* 81.
- ¹² Smith, *European Vision* 82.
- ¹³ Smith, *European Vision* 82.
- ¹⁴ Beaglehole, *Life of Captain James Cook* 692.
- ¹⁵ John Charles, conversation. A Briton, John Charles was a graduate student at the East-West Center in 1978-1980.
- ¹⁶ John Charles, "The Yorkshire Haunts of Captain Cook," East-West Center Cultural Learning Institute, Honolulu, 1978.
- ¹⁷ William Cowper, *The Correspondence of William Cowper*, ed. Thomas Wright, 4 vols. (New York: AMS, 1968): 2: 249-50.
- ¹⁸ *Historical Sketch of the Sandwich Islands* (Edinburgh: Ogle and Aikman, 1800) 121.
- ¹⁹ Samuel M. Kamakau, *Ruling Chiefs of Hawaii* (Honolulu: Kamehameha Schools P, 1961) 103-4.
- ²⁰ Beaglehole, *Life of Captain James Cook* 713-4.