

Encountering Oceania:
Bodies, Health and Disease, 1768-1846.

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Abstract

This thesis offers a critical re-evaluation of representations of bodies, health and disease across almost a century of European and North American colonial encounters in Oceania, from the late eighteenth-century voyages of James Cook and William Bligh, to the settlement of Australia, to the largely fictional prose of Herman Melville's *Typee*. Guided by a contemporary and cross-disciplinary analytical framework, it assesses a variety of media including exploratory journals, print culture, and imaginative prose to trace a narrative trajectory of Oceania from a site which offered salvation to sickly sailors to one which threatened prospective settlers with disease.

This research offers new contributions to Pacific studies and medical history by examining how late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century concepts of health and disease challenged, shaped and undermined colonial expansion in Oceania from 1768-1846. In particular, it aims to reassess the relationship between contemporary thinking on bodies, health and disease, and the process of colonial exploration and settlement in the period studied. It argues that this relationship was less schematic than some earlier scholarship has allowed, and adopts narrative medical humanities approaches to consider how disease and ill-health was perceived from individual as well as institutional perspectives.

Finally, this thesis analyses representations of bodies, health and disease in the period from 1768-1846 in two ways. First, by tracing the passage of disease from ship to shore and second, by assessing the legacy of James Cook's three Pacific voyages on subsequent phases of exploration and settlement in Oceania.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Table of Contents	3
List of Figures	5
Acknowledgements	6
Author's Declaration	7
Introduction	8
Subject Matter: Oceanic Encounters from Cook to Melville.....	11
Pacific Studies and the Body: A Critical Survey	17
Methods and Approaches	29
Chapter One: Scurvy Within and Beyond Pacific Exploration	42
Introduction: Scurvy and British Exploration from George Anson to James Cook	42
The Empire at Home: Quacks and Physicians – Francis Spilsbury, James Lind and Others	50
Scurvy and British Exploration from 1768	66
Cook, Science and the <i>Endeavour</i> expedition.....	75
William Bligh, Food and the Mutiny on HMS <i>Bounty</i>	85
Scurvy Prevention and Pacific Encounters	94
Chapter Two: Australia Revisited	104
Introduction: Encountering Australians, from James Cook at Botany Bay to Smallpox at Port Jackson	104

Proposals and motivations for an Australian settlement	118
The First Fleet and the Health of its Crews in England	124
The passage of the First Fleet to Australia	129
Europeans in Australia	140
Smallpox in Australia.....	151
Chapter Three: <i>Typee</i>: Melville in the Marquesas.....	171
Textual introduction – The Making and Reception of Melville’s Pacific Narrative	172
Historical introduction – The Emergence of an American Literary Maritime Empire, and Historical Influence in <i>Typee</i>	183
Cannibalism and Pacific Travel Narratives.....	189
‘Unnatural gourmands’: Hunger in <i>Typee</i>	199
‘Mysterious disease’: The Exploring Body in <i>Typee</i>	219
‘Pricking in straight marks’: Tattooing in <i>Typee</i>	230
Conclusion.....	240
Bibliography.....	247

List of Figures

Figure 1 – Sketch of two Australian Men and artefacts. Sydney Parkinson (1770). BL Add.
MS 9345, f. 14.....104

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Finally, I would like to thank a former mentor, Stuart Murray at the University of Leeds, for helping with the inception of this project.

Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own original work, and has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. Some material from Chapter One has been published as “Metropolitan Scurvy in the Shadow of the Cook Voyages,” in *The Journal of Pacific History* 52, no. 1 (2017): 15-33.

Introduction

This thesis examines representations of bodies, health and disease across three discrete phases in Anglophone contact with Oceania¹: the Pacific voyages of Captain James Cook (1768-1779) and the first breadfruit voyage of William Bligh (1787-1790); the establishment and early years of the convict colony in New South Wales, Australia (1788-1790); and Herman Melville's representation of his experiences at Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas Islands, which culminated in the publication of his first novel, *Typee* (1846). Although my analysis focuses specifically on these events, the narrative trajectory of the work that follows considers the historical and literary influences that shaped these phases of encounter, and their retrospective literary representations. In conclusion, I consider the lasting impact of these voyages and their material productions on the subsequent literature of contact between Oceania and the West.

The decision to begin with the voyages of James Cook reflects my understanding of the *Endeavour* voyage as a crucial turning point in the history of Western encounters with Oceania, and the subsequent impact of the Cook voyages on knowledge about bodies and disease in European and Oceanic contexts. The ability to conduct an expedition of *Endeavour*'s size without any loss of life to scurvy attracted much attention at the time and continues to do so now, while the *Endeavour*'s landing on the east coast of Australia in

¹ I use the term 'Oceania' in the broadest sense here, as a sea region which extends from Southeast Asia to the coast of the Americas, to include Australia. I have also adopted Polynesia where appropriate. As Bronwen Douglas explains, 'Polynesia' was initially used by naturalists in the 1780s to describe everything within the vast Pacific Ocean, but this space was separated into the sub-regions of Polynesia, Malaysia, Melanesia and Micronesia by Jules Dumont d'Urville, which are still used today. See Bronwen Douglas, *Science, Voyages and Encounters in Oceania, 1511-1850* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 6-7.

1770 set in a place a chain of events which led to the establishment of permanent British colony there, at the same time that an epidemic of smallpox struck New South Wales.

The extent to which the Cook voyages represented a paradigmatic shift in the execution and processes of exploration voyages has been reviewed in recent decades. Randolph Cock, for example, has noted that Cook was no more successful than Byron or Wallis when it came to mortality rates and was influenced by their surgeons' reports on scurvy prophylaxis.² Similarly, French scholarship has argued that Louis-Antoine de Bougainville's 1766-69 voyage anticipated the scientific aims of Cook's circumnavigations and was completed with a comparably low mortality rate.³ However, it remains convincing that there was something palpably different in the way the *Endeavour* voyage was conducted. Here I offer two examples to support this claim, one from contemporary scholarship and one a historical anecdote.

Anthropologist Nicholas Thomas, who has worked extensively on the Cook voyages and Oceanic cultures, offers the following explanation of the distinctiveness of Cook's expeditions:

Cook's voyages were different because the investigative role was embraced with unprecedented energy – these were peculiarly extended and sustained missions, that simply went to many more places, and dedicated more extended effort than any predecessor had, to the investigation of parts of the world until then unknown or only partially known to Europeans.⁴

² Randolph Cock, "Precursors of Cook: The Voyages of the *Dolphin*, 1764-8," *The Mariner's Mirror* 85 (1999): 30-52.

³ See Etienne Taillemite (ed.), *Bougainville et ses compagnons autour du monde*, 2 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1977) and Adrien Carré, "L'Expédition de Bougainville et l'hygiène navale de son temps," *Journal de la Société des océanistes* 24 (1968): 63-75.

⁴ Nicholas Thomas, "The Age of Empire in the Pacific," in *Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People*, eds. David Armitage and Alison Bashford (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 77.

The central point Thomas makes turns on the idea of the investigative role, which he views as comparatively enhanced by the Cook voyages. As my chapters demonstrate, a large part of the investigative enquiries of Cook and subsequent explorers and writers revolved around bodies, health and disease. An effective way of corroborating this point, and advocating for the significance of the *Endeavour* voyage as a juncture in the nature of exploration, is to turn to a contemporaneous European expedition which overlapped with Cook's but could not have been more divergent in its intentions, execution and results.

The often overlooked French voyage of the *St Jean-Baptiste* set sail for the South Seas in 1769, only one year after Cook departed on the *Endeavour*. This mercantile expedition led by Jean-François-Marie de Surville, a former captain of the French East India Company, had two related aims: to trade its rich East Indian cargo of luxury cloths, herbs and spices, and to search for Davis Land. Davis Land was a chimerical island which was rumoured to be 'very rich' and home to 'a colony of Jews'.⁵ It is worth questioning how, in an age of increasing contact with the Pacific Ocean, and on the back of a number of recent expeditions from Anson to Bougainville, such a speculative voyage was even launched, let alone heavily invested in.

As Pacific historian John Dunmore suggests, it seems likely that a French agent working in Cape Town heard garbled rumours about Samuel Wallis's recent voyage to Tahiti, and confused this with the hypothetical Davis Land, which was itself the result of misinformation given by Edward Davis to practical seaman William Dampier in 1687 concerning a coastline which he supposed might form part of the larger *Terra Australis*.⁶ Hearsay was hardly the basis for a prolonged expedition of this nature, but the excitement

⁵ John Dunmore (ed.), *The Expedition of the St Jean-Baptiste to the Pacific, 1769-1770* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1981), 23, 32.

⁶ Dunmore, *St Jean-Baptiste*, 20-27.

these rumours generated was enough for the ship's owners to put a considerable sum of money behind the voyage (some 3-400,000 *livres*, more than the cost of the *Endeavour*). Inevitably, the voyage did not reach its intended terminus, nor trade its luxurious cargo with any wealthy settlers. It drifted through the Pacific with few notable landfalls, its crew dying from scurvy in large numbers (103 out of 177 men), and ended in disaster with its captain drowning off the coast of Peru and the ship detained by Spanish authorities.⁷ The irony of the *St Jean-Baptiste* voyage was that it was at New Zealand at exactly the same time as James Cook, who lost no men to scurvy on the *Endeavour*, made several significant landfalls, and established fairly effective systems of barter for local resources. As it happened, the ships sailed past each other in a storm on 12 December 1769, and while Cook's achievements – especially in preserving the health of his crew – were lauded across Europe, the *St Jean-Baptiste* was largely forgotten. That two concurrent voyages could have such vastly different outcomes speaks both to the power of speculation concerning the South Seas, which I revisit in the third chapter, and the devastating impact of disease on long Pacific expeditions. In the chapters that follow, I look at three case studies of bodies and disease in narratives of the Pacific, from the differing points of view of British explorers, colonised indigenous Australians and British settlers, and an American sailor and writer.

Subject Matter: Oceanic Encounters from Cook to Melville

This thesis is divided into three long chapters to facilitate a broad and deep understanding of almost a century of contact with Oceania, from mid-eighteenth century British voyages

⁷ Dunmore, *St Jean-Baptiste*, 44-45, 51; Glyn Williams, "Scurvy on the Pacific voyages in the age of Cook," *Journal for Maritime Research* 15 (2013): 40.

of exploration to the publication of Melville's novel, *Typee*. Throughout the chapters, I offer a sustained analysis of the capability and fallibility of the human body in Oceania by explorers and writers as they made contact with a vast region of the world which was only beginning to be mapped out when James Cook sailed for Tahiti on the *Endeavour* in 1768. While the first two chapters focus primarily on historical sources in the latter part of the eighteenth century, the third marks a temporal distinction as it considers how Oceanic contact was represented through a sustained literary production. As I will argue, *Typee* was fashioned as a synthesis of established generic conventions for travel writing, buttressed by the style and popularity of the kinds of material productions of explorers like James Cook and his crews, and the early settlers of Australia from the First Fleet.

Beginning with British Pacific exploration from George Anson to James Cook, and ending with an American literary representation of this process (albeit one based on maritime experience) this research covers roughly a century of contact and encounter. The media studied within this period comprise a varied assortment of materials. For the first chapter, 'Scurvy Within and Beyond Pacific Exploration', I focus my critical attention on the journals kept by James Cook on his three Oceanic voyages, and William Bligh on the *Bounty* expedition, in juxtaposition with those maintained by their captains' subordinates, to offer an analysis of the contrasting ways in which scurvy was described, treated and prevented on Pacific voyaging. The chapter also considers the ways in which George Anson's voyage of 1740-1744, which returned with heavy losses, stimulated medical research into scurvy at home in Britain. Recent studies assess the ways in which eminent physicians had opposing views on how best to treat the disease, and how this may have contributed to the delay in finding a sovereign cure. However, this chapter breaks new ground by revealing how those outside naval or medical institutions were also involved in

a debate about how to solve the problem of scurvy, and might have had significantly more sway with the general public than established medical practitioners.

While the chapter makes use of works by eighteenth-century physicians such as James Lind, it also assesses the influence of writings by so-called ‘quack’ physicians – those with more pragmatic, commercial interests – who published their own pamphlets and essays, often acting as manipulative middlemen between learned members of the establishment and the general public. In addition to these works, the chapter engages with newspapers and advertisements, and even popular song, to assess how ideas about scurvy were disseminated to a broader section of society than has been considered in recent scholarship.

While the voyage narratives of the 1760s I discuss in the first chapter articulate the effects of disease as a by-product of colonial endeavours, the motivations for the First Fleet revealed that disease was also an incentive. The second chapter, ‘Australia Revisited’, offers a sustained analysis of public and institutional perceptions of Australia, the passage of the First Fleet and the establishment of the penal colony in 1788 at Port Jackson, and looks closely at disease in the context of colonial settlement as opposed to exploration. The worsening conditions of English prisons prompted the government in the 1780s to consider a number of proposals to mitigate the effects of overcrowding and endemic diseases like typhus and typhoid fever by shipping prisoners overseas. I consider how these diseases were perceived by the medical community in Britain and how they became manifest on the ships of the First Fleet. Disease was, however, not the sole incentive for the government to consider overseas colonies as a place where prisoners could be used as a source of labour to create distant outposts for trade and commerce. Thousands of convicted felons were transported to North America throughout the eighteenth century but following the

American Revolution, this was no longer possible.⁸ Furthermore, Britain was keen to consolidate its discoveries in the South Pacific and establish a trading post in the region, with Australia well situated as a stopping point between the East Indies and the Cape of Good Hope. It was a symbiosis of these commercial and political plans which led the government to decide on the establishment of a colony in New South Wales, despite the fact that written records from the *Endeavour* did little to establish its suitability.

The source materials that form the research for this chapter include the journals kept by those who departed from England in 1787 as part of the First Fleet. The accounts of the surgeons to the Fleet, John White and Arthur Bowes Smyth, give a useful commentary on the health of the ships' crews during the passage to Australia; the remaining journal keepers, including Watkin Tench, John Hunter and Philip Gidley King provide a detailed insight into life in the emerging colony, and it is mostly from these texts that we are able to form an image of early relationships with the original inhabitants of Australia and their land. These texts are especially significant as the only documentary evidence for the smallpox epidemic that gripped Port Jackson in 1789, which I analyse extensively in the latter part of the chapter.

The smallpox epidemic, which coincided with beginnings of the penal colony in Port Jackson, was a decisive moment in the history of European colonial settlement. Using reports from the written accounts of the colony, together with contemporary medical history and a knowledge of the treatment of smallpox in eighteenth-century Britain, the latter part of this chapter reveals how an outbreak of the virus transformed the life of the colony, for the Europeans and more significantly, for the indigenous Australians who had

⁸ Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: A History of the Transportation of Convicts to Australia, 1787-1868* (London: Collins Harvill, 1987), 41-42.

no natural or conferred immunity to this especially pernicious disease. While recent scholarship has produced some exciting and valuable work on the possible origins of the virus, there has been much less written about how exactly smallpox affected indigenous communities in and around Port Jackson. My research is attentive to arguments about the introduction of smallpox but makes an original contribution to this research by extrapolating, through a sustained textual analysis, the consequences of the epidemic for both Australian and European societies. I foreground the ways in which smallpox altered the structure, rites and ceremonies of indigenous Australian communities, as this focus has until now been lacking in official accounts of the disease and contemporary scholarship. Towards the end of the chapter, using personal correspondence from a colonist, I show how the disease undermined ideas about the potential for human life in the South Pacific for European settlers who, as part of an expanding population that included a growing number of children, were especially anxious about the prevalence of the disease away from the metropolitan centres of inoculation and vaccination.

In the third chapter, '*Typee*: Melville in the Marquesas', I revisit colonial anxieties about health and disease half a century later to examine how these developed between the late-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, and re-entered popular fiction. Melville's narrative, as I will argue, is a composite text, indebted to a wealth of previous material in Pacific exploration for both tone and style. It represents a synthesis – both narratological and biological – of the concerns of explorative and early colonial texts from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, but from an American perspective. With this in mind, I have not restricted my analysis of bodies, health and disease to a particular illness, as I did in the first two chapters, but have chosen to focus on three interlinked facets of bodily preservation and corruption in *Typee*: cannibalism, the exploring body and tattooing.

The narrative of the Marquesas Melville constructed borrowed heavily from the style of late eighteenth-century explorers, including Cook, as it applied this successful model to create a narrative which recorded, ostensibly, the observations of an objective, impartial narrator. While I offer a close textual and literary analysis of the novel itself, I also explore how Melville engaged with the narratives discussed in earlier chapters. Melville's ideas about cannibalism, for example, were clearly influenced by the Cook voyages, and I offer a new interpretation of the dialogue between Melville's creative fiction and accounts of cannibalism from the Cook voyages and later American sources, such as Commodore David Porter⁹.

The leg injury, or disease, Melville's narrator sustains early on in the novel is an important narrative device that allows the narrator to make a series of sustained observations from a position of restricted mobility. In this part of the chapter, I offer a fresh critical analysis that argues that the narrator's 'mysterious disease' is a symbiosis of the acute physiological concerns that were articulated in eighteenth-century narratives of exploration. *Typee* establishes the communication of disease as a two-way process as its narrator's body fails to adapt to the environment of the Marquesas Islands.

I argue that Tommo's illness becomes worse in proximity to the Marquesan practices of cannibalism and tattooing. Tommo's intense fear of becoming the subject of this form of Polynesian body art speaks to several popular conceptions about tattooing in the nineteenth-century, which I draw on in the chapter. Tommo's ambivalence about tattooing, particularly his fear that it will preclude him from re-entering 'civilised' society, reflects the cultural connotations of the tattoo in the Western imagination. I suggest that

⁹ David Porter, *Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean in the United States Frigate Essex in the Years 1812, 1813 and 1814* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1822).

Tommo's interpretation of the tattoo as a foreign body and a form of violence forms part of a broader narrative of a decaying vision of the Pacific, which becomes further ingrained in the words of Robert Louis Stevenson, whose writing I use to bring these ideas together in the conclusion.

Pacific Studies and the Body: A Critical Survey

Since the mid-twentieth century, when Pacific history became institutionally recognised with the establishment of the Department of Pacific History at the Australian National University, Pacific studies has become a vibrant, interdisciplinary subject.¹⁰ The sheer size of the geographical area of this ocean, comprising roughly one third of the earth's surface, several thousand islands and the rim of four continents, has naturally attracted a diverse range of critical attention from scholars working in fields such as literature, history, and anthropology to name but a few. Any contribution to this extensive body of scholarship about an expansive ocean requires one to be selective, not only in the materials chosen for analysis but also in the acknowledging the influence of historical and recent scholarship which elucidates these materials. The purpose of this section of the introduction is to set out what I consider to be some of the most relevant interventions in Pacific studies for my own research to support the methodology sections that follows.

With my analysis concentrated on the representations of bodies and disease in accounts and representations of Pacific travel from Cook to Melville, it should be noted that I am interested in two sets of bodies; those of explorers and those of the island peoples

¹⁰ K. R. Howe, "The Fate of the 'Savage' in Pacific Historiography," *New Zealand Journal of History* 11 (1977): 147-148.

they interacted with, although in the case of beachcomber narratives which I discuss in the final chapter, there is some overlap between these. It is necessary to say a few words on the most salient point of departure for critical scholarship on disease in the context of islander bodies. Although, at least since the voyages of the 1760s, there was interest in the pejorative side effects of bringing ‘civilisation’ to the Pacific, the ‘fatal impact’ theory of the 1960s made strong claims for the deleterious effects of Anglophone Pacific expansion.¹¹

Alan Moorehead’s *The Fatal Impact: An Account of the Invasion of the South Pacific 1767-1840* (1966), with its focus on the Cook Voyages and early Australia, covers a similar time period to my own research, although like a number of recent scholars, my analysis diverges from his in a few key ways. Moorehead prefaced his argument by stating that the voyages of Cook represented a ‘fateful moment when a social capsule is broken open, when primitive creatures, beasts as well as men, are confronted for the first time with civilization’.¹² He goes on to specify the extent of the damage done to the indigenous inhabitants of the South Pacific in an analysis which holds contaminating contact, both literally through disease and figuratively through the baggage of colonialism, at the forefront. While it is an undeniable fact that burgeoning colonialism altered life for the peoples of Pacific, introduced new diseases and technologies and, in some cases, instigated rapid depopulation, Moorehead’s exposition was extensively revised and, at least within the academy, supplanted in the decades that followed. Subsequent historians and anthropologists have pointed out the key failings of this and related hypotheses as follows:

¹¹ J. R. Forster’s published account of the second Cook voyage contains some extended passages on disease transmission and degeneration in the Pacific. See Johann Reinhold Forster, *Observations Made During a Voyage Round the World*, eds. Nicholas Thomas, Harriet Guest, and Michael Dettelbach (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1996), 192-196, 296-303.

¹² Alan Moorehead, *The Fatal Impact: An Account of the Invasion of the South Pacific, 1767-1840* (London: Penguin, 1966), 14.

that, in the words of K. R. Howe, they viewed islanders as ‘explicitly or implicitly inferior’, implying that indigenous people were ‘passive’ where Europeans were ‘active’ and, as Lamb, Smith and Thomas suggest, such arguments were insensible of the extent to which ‘European goods, persons, practices, and institutions were consistently subject to local manipulation’.¹³ These counterclaims have been particularly influential for my research into historical accounts and literary representations of the effects of disease on relationships between Europeans and indigenous Oceanians. I offer some pivotal examples of such scholarship, which have influenced my thinking in explicit or inherent ways, below.

Vanessa Smith’s pioneering work on the centrality of friendship bonds (*taios*) in *Pacific Encounters* has been especially helpful for my understanding of the reciprocal and dynamic nature of relationships formed between Pacific islanders and voyaging Europeans. In her analysis of the crowd scenes that greeted European visitors in the mid eighteenth-century, Smith persuasively argues that, far from being the ‘passive’ objects of colonial endeavours that earlier ‘fatal impact’ theories imply, Pacific islanders were active and numerous participants in European encounters. Adroitly summarising some of the deficiencies of the ‘collective European imagining of islands as inherently uncrowded’, Smith warns that:

The image of the desert island morphs too easily into that of the deserted or decimated Pacific island, ravaged by imported disease or weapons or intoxicants, by slaving and blackbirding.¹⁴

¹³ Jonathan Lamb, Vanessa Smith and Nicholas Thomas (eds.), *Exploration and Exchange: A South Seas Anthology, 1680-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), xiv-xv.

¹⁴ Vanessa Smith, *Intimate Strangers: Friendship, Exchange and Pacific Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 25.

I have been particularly influenced by Smith's conception of encounters as bustling scenes of activity, and of Oceanic peoples as having a decisive role in the undertakings of voyages of exploration. The latter point is particularly important for my research on scurvy for, as I argue in the first chapter, the scurvy-stricken explorers of the eighteenth century were only able to make their 'discoveries' with the active participation of Pacific islanders; as Smith rightly asserts, it is through the *taio* 'that access to resources is ultimately mediated.'¹⁵ Although the *taio* framework only emerged in English following European voyages to Tahiti, it shaped the ways in which Cook and subsequent voyagers embarked on relationships with other Oceanic peoples. Applying Smith's model of Pacific islanders as essential mediators, I reveal in the first chapter how influential they were to Cook's perception of his success in treating scurvy.

Smith's work invites us to consider the agency of Pacific islanders in encounters and transactions with Europeans, which has also been an enduring theme in the work of Pacific historian Bronwen Douglas. In a recent book, Douglas offers some detailed defining principles to her definition of 'encounters' and interpretation of indigenous agency. Here I have extracted some of these which are most applicable to my own readings of the meetings between Europeans and Oceanians, and complement some of the characteristics ascribed to crowd scenes by Vanessa Smith in *Intimate Strangers* (2010). Douglas argues that, in the first instance, encounters are not 'general clash[es] of two opposed, homogeneous, reified cultures, leading inexorably to the destruction of demoralization of the weaker', and instead articulates their manifestations as 'embodied episode[s] in a specific time and place'.¹⁶ The historical specificity of the encounters

¹⁵ Smith, *Intimate Strangers*, 23.

¹⁶ Douglas, *Science, Voyages and Encounters in Oceania*, 19.

between Europeans and indigenous Oceanic peoples which Douglas alludes to is especially important for my research into the first years of European settlement in Australia.

In Douglas's latest book, which offers a close textual analysis of the ways Europeans wrote about Oceanic people, she applies Barthesian poststructuralist concepts to reveal indigenous agency in textual productions. As she explains, '[t]he method rests on careful linguistic investigation of the relationships between signifiers (expressions), signifieds (meanings) and referents (things referred to).'¹⁷ Douglas asserts that 'indigenous presence' can be read into textual productions through embedded and often covert referents and signifiers. Douglas's argument is strikingly revealing when she applies it to a close linguistic analysis of the ways in which indigenous people were described according to emerging categories of race and difference, particularly during scenes of hostility or violence. However, while I find her methodology for identifying and collating signs of agency in certain textual productions useful, I remain cautious about its wider application. This is because I am conscious of the hazards of applying relatively modern literary critical apparatus to historical texts, especially those that have been published, which form a large amount of my source material and where I think the model is less effective. As I argue throughout, published texts were often adapted and embellished to suit their readerships, so any countersigns of indigenous agency would have been subject to a process of modification in line with evolving generic expectations and conventions. However, her work remains important for my reading of indigenous agency in the early Australian context, for reasons that will become clear in the second chapter.

¹⁷ Ibid., 20.

The *Endeavour*'s reception on the east coast of Australia in 1770 was unlike anything Cook's crew had experienced before, and they struggled to explain the perceived lack of interest by indigenous Australians against the bustling scenes of arrival that had greeted them elsewhere in Polynesia. Although I have situated my analysis within three discrete phases of Euro-American contact with the Oceania, it should therefore be noted that my research is also attentive to sites of contact as discrete *places*. While I fully concur with recent scholars who have rejected an impulse for homogeneity when assessing the impact of colonialism on Pacific societies – which is an implicit trope of the 'fatal impact' theories outlined above – I stress how different Australia appeared to be compared other sites in the Pacific and how this upset the emerging categorisation of Pacific peoples.

First published in 1960, Bernard Smith's seminal *European Vision and the South Pacific* has done much to illuminate the ways in which Pacific cultures were represented visually, highlighting the interplay between graphic and textual depictions. It anticipated critical discussions about how indigenous cultures were understood in European thought from the mid-eighteenth century. As Jocelyn Linnekin points out, Smith was 'ahead of his time in addressing how Europeans constructed knowledge about indigenous societies during the period of exploration and colonisation.'¹⁸ This claim rings true for Smith's analysis of early artistic impressions of Australia in particular. For a number of reasons which I assess throughout the first two chapters, there was a sharper paucity of comprehension about indigenous Australians than other, Polynesian groups. The repeated miscommunications between Australians on the east coast and the *Endeavour*'s crew resulted in inchoate representations of their way of life and relationship to their land, which

¹⁸ Jocelyn Linnekin, "Contending Approaches," in *The Cambridge History of the Pacific Islanders*, ed. Donald Denoon et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 12.

subsequent colonisers of the First Fleet were keen to interrogate and supersede. Smith's attention to visual depictions of Australia and its inhabitants make vital interventions on textual productions which struggled to convey an image of Australians participating in social relations.¹⁹ In later works such as *Imagining the Pacific In the Wake of the Cook Voyages* (1992), Smith examined artwork from the Cook voyages in more detail, assessing its relationship to and influence upon European perceptions of the Pacific.²⁰ It is through Smith's reproduction of a sketch by the botanical draughtsman Sydney Parkinson in an edited volume on early European impressions of indigenous Australians that I launch my analysis in the second chapter, arguing that Parkinson's uncharacteristically fragmentary sketch is indicative of the way Europeans struggled to make sense of the local response to their arrival in 1770.²¹

While offering divergent perspectives on their materials, all of the scholarship cited thus far shares a common trait in the ways that it extrapolates meaningful narratives from historical sources. The many works of Greg Dening have been especially influential in shaping this process. Beginning with an article in the first volume of the *The Journal of Pacific History* and expanded in several book-length contributions to Pacific history that followed, Dening offered a critical dissection of the nascent field of ethnohistory, and the possibilities of its practical application in understanding the pasts of non-literate cultures. Dening conceived of ethnohistory as a 'mixture' of history and anthropology, arguing for example, that to construct a 'thesis on the factors which diversified Polynesian societies', one should be attentive to 'the development of Polynesian culture in the past 150 years'

¹⁹ Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 170-173.

²⁰ Bernard Smith, *Imagining the Pacific in the Wake of the Cook Voyages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

²¹ Bernard Smith, "The First European Depictions," in *Seeing the First Australians* eds. Ian Donaldson and Tamsin Donaldson (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1985), 21-22.

and the ‘impact of the first 20 years of European penetration.’²² Denning’s subsequent work extended this technique to reconcile Polynesian and European interpretations of moments of encounter. His work on the *Bounty* saga, in particular, has been useful for my research in the first chapter, as I consider the extent to which the mutineers had become assimilated into Tahitian culture, and the centrality of food, which they stockpiled to ward off scurvy, to their list of grievances.²³ His book on the Marquesas Islands has also been a useful counterpoint for my third chapter which focuses on Melville’s literary rendition of life on Nuku Hiva, and representations of bodies and diseases there.²⁴

There are two important post-millennial works on the Cook voyages which have revised earlier narratives produced in the decades that followed J. C. Beaglehole’s monumental edited volumes of Cook journals. While Beaglehole’s editions remain an invaluable resource for Cook scholars, his view of Cook as an infallible commander who deftly executed instructions has been increasingly contested in exciting ways since postcolonial discourse became integrated into academic enquiry. Nicholas Thomas’s work in Pacific anthropology, and his trajectory of the Cook voyages in particular, has portrayed Cook’s actions as sometimes being the result of expediency, confusion and compromise, alerting us to the fact that the process of exploration and colonisation was not always steady or cogent. Such insights have real value for my work on the Cook voyages, and the way Cook handled scurvy in particular, but they are also essential for my apprehension of the complexity of encounters between Europeans and Oceanians, which has significant implications for my analysis of the reciprocal transmission of disease in the second and

²² Greg Denning, “Ethnohistory in Polynesia: the value of ethnohistorical evidence,” *Journal of Pacific History* 1 (1966): 34.

²³ Greg Denning, *Mr Bligh’s Bad Language: Passion, Power and Theatre on the Bounty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁴ Greg Denning, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land, Marquesas 1774-1880* (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1980).

third chapters. In *Discoveries: The Voyages of Captain Cook* (2003), Thomas notes that while Cook was unquestionably an assured and competent cartographer, he ‘lacked devices that might measure or describe a meeting with men, women and children.’²⁵

Anthropology’s most valuable contribution to Pacific studies has been a critical interrogation of these meetings, to recentre the implications of colonial contact from a vantage point that emphasises the impact of European encounters on local communities. As Thomas states in his introduction, ‘[t]he Oceanic peoples Cook discovered themselves discovered Europe, or rather they discovered peculiar floating samples of European society.’²⁶ For the second chapter in particular, my research has been guided by a cross-examination of smallpox as a biological ‘sample’ of contact. Whether that sample was European or not, I consider in more detail in the second chapter but my emphasis is more on effect – and this is where anthropology has stimulated my enquiry – than origin.

A further useful study is to be found in the works of Anne Salmond, who has produced comprehensive accounts of Maori culture at the point of contact and a more wide-ranging study of the Cook voyages.²⁷ As my second and third chapters consider the lasting influence Cook’s expeditions, her work has been conducive to considering how key moments within encounters had an enduring currency in popular thought in Europe, shaping the perceptions of subsequent writers and explorers. Nowhere is this truer than in European reactions to and speculation about cannibalism, which I discuss in detail in the third chapter, arguing that a series of incidents involving Maori cannibalism – or at least a performance of cannibalism – on the Cook voyages permeated subsequent texts and

²⁵ Nicholas Thomas, *Discoveries: The Voyages of Captain Cook* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), xx.

²⁶ Thomas, *Discoveries*, xx.

²⁷ See Anne Salmond, *Two Worlds: First Meetings between Maori and Europeans, 1642-1772* (London: Viking Press, 1993) and *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog: Captain Cook in the South Seas* (London: Penguin, 2004).

influenced Melville's literary representation of Nuku Hiva in his novel *Typee*. Salmond's and Thomas's work complement each other well. While Salmond's work, at least on the Cook voyages, is grounded in assiduous textual analysis to a greater extent than Thomas's, Thomas pauses to offer a deeper, sometimes speculative approach to the dynamics of interactions between Europeans and Oceanians. My training as literary scholar, though one who is keen to apply the apparatus of literary analysis to historical texts, means that unlike an anthropologist, I do not read behaviour quite so extensively as something existing outside of the text, in the way that Thomas or Marshall Sahlins do.²⁸ However, anthropology has aided my research in assessing how encounters altered the structure of indigenous societies and probing the repercussions of these changes in European texts, especially for representations of bodies and disease.

By the end of the period studied in this research, the Pacific was still frequently represented by Europeans as a vast and empty ocean, at the periphery of the colonial world. Since the Pacific Ocean was named by Magellan in 1520 for the still and tranquil waters the Portuguese explorer found as he crossed the Strait now named after him, the Pacific Ocean, its islands and peoples have been represented as static and disparate, until at least the twentieth century.²⁹ This image was, however, eloquently revised by the Tongan anthropologist Epeli Hau'ofa who, in a seminal 1993 essay, put forward his view of the Pacific as a 'sea of islands', as opposed to the (neo)colonial vision of 'islands in a far sea'.³⁰ Hau'ofa's essay stressed a high degree of interconnectedness between island groups and asserted agency on the part of their inhabitants, which was either denied or overlooked

²⁸ See, for example, Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985) and *How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, For Example* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996).

²⁹ Theodore J. Cachey, Jr. (ed.), *The First Voyage around the World, 1519-1522: An Account of Magellan's Expedition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 25.

³⁰ Epeli Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," in *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 27-40.

by continental explorers of the long eighteenth century and, later, twentieth-century centres of global economic power. My research, which focuses on scenes of colonial encounter, is indebted to Hau'ofa's reading, and stresses the nuances within Oceanic societies at the point of contact, which are often absent in explorers' accounts, and integrates them more fully into a discussion of bodies and diseases.

In the last part of this critical survey, I turn my attention to authors who have written specifically on the subjects of bodies and disease in Pacific narratives, and their application to my own research. Rod Edmond's *Representing the South Pacific* (1997) adopts a chronology of Pacific colonial encounters that begins with the death of Cook and ends with the art of Gaugin, weaving his analysis through a series of texts that includes historical accounts, creative fiction and works of art. In each case, Edmond considers how knowledge about the Pacific accumulated over time but, between the chapters on nineteenth-century narratives especially, Edmond conveys a sense of how conceptions of the Pacific became darker and more diseased.³¹ In later works, Edmond concentrated more specifically on the subject of disease in colonial contexts. An essay on the development of medical discourse in Pacific contexts following the 'complex disease exchanges' which occurred with European exploration of 1760s and 1770s was published in *The Global Eighteenth Century* (2003) and staked a claim, central to my own thinking in the first chapter, that disease 'undermined the ordering of relationships' on the Cook voyages.³² His observation that a 'revival of environmental disease aetiology resulted in new biogeographical understandings of the world' in the eighteenth century is an important claim for my third chapter, where I demonstrate that Melville applied philosophical notions

³¹ Rod Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gaugin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

³² Rod Edmond, "Island Transactions: Encounter and Disease in the South Pacific," in *The Global Eighteenth Century*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 252, 262.

about degeneration to his representation of the Marquesan Islands, and the Pacific more broadly.³³ His book-length study of leprosy also invites a re-reading of this disease in colonial contexts which has implications for studying the writings of Pacific literary travellers outside the main remit of this study, such as Robert Louis Stevenson.³⁴

Of the diseases considered in this study, none has received more critical attention in recent years than scurvy. The relationship of scurvy to Pacific voyages is a complex one which I untangle in the first chapter but suffice it to say, this disease was seen as the main obstacle to European expansion at the beginning of the period studied. Although some voyages before Cook's escaped with relatively low mortality rates, Pacific voyages from the Spanish and Portuguese expeditions of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, until those contemporaneous with Cook's, were marred by this destructive and perplexing disease. Studies of scurvy have become central to scholarship on maritime expansion but have tended to focus specifically on Pacific voyages of exploration as a hotbed where the disease was both more frequent and acute, or on related debates between medical and naval institutions. This viewpoint is justified: Pacific voyages were naturally of a longer duration than other naval expeditions departing from Western Europe, they were documented more meticulously, and they invited a discourse between medical and naval practitioners, who were united in viewing scurvy as a threat to British overseas expansion. Jonathan Lamb's research has done much to push scurvy towards the centre of scholarly debates.³⁵ My own work goes beyond Lamb's in that I do not view scurvy as being exclusively linked to maritime pursuits, or indeed medical and naval contexts.

³³ Rod Edmond, "Island Transactions," 252.

³⁴ Rod Edmond, *Leprosy and Empire: A Medical and Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³⁵ See, for example, the chapter on scurvy in Jonathan Lamb, *Preserving the Self in the South Seas, 1680-1840* (Chicago: University of Chicago University Press, 2001), 114-131.

Lamb's latest book on scurvy, which was published just as my research here was coming to a close, is a more expansive treatment of the disease, considering scurvy in naval, medical, penological and literary contexts.³⁶ However, its scope is still institutional; it does not consider whether scurvy was common amongst, or influenced, the general population. My particular contribution to the growing body of knowledge about this disease is my contention that the problem of scurvy was prevalent in metropolitan London and elsewhere in Britain, and to argue that examining it a local level presents interesting contrasts with the way the disease was thought of at sea. In other words, although I acknowledge that scurvy was a huge factor in the history of maritime expansion, I suggest that maritime expansion played a smaller role in the history of scurvy. In particular, I assess scurvy's prevalence in print culture to demonstrate that cultural associations with the disease, such as shame and stigma, altered the perception of the disease at sea in the voyages of James Cook and later, William Bligh. In the first and subsequent chapters, I argue that to understand the significance of diseases in colonial encounters, we should also engage with them at the patient level, for reasons I explain in the methodology section that follows.

Methods and Approaches

As the critical survey suggests, the character of Pacific studies has been shaped by the involvement of scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds, who are willing to suspend some of the constraints and boundaries that shape their work outside of this field of scholarship. My own research, which studies a variety of texts across disciplinary

³⁶ Jonathan Lamb, *Scurvy: The Disease of Discovery* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017).

binaries, is necessarily indebted to this way of working. My chapters therefore consider a variety of historical, medical, literary and anthropological works to produce a consistent and comprehensive understanding of the phases of contact that define this research.

While the chronology of the work that follows covers a trajectory of almost one hundred years of Euro-American encounters from the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century, it chooses to tell it through three distinct phases or episodes. The status of the century of material studied saw the emphasis on voyaging shift from being expeditionary – for scientific, geographical and cultural knowledge – to commercial, with the establishment of colonial outposts such as the New South Wales colony and the emergence of whaling, an intensely commercial form of voyaging that powered progress at home. The three phases of contact studied in this work concentrate on material productions resulting from this shift – from voyaging, to settlement, to whaling. I argue that this focus makes visible the relationship of bodies and disease to writing and the Pacific that a broader and more historically encompassing analysis would not. In situating my research within these three phases, I aim to throw into relief the focus on disease, impairment and perceptions of the body, and explain how these phases brought that into focus.

The first chapter concentrates on the voyages of James Cook and the first breadfruit voyage of William Bligh. As a result of the extended investigative role that Nicholas Thomas refers to in the essay cited earlier, these voyages in particular – which made for longer landfalls than their predecessors, and an increased emphasis on gathering and disseminating data – allowed for a more detailed knowledge about the role of voyaging and the peoples of the Pacific. This knowledge was by no means comprehensive or complete; it was gradually added to over the course of the Cook voyages, in what Harriet Guest terms an ‘accretional logic’, and subsequently reflected in a plethora of literary and graphic

productions, with Tahiti frequently used as a frame of reference.³⁷ As I have explained, the relationships formed with Pacific peoples are crucial in assessing the impact of diseases and perceptions of the body, from those which affected the extent to which voyaging could be successfully undertaken at all, such as scurvy, to those which affected the foundations and dynamics of indigenous Oceanic societies, like smallpox. To apprehend this fully, my research makes use of the many different disciplinary contributions to Pacific studies, as outlined above.

My position as a literary scholar, but one with an interest in medical history and the more contemporary field of medical humanities, has shaped the original analytical framework through which this research has been carried out. In the first and second chapters, I pay close textual attention to non-literary sources, which take the form of journals, correspondence and medical texts. This is because I am interested in unpacking the silences and omissions within these sources – such as James Cook’s reticence towards outbreaks of scurvy, or the laconic entries of the First Fleet colonists about smallpox, to offer insights into the ways debates about bodies and diseases were framed in colonial discourse. A further reason for this approach, which I make explicit throughout the chapters, is my awareness of the ways in which historical sources were or could become crafted literary productions. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the South Seas were encountered almost exclusively through print for British and American readers; and the creative, literary renditions of earlier writers like Defoe and Swift often overlapped with the observations made by later voyagers, with Melville’s *Typee* being a synthesis of both.³⁸ The third chapter therefore engages with a close literary analysis of a novel which

³⁷ Harriet Guest, *Empire, Barbarism and Civilisation: James Cook, William Hodges and the Return to the Pacific* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 21.

³⁸ A point which is illustrated by the fact that nineteenth-century visitors to Juan Fernández sometimes went looking for evidence of Robinson Crusoe’s residence and not Alexander Selkirk’s. See Andrew Lambert,

is dependent in its structure and presentation on the kinds of historical sources assessed in the preceding chapters.

The chapters that follow offer fresh perspectives on debates about bodies and disease in the context of writing about the Pacific by assessing these positions through an analytical approach that considers individual, as well as institutional, responses to health and disease in colonial contexts. I argue that while existing scholarship has made excellent contributions to understanding how the role of disease in Oceanic encounters was considered by government, naval, medical and penological institutions, it has frequently overlooked how diseases were perceived from the patient end, whether this has been in historical case studies or literary representations indebted to historical sources. The latter point is important because it is only through individual responses to disease that we are able to form an idea of what was like to suffer from them and how they transformed the patient's understanding of their body. With this in mind, my research has been guided by some of the foundational texts within medical humanities. Although, as a number of recent texts in the field make clear, medical humanities is a 'fluid notion [...] likely to shift and develop as scholarly fashions, health focuses and political contexts change', the scholarship continues to be influenced by works which are grounded in the patient experience of illness.³⁹

While the analytical outlooks of the medical humanities are therefore evolving, it remains indebted to scholarship which has, from the late 1980s, considered the narrative

Crusoe's Island: A Rich and Curious History of Pirates, Castaways and Madness (London: Faber & Faber, 2016), 147-148.

³⁹ Anne Whitehead and Angela Woods (eds.), "Introduction," in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Critical Medical Humanities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 1.

potential of illness as relayed by those suffering from it as well as medical communities.⁴⁰ This concept, which forms a central tenet of what Whitehead and Woods term ‘first-wave or mainstream medical humanities’ intended to ‘produce a shift in clinical method towards attending to and interpreting patients’ subjective experience as well as scientific knowledge and data.’⁴¹ Since this ‘first-wave’, such notions have thrived in contemporary application but are more rarely considered alongside historical sources. This is particularly true for scholarship on scurvy, which continues to study the disease in relation to those who witnessed its effects indirectly, either as physicians or prominent naval figures (the disease was most prominently recorded at sea), but is less attentive to those who actually suffered from it.⁴²

My aim in the first chapter has been to redress this balance in two significant ways. First, I consider in more detail the narratives of scurvy produced by the subordinates to the voyages of James Cook and William Bligh. As the chapter demonstrates, Cook will occasionally admit to outbreaks of scurvy and Bligh will flatly deny them, with the result being that neither offer an understanding of what the disease feels like or how it affects the body. I apply Arthur Kleinman’s distinction between disease and illness narratives to demonstrate the differences between the way scurvy was thought of by naval commanders and by the voyagers it actually affected; revealing that the symptoms and suffering that form the patient experience of illness are more prevalent in narratives produced by subordinates of Cook than by Cook himself.⁴³

⁴⁰ Two foundational texts are Arthur Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) and Arthur Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing and the Human Condition* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

⁴¹ Whitehead and Woods, “Introduction,” 1, 4.

⁴² See for example, Jeremy Hugh Baron, “Sailors’ scurvy before and after Lind – a reassessment,” *Nutrition Reviews* 67 (2009): 315-332 and Mark Harrison, “Scurvy on Sea and Land: political economy and natural history, c. 1780 – c. 1850.,” *Journal for Maritime Research* 15 (2013): 7-25.

⁴³ Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives*, 3-6.

Second, and for the first time in scurvy scholarship, my work considers the influence of print culture and quack physicians in shaping public opinion about the disease. The latter treated a significant number of those who either had scurvy, or believed they did, at home in England. I argue that these quasi-physicians, who were prolific publishers as well as money-makers, made significant interventions into dialogues about scurvy between physicians and naval administrators. By publishing in newspapers and pamphlet form, they influenced a broader section of society than medical practitioners and argued – sometimes persuasively – that land and sea scurvy were two distinct diseases. As physicians responding to their publications demonstrate, they promoted dangerous ‘cures’ for scurvy, ensuring that their clients remained in need of treatment. I argue that in doing so, they played an overlooked role in debates concerning the delay between James Lind’s recommendation that citrus fruits be used to cure scurvy in 1753, and the Admiralty’s decision to supply naval ships with a quantity of lemon juice at the end of the eighteenth century. This chapter makes an original contribution to historical knowledge of scurvy by assessing the interplay between scurvy in medical and naval contexts and the general public by examining the influence of quack physicians, who helped keep scurvy a confused and confusing disorder throughout the eighteenth century.

With this in mind, and using a considerable number of texts which have not been previously applied to scurvy scholarship, I suggest that there is a correlation between the way scurvy was thought of at sea and on land. Towards the end of the first chapter, I argue that the threat of scurvy, as exemplified in the many sources used throughout the chapter – historical, medical and literary – affected the nature and course of the voyages of Cook and Bligh. I add a new perspective to critical commentaries on the death of Cook by proposing

that his inability to secure the necessary resources for scurvy prevention was a significant and overlooked factor in his death in Kealakekua Bay in 1779.

The first chapter stakes a claim that in order to understand the true extent of diseases attending exploration, we should study them on land as well as at sea. This focus is extended to my second and third chapters, which considers the passage of the First Fleet to Australia and the smallpox epidemic following its arrival, and Melville's representation of the fragile and temporal nature of the explorer's body, respectively. Scurvy and smallpox are obviously vastly different diseases – one noncommunicable and the other highly contagious. Nonetheless, as Erica Charters has pointed out, in the eighteenth century they were both seen as crowd diseases which affected Britain's colonial ambitions, and were even thought to affect people of similar temperaments.⁴⁴ The second chapter explores the lasting impact of representations of Australia from Cook's voyages on the settlers of the First Fleet. In particular, using ethnographic materials such as glossaries and sketches, I argue that a series of prolonged miscommunications from the *Endeavour* voyage, allowed for a representation of indigenous Australians themselves as artefacts as they were compared unfavourably with other Oceanic cultures, particularly those of the Society Islands. This is exemplified in my use of a visual text – one of the earliest sketches of indigenous Australians – and an art historical analysis of its composition that offers new insights into the ways Australians were perceived by Europeans before the process of colonial settlement began in earnest. As I demonstrate, the glossaries compiled on the *Endeavour*'s Australian sojourn are striking for being so overwhelmingly anatomical. This can to some extent be explained by the rather limited nature of the interactions that took

⁴⁴ Erica Charters, *Disease, War and the Imperial State: The Welfare of the British Armed Forces During the Seven Years' War* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2014), 19.

place there. Tupaia, the Polynesian navigator who joined the expedition in Tahiti, was unable to act the role of translator and interpreter, as he had done in the Society Islands, due to the language barrier.⁴⁵ Vocabularies were therefore compiled using whatever was immediately visible to both parties – parts of each other’s bodies, or local flora and fauna. However, as I will argue, these taxonomic practices were also about controlling and ordering, by knowledge, the bodies of indigenous populations.

Using a variety of published and unpublished sources, I demonstrate that the European interest in bodies and clothing was reciprocated by the Australians, who were – contrary to representations by Cook’s voyagers – curious about the arrival of visitors to their country, although their curiosity did not always take the forms that Europeans could recognise. However, the first smallpox epidemic in Australia, recorded by the journal-keepers of the colony in 1789, was a decisive moment in the history of European settlement in the Pacific region, which undermined the progress made in encounters with local tribes. I use the reports of the colonists, together with contemporary medical histories and a knowledge of the treatment of smallpox in eighteenth-century Britain to assess how the smallpox virus affected indigenous Australians in and around the colony, and scrutinise the European response to the disease in closer detail than recent historical scholarship. Additionally, Australia remains conspicuously absent in official accounts of the disease, such as the World Health Organization’s publication marking its eradication.⁴⁶ This can partly be explained by the fact that outbreaks of smallpox were so severe that the virus killed itself off before it could become endemic. Nonetheless, it is striking that a disease which was estimated by the governor of the settlement to have killed half of all indigenous

⁴⁵ J. C. Beaglehole (ed.), *The Journals of Captain James Cook*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1955–1968), I, *The Voyage of the Endeavour, 1768–1771*, 305.

⁴⁶ Frank Fenner et al., *Smallpox and its Eradication* (Geneva: World Health Organisation, 1988).

Australians in the vicinity, and further out, has received such little attention in global histories of the disease.⁴⁷

My chapter makes a new contribution to research into the histories of smallpox epidemics by offering a more sustained and patient-focused account of the outbreak in 1789, using contemporary reports to build a picture of the effects and course of the epidemic on Australian tribes. I assess the relative merits of recent debates surrounding the contested origins of the smallpox virus, but ultimately conclude that it is not possible to be certain on this subject.⁴⁸ Instead, through a close reading of published and unpublished accounts from members of the Port Jackson settlement, I centre my analysis on the consequences of the epidemic for both Australian and European communities.

Smallpox caused significant concern for the first European settlers of Australia and, with a growing number of children in the colony, generated wider anxieties about the potential of life in the South Seas. The third chapter focuses on how these anxieties about bodies, health and disease entered popular fiction in Melville's first novel, set on the Marquesan island of Nuku Hiva. I argue that *Typee* is a narrative fusion of the kinds of exploratory and settler accounts discussed in the first two chapters, while also representing a synthesis of the diseases, vulnerabilities and anxieties attending colonial enterprise in the Pacific region. On one level, arguments about the representation of experience – which I develop in the first two chapters – come full circle with the publication of *Typee*. If one of the objectives of Cook's voyages was to lay to rest fabulous rumours of the South Pacific –

⁴⁷ Letter from Arthur Phillip to Lord Sydney, 13 February 1790 in *Historical Records of New South Wales*, ed. Frank M. Bladen, vol. 1, pt. 2 (Sydney: Charles Potter, 1892), 304-310.

⁴⁸ See Michael J. Bennett, "Smallpox and Cowpox under the Southern Cross: The Smallpox Epidemic of 1789 and the Advent of Vaccination in Colonial Australia," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 83 (2009) and Judy Campbell, *Invisible Invaders: Smallpox and Other Diseases in Aboriginal Australia, 1780-1880* (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2002).

of which the legendary *Terra Australis* was the key example – then Melville’s account in *Typee*, based upon little evidence, was to resurrect myths and hearsay, to reconstruct existing modes of travel writing, and pass these off as an objective account.

What Melville explores most saliently in *Typee* is the fallibility of the explorer’s body in proximity to the environment and customs of Nuku Hiva, with particular attention to the practices of cannibalism and tattooing, and the ‘mysterious disease’ the narrator contracts almost as soon as he crosses the beach. While the novel is firmly situated on one Marquesan island, it quickly became subsumed into the wider category of Pacific travel narratives, inviting comparisons with Robinson Crusoe/Alexander Selkirk and other explorers and missionaries, and was a point of reference for later writers like Stevenson.⁴⁹ Adapting a variety of sources concerned with different regions and themes from South Seas travel writing, Melville cultivated an image which was applied to other Pacific islands. Referring to explorers’ accounts of the 1760s and 1770s, Rod Edmond has described a ‘subtle dialectic of similarity and difference’ in observations of Pacific islands and cultures where ‘disease and analogous forms of contamination seemed likely to reduce every island to the same kind of place.’⁵⁰ *Typee* deliberately exhibits the ‘analogous forms of contamination’ so astutely proposed by Edmond, suggesting that there is something intangibly corrupting about the environment and customs of Nuku Hiva, without pinpointing a biological or physiological source. Through a close literary analysis of the text and its influences, I analyse the function of cannibalism and tattooing within the text, alongside the unexplainable leg injury the narrator sustains during his residence, in these terms. I stress the connections and distinctions between American and British interventions

⁴⁹ Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville: The Contemporary Reviews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 29-30, 59-60.

⁵⁰ Edmond, “Island Transactions,” 260.

in the Pacific in the first part of the chapter, focusing on the US dominance on the whaling industry in the mid-nineteenth century in particular.

The centrality to Melville's fictional writing of enduring discussions in print culture about anthropophagy in the Pacific is a key part of my analysis. This particular form of bodily sacrilege was much discussed by sailors in the early nineteenth century, not only in the form of yarns swapped about exotic islands, but of survival cannibalism practised by the crews of domestic ships. I offer new insights into Melville's relationship with texts that claimed to bear witness to such incidents, including journals from the Cook voyages, but also from American naval and whaling vessels. I argue that Melville used these available discourses on cannibalism to underscore its instability in literary representations, as evidenced by what Paul Lyons has termed the 'multiply citational' structure of *Typee*.⁵¹ Melville's narrator does not directly witness a scene of cannibalism, and I have therefore interpreted his relationship to the discourse of anthropophagy metaphorically as the fear of consumption by an alien culture, recalling the 'analogous forms of contamination' proposed by Edmond.

My chapter brings original research to discussions of the 'mysterious disease' affecting *Typee*'s narrator, arguing that it is the literalization of a number of prevailing ideas about disease and degeneracy which had been applied to Oceania by beachcombers and explorers. Drawing on medical histories of tropical and sexual diseases, but emphasising how these are related in the narrator's response to symptoms and illness, I propose that *Typee* establishes contamination as a two-way process as its narrator's body fails to adapt to the environment on Nuku Hiva. Paying close attention to the changes in

⁵¹ Paul Lyons, *American Pacificism: Oceania in the U.S. Imagination* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), 41.

language used by the narrator to describe his condition, I suggest that Tommo's illness squarely fits the remit of classic disability narrative tropes provided by Mitchell and Snyder.⁵²

My reading of cannibalism and tattooing in the novel assesses the textual interactions between Melville's novel and the sources that influenced it. I offer an original and detailed literary analysis of the connections between these and the narrator's representation of the increasing vulnerability of the exploring body in the nineteenth century, using modern historical and anthropological scholarship. Gananath Obeyesekere's work on cannibalism has been influential for my research in teasing out the lasting influences of the Cook voyages on Melville's fiction, where Alfred Gell's work has highlighted the cultural significance of tattooing, which I apply to my close readings in *Typee*.⁵³ I argue that Melville's work instilled a vision of a corrupted and contaminated Pacific in nineteenth-century literature, which I revisit in the conclusion.

The three detailed chapters that form this research make two original contributions to a study of bodies and disease in narratives of exploration and encounter from Cook to Melville. First, I trace the passage of diseases attending exploration from ship to shore. I demonstrate that scurvy was the main obstacle to Pacific exploration at the beginning of the period studied, while conceding that concerns about the disease were not, as is often assumed, restricted to colonial culture. In my research into the Australian colony, I develop this idea to show how colonial anxieties about disease were borne out on the ships of the First Fleet. However, I reveal how the arrival of smallpox to Australia shifted the focus on

⁵² David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

⁵³ See Alfred Gell, *Wrapping in Images: Tattooing in Polynesia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) and *Cannibal Talk: The Man-Eating Myth and Human Sacrifice in the South Seas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

diseases from the process of exploration to settlement. Finally, I argue that *Typee* presents the environment and customs of Pacific Islands as obstacles to integration and settlement for their toll on the health of explorers.

The second contribution of this research is about the legacy of Cook and the lasting influence of his voyages on subsequent phases of Pacific exploration and settlement. Later writers and explorers invoked and revised Cook's narratives and observations. I focus on the extent to which this was revision was effected in New South Wales in 1788, while my third chapter reveals how the mythology of Cook was added to by Melville, with the figure of Cook becoming a bit player in fictional scenes. In the conclusion, I use the Pacific writings of Robert Louis Stevenson to comment on the progression of the diseased vision of the Pacific foregrounded by Melville, and the status of Cook in fictional writing at the end of the nineteenth century.

Chapter One: Scurvy Within and Beyond Pacific Exploration

Introduction: Scurvy and British Exploration from George Anson to James Cook

The departure of the *Endeavour* for Tahiti in 1768 represents a contested juncture regarding the health and mortality of crews in the history of South Seas expeditions. On one level it has been viewed as the end of a “dark age” of voyaging, where at least two-thirds of a given crew could be expected to perish in the journey and where encounters with island cultures resulted in very little seen, and much less understood, of new places and peoples.¹ Although some of Cook’s predecessors enjoyed relatively good mortality rates, critical attention has tended to focus primarily on Cook.

The *Endeavour* expedition did signal the birth of voyaging as a more intensely scientific process of exploration, where cumulative experiences were codified into systems, procedures and results; data was gathered, knowledge was formulated empirically and hypotheses were tested to conclusion. Cook’s voyages were original in that they transported influential scientists with them, and much more scientific equipment, in contrast to the 1764-68 voyages of the *Dolphin*, as Randolph Cock has made clear.² Even in the least successful encounters of the *Endeavour*, a process of ethnographic cataloguing is visibly at work. Glossaries are drawn up, habitations and weapons are described, plant and animal specimens acquired and examined. The locale of the *Endeavour* was a site of multifarious experiments set within a wooden microcosm of eighteenth-century society but these experiments were not static representations of an imperialist enlightenment project

¹ Lamb gives an overview of the number of fatalities on such voyages – from scurvy alone – in *Preserving the Self in the South Seas*, 117.

² Cock, “Precursors of Cook,” 45.

that dispatched ships to the ends of the known world. Jonathan Lamb, like a number of other recent historians of South Pacific exploration proposes, in an argument neatly summarised by Vanessa Smith, that European colonial ambition was an essentially unstable project: ‘not the coherent policy of a consistent, enlightened subject that it has often been assumed to represent, but rather a fraught endeavour of increasing bewilderment, apt to dissolve rather than, in any simple sense, reconstitute European cultural certainties.’³

What is most useful in Smith’s summary is the depiction of colonial expansion as ‘a fraught endeavour’ (pun probably intended) with the capacity to ‘dissolve... European cultural certainties’, which resonates with my own reading of the voyages of James Cook from 1768-1779. I am interested in particular in the notion of *dissolution* which features so prominently in narratives of scurvy, and which can be seen to challenge the objectives of exploration. The experiments being conducted on expansionist voyages towards the end of the eighteenth century sought a compromise whereby these objectives could be achieved with minimal loss of life from disease. Some of these experiments were overt; directed by the Admiralty, executed by Cook and recorded in the logs and journals from the ships. Others were covert, less explicit experiments in power structures, social mores and control, both on and off the ships. The most pressing obstacle to an expedition of this size and scope was scurvy, a disease well known to explorers which was particularly acute on Pacific voyages. Indeed the historiography of the scurvy appears to overlap with South Sea expeditions; the vast majority of its records stem from these voyages. In the introduction to his history of the disease, Kenneth J. Carpenter contends that excluding famine, ‘scurvy is probably the nutritional deficiency disease that has caused the most human suffering in

³ Smith, *Intimate Strangers*, 14.

recorded history.⁴ My reading of this claim acknowledges Carpenter's use of the word 'most' on two levels; the extensive accounts of the disease recorded by Pacific voyagers, and the variety of symptoms it produced.

Scurvy first caught public imagination in England following Commodore George Anson's voyage of 1740-1744, which takes a prominent place in the history of the disease because it was the last great buccaneering expedition of its time, and for the quality of the writing on scurvy it produced. On its return, Anson's voyage captured the public's attention during a relatively quiet time for Britain's overseas acquisitions and, on 4 July 1744, the treasure seized from the *Covadonga* – thirty-two wagons' worth – was paraded through the streets of London while Anson was fêted as a hero. On the surface this weighing up of the treasure presents the voyage as a huge success, belying the fact that it was, in terms of the cost in human life, a disaster. Out of 'the more than 1,900 men who had sailed from Spithead in September almost 1,400 had died' and the vast majority of these deaths were the result of scurvy.⁵ Richard Walter, chaplain on the *Centurion*, compiled an official account of the voyage. His narrative is perhaps the best historical account of scurvy and certainly the most richly descriptive, at times sounding as though it were drawn from fiction and not memory. The first edition of *A Voyage Round the World in the Years MDCCXL, I, II, III, IV by George Anson* was published in May 1748 (with 1,800 advanced subscribers) and demand was so high that it went through four subsequent editions by the year's end.⁶ His description is worth quoting in full, both for the quality of

⁴ Kenneth J. Carpenter, *The History of Scurvy and Vitamin C* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), vii.

⁵ Glyn Williams, *The Prize of all the Oceans: The Triumph and Tragedy of Anson's Voyage Round the World* (London: Harper Collins, 2000), 202. Others died from dysentery and malaria.

⁶ Glyndwr Williams, *A Voyage round the World in the Years MDCCXL, I, II, III, IV by George Anson* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), ix.

the prose and because it introduced scurvy to English readers in the mid-eighteenth century:

Soon after passing Streights Le Maire, the scurvy began to make its appearance amongst us [...]

This disease so frequently attending all long voyages, and so particularly destructive to us, is surely the most singular and unaccountable of any that affects the human body. For its symptoms are inconsistent and innumerable, and its progress and effects extremely irregular; for scarcely any two persons have the same complaints, and where there hath been found some conformity in the symptoms, the order of their appearance has been totally different. However, though it frequently puts on the form of many other diseases, and is therefore not to be described by any exclusive and infallible criterions; yet there are some symptoms which are more general than the rest, and therefore, occurring the ofttest, deserve a more particular enumeration [...].

This disease is usually attended with a strange dejection of the spirits, and with shiverings, tremblings, and a disposition to be seized with the most dreadful terrors on the slightest accident.⁷

Walter's description marks the beginning of a very particular and unusual way of writing about scurvy in the eighteenth century that was adopted by subsequent exploratory journalists. Walter does not say that some of the men have symptoms of scurvy; instead, he personifies the disease. By introducing scurvy in this way he invests it with agency, and suggests it has been present all along but waiting – or dormant – until now. He does not offer any rationale for its presence at this time, merely that it is 'frequently attending long voyages'. The spectre of the disease is ingrained in his narrative by being both 'singular and unaccountable'; in a paradox of symptomology, it is both specific and general. The shape-shifting qualities of the disease are underscored when Walter notes that 'scarcely any two persons' have like symptoms, but where there is a resemblance, 'the order of their appearance has been totally different.' Not only is scurvy capable of mapping itself onto the body in differing ways, it also has the capacity for disguise: 'it frequently puts on the

⁷ Williams, *A voyage round the world*, 105-107.

form of many other diseases’, rendering itself unidentifiable by ‘exclusive and infallible criterions’. In ascribing this kind of mimicry to scurvy, Walter gives it an elusive quality, projecting his inability to read scurvy back onto the disease itself. Scurvy undermines the authority of its readers by removing their capacity to distinguish it from other diseases: it is ‘irregular’ in the sense that it resists regulation and this increases its power in written accounts. The inability (and in some cases, unwillingness) to “read” scurvy is a consistent theme throughout the literature on the disease – scientific and exploratory – and one which became exploited by those with more commercial interests, as I will discuss in the next section.

Walter’s account of the disease is more a characterisation than a diagnostic description. Scurvy exceeds its markers – the collection of like symptoms – through its unaccountable and unquantifiable behaviour. It becomes a bit player in the expedition, stalking the ships with its trickster abilities for mimicry and deception. The most unsettling feature of the disease in Walter’s narrative, however, is a ‘most extraordinary circumstance’ which he relates as follows:

[O]ne of the invalids on board the *Centurion*, who had been wounded above fifty years before... on his being attacked by the scurvy, his wounds, in the progress of his disease, broke out afresh, and appeared as if they had never been healed: nay, what is still more astonishing, the callous of a broken bone, which had been compleatly formed for a long time, was found to be hereby dissolved, and the fracture seemed as if it had never been consolidated.⁸

Scurvy is positioned here in ‘extraordinary’, supernatural terms as it subverts the body’s ability to heal. It undoes the healing process of the body of a veteran who sustained an injury in the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, recalling the dissolution of ‘cultural certainties’ that Vanessa Smith has emphasised. Walter framed his description of scurvy in terms of a

⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

unique, knowledge-defying model of disease, uncontrollable and resistant to categorisation: ‘unaccountable’, ‘inconstant’, ‘innumerable’ and ‘irregular’. He crosses the threshold into admiration when he describes scurvy as ‘wonderful’, relating how it often came to men confined to their hammocks who, although appearing cheerful and well, ‘immediately expired’ on attempting to reach the deck.⁹ Of all these adjectives, ‘wonderful’ stands out the most, implying a perception of the disease that is simultaneously horrified and fascinated.¹⁰ It was a similar sense of wonder which prompted many of the Enlightenment’s scientific inquiries, and one which was clearly bound up in Pacific exploration from the 1760s onwards. He goes on to refer to the swelling of gum tissue (the scurvy symptom *par excellence*) in the rich imagery of ‘a luxuriancy of fungous flesh’, an especially poignant description and a deeply ironic one considering the scant provisioning of Anson’s ships and contrasting absence of the nutrition required to stave off the disease. Walter invokes what I have come to view in my analysis as the dialectics of absence and presence in discussions of scurvy in South Seas voyaging. By his own account scurvy is malevolent and invisible, yet it contains the ability to drastically alter the human form with excess appendages on the faces and limbs of its sufferers; a startling juxtaposition of growth and decay. Its incipience and fertility uncannily resemble the way later explorers came to perceive the Pacific – and Tahiti in particular – as a fecund paradise. Viewed through the lens of shipboard life, Tahiti, with its abundance of breadfruit and apparently licentious women, came to represent everything denied to the malnourished sailor during his arduous passage.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁰ Lamb gives examples of some of the complimentary language used to describe the “genius” of scurvy in *Scurvy: The Disease of Discovery*, 42.

Jonathan Lamb's work on South Seas exploration questions assumptions about enlightenment imperialism, arguing that colonial expansion in the Pacific from the late seventeenth-century onwards was a complex and fragmented affair, less homogenous than earlier (post)colonial and anthropological accounts have made out. He investigates the destabilising effects of encounters that confronted explorers' perceptions of their selves, and their cultural baggage, in the face of unknown lands and people. This instability is one that Lamb views as pathological as he proposes, in his chapter on scurvy, that the conception of the Pacific was moderated by the imbalances and deficiencies – cultural and chemical – that attended exploration. The morbid attraction that Walter displays toward scurvy seems to support Lamb's reading of infatuation, 'a word serving not to explain but to collocate certain gestures and actions belonging to the mental state induced by scurvy in the South Seas.'¹¹ This was particularly acute on Pacific voyages in the form of heightened 'intensities' and 'sensations'. As examples, Lamb cites Bougainville's belief that he had found Cythera at Tahiti, Bligh's rationale for the mutiny on HMS *Bounty* and Cook's erratic behaviour on his third Pacific voyage; that latter of which I will discuss in some detail later on.¹² My analysis differs from Lamb's in that I do not view these reactions to scurvy as exclusive to South Seas voyaging. Rather, I read the ambiguous responses towards scurvy as a wider phenomenon than the limited numbers of Pacific voyagers it also affected, to include metropolitan responses to the texts they generated and to the disease itself. These reflected how the disease was thought of and treated, by those directly concerned with the voyages and by readers whose interests were more detached, both at home in Britain and in the Pacific Ocean. In doing so, I aim to demonstrate how studying

¹¹ Lamb, *Preserving the Self*, 122.

¹² *Ibid.*, 124.

scurvy in the metropolis contrasts with the way we think about its treatment and perception at sea.

Anson's voyage triggered a recognition of the problem scurvy posed to the navy, and as a result the Admiralty, along with the scientific community, slowly began to take notice. It is very likely that Walter's narrative influenced physicians in their writings on scurvy, particularly those of James Lind and later, Thomas Trotter, whose experiments and hypotheses both drew on experiential accounts of the disease.¹³ Like Walter, both writers had recourse to written and oral accounts of naval experience and their scientific writings are conflated, and often at odds with, their experience of the disease ashore. James Cook's three Pacific voyages also played a prominent role in this process of recognition and experiment although, for reasons I will cite later, Cook's relationship to the disease was more of a 'fraught endeavour' (to borrow Vanessa Smith's phrase) than was immediately apparent.

This first part of this chapter engages with debates around scurvy's treatment, prevention and cure from the mid-eighteenth century by examining records from both significant naval voyages – particularly those of James Cook and William Bligh – as well as from prominent physicians at home. In particular I will be addressing the narrative style of these writers in order to analyse the way they attempt to explain and treat scurvy, as well as considering the factors that made Cook's expeditions comparatively successful in terms of scurvy prevention (reportedly he would lose no men to scurvy, although the evidence suggests at least one man, the *Adventure's* cook, succumbed to the disease).¹⁴ Secondly, it

¹³ Trotter described his experiences of scurvy on slave ships. See Thomas Trotter, *Observations on the Scurvy*, (London: T. Longman, 1792), 61-69.

¹⁴ It seems likely that Murdoch Mahony, the *Adventure's* cook, died of the disease. His death is noted by Forster during commentary on an outbreak of scurvy. See Michael Hoare (ed.), *The Resolution Journal of Johann Reinhold Forster 1772-1775*, 4 vols. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1982), II, 316.

will consider shipboard discipline as a prophylactic and its wider implications beyond the scope of disease control. Cook had a specific regime in place which he believed controlled scurvy, and scientific institutions took this very seriously: on returning from his second voyage he was awarded the Copley Medal by the Royal Society for his paper in their *Philosophical Transactions* (January 1776) which reported on his methods.¹⁵ The relationships Cook's crews formed with the island peoples of the Pacific were predicated on the necessary acquisition of fresh supplies of food and water, and this chapter will place friendship bonds (or *taios*) within the overall context of a program of health preservation. Finally, I consider the extent to which the gradual erosion of authority and disciplinary structures in the voyages of Cook and Bligh resulted in death and mutiny – and how ideas about scurvy were linked to these.

The Empire at Home: Quacks and Physicians – Francis Spilsbury, James Lind and Others

On August 13th 1794, the *Oracle and Public Advertiser* recorded the death of Dr. James Lind, 'formerly physician to the Royal Hospital at Haslar and well known to the Medical World by his writings.'¹⁶ Lind had authored successful works on many aspects of naval health, as the frequent notices of reprints in newspapers make clear. Just below this concise obituary, between the price of grains and a purported cure for venereal disease, is an advertisement for Spilsbury's Antiscorbutic Drops. It is a fitting irony; Lind's *A Treatise of the Scurvy* (first published in 1753) was the inaugural text on this disease: it was the first to

¹⁵ James Cook, "The Method Taken for Preserving the Health of the Crew of His Majesty's Ship the *Resolution*," *Philosophical Transactions* 66 (1776): 402-406.

¹⁶ *Oracle and Public Advertiser* (London, England), August 13, 1794.

provide a relatively complete history of scurvy, but more significantly, it was the first text to record what could, by today's standards, be called a clinical trial of scurvy patients.

The advertisements for Spilsbury's drops and the work of James Lind give us two reference points for understanding scurvy in the eighteenth century. Institutionally regarded as a serious problem and a threat to British overseas expansion, scurvy prompted genuine scientific enquiry from the mid-eighteenth century. But the public perception of scurvy might have been altogether different. As the reputed success (at least commercially) of Spilsbury's drops suggests, scurvy was a catch-all diagnosis, as popular in the public imagination as it was repulsive. Scurvy was a word in popular usage in the eighteenth century and signalled many things besides the denotation of disease. It became a cultural byword for corruption and pestilence in general. The premier lexicographer, Samuel Johnson, included the following amongst the definitions in his *A Dictionary of the English Language*, published in 1755:

SCURVILY. *adv.* [from *scurvy*] Vilely; basely; coarsely. It is seldom used but in a ludicrous sense. [...]

SCURVY. *adj.* [from *scurf*, *scurfy*, *scurvy*]

1. Scabbed; covered with scabs; diseased with the scurvy.
2. Vile; bad; sorry; worthless; contemptible; offensive.¹⁷

Johnson's definition provides some further connotations to this word. The connection between scurvy and baseness or coarseness is indicative of something much broader than the clinical description of disease. There are sexual connotations, for instance, and it is interesting to note the comparisons between the 'scabbed' nature of scurvy and those of venereal diseases, such as syphilis. Sailors certainly suffered from both afflictions, and cures marketed towards scurvy were often identical to those aimed at venereal disease,

¹⁷ Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, 2 vols., II, (London: W. Strahan, 1755), 643.

with mercurials being at the centre of the debate. The prominent naval surgeon John Atkins had discussed the treatment of venereal diseases by mercury at some length and a survey of eighteenth-century medical literature throws up a number of publications discussing the relative merits of such remedies.¹⁸ The scabs themselves, not something typically associated with scurvy today, imply a sweeping symptomology: there was clearly a large disparity between those afflicted with skin diseases causing scabs and actual scurvy sufferers. For those in the dispensary business, it was simply an issue of doubling up: drops advertised for scurvy would often additionally cure leprosy.¹⁹

When Johnson referred to the ‘ludicrous sense’ in which the word scurvily was most often used, he was, according to his own definition, representing this as ‘[b]urlesque; merry; sportive; exciting laughter’ – a now obsolete usage – but not altogether dissimilar from the current definition, meaning something more akin to ‘laughably absurd’.²⁰ Scurvy was more than a disease in the eighteenth century; it was an epithet, a form of repartee, a particular way of communicating. With the vast majority of people not having access to Johnson’s – or any – dictionary (or medical text), it is not difficult to see why scurvy meant so many different things to so many people. By implication, we can perhaps begin to understand how this disorder was confused and conflated amongst the general populace and how there were several ways of treating it – some of which involved inducing the very merriment behind Johnson’s sense of the ludicrous, as we shall see.

The cultural associations attached to Johnson’s readings of scurvy are appropriately exemplified in a popular song from the period. Actor and comic writer, George Alexander

¹⁸ John Atkins, *The navy-Surgeon: or, a practical system of surgery* (London: Ward and Chandler, 1734), 227-264.

¹⁹ Roy Porter, *Health for Sale: Quackery in England, 1660-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 116-117.

²⁰ Johnson, *A Dictionary*, II, 78.

Stevens, produced a hugely popular and commercially successful collection of songs in 1772. His ‘Song of the Scurvy’ is a notable example. Stevens made a living performing the balladesque songs at markets and other public gatherings, which came to be read aloud by many subsequent performers.²¹ The opening stanzas read:

Eve tempted to err, ill betide the sad time,
Ye modern wives pity her fall,
Since we her sons suffer for Grandmamma’s crime,
The *Scurvy* has tainted us all.

To curb the contagion which putrifies here,
In vain have the Faculty try’d;
Its pestilent symptoms offensive appear
In vulgar eruptions of pride.²²

Stevens’s song masterfully manages to capture the bodily corruption of scurvy with references to eruptions and putrefaction but transplants them into the public sphere, associating them with the moral contaminations of vanity, sex and pride, and poking fun at them. The song is deliberately ambiguous as to whether it is evoking ‘pestilent symptoms’ in the medical or metaphorical sense but the ‘vulgar eruptions’ certainly function as a sexual, and sexually diseased, double entendre. By the end of the song it is unclear whether Stevens is actually referring to scurvy in the medical sense at all; rather it appears that he is ascribing scurvy-like attributes, in the adverbial sense, to venereal diseases, which have corrupted society as the ‘Faculty’ vainly try, and fail, to abate their spreading which only ‘putrifies’ further in the absence of a cure.

Part of that ‘Faculty’ was Francis Spilsbury, who in 1775 had penned the ambitiously titled *A Treatise on the Method of Curing the Gout, Scurvy, Leprosy,*

²¹ James Sambrook, “Stevens, George Alexander (1710?–1784),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed 30 June, 2017. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26422>.

²² George Alexander Stevens, *Songs, comic, and satirical* (Oxford: J. Waller, 1772), 119-121.

Elephantiasis, Evil and other Cutaneous Eruptions. He was one of the more prominent ‘quacks’, an emerging class of quasi-physicians who, in the second half of the eighteenth century, were monopolising the treatment of the sick and making significant sums of money doing so. Medical histories of scurvy have an obvious bias towards the disease at sea; understandable enough given its vast literature and the proponents involved. However, Francis Spilsbury adds an interesting dimension to the discussion of scurvy by focusing on the land-dwelling urban poor, publishing pamphlets and advertisements for alleged cures which would certainly have had a readership beyond those with sea-faring connections. Historians are often tempted to explain scurvy, particularly the delay between the results of Lind’s experiments and the Admiralty’s sanctioning of lemon juice in the 1790s, in terms of a series of unfortunate hindrances and abeyances prompted by the piecemeal style of Lind’s writing, the contrasting opinions of other eminent physicians and the role of James Cook. But Spilsbury himself has a crucial role to play in this debate.

To understand Spilsbury’s influence we must first understand his clientele. It is tempting to assume that those who acquired the drops in a ‘5s. bottle’ were both literate, in order to read the advertisements, and possessed a disposable income, for buying them, as Roy Porter has suggested.²³ But probably neither of these assumptions are true. First, the newspaper reading public in the eighteenth century was a diverse body which encompassed all orders of society. Hannah Barker, amongst others, has stressed that ‘[n]either the inability to read nor the high cost of newspapers prevented the bulk of the population from discovering their contents.’²⁴ Newspapers were frequently read aloud, in public houses as well as domestic settings, and ‘those who could read were expected to read aloud to those

²³ Porter, *Health for Sale*, 47.

²⁴ Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society 1695-1855* (Essex: Pearson, 2000), 63.

who could not.²⁵ Publications were also purchased by syndicates (two or more people sharing the cost of a subscription). Second, respecting such financial implications, what the advertisements do not make clear is that Spilsbury offered services to the poor free of charge. There are several references to these services, in his own publications and in those of physicians responding to them. In a 1777 pamphlet, Spilsbury claimed that ‘on Tuesdays and Fridays, from nine in the morning to three in the afternoon, I will give advice and attendance gratis, at my own house, to poor persons of either sex, and of any age.’²⁶ Spilsbury was experimenting on or with the poor and, if we are to believe Thomas Prosser’s reply to his pamphlet, on a grand scale as he speaks of the ‘quantities in gallons, quarts and kegs, [sent] to our neighbouring kingdoms, to be discretionally distributed by his agents to the poor.’²⁷ Prosser’s description, with its discretionary agents (dealers?), suggests a large supply chain, pushing outwards from the city to the provinces. Spilsbury would have become immensely wealthy from the sale of his drops. The scale of his enterprise and the amount of advertising he takes up certainly makes him analogous with other leading nostrum-merchants of the day, such as Dr Robert James. James’s ‘Fever Powders’ were deemed comparatively expensive at 2s 6d for two (still cheaper than Spilsbury) and sold 1,612,800 times in a space of twenty years.²⁸

If contemporary accounts are to be believed, Spilsbury’s drops were worse than dubious; they were outright dangerous. Prosser contends that they contained mercury and the side-effects of taking them included ‘fevers, consumptions, salivations, or inflammations of the brain’ and goes on to speculate that ‘a considerable number of those

²⁵ Barker, *Newspapers*, 53.

²⁶ Francis Spilsbury, *Free Thoughts on Quacks and their Medicines* (London: J. Wilkie, 1777), 129.

²⁷ Thomas Prosser, *The Oeconomy of Quackery considered, in a Reply to Mr. Spilsbury’s Pamphlet* (London: J. Bew, 1777), 15.

²⁸ Porter, *Health for Sale*, 45, 52.

[who take them] die of an imprudent use of mercury.’²⁹ James Adair, in his essay on fashionable diseases, claimed to have performed an analysis of Spilsbury’s drops, finding that they consisted of ‘only the common antimonial wine disguised.’³⁰ Modern medical historians generally agree that they contained both mercury and antimony.³¹ Mercury is now known to be highly toxic in all forms and the use of mercurials in medicine vastly declined in the twentieth century. The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry lists ‘lung damage, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea’ among the symptoms of short-term exposure to mercury. Exposure at high levels can cause ‘irritability, shyness, tremors, changes in vision or hearing, and memory problems’ and permanent brain damage.³² That an official institution such as this continues to list ‘shyness’ as a side effect of mercury poisoning speaks to a very eighteenth-century sense of uncertainty regarding clinical diagnostics which appear to have continued right into the modern day.

The symptoms of mercury poisoning bear similarities with those side-effects Prosser mentions. On the effects of being treated with the drops, Prosser gave some further examples from cases he had met with:

Know then, Mr. Spilsbury, a Mr. Prescott, of Medhurst, in Sussex, took your drops till he found his mouth sore and teeth loose. A person in the service of the Right Hon. The Earl of Egremont, at Petworth, in the same county, was also a customer of yours, and he believes a great sufferer in his health by your Universal Antiscorbutic Drops; he was severely salivated, and reduced to a low hectic state of health, and ill a great part of the winter before last, and the following spring...³³

²⁹ Prosser, *Oeconomy of Quackery*, 13.

³⁰ James Makittrick Adair, *Essay on Fashionable Diseases* (London: T. P. Bateman, 1790), 193.

³¹ Baron, “Sailors’ scurvy before and after Lind,” 322.

³² Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, ‘ToxFAQs™ for Mercury’, accessed June 30, 2017, <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tf.asp?id=113&tid=24>.

³³ Prosser, *Oeconomy of Quackery*, 16.

The sore mouths and loose teeth bore an obvious and unfortunate resemblance to the disorder they were intended to abate. It is interesting to note also the changes in personality that can result from mercury poisoning as they intersect quite obviously with those of scurvy, particularly in the form of alterations in aural and ocular perceptions.³⁴ It is quite likely that some sailors on Pacific voyages had access to these drops and we might speculate that many suffered the effects of mercury poisoning, instead of and in addition to, scurvy. That being said, the cures at a naval surgeon's disposal could be equally as pernicious. Wayne Myers suggests that a 'ship's medical personnel, if any, were probably frequently as dangerous as they were therapeutic', and reminds us that a favourite curative, the 'elixir vitriol' which James Lind used in his clinical trial of 1747, was composed of dilute sulfuric acid.³⁵

Spilsbury deflected accusations about mercury in his pamphlet, claiming that he had witnessed patients 'who complain of all the symptoms which are found to affect the mouth after Mercury has been taken [...] which affection was intirely and solely owing to a mere scorbutic habit of their body.'³⁶ In such cases, we can only imagine a further course of the drops being dished out and sick patients (or perhaps more appropriately, customers) staying sick. We should not underestimate the detrimental effects of Spilsbury's dispensary in his treatment of the poor, and in contributing to the general misunderstanding of scurvy's signs and symptoms.

Spilsbury played an important and overlooked part in the debate which has led historians to question why there was such a delay between James Lind's discovery of the

³⁴ Some of these are discussed by Lamb in *Preserving the Self*, 125.

³⁵ Wayne Myers, "Cook the Physician," in *Exploration in Alaska: Captain Cook Commemorative Lectures*, ed. Antoinette Shalkop (Anchorage: Cook Inlet Historical Society, 1980), 60-61.

³⁶ Spilsbury, *Free Thoughts*, 43.

efficacy of citrus fruits in curing and preventing scurvy, and the sanctioning of this model by the Admiralty in 1795. While the arguments put forward by recent scholars such as Jeremy Hugh Baron are convincing, historians of scurvy have generally confined its key players to a relatively small tranche of eighteenth-century society consisting of naval physicians, James Cook and those in senior positions in the naval institution. But Spilsbury's writings, the ubiquitousness and popularity of his useless drops, and his particular attention to the poor (he speaks of his experienced 'gathered in attending such a number of patients of *that class*' [my emphasis]) reveal another, broader, section of society which he was attempting to represent.³⁷ To the twenty-first century reader, Spilsbury's writings can be read partly as an attempt to justify his dispensary and his practice as a quack physician. However, his theorising on diseases, and particularly scurvy, has a certain correlation with the work of more established practitioners like Lind. Spilsbury maintained that land-scurvy and sea-scurvy were in fact two different diseases. In this way he was able to sustain two markets for his drops by suggesting that treatments for the disorder at sea would be rendered ineffective on land. By the second edition of his *Treatise* Lind stated that he believed 'the scurvy is not a hodge-podge or complication of various different disease, but is itself a simple identical malady.'³⁸ Yet his text still included the chapter on the divisions commonly made between land and sea scurvy and, although Lind believed these to be misnomers, he had by its third and final edition failed to single out a cure, a subject which I will address in some detail later.³⁹ Spilsbury capitalised on these confusions and alleged distinctions. He lambasted the diet of fresh foods recommended by physicians and used successfully by James Cook:

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁸ James Lind, *A treatise on the scurvy. In three parts* (2nd ed., London: A. Millar, 1757), 351.

³⁹ See Lind, *A treatise*, (3rd ed., London: S. Crowder, 1772), 29-40.

[T]heir recommending so strongly the use of vegetables, such, for instance, as brooklime, water-cresses, scurvy-grass, &c, &c, and all on no other foundation but their happening to have been found indeed of real service in the case of the *sea-scurvy*. They do not consider that these two disorders, though of similar christening, are as distinct, different, and opposite in their nature, species and characters, as the very causes and principles themselves which give them rise.⁴⁰

In establishing his own variant of the disease, land-scurvy, and with land-dwellers being considerably more populous than those with sea-faring tendencies, Spilsbury opened up an extensive market for himself in both urban and rural England. His dismissal of foodstuffs with some genuine antiscorbutic properties meant that his scurvy-suffering patients, if they took his advice, would probably remain in need of constant treatment. Among the causes Spilsbury ascribed to land-scurvy, the most prominent were ‘frights, surfeits and accidents’.⁴¹ If we consider how many of the poorer classes were prone to injuries, anxieties and repetitive diets, we get some idea of just how extensive his clientele might have been; certainly enough to warrant the gallons, kegs and supply chains that Prosser speaks of. Spilsbury (like many others) believed that scurvy was the result of an excess of “bad blood”, attributable to a variety of causes that no amount of vegetable matter could cleanse.⁴² He recommended the use of ‘some more powerful agent’ – minerals such as mercury and antimony – and while admitting they were poisonous, he claimed to have rendered them ‘so tamed, or corrected, as to make them subservient to the greatest end.’⁴³ Refining these elements to make them safe is a complex and contentious process even now, so it is highly doubtful that Spilsbury was as erudite in this faculty as he claims. But his body of work and the advertisements for his dispensary proves that there was a wider market beyond that of naval physicians and sailors, who had scurvy or were

⁴⁰ Spilsbury, *Free Thoughts*, 85-86.

⁴¹ Francis Spilsbury, *A treatise on the method of curing the gout, scurvy, leprosy, elephantiasis, evil, and other cutaneous eruptions*. (3rd ed., London: J. Wilkie, 1775), 70.

⁴² Spilsbury, *A Treatise*, 69.

⁴³ Spilsbury, *Free Thoughts*, 65, 114.

susceptible to it, and were being experimented upon in unorthodox and dangerous ways. By the time of James Lind's death, forty years after his first published work on the disease, scurvy remained a confused and confusing disorder.

James Lind's 1753 *Treatise* was dedicated to George Anson, then first Lord of the Admiralty 'as a just reward for the great and signal services done to the British Nation.' We might assume then that Lind's readership would cover those with naval interests, learned men and possibly those general readers who remembered Anson's triumphant return to England in 1744 and the terrible losses that accompanied his voyage. For the most part, Lind's *Treatise* typifies the structure of eighteenth-century medical debates. Graham Sutton, who has analysed Lind's work in the context of documents relating to his early naval career, proposes that eighteenth-century medical practice was 'not based on reason and experiment, but on custom and eminent opinions – especially in a hierarchical institution such as the Navy.'⁴⁴ A large portion of the *Treatise* (forty pages in the first edition) is given over to constructing a 'critical history', essentially a literature review, of accounts of scurvy from antiquity to the present day. However, Lind establishes his position in the preface by noting that before his publication 'no physician conversant with the sea, had undertaken to throw light upon the subject' and, as the first, he would need to 'remove a great deal of rubbish.'⁴⁵ He acknowledges his distance from the authority of precedent and custom by recourse to his experience as a naval surgeon. What distinguishes Lind from his contemporaries, and from scurvy theorists in particular, is that he conducted what might have been the first clinical trial on scurvy patients. On the *Salisbury* in 1747, Lind took six pairs of sailors who were suffering from the disease and provided each with

⁴⁴ Graham Sutton, "Putrid Gums and 'Dead Men's Cloaths': James Lind aboard the *Salisbury*," *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 96 (2003): 608.

⁴⁵ James Lind, *A treatise of the scurvy. In three parts.* (Edinburgh: Sands, Murray & Cochran, 1753), vii-viii.

one of six scurvy ‘cures’: cider, elixir vitriol (sulfuric acid), vinegar, sea-water, oranges and lemons, and a purgative mixture. Lind related the outcome of his trial as follows:

The consequence was, that the most sudden and visible good effects were perceived from the use of oranges and lemons; one of those who had taken them, being at the end of six days fit for duty [...] The other was the best recovered of any of in his condition; and now being pretty well, was appointed to attend the rest of the sick.⁴⁶

This has led to the common assumption that James Lind found the cure for scurvy, which is not quite true. Lind’s experiment had revealed that citrus fruits could cure scurvy more quickly and effectively than other remedies at a naval surgeon’s disposal but of course Lind did not know that this was due to the high quantity of Vitamin C in the fruits, as the vitamin was not synthesised until as late as the 1930s.⁴⁷ The question remains though as to why Lind’s findings were not sanctioned by the Admiralty until 1795, a year after his death. Here I have extracted some of the more convincing arguments that explain the forty-two year delay from the publication of the *Treatise* to the recommendation of the Board of Sick and Wounded Sailors that all Navy ships carry lemon juice in 1795.

The first and most pertinent explanation in relation to the narratives of James Cook’s voyages is a culture of silence surrounding scurvy. Sutton’s analysis of the *Salisbury* logs finds that ‘the weekly roll-call shows at most one or two, and usually none, as sick during this entire voyage.’⁴⁸ When Lind performed his controlled trial on twelve scorbutic sailors they were all apparently so ill they were unable to attend their duties, being confined to the fore-hold (‘a proper apartment for the sick’).⁴⁹ Two of them, the ‘worst patients’, were obviously pretty far gone with the disease. And yet, officially, none

⁴⁶ Lind, *A treatise*, 193.

⁴⁷ Carpenter, *History of Scurvy*, 197.

⁴⁸ Sutton, “Putrid Gums”, 607.

⁴⁹ Lind, *A treatise*, 149.

of these men was sick. From this we might conclude that they were reluctant to diagnose scurvy, perhaps because of the stigma attached to the disease, its resemblance to other disorders, or, as Sutton stipulates, a ‘culture of denial of sickness, at least at sea.’⁵⁰ I am inclined in general to believe the latter, although I would modify Sutton’s outlook on scurvy in particular. Sickness and sick lists were common on Pacific voyages in the eighteenth century. Cook and Bligh freely admit the presence of venereal diseases, for example, but it is only with scurvy that their admissions hold back.⁵¹ Bligh disputed his surgeon’s opinion that the crew were suffering from scurvy; Cook barely acknowledges it at all, yet we know from other journal-keepers that it was present at various stages on at least the first two voyages, sometimes when Cook remained silent on the matter. The shame and stigma attached to scurvy on ships was clearly a factor in its misdiagnosis and underdiagnosis too. Johnson’s definitions and Stevens’s song, which I quoted earlier, certainly speak to these associations: scurvy was viewed as an ‘offensive’ disease with the ability to ‘taint’ those in its proximity. For an example of this in action, we can look to William Bligh’s refusal to directly acknowledge its presence on his *Bounty* voyage of 1787-89, dismissing his surgeon’s findings (‘the Doctor insists upon it that it is Scurvey’), and arguing that William Brown and others were instead suffering from ‘Rheumatic Complaints’.⁵² Having sailed with Cook, Bligh was clearly mindful of how scurvy could undermine a commander’s authority, something I discuss later in this chapter. I will return to these examples in more detail but it is clear that naval commanders were hesitant to

⁵⁰ Sutton, “Putrid Gums,” 608.

⁵¹ Cook anticipated interest surrounding the introduction of venereal diseases to the Pacific Islands, often re-drafting passages concerning it, such as at Tahiti in June, 1769. See J. C. Beaglehole (ed.), *The Journals of Captain James Cook*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1955–1968), I, *The Voyage of the Endeavour, 1768–1771*, 98–99.

⁵² Owen Rutter (ed.), *The Log of the Bounty*, 2 vols. (London: Golden Cockerel Press, 1937), II, 360-364.

admit having scurvy on their ships; it was a mark of failure in their duty to look after the men beneath them.

Also absent from Lind's log is any mention of the oranges and lemons which he supplied his trial patients with, suggesting they were not considered worthy of recording in the ship's log because they were privately purchased. It should further be observed that Lind's experiment was innovative in the sense that it was uncommon for a naval surgeon to carry out such experiments in an age of practice dominated by opinion and speculation. Lind did not draw special attention to his trial because he did not want to alienate himself from the very demographic he was targeting through publication.

There were many remedies already in place to tackle scurvy. The profitability of Spilsbury's drops as late as 1794 is indicative of the public's desire to procure treatments that were neatly packaged and widely promoted over common fruits which would not last long at sea anyway. Lind's own 'critical history' also omits any analysis of texts by earlier explorers who recommended treatment with citrus fruits, such as Richard Hawkins.⁵³ Aware of the problem of preserving fruit at sea, Lind proposed the use of 'robs', a kind of vapour distillation made from boiling the juice of lemons which would have vastly reduced its Vitamin C content. It was an expensive procedure which the Navy would be unable to sanction on a large scale, although it did have its advocates, among them Joseph Banks who 'flew to the lemon juice' at the onset of symptoms in April 1769 and reported that 'in less than a week [his] gums became as firm as ever'.⁵⁴ We can speculate that either Banks was lucky in procuring a quantity of lemon juice with sufficient Vitamin C content, or that he was receiving enough of the vitamin from the fresh food Cook was bartering for on

⁵³ Baron, "Sailors' scurvy before and after Lind," 318.

⁵⁴ J.C. Beaglehole (ed.), *Endeavour Journal of Joseph Banks 1768-1771*, 2 vols. (London: Angus and Robertson, 1962), I, 251.

shore. Either way, it is probable that Banks had heard of Lind even if Cook had not: Lind had read a paper on sea water distillation to the Royal Society in 1762.⁵⁵ Banks's private stash is a status symbol and something to which ordinary sailors, unlike the picked men on Cook's voyages, probably would not have had access.

Prior to the *Endeavour's* departure, Banks had engaged in a private correspondence with Nathaniel Hulme, who had provided him with a veritable arsenal of various forms of lemon juice and it is possible that some of these retained enough vitamin content to be effective.⁵⁶ Whether or not Banks shared this is unknown but there is no mention of it in other journals recalled from the expedition. What is most important about Banks's experience of scurvy is that he went to the lemon juice *after* having already taken his daily allowances of salted cabbage and wort, but confessing 'all this did not entirely check my distemper as to prevent my feeling some small effects of it.'⁵⁷ Had Banks not effectively performed a clinical trial on himself, with the results suggesting lemon juice was more effective than wort? This is a question historians of scurvy should consider. Admittedly, this "trial" was not as methodical as Lind's, but its results are just as conclusive. While Banks become a cause célèbre in London following John Hawkesworth's publication of the voyage, nobody at the admiralty twigged that he had made a worthy contribution to one of their long-standing medical debates.⁵⁸ Or, rather, they chose to ignore it in favour of the writings from more eminent physicians, and Cook's own report on the efficacy of wort, for which he was awarded the Royal Society's prestigious Copley medal. Banks's supply was not public knowledge on board the *Endeavour*; it was probably too good to share.

⁵⁵ Baron, 'Sailors' scurvy before and after Lind', 318.

⁵⁶ Beaglehole, *Journal of Banks*, II, 301.

⁵⁷ Beaglehole, *Journal of Banks*, I, 251.

⁵⁸ John Hawkesworth, *An Account of the Voyages Undertaken by the Order of His Present Majesty for Making Discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere*, 3 vols. (2nd ed., London: W Strahan & T. Cadell, 1773).

It is interesting to note that between the publication of the first (1753) and second (1757) edition Lind had changed his title from *A Treatise of the Scurvy* to *A Treatise on the Scurvy* [my emphasis]. This is significant: I think Lind realised that to write ‘of’ a disease was akin to writing about or around it; to write ‘on’ one was to imply contact and intervention. With the second edition being printed in London and not Edinburgh, Lind was aiming his work at a different, more scrupulous, readership and one much closer to the navy. Between 1753 and 1757 Lind would have gained increasing experience of scurvy patients at the Royal Hospital at Haslar and the title change, along with his expanded bibliography and occasional revisions, reflect this. In 1775, Francis Spilsbury, in an imitation of Lind, had likewise chosen to write *A treatise on* [...], and was certainly mindful of the plausibility of his writing to the reading public – his living depended on it. However, lexical semantics aside, the essence of Lind’s work remained unaltered. By the third and final 1772 edition, he went as far to suggest that ‘*the principal and main predisposing cause... is a manifest and obvious quality of the air, viz. its moisture.*’⁵⁹ In the 1772 edition, when James Cook was on his second voyage, Lind had ultimately admitted defeat. In its opening pages he wrote, ‘I shall not further enlarge; being persuaded I can carry my researches no further; without launching into a field of conjecture and uncertainty.’⁶⁰ As the numerous newspaper advertisements for his works show, Lind had reached a position within medical and naval circles where he could no longer speculate on the cause of scurvy without providing a sovereign cure. In conducting his trial, Lind demonstrated a progressive, empirical side to his research but, two decades later, he saw his ground-breaking experiment had made little impact in naval-scientific circles; it is

⁵⁹ James Lind, *A treatise* (London: S. Crowder et al., 1772), 64.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, v.

striking that nobody had even attempted to repeat it between 1753 and 1772.⁶¹ Like Cook in the Antarctic, Lind sensed he had come so far, and could go no further. It was precisely this prolonged uncertainty about scurvy and its origins – borne out in both popular accounts like Walter’s and in works from the higher echelons of naval-scientific enquiry – that allowed those with more utilitarian interests, such as Francis Spilsbury, to prosper.

Scurvy and British Exploration from 1768

During James Cook’s second voyage, as the *Resolution* and *Adventure* were making their way from New Zealand to Tahiti in July 1773, Cook sent a boat out to the *Adventure*, the companion ship under the command of Captain Tobias Furneaux, to enquire on the state of their crew. He noted, with some disappointment and annoyance that

I learnt that her cook was dead and about Twenty more were attacked with the Scurvy and Flux; at this time we had only three men on the Sick list and only one of them of the Scurvy[...]⁶²

It was not the first time that Cook felt it necessary to remind Furneaux of the importance of a fresh food diet; he had intervened in a similar manner at Queen Charlotte Sound, New Zealand, in May of that year. He was now noting – perhaps with some small degree of satisfaction – the perils of ignoring his advice. On the second voyage, Cook had begun, on occasion, to think of himself and his achievements in grandiose terms. On this occasion he wrote that, ‘To introduce any New article of food among Seamen, let it be ever so much for their good, requires both the example and the Authority of a Commander’.⁶³ Cook had begun a process of constructing an exemplary image of himself, perhaps solidified six

⁶¹ Jonathan Lamb claims that Gilbert Blane arranged to repeat the trial in 1793, one year before Lind’s death. See Lamb, *Scurvy: The Disease of Discovery*, 31.

⁶² J. C. Beaglehole, *The Journals of Captain Cook*, II, *The Voyage of the Resolution and Adventure*, 186-187.

⁶³ Beaglehole, *Resolution and Adventure*, 187.

months later during his sweep towards the South Pole. Surrounded by gigantic, untraversable blocks of ice, he entered this, now often quoted remark, in his journal:

I whose ambition leads me not only farther than any other man has been before me, but as far as I think it possible to go, was not sorry at meeting with this interruption, as it in some measure relieved us from the dangers and hardships, inseparable with the navigation of Southern Polar regions.⁶⁴

There is a tendency amongst Cook biographers, which culminated in the work of J. C. Beaglehole, to present Cook as the ambitious, infallible and masculine spearhead of exploration. When he is not conquering islands and peoples, he is conquering diseases, and scurvy in particular.⁶⁵

The self-image Cook had begun constructing on his second voyage – determined, laconic in his writing and occasional hyperboles, and careful in his attention to detail and discipline – is supported by his meetings with influential members of society, and their representations of him. Frances Burney, meeting him in 1772, recalled that he was ‘studiously wrapped up in his own purposes and pursuits; and apparently under a pressure of mental fatigue when called upon to speak, or stimulated to deliberate, upon any other.’⁶⁶ Burney’s characterisation is of an inward-looking figure who resists scrutiny, concerned only with his objectives as an explorer and with little patience, or ability, for anything else. It adds to the continuing popular perception of Cook as a man in control, a disciplinarian and a conqueror.

John Gascoigne, in a more recent, astute study of Cook and the context of his explorations has written that the low mortality rates on the second and third voyages

⁶⁴ Ibid., 322.

⁶⁵ See J. C. Beaglehole’s *The Life of Captain James Cook* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974). A study specific to scurvy is Francis E. Cuppage, *James Cook and the Conquest of Scurvy* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994).

⁶⁶ Frances Burney, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney, Vol. I*, (London: Edward Moxon, 1832), 271.

‘underlined the fact that Cook had conquered one of the most formidable obstacles to Pacific travel: the human body’s need for fresh food or its equivalent.’⁶⁷ While I do not disagree with Gascoigne here (because he is not saying Cook conquered scurvy *per se*) I do find the presentation of Cook as a ‘conqueror’ – especially one of diseases, but also more generally – problematic. It seems to me a limiting and obvious pitfall to assume that Cook was a deft commander who seamlessly carried out orders, conquering places, peoples and diseases in the process. Cook’s reservedness, his dislike of small talk and his preoccupation with work come through in Burney’s recollection. But I think it is possible, perhaps because of these characteristics (or lack of them) to project various assumptions about personality onto Cook: he seems to absorb them so readily. Is it not equally tenable that Burney’s recollection reveals something else about Cook; his lack of social skills or his single-mindedness, his limited Quaker education and interests? It is not my intention to debunk Cook’s personality or achievements, but I am interested in questioning assumptions about him, and how they affected the way he managed his crews and the outcome of his explorative career. I am not alone in doing this; a number of scholars have, since the early 2000s, questioned cultural and historical assumptions about Cook.

Referencing Cook’s idea of himself as the explorer who went the furthest, Nicholas Thomas reminds us that

Cook’s voyages and his life had passages quite unlike this heroic probing of the Antarctic. Elsewhere, he was not author of the script and director of the action. He was in the midst of a crowd, playing roles he had not chosen. He was a witness and a reporter – sometimes of things that had gone wrong.⁶⁸

In my analysis of scurvy on exploratory voyages, I am similarly interested in how Cook responded to events that had ‘gone wrong’ – in terms of the outbreaks of the disease he

⁶⁷ John Gascoigne, *Captain Cook: Voyager Between Worlds* (London: Continuum, 2007), 35.

⁶⁸ Thomas, *Discoveries*, xx.

was so reluctant to disclose, and his methods in establishing and maintaining discipline. The suggestion that Cook was not always ‘author of the script’ is another idea I hope to build on. Scurvy narratives, as Kenneth Carpenter has suggested, are abundant, and I am interested in the construction of Cook’s, and other eighteenth-century explorers’, scripts. Cook’s reticence about scurvy is, I think, designed to obfuscate his difficult relationship with it. Bligh and other explorers encountered similar difficulties in the way they presented scurvy in their written accounts. I am intrigued by the bewilderment and ineptitude of eighteenth-century explorers attempting to prevent and treat scurvy, as well as their determination and competence, which I assess below.

In attempting locate Cook within the culture of silence surrounding scurvy I described earlier, it is important to consider how other journal keepers on his voyages responded to disease. When Cook learnt about the outbreak of scurvy aboard the *Adventure* in July 1773 his observations and actions were detached and professional; he simply notes how many are sick or dead, in what circumstances and his plan of action. It is characteristic of the way Cook wrote about disease, even – as we shall see – when it was his own. Cook is willing to allow scurvy a place on his voyages, he will take notice but not accountability, and this is key to maintaining his authority and disciplinary control – especially in situations where, in Thomas’s words, things had ‘gone wrong’. However, other journal keepers were able to talk about scurvy in less prohibitive ways. The cantankerous naturalist Johann Reinhold Forster, accompanying Cook on the second voyage, also wrote about the outbreak of scurvy aboard the *Adventure*. Writing up the events of that day, he provides an insightful case study of one of the afflicted:

[He] was sick & had his legs contracted by the Scurvy [...] In Dusky Bay and at Queen Charlotte’s Sound he was quite better, & continued so for some weeks after we went out to Sea, but he fell again in and now his hand was quite

contracted, his Gums and Teeth bleeding, the Breath stinking, the Urine quite so stringy as in such who are far gone in the scurvy.⁶⁹

As well as providing a description of the bleeding gums and stinking breath – definitive symptoms of scurvy but not always recorded in voyage literature of the period – Forster is able to chart the progression of the sailor’s affliction as a journey from illness to health to illness again. For Cook, to do so would be an admission of a lack of control which he does not permit in his writing, where scurvy is given a place but not a voice.

The gulf between Cook and Forster in their descriptions of sickness is large enough to recall the distinctions – between the clinical and the personal – that have become cornerstones in debates about narrative medicine and medical humanities since the late-twentieth century. Such works are attentive to the different experiences medical narratives create depending on who is telling them. In a notable example of the work done in this field, Arthur Kleinman has suggested that there is in fact a dichotomy between disease narratives and illness narratives, and the differing voices of journal writers from Cook’s voyages, their observations and understandings of sickness, elucidate this divide. Kleinman proposes that diseases are ‘problems from the practitioner’s perspective... reconfigured *only* as an alteration in biological structure or functioning.’⁷⁰ The disease narrative, as he sees it, is one in which necessarily excludes a degree of empathy and understanding, where the disease is the byword for the role of the physician, which is to rectify a biological problem. I think this definition encapsulates Cook’s attitude to scurvy in terms of problems and restricted functioning: it is his default response to things that have ‘gone wrong’. He disempowers scurvy by ‘reconfiguring’ it; shaping his response in a way that determines a clinical perception of the problem, merely describing events in the most succinct way and

⁶⁹ Michael Hoare, *Journal of Forster*, II, 316.

⁷⁰ Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives*, 8.

outlining his treatment plan. To expand on this would be to invest scurvy with enough power to challenge his authority, as a naval commander and a writer.

Forster, on the other hand, is able to describe symptoms and variations – people are named, get better and fall ill again – the states of being sick and being well are not as binary as they are for Cook. His descriptions align him more with the set of characteristics belonging to the illness narrative, which Kleinman conceptualises as ‘how the sick person and the members of the family and wider network perceive, live with and respond to symptoms and disability.’⁷¹ The ability to respond to symptoms on a personal level – to empathise – is the key factor. Cook is only able to respond in terms of what he will do next, whereas Forster links sickness back to the network he is part of; his writing engages with the people and symptoms that Cook’s excludes. To understand what scurvy was really like on Cook’s voyages we must turn to the journals of his subordinates, not only because we are more likely to find it there, but because it is only in these materials that the impact of the disease can be assessed.

During the second voyage, Cook became seriously ill with an unidentified condition that has become the subject of much speculation. Though these theories may have merit, the problem with retrospective diagnoses of Cook’s illness is that it is almost always used as a means of explaining and, in some cases exculpating, his conduct towards the end of his career and his role in the skirmish that led to his death in 1779. The most notorious example of this retrospective diagnostic approach was one put forward by naval surgeon James Watt in the late 1970s. Watt’s hypothesis was that Cook was the victim of ‘a heavy ascaris (roundworm) infestation of the intestine’ which caused another kind of

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

nutritional deficiency (of the B complex of vitamins), producing side effects as varied as weight loss, anaemia, digestive disturbances, irritability, depression, memory loss and personality change.⁷² It is a tempting proposition because it is a more tangible one than the nutritional disorder most commonly associated with voyaging, scurvy. The roundworm is a living entity – a veritable presence in the midst of the absences associated with Vitamin C deficiency, which have already been discussed. Although Cook's gastrointestinal complaints on the second voyage, and the alteration in his mood and temperament on the third, broadly fit the model Watt proposes there are several problems with his theory, not least because there is no supporting evidence for it bar any correlation to the manifold symptoms he outlines. It is only a speculative, if educated, guess at what might have been responsible. Where it falls apart is its isolation of Cook from the rest of his crew where, logically, the redistribution of food on the voyages would mean that several others would probably have suffered similar gastrointestinal complaints. We might allow for the possibility that unidentified others suffered in silence; however, there is no corroborative evidence from the journals recalled from the voyages to suggest anyone else suffered gastrointestinal symptoms with such severity, barring those that died of unrelated illnesses such as dysentery, which claimed a large number of lives on the *Endeavour*, but in a much shorter space of time.

I think it is too convenient to attribute Cook's ill health, and especially his mood changes on the third voyage, to an ascaris infection with an open ended symptomology. Not only is the scientific evidence lacking but it underestimates Cook's behaviour and the choices he made throughout his voyaging career. Parasitic infections became easy to

⁷² James Watt, "Medical Aspects and Consequences of Cook's Voyages," in *Captain James Cook and His Times*, eds. Fisher and Johnston (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979), 155.

diagnose with technological advances in the twentieth century but it seems to me just as feasible to construct an argument suggesting Cook had a personality disorder and the gastrointestinal complaints were a coincidence (and not altogether uncommon on long voyages). His interactions with notable members of the public already discussed and his apathy and aggression on the third voyage would certainly support this. The point is that we should, on balance, hold Cook accountable for his actions, and not a parasitic roundworm.

I am more interested in the response to Cook's illness at the time than educated guesswork. Once again, there is a clear discrepancy between Forster and Cook in their commentary on this issue. The first signs of strain in Cook's health appeared at Dusky Sound on 6 May 1773. In his log, Cook only noted that he had been 'confined on board by a Cold'.⁷³ Forster, as ever, displays a sharper awareness of the Captain's symptoms which he describes as 'a fever, & a pain in the groin which terminated in a rheumatic swelling in the blade of the right foot [...]'.⁷⁴ Forster's diagnosis is slightly murky – it is not altogether clear how his observations are related – but they do show that Cook was clearly suffering from more than the common cold and that he made some effort to keep this secret. Later in the voyage, heading towards Easter Island on 27 February 1774, Cook's condition became much more serious: 'I was now taken ill of the Billious colick and so Violent as to confine me to my bed', he wrote, before handing management of the ship over to the first officer, Robert Cooper.⁷⁵ That Cook should name his condition as such is revealing. In James Adair's 1790 *Essay on Fashionable Diseases*, which I referred to earlier in light of the probable content of Spilsbury's Antiscorbutic Drops, he charts a chronology of fashionable

⁷³ Beaglehole, *Resolution and Adventure*, 129.

⁷⁴ Hoare, *Journal of Forster*, II, 273.

⁷⁵ Beaglehole, *Resolution and Adventure*, 333.

diseases in the latter half of the eighteenth century, explaining that ‘upwards of thirty years ago’ (so the 1760s) nervous diseases were the most vogueish. However, at the time of writing, a Dr. Coe had published a paper on ‘biliary concretions’ and this, he claims, ‘turned the tide of fashion. Nerves and nervous diseases were kicked out of doors and *bilious* became the fashionable term.’⁷⁶ It is interesting to find Cook, who was by no means a ‘fashionable’ member of society, caught up in this eighteenth-century medical drama.

That Cook would automatically select whatever was fashionable when speculating on his own health is both a tribute to the sway of popular writing on diseases, and perhaps a further indication of his unwillingness to enquire into aspects of sickness which he was reluctant to disclose. As Jonathan Lamb points out in his latest book, the gastroenterological symptoms of scurvy were often associated with bilious complaints.⁷⁷ Towards the end of the second voyage, Forster had noticed a more familiar aspect in Cook’s countenance. Entering the Strait of Magellan in December 1774, he remarked, ‘The Captain has a return of swelled feet & Obstructions, my Son likewise has swelled Legs, all owing to the Scurvy.’⁷⁸ It is clear that there was an outbreak of scurvy at this point; the *Resolution* had been at sea for some weeks past. Cook’s silence here is conspicuous. He did not enter anything at all on the date Forster noticed signs of scurvy in him, 8 December, claiming the day before there was ‘Nothing remarkable’ for him to record.⁷⁹ Whether or not Cook did have scurvy is perhaps beside the point, but Forster was by far the most assiduous chronicler on the voyage. What it shows is Cook’s participation in the

⁷⁶ Adair, *Fashionable Diseases*, 6.

⁷⁷ Lamb, *Scurvy*, 45.

⁷⁸ Hoare, *Journal of Forster*, IV, 689.

⁷⁹ Beaglehole, *Resolution and Adventure*, 584.

culture of silence surrounding scurvy, on a voyage where he was extremely proud of his impressively low mortality rate.

Cook, Science and the *Endeavour* expedition

By the time Cook was commissioned to chart the *Endeavour* in 1768, the discovery of new lands for curiosity or rivalry's sake was, ostensibly, no longer sufficient justification for public investment in naval expeditions; significant scientific returns were required in a process of legitimisation. This is what distinguished the *Endeavour* voyage from its Pacific precursors. The secret instructions issued to Lieutenant James Cook were explicit in this regard:

You are also carefully to observe the Nature of the Soil, and the Products thereof; the Beasts and Fowls that inhabit or frequent it, the fishes that are to be found in the Rivers or upon the Coast and in what Plenty; and in case you find any Mines, Minerals or valuable stones you are to bring home Specimens of each, as also such Specimens of the Seeds of the Trees, Fruits and Grains as you may be able to collect, and Transmit them to our Secretary that We may cause proper Examination and Experiments to be made of them.⁸⁰

This was the kind of scientific enquiry that framed the *Endeavour* voyage and Cook modelled his authority and intentions on performing these duties. It was a far cry from the vague objectives issued to Commodore Anson in 1740 who was sent to 'annoy' Spanish trading vessels and, basically, to see what treasure could be plundered.⁸¹ In addition to these instructions, Cook was ordered to experiment with a kind of malt drink during the voyage which was reputed for its antiscorbutic qualities.⁸² David MacBride had written of its positive effects in a series of essays published in 1764. MacBride had some limited

⁸⁰ Beaglehole, *Endeavour*, cclxxxii-cclxxxiii.

⁸¹ Williams, *The Prize of All the Oceans*, 1. Williams proposes that the voyage was intended to be 'more than a plundering raid' (11). However, the end result was that the treasure was almost all that remained of an expedition that had lost most of its ships and crews.

⁸² Beaglehole, *Endeavour*, 622.

experience of the disease at sea; he had served as mate on a hospital ship during the war of Austrian succession.⁸³ His writing on scurvy did not wholly rely on the ‘custom and eminent opinions’ (as Sutton puts it) that characterised eighteenth-century medical writing, but his *Experimental Essays* contains a not particularly well-articulated set of opinions on a variety of diseases and he does make recourse to the opinions of influential people; a letter from Dr. John Pringle, for example, is quoted at length. MacBride reveals that he, like Lind, had planned a trial on scurvy patients but, he explained, in order for it to be reliable his patients would need to be debarred use of all vegetables, and this ‘looked so like retarding men’s cures for the sake of experiment [it] put a stop to the further exhibition of the *wort* at the hospitals.’⁸⁴ MacBride was not prepared to go as far as Lind in his experimentations but he cited Lind’s *Treatise* and shared his opinion that ‘moisture in the atmosphere’ was the primary cause of scurvy.⁸⁵ However, he suggested that a proper experiment should be made with the malt concoction at sea and this, evidently, is what prompted the Admiralty’s instructions to Cook.

Before moving on to a discussion of Cook’s handling of scurvy, we should note that there is no evidence that Cook had ever read Lind’s *Treatise*. The same can be said for a number of mid to late eighteenth century explorers.⁸⁶ There is usually no reference to Lind in logs and journals kept by seamen, or in the private correspondence of captains of navy ships. Cook had possibly heard of Lind; Joseph Banks, as I speculated earlier, would

⁸³ John G. McEvoy, “David Macbride (1726-1778), chemist and physician,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Available online: <http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.york.ac.uk/view/article/17360>, accessed June 30, 2017.

⁸⁴ David MacBride, *Experimental Essays* (London: A. Millar, 1764), 174.

⁸⁵ MacBride, *Experimental Essays*, 175-178.

⁸⁶ The exception is a contemporaneous French voyage. John Dunmore notes that La Pérouse took a copy of Lind’s *Treatise* with him on his 1785–88 voyage. However, Dunmore suggests that it ‘had no discernible influence on La Pérouse’, who instead modelled his methods on Cook. See John Dunmore (ed.), *The Journal of Jean-François de Galaup de la Pérouse, 1785–1788*, 2 vols. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1994–95), I, c–cvi.

have been more likely to, but there is likewise no reference in his writings. Confusingly, a Dr. James Lind (also from Edinburgh) later accompanied Banks on his Iceland voyage but, as Carpenter explains, this was a namesake, and twenty years younger than the Lind who authored the 1753 *Treatise*.⁸⁷ In her work on the *Bounty* saga, Anne Salmond has envisioned William Bligh following Cook's methods and 'consulting his copies of James Lind's *A Treatise on Scurvy* and *On the Most Effectual Means of Preserving the Health of Seamen in the Royal Navy* at regular intervals.'⁸⁸ However, there is no citation linking this claim to any corroborative evidence and I have not found any mention of it in the *Bounty* logs. My instinct is that Lind was known and talked about in naval-scientific circles, but not heavily relied upon by those commanding expeditions; his works are not mentioned in ships' libraries the way published accounts of previous explorers were. There is a relationship between Cook and Lind in the sense that both believed a fresh food diet, along with cleanliness and personal hygiene, could help to prevent and cure scurvy; in this regard Cook was arguably more fastidious than Lind, although he was influenced by the recent *Dolphin* voyages to a greater extent than some earlier scholars have acknowledged.⁸⁹ As writers of disease narratives which were linked to discoveries of the unknown, both were acutely aware of, and guarded against, uncertainty. The link between discovery, disease and medicine is one underpinned by Rita Charon, who writes in *Narrative Medicine* (2006) that

Danger is contained in the unknown [...] The imperative to sail across the unsailed sea, to settle wild frontier lands, or to peer within the human body all emit from the refusal to be frightened in the face of the unknown.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Carpenter, *History of Scurvy*, 80.

⁸⁸ Anne Salmond, *Bligh: William Bligh in the South Seas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 122-23.

⁸⁹ Cook, "Precursors of Cook," 42-43.

⁹⁰ Rita Charon, *Narrative Medicine: Honouring the Stories of Illness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 49.

Cook and Lind both engaged with scurvy through this process of danger-containment. Lind used a scattergun approach as he offered up a vast number of methods to prevent and cure scurvy; Cook preferred reticence. Danger-containment is the link between these two writers who probably never encountered one another. I think this is as definitive as we can be about the relationship between the two: it is much more likely that Lind was familiar with Cook's writing than the other way round, given the enormous popular appeal of voyage publications.

Charon's work further reminds us of the difficulties of relating to diseases as entities or 'things'. This has particular resonance for scurvy which is antithetical to a biological entity in the way a virus is, for instance, as it results not from a 'thing' – a contagion – but a deficit (an absence) of a certain nutritional chemical which, paradoxically for its sufferers, resulted in a sporadic and varied symptomology. British epidemiologist F. G. Crookshank summarised this idea adroitly by claiming

[I]n hospital jargon 'diseases' are 'morbid entities', and medical students fondly believe that these 'entities' somehow exist *in rebus Naturæ* and were discovered by their teachers much as was America by Columbus.⁹¹

Rather, as Crookshank explained, diseases are really labels created to group together a collection of like symptoms into something meaningful. The problem with scurvy, as the works I have cited so far make clear, is that it was an especially enigmatic disease given the variety of symptoms it produced, and the inconsistencies within these. It was, by the rationale of those witnessing its effects, quite a meaningless disease. In the eighteenth century theories abounded about the aetiology of scurvy, its treatment and prevention. Its most striking features were undoubtedly those affecting the face. For

⁹¹ F. G. Crookshank, "The Importance of a Theory of Signs and a Critique of Language," in *The Meaning of Meaning*, eds. C. K. Odgen and I. A. Richards (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company Inc., 1927), 342.

Walter, this was the ‘luxuriancy of fungous flesh’ in the gums of the sailors aboard the *Centurion*. Elsewhere, in similar language, Jonathan Lamb has described it as ‘a strange plethora of gum tissue sprouting from the mouth, which immediately rotted and lent the victim’s breath an abominable odour.’⁹² But, although immediately visible, these were some of the least life-threatening manifestations of the disease. Definitions of scurvy remain unstable, but one of the best I have come across so far is in a Royal Society of Chemistry publication from 1991, which describes it as:

A disease which produces haemorrhaging into tissues, bleeding gums, loose teeth, anaemia and general weakness. However, contemporary descriptions of individual cases bring home to us the unpleasantness of scurvy.⁹³

While accurate, it is telling that this literally ‘textbook’ definition makes recourse to first-hand accounts to convey something less tangible about scurvy; an unpleasantness which can only really be appreciated by turning to the historical literature. The ‘specialised and unusual business of maritime exploration’, as Thomas succinctly puts it, was necessarily a project of definition and it is worth considering the conflict between Cook and scurvy as one between a cartographer and a disease which refused to be “mapped”.⁹⁴ Revealing itself only during long periods at sea, it was a disease that literally appeared from nowhere, the spectral qualities of which Walter hinted at in his narrative. It signified absence in a double capacity: a deficiency of both body and land. In Cook’s response to scurvy there is a cartographical impulse to give it a place within the overall context of his voyage journals. Adhering to the Admiralty’s instructions to make use of MacBride’s malt drink, and shortly before making landfall at Tahiti in April 1769 (where there was a guaranteed

⁹² Jonathan Lamb, ‘Captain Cook and the Scourge of Scurvy,’ BBC, accessed June 30, 2017, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire_seapower/captaincook_scurvy_01.shtml.

⁹³ Michael B Davies et al., *Vitamin C: Its Chemistry and Biochemistry* (London: Royal Society of Chemistry, 1991), 7.

⁹⁴ Thomas, *Discoveries*, xvii.

supply of fresh food), Cook described his usage of this purportedly curative treatment in the following way:

Wort was made of the Malt and at the discretion of the Surgeon given to every man that had the least symptoms of Scurvy upon him, by this means and the care and Vigilance of Mr Monkhouse the surgeon this disease was prevented from getting a footing in the Ship.⁹⁵

Cook's description here has echoes of Walter's as he personifies scurvy by giving it a 'footing' in his ship, but differs in that scurvy does not have the unbounded physical presence Walter empowers it with. Rather it is immediately restricted to the arena of the ship over which Cook has control. This episode is also noteworthy as it is the only time we see Cook entrust his dealings with scurvy to his surgeon. The extant portion of Monkhouse's journal, incidentally, contains little in the way of medical observation, although it does contain a useful early account of European-Maori relations.⁹⁶ In Cook's later voyages, surgeons are not generally consulted about scurvy cases and fulfil other functions, such as producing anthropological writings – Anderson and Samwell's writings on the third voyage are cases in point here. Having fulfilled his duties Cook effectively takes over the surgeon's responsibilities. As his Pacific career progressed Cook would increasingly play fast and loose with naval conventions, and his disciplinary tactics would be adjusted to suit his immediate needs, as we shall see.

We might ask, given the mortality rates of some, but by no means all of Cook's Pacific predecessors, how he was able to lose only one man to scurvy across his naval career. The answer I think lies partly in his reliance on a fresh food diet. Cook was meticulous in recording the various victuals he acquired before and during voyages. Before departing on the *Resolution* in 1772, Cook provided a table of the items he had procured,

⁹⁵ Beaglehole, *Endeavour*, 74.

⁹⁶ William Monkhouse, Add. MS 27889, British Library, London.

with an asterisk indicating the ‘antiscorbuticks’ to which he attached particular value – amongst them ‘Sour Krout’, ‘Salted Cabbage’, ‘Portable Broth’, ‘Saloup’, ‘Mustard’ and ‘Mermalade of Carrots’.⁹⁷ None of these articles would have had an especially high Vitamin C content but the combination of them – along with the refreshments picked up *en route* – probably contained enough to be a sufficient prophylactic, most of the time. Contrary to the self-image Cook presents in his journals and later, in his 1776 paper for the Royal Society, his inventory does not reveal an experimental thinker. He does not attempt to ascertain whether some items are more useful than others, as James Lind might have done. I think Cook saw all of this food before him and, as a logical person, thought it was safer to try everything at his disposal rather than pin his hopes on one thing in particular. However, this was not the impression he gave in his essay published by the Royal Society in January 1776, in which he stated that the malt drink we saw him distributing on the *Endeavour* was

[W]ithout doubt one of the best antiscorbutic sea medicines yet found out; and if given in time will, with proper attention to other things, I am persuaded, prevent the scurvy from making any great progress for a considerable time: but I am not altogether of opinion, that it will cure it in an advanced state at sea.⁹⁸

Cook’s uncertainty is underscored by his qualifications: *if* certain other criteria are met, the malt will be effective. But he is unconvinced it will cure late-stage scurvy; hence we can deduce, with hindsight, it was not an effective antiscorbutic at all, given that sufficient Vitamin C reuptake would cure even advanced cases. He goes on to say that ‘with plenty of fresh water, and close attention to cleanliness, and ship’s company will seldom be much afflicted with the scurvy’, even if they are debarred the use of any antiscorbutics.⁹⁹ With

⁹⁷ Beaglehole, *Resolution and Adventure*, 13.

⁹⁸ James Cook, “The Method Taken for Preserving the Health of the Crew of His Majesty’s Ship the *Resolution*,” *Philosophical Transactions* 66 (1776): 403.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 405.

his understanding of scurvy so limited, even after witnessing the disease first-hand, it is impossible that Cook could have cured (or ‘conquered’) this disease. His unsteadfast endorsement of MacBride’s concoction demonstrates that he was, at best, misguided about its effectiveness and, at worst, willing to promote something in order to advance his position or win the Admiralty’s favour. There is no doubt that he was an adept social climber. When it came to getting what he wanted, his education and upbringing was no obstacle. We only have to imagine him in the company of Joseph Banks – or indeed the King George III – to know this was the case.

What is significant in this kind of collecting is Cook’s buying off of scurvy with the establishment of a visual commercial framework where money (or barter) provides health and respite for his crew. Diet, widely recognised as a key factor in eighteenth-century scurvy prevention, was something Cook had considerably more financial control over than many of his contemporaries. Cook’s crews do occasionally experience bouts of scurvy but, excepting the single fatality on the *Adventure*, they do not die from it and are not seen to suffer its worst excesses, such as the internal bleeding mentioned in the Royal Society of Chemistry’s definition.

Cook’s crews were fairly unique in being largely “picked men”. Some were recruited for their Pacific experience, having sailed with Byron and/or Wallis on the *Dolphin* voyages of 1764-68; others were influential members of scientific communities, such as Joseph Banks and Johann Reinhold Forster, or established artists like William Hodges.¹⁰⁰ This was during a time when it was common for sailors to be drafted into voyages at short notice or ‘press-ganged’ into joining. Anson’s squadron, for example,

¹⁰⁰ There were at least nine men, and one goat, who had previously encountered the Pacific on the *Dolphin* between 1764 and 1768. See Cook, “Precursors of Cook,” 40.

contained a delegate of over two hundred Chelsea Hospital pensioners to make up its numbers, and who should not have been there in the first place.¹⁰¹ As Glyndwr Williams has noted, ‘Anson’s requests for more sailors were met with an order to make up his complement with men discharged from hospital, drafts brought in by the press gang, and marines quartered nearby.’¹⁰² The comparison is worth making. Bearing in mind that the onset of scurvy depends on how long it takes an individual to use up their body’s limited store of Vitamin C, we might make certain assumptions about the demographics of Cook’s men: namely, they probably ate better than the average person on shore and, hence, could stave off scurvy for longer.

As we have seen in Cook’s indirect attention to scurvy through the attendance of his surgeon on the *Endeavour*, he engaged on some level with the kind of ‘culture of denial’ that Sutton has referenced with regard to James Lind’s naval career. This was part of Cook’s broader programme to discipline scurvy, along with dietary regulations and his use of physical punishments. As Greg Denning has shown, Cook used floggings to enforce his antiscorbutic diet, as he did whenever his authority was threatened, and he used them increasingly, and with more intensity, throughout his naval career, flogging 20 percent of the crew on the first voyage and 37 percent on the third.¹⁰³ Food was an important factor in the relationship between a commander and those underneath him and it would play a crucial role in both Cook’s and Bligh’s voyages. Very early on into the first voyage, Cook made an example of this by flogging two men who were found non-compliant with his dietary programme at Madeira. This was his entire journal entry for 16 September 1768:

¹⁰¹ Williams, *Prize of All the Oceans*, 19-21.

¹⁰² Williams, *A Voyage round the World*, xi.

¹⁰³ Denning, *Mr Bligh’s Bad Language*, 63.

Winds easterly. Punished Hen^{ty} Stephens Seaman and Tho^s Dunister Marine with 12 lashes each for refusing to take their allowance of fresh Beef. Emp^d taking on board wine and water.¹⁰⁴

Sandwiched between some characteristically terse observations on the weather and tasks delegated to his crew, it is a passage that raises questions for naval historians. Why did Cook punish these men and, even more beguiling, why would any sailor refuse a luxury like fresh beef in an age when salt meat and weevil-infested biscuit were the norm? To answer the first question, it was partly about setting a precedent. 3rd Lieutenant John Gore, one of the few men on the *Endeavour* with any experience of the Pacific (having sailed with Byron and Wallis), bluntly records that they were given a dozen lashes each for ‘mutiny’, suggesting that this word could be broadly interpreted to mean anybody who disobeyed a commander’s orders. Understandably, Cook did not wish to leave this unchecked so early on. But I think Cook went into the first voyage with very fixed ideas on what men should and should not eat, to keep them healthy and, in turn, facilitate successful completion of the voyage. He was conscious that the Admiralty had issued him with instructions on how to do this and he was keeping to orders. But Cook had also experienced the debilitating effects of sickness during his time off Newfoundland in 1762, and it was an episode he did not wish to see replayed.¹⁰⁵ However, the question remains as to why these two sailors would opt to refuse this rarity. On this matter I can only speculate. I can imagine hardened sailors of the old school variety, used to their rations of grog and biscuit, treating anything new like fresh beef with suspicion. Or, perhaps the opposite is true; they thought the meat was of inferior quality, or that they had been served inadequate

¹⁰⁴ Beaglehole, *Endeavour*, 7.

¹⁰⁵ J. C. Beaglehole, *The Life of Captain James Cook* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 55-56.

portions. It became well known on his voyages that Cook would eat practically anything, and he might have expected the same of his crew.

William Bligh, Food and the Mutiny on HMS *Bounty*

Some of the earliest seeds of dissension on board the HMS *Bounty*, two decades later, were sown over this exact reason. One of the alleged mutineers, James Morrison, would recall in his published account that the beef Bligh had procured at Tenerife in January 1788 was,

[F]or the Most part thrown overboard as soon as it was served out by the People who were not yet sufficiently come to their Stomacks to eat was they supposed to be either an Ass or Mule.¹⁰⁶

Morrison presents a picture of unusual refinement among the *Bounty*'s crew and it is true that some of them (Fletcher Christian included) were uncommonly educated and intelligent compared to the ordinary sailor. This was one of many disagreements over food – and alcohol – which it appears Bligh was unable to suppress. Morrison goes on to recollect that the portions of boiled wheat and barley served were of 'scanty allowance [which] Caused frequent broils in the Galley'.¹⁰⁷ We should approach Morrison's account with some degree of caution – he was writing it during his trial in London, keen to exonerate himself, and ultimately dexterous enough in his defence to receive a royal pardon and avoid being hanged. However, this does not take away from the importance of his journal in depicting the centrality of food and drink to shipboard life, and the consequences of surveillance and curtailment upon them.

¹⁰⁶ Vanessa Smith and Nicholas Thomas (eds.), *Mutiny and Aftermath: James Morrison's Account of the Mutiny on the Bounty and the Island of Tahiti* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 25-26.

¹⁰⁷ Smith and Thomas, *Mutiny and Aftermath*, 29.

Morrison does not paint a flattering picture of Bligh's ability to manage food – or anything else – fairly, but if there is any truth in Morrison's account (and I suspect there is) it can only be offset by Bligh's life-saving divisions of food post-mutiny during his perilous 3,618 nautical miles' open-boat voyage in the *Bounty's* launch where, incredibly, he made about five days' worth of food last forty-eight. Denning estimates that the daily allowance of food for a sailor was around 4,450 calories a day.¹⁰⁸ Bligh's men in the launch survived on approximately 345 and yet, Bligh lost only one man before arriving at Timor (and this the result of an ambush on Tofua).¹⁰⁹ Bligh's account of the torturous launch-voyage unsurprisingly reveals his men in dire states of health: constantly suffering from rheumatic pain, tenesmus and dizziness. Approaching Timor, in uncharacteristically emotive language (at least for his journal) he even recorded the 'extreme Weakness, Swelled legs, Hollow and Ghastly countenances'.¹¹⁰ However, it does not appear that anyone suffered from scurvy during this passage, for there is no mention of it in Bligh's log at this stage or in later recollections of those who accompanied him in the launch. The oysters the men dutifully collected on the North Australian Coast would have been an additional source of Vitamin C.¹¹¹ It is possible that those in the launch were able to stave off scurvy for seven weeks, or perhaps only incur its incipient stages, which may well have become suffused into broader health concerns.

In Morrison's account, and in those of others on trial in 1792, the presage to the mutiny itself, the major incitation – ridiculous though it seems – was about coconuts.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Denning, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language*, 101.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹¹⁰ Rutter, *The Log of the Bounty*, II, 219.

¹¹¹ Denning, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language*, 101-102.

¹¹² Caroline Alexander, *The Bounty: The True Story of the Mutiny on the Bounty* (London: HarperCollins, 2003), 134-135; Salmond, *Bligh*, 208-209.

The incident had occurred off Nomuka in the Tongan archipelago, some three weeks after the *Bounty* had departed Tahiti on April 4, 1789. This is what Morrison recalled:

In the Afternoon of the 27th Mr. Bligh Came up, and taking a turn about the Quarter Deck when he missed some of the Cocoa Nuts which were piled up between the Guns upon which he said that they were stolen and Could not go without the knowledge of the Officers [...] He then questioned evry Officer in turn concerning the Number they had bought, & Coming to Mr. Christian askd Him, Mr. Christian answered “I do not know Sir, but I hope you dont think me so mean as to be Guilty of Steling yours”. Mr Bligh replied “Yes you damn’d Hound I do [...]”.¹¹³

The incident receives no mention at all in Bligh’s logs, although it would be corroborated by Master John Fryer who, joining Bligh in the launch, would later attend the court-martial to provide evidence. Caroline Alexander writes that the incident must have seemed ‘a very slight pretext’ in qualifying Fletcher Christian’s remarks that he had been ‘in Hell’ for weeks past.¹¹⁴ Perhaps, to the prosecution, it was. On the other hand, there is more to this episode than meets the eye.

Having left Tahiti, where the crew had enjoyed hospitality in abundance, they were now faced with an arduous passage back which, if it had been anything like the voyage out, would be attended with no small degree of ill-health. The crew were storing coconuts as provisions in an attempt to prevent, among other illnesses, scurvy. Coconuts do contain a relatively small amount of Vitamin C, so would have been a useful addition. Although the crew would not have known this, they were aware that they lasted longer than most fresh foods at sea. They were also, at this point, without their surgeon. Thomas Huggan had drunk himself to death at Tahiti, the impact of which I will study closely in the proceeding paragraphs. Furthermore, the accusation of theft was a serious one in the eighteenth century and an insult to one’s honour and reputation – the kind of stuff, as Anne Salmond

¹¹³ Smith and Thomas, *Mutiny and Aftermath*, 48.

¹¹⁴ Alexander, *The Bounty*, 225.

suggests, that duels were fought over at home in London.¹¹⁵ Bligh doubled up as purser on the *Bounty*, meaning that he was responsible for the purchase and distribution of food. Having taken a significant pay cut for the voyage (from five hundred pounds yearly to fifty), he was keen to recuperate his losses wherever possible.¹¹⁶ The coconut episode was part of a bigger picture of Bligh being parsimonious to his crew's detriment. Morrison recalls an earlier incident where Bligh had declared two cheeses had been stolen from his supplies before being reminded, embarrassingly, that the cheeses had been sent to his address unopened before the voyage.¹¹⁷ The result was that Bligh put his men under a strict ration of butter only the next Banyan day (where traditionally only vegetables were served), but this was refused by the sailors, with Morrison astutely observing that to accept such a ration was tantamount to 'tacitly acknowledging the supposed theft'. On learning this, Bligh, in a classic example of his verbal outbursts, called the men "damn'd Infernal scoundrels", threatening that they would eat even grass before he was through with them.¹¹⁸ Out of context, these incidents might appear as trivial reflections of the inevitable infighting between sailors who spent whole days and nights in each other's constant company but the compilation of them gives us some insight into the way Bligh mismanaged his crew and the rather hasty and caustic language he directed at them. I argue that before the mutiny, food and drink, even down to the minutiae of a bunch of coconuts or a couple of cheeses, were key indexes of the tensions and calamities that befell the voyage.

The *Bounty* was, in essence, all about food and drink. The voyage was conceived of by Joseph Banks, whose botanical epiphanies in the Pacific ('trees loaded with a profusion

¹¹⁵ Anne Salmond, *Bligh*, 207, 209.

¹¹⁶ Denning, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language*, 22-23.

¹¹⁷ Smith and Thomas, *Mutiny and Aftermath*, 26.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

of fruit') had led to him to become in awe of the breadfruit, central to the diet of so many islanders, and of which there was an especial abundance at Tahiti.¹¹⁹ His idea was that the breadfruit (over 1000 of them) could be transplanted from Tahiti to the West Indies, where they would serve as a cheaper source of sustenance for slave plantations.¹²⁰ The images produced by artist Sydney Parkinson on the *Endeavour* had captured the centrality of the breadfruit to Tahitian life and it became a recurring motif of Pacific voyage narratives. The spatial conception of the *Bounty* had to be adjusted to make room for this nursery. The quarterdeck, a space generally reserved for captains, had been completely absorbed by Banks' scheme and was lost to Bligh from the outset. This space was an especially significant one in terms of the power it symbolised. Denning pays particular attention to it in his narrative of the *Bounty* saga, describing it as follows:

By the eighteenth century, the quarterdeck was sacred to the presence of sovereign power in its displays of etiquette and privilege. It was the captain's territory – his to walk alone, his to speak from but not to be spoken to unless he wished it [...] From the start the main space of the *Bounty* was subordinated to its botanical function.¹²¹

Bligh enjoyed none of the status a quarterdeck usually conferred. Granted a small space near the rear hatchway, he slept in uniquely unusual, intimate confinement with the rest of the crew, and not at all like a captain. The quarterdeck symbolised authority and everything that came with it: respect, discipline, supremacy, approbation. Bligh's living quarters, if they can be called that, meant that his crew's view of him in light of his position was skewed; there was a clear disconnect between his status on the vessel and the space he inhabited. His crew might have taken additional umbrage at his orders and outbursts considering he bore none of these conspicuous tokens of authority. Denning asserts that the

¹¹⁹ Beaglehole, *Journal of Banks*, I, 252.

¹²⁰ John Gascoigne, *Encountering the Pacific in the Age of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 277-278.

¹²¹ Denning, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language*, 19.

main space of the *Bounty* was subordinated; I will go one further and say that it was violated. At Tahiti, the crew was in and out of the quarterdeck all day; it was a necessary part of their duties. This symbolic space became distorted and subverted within the overall plan of the voyage. Bligh had, in effect, been usurped by a fruit. He would later blame Tahiti for the mutiny, and it was the very essence of Tahiti (the *uru*) which forbade him his special space on the ship.

Alcohol was a further catalyst for the mounting tensions during the expedition. Where Cook relied on the traditional flogging to enforce his antiscorbutic diet, Bligh utilised more creative punishments, reporting on 19 October 1788:

John Mills & Wm Brown refusing to dance this evening, I ordered their Grog to be Stopt with a promise of further punishment on a Second Refusal. I have always directed the Evenings from 5 to 8 O'Clock to be spent in dancing, & that every Man should be Obliged to dance as I considered it conducive to their health.¹²²

There is something tragi-comic about this unusual episode; on reading it we discover that Bligh was coercing his crew into having fun for a rigorous three hours *every* evening, then punishing those who failed to humour him, no doubt leaving the crew in an ambiguous state of morale. He was insisting they have fun or pretend to, or forfeit their grog. The image is certainly absurd: no doubt it was the job of the blind fiddler Michael Byrn, who would later be seen crying on the morning of the mutiny because he could not tell which boat he was supposed to be getting into, to provide for this interminable entertainment.¹²³ Yet it was not completely without precedent. At the end of the sixteenth century Richard Hawkins had returned from an expedition in the West Indies and South Seas. While

¹²² Rutter, *Log of the Bounty*, I, 60.

¹²³ Alexander, *The Bounty*, 229-230.

professing the benefits of oranges and lemons in treating scurvy, he made recommendations to:

[K]eepe the company occupied in some bodily exercise or worke, of agilitie, of pastimes, of dancing, of use of armes; these helpeth much to banish this infirmitie.¹²⁴

Bligh undoubtedly had good intentions in rehearsing this routine but, as was often the case, his skills for people management were deficient. Three hours was a strenuous daily demand on his crew, many of whom were unwell on the outward voyage, and punishing those non-participants did not lift morale or make his precarious position any more favourable to them.

The hypocrisy of refusing sailors their grog would have been a sore point considering Bligh was nowhere near as meticulous when it came to disciplining his surgeon, Thomas Huggan, who was perennially intoxicated. On 24 October 1788, the surgeon's assistant, Thomas Ledward, gave the daily sick list to Bligh with Huggan down as suffering from a 'Paralytic Affection' brought on by drink; it was only at this point, after more than ten months at sea, that Bligh decided to confiscate his private stock of liquor. He would be dead by Christmas on account of 'drunkenness and indolence'.¹²⁵ We should not underestimate the ignominy this incident cast on Bligh. He wasted no time burying the surgeon at Tahiti and with him perhaps any shred of respect the crew had left for its commander, whose negligence meant they would not have anyone to administer to their wellbeing on the voyage home. The Tahitian chiefs were well aware of Huggan's behaviour, which became a popular talking point. According to Bligh they attributed his death, perceptively, to "not working and drinking too much Ava no Pretanee" – 'ava', or

¹²⁴ Richard Hawkins, *Voyage into the South Sea, in the year 1593* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1847), 59.

¹²⁵ Rutter, *Log of the Bounty*, II, 367, 418.

kava, was a local plant (*Piper methysticum*) from which a narcotic beverage was produced; ‘no Pretanee’ (a corruption of Britannia) might signify that the drink is not produced in Britain, or that Huggan would not be returning there.¹²⁶ It was another Tahitian plant that had got the better of Bligh, and I propose that Huggan’s death is something to consider in relation to the mutiny. Tahiti represented health and plenty, antithetical to the scarcity of the *Bounty* with its scandalous and incompetent surgeon. At the court-martial *Bounty* midshipman Thomas Hayward would recall that the mutineers briefly considered detaining acting surgeon Ledward before releasing him, ‘saying that they would have Little Occasion for Doctors.’¹²⁷ With all the *ava* in the Pacific at their disposal, they would not need to worry about their grog being stopped either. It is not surprising then, as the many accounts at the court-martial demonstrate, Tahitian became the lexicon of mutiny – the *Bounty* men were identifying more with this island than their ship or its commander. That Bligh, who stayed in the ship while it was moored, could not comprehend the finer details of these linguistic parlances, was an additional advantage.

As Dening’s enumeration of the floggings conducted on each Pacific voyage from Byron to Vancouver shows, Bligh was a less violent disciplinarian than Cook – in the sense that he had fewer people flogged – but by his own account, supplemented by the testimonies of those brought to England for trial, he was prone to verbal punishments and intimidations, perhaps to a higher degree than the average sea-captain. The bad language Bligh directed at his men (principally his officers) was accusatory and caustic. Dening rightly observes that Bligh’s fits of rage generally happened when the *Bounty* was moored at Tahiti and suggests that these were reactions to ‘how distant the wooden world of the

¹²⁶ Ibid., 418.

¹²⁷ Alexander, *The Bounty*, 243.

Bounty was from what he ambitioned it to be'.¹²⁸ I have already discussed the dangers inherent in the conversion of the quarterdeck. 'Discipline proceeds', Foucault reminds us, 'from the distribution of individuals in space.'¹²⁹ The space of the ship was not unlike that of the hospital or the prison – indeed, I would argue it was a symbiosis of these two spaces – and there was no privileged enclosure to differentiate Bligh from the common lot. Tahiti was an ambiguous space that altered the *Bounty*'s crew, further disrupting their ambivalent responses to the figurative spaces of the ship; the quarterdeck they were constantly using to store breadfruit, Bligh's own cramped living quarters and the curiously privileged space of the surgeon, who was allowed to drink himself into a daily stupor while others were on trial for their allowance of grog. It became antithetical to that wooden world.

Those present at the court-martial in 1792 would recall how Christian spoke in a pidgin of English and Tahitian during the mutiny, interspersing his demands with shouts of the Tahitian 'Mammo' (*mamu*) for silence.¹³⁰ Bligh, cast adrift in the launch after the mutiny, would describe the mutineers by their tattoos – a more permanent indication of the lasting imprint of Tahitian culture. Linguistically and physically, they had been marked by Tahiti – and it was exactly these marks that Bligh was suggesting the Admiralty could track them down by; it was what made them unique. Denning proposes that while Bligh's language was often bad, it was not exceptional for a seaman and it was not obscene:

“He did not dislike any man’, said one defender, suggesting that Bligh’s language was not the measure of the man and his anger blew away with his words.’¹³¹

¹²⁸ Denning, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language*, 57.

¹²⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 141.

¹³⁰ Salmond, *Bligh*, 213.

¹³¹ Denning, *Mr Bligh's Bad Language*, 58.

It makes sense that Bligh would not be an especially physically violent disciplinarian if there was such instant catharsis in his bad language. But the *Bounty* crew did not recognise this as they would from any other captain, and this is a measure of how different the *Bounty* was from typical naval expeditions: a privately chartered vessel represented by the uniforms and decorum of a public institution, a commander on a huge pay cut sleeping like an ordinary sailor, the weight of cross-cultural experiences in Tahiti.

Scurvy Prevention and Pacific Encounters

So far, this chapter has analysed scurvy in the context of the British voyages, institutions and publics that attempted to find ways to ameliorate its detrimental effects for colonial, scientific or personal gains. However, it is important to understand that this disease also played a large part in the reciprocal receptions of Pacific Islanders themselves and in the events that led to some of the more climactic and far-reaching events in the Pacific. I have discussed the ways in which scurvy might have acted as a catalyst in the *Bounty* saga and the same can be said for the death of James Cook in 1779, perhaps the most written about and mythologised moment of any cross-cultural encounter in the eighteenth century.

Vanessa Smith's work on friendship in the context of Pacific encounters has been particularly useful for understanding the ways and motives through which relationships were formed between Pacific Islanders and European travellers. In the first chapter of *Intimate Strangers* (2010) she underscores the point that the relationship between the *taio* and the traveller is the nexus 'through which access to local resources is ultimately mediated.'¹³² As Smith points out, the word *taio* found its way into English from the cultural experiences of European voyagers to Tahiti, specifically through the accounts from

¹³² Smith, *Intimate Strangers*, 23.

Louis Antoine de Bougainville's 1766-69 expedition, which arrived one year before the *Endeavour* in 1768. However, I think it would be fair to say that Cook's understanding of the implications of the *taio* bond became suffused with his anticipations and expectations for all Pacific peoples, not just the Tahitians. In other words, Cook assumed that the *taio* framework, which he used to acquire resources at Tahiti, could be applied elsewhere on his travels. In this section I hope to make three interrelated points: that the relationships formed on shore with Pacific Islanders were predicated on the need for fresh resources, essential for preventing and treating scurvy; that there was a disconnect between popular perceptions (and expectations) of abundance in the Pacific and reality; and that the pressure Cook put on these peoples was a major factor in the skirmish that led to his death in 1779.

The representation of Tahiti as a kind of utopic island has much to do with the health – and desperate expectations – of sailors who made the arduous passage to the Pacific. In many cases they suffered directly from scurvy, but those who did not certainly lived in fear of it. In *Preserving the Self in the South Seas* (2001), Jonathan Lamb suggests that a 'pathological state of the nerves, keyed up to overreact to any stimulus after long voyages' was the key reason why representations of terra incognita were often paradisiacal.¹³³ The hunger of sailors as they approached Tahiti was figurative and literal: they yearned for the restorative power of fresh food but also for the experiences of a landfall unbounded from the cramped and closely guarded life on ships. Cook had read the accounts of Wallis's arrival at Tahiti (or 'King George's Island') in 1767 with interest, and no doubt consulted those amongst the *Endeavour*'s crew, such as John Gore and Charles Clerke, who had sailed into the Pacific on the *Dolphin* under Byron or Wallis. George

¹³³ Lamb, *Preserving the Self*, 125.

Robertson's account of the discovery of Tahiti associates the appetites of those afflicted by scurvy with something more than a simple longing for nourishment. On leaving the island of Mehetia, where the crew was prevented from gathering refreshments by a hostile reception, he recorded that 'we hade our Capt. And first Lieut. Very Bade, and a great many of our Men Extreemly bade in the Scurvey' before providing a list of what the afflicted men hoped to find at their next landfall: 'Every man wished to find what he liked most, some wanted to find Good Beef, oythers Sheep or Hogs'; others 'wished for wild Game, Gold, Silver, Diamonds Pearls & some for fine young Girls.'¹³⁴ Tahiti became the site on which these varied projections of want and hunger were fixed, and Cook's own experience arriving at this island was imbued with these expectations.

On 13 April 1769, soon after anchoring in Matavai Bay, he recalled with disappointment that 'not so much as a Hog or Fowl was to be seen – no very agreeable discovery to us whose Ideas of plenty upon our arrival at this Island (from the report of the Dolphin) was carried to the very highest pitch.'¹³⁵ It was the first of many instances of a discontinuity between Cook's assumptions of what the islanders of the Pacific had, or could afford, to offer. Some effort was made to forestall the traffic of sex in return for iron, which had been popular on Wallis's expedition: Cook's written instructions to the crew on arrival at Tahiti explicitly forbade the trade of iron for anything other than provisions.¹³⁶ However, the reality was that Cook could not adequately suppress this and several instances went unchecked: thus the Tahitians got a fairly inconsistent picture of what could or could not be traded.

¹³⁴ George Robertson, *The Discovery of Tahiti*, ed. Hugh Carrington (London: Hakluyt Society, 1948), 113.

¹³⁵ Beaglehole, *Endeavour*, 76.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

Cook framed his necessity for fresh food on a central idea of trade with the islanders he encountered. In this way the *Endeavour*'s landings became well-rehearsed scenes, at least for those on board. Ships would invariably make anchorage, some kind of peace offering would occur between the locals and the ships and a trade in goods would commence. The peoples of the Pacific were judged on their capacity for participating in this theatrical encounter, and their skills in trade and commerce. The societies which came across most favourably in these beach-crossings were the ones who proved most useful to Europeans and managed to become successfully integrated into their commercial ideologies. However, it is worth looking at instances where this model failed, where things went wrong for Cook and his crews.

Of all the encounters with the peoples of Pacific, Cook's survey of the east coast of Australia probably holds the record for the largest and most prolonged failure of communication. During April and May 1770, Cook's party failed to engage in any dialogue or commerce with the indigenous Australians they met. Most attempts ended with the Aboriginal peoples fleeing on approach. More disheartening for Cook, however, was their reluctance to accept any of the gifts he attempted to distribute amongst them and in doing so, failing to provide anything in return. The trading model Cook used with success in Tahiti, and mixed success in New Zealand, now completely fell apart. On 29 April 1770, Cook disappointingly observed that the beads he had left with some children the previous night 'were found laying in the hut this morning, probably the natives were afraid to take them away.'¹³⁷ That they were afraid may have been the most palatable explanation for Cook, who was basing his experiences on previous Polynesian encounters. An alternative theory might venture to suggest the indigenous Australians were simply not willing to

¹³⁷ Beaglehole, *Endeavour*, 306.

participate in the kind of theatrical trading that Cook had become accustomed to elsewhere in the Pacific. Perhaps they had no interest in bartering for any of his trinkets, or relinquishing any of their resources for these uninvited travellers. One day later Cook was more explicit, noting that his second-in-command, Zachary Hicks ‘did all in his power to entice them to him by offering them presents’ but surmises ‘all they seem’d to want was for us to be gone.’ Having thus failed to encourage the locals in bartering, Cook decided to take matters into his own hands: ‘in 3 or 4 hauls with the seine we caught above 300 pounds weight of fish’.¹³⁸ Then on May 3, his party came across some recently abandoned fires on the shore where mussels and oysters were cooking. They ‘tasted of their cheer and left them in return strings of beads’, in which the Aboriginals had consistently expressed no interest whatsoever, before returning to the ship.¹³⁹

What Cook either did not realise, or was not sympathetic to, was that in taking 300 pounds’ worth of fish he was putting an excessive strain on an economy which was functioning at subsistence level. He would later revise his opinion of the indigenous Australians he had encountered to say that ‘they are far more happier than we Europeans; being wholly unacquainted not only with the superfluous but the necessary conveniences so much sought after in Europe, they are happy in not knowing the use of them.’¹⁴⁰ However, Cook underestimated the damage that Europeans could cause in such societies by seeking replenishment. Indeed, it was a disagreement over the crew eating turtles (Cook refers to them with no hint of irony as ‘our turtles’ – my emphasis) at Endeavour River in July 1770 which led to one of the most violent confrontations of the voyage, when the indigenous Australians attempted to burn some of the *Endeavour*’s tents on shore, and one

¹³⁸ Ibid., 306.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 306-309.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 399.

of them was shot in the ensuing fracas.¹⁴¹ Stuart Murray's analysis of the event is insightful. He views it as a conclusion to

a series of non-communications to the Aboriginal inhabitants who singularly refused to match either the civility of the Tahitians or the aggressiveness of the Maori, both encountered earlier on the voyage and possibly explicable to the minds of the crew because they fitted into existing European discourses on, and perceptions of, Polynesian behaviour.¹⁴²

Murray emphasises the difficulty Europeans had in moulding indigenous Australians into cultural models and stereotypes. The relationships Cook's crews made with Pacific peoples were based on these models; they engaged with them in order to facilitate the trade in fresh foods, so essential for scurvy prevention, and they broke down whenever a particular group was found to exceed this paradigm, or refuse participation in it.

It is my opinion that this kind of miscommunication, in which the acquisition of fresh food was a catalyst, was a crucial and subsequently overlooked factor in Cook's death at the hands of the Hawaiians in February 1779. The controversy surrounding Cook's death at Kealakekua Bay led to one of the most heated academic debates of the 1990s, between anthropologists Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere. Sahlins had argued in several books and articles since the late 1970s that Cook's arrival at the Hawaiian islands in November 1778 took place during a ritual festival, the Makahiki, in which (as Rod Edmond concisely summarises) 'the war god Ku was supplanted by the god of fertility, Lono, followed eventually by a ritual counter-attack resulting in Ku's reinstatement and Lono's exile.'¹⁴³ Sahlins' position is that Cook was taken to be the incarnation of Lono; consequently he was revered and honoured as a god during his circuit

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 361.

¹⁴² Stuart Murray, "Notwithstanding our signs to the contrary": textuality and authority at the Endeavour River, June to August 1771," in *Captain Cook: Explorations and Reassessments*, ed. Glyndwr Williams (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2004), 64.

¹⁴³ Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific*, 52.

of the island before making his exit, on cue, coinciding with Lono's exile. However, Cook had to return a few days later to repair a damaged foremast, from which point the reception towards him turned decidedly hostile. When the *Resolution's* cutter was stolen, Cook resorted to his usual practice of taking important chiefs hostage (in this case a king of Hawai'i island, Kalani'ōpu'u). A crowd gathered to protest this and Cook, unable to make it to back to the ships, was stabbed with an iron dagger and clubbed to death. The identification of Cook with Lono appears to have been accepted until 1992, when Gananath Obeyesekere attacked Sahlins's hypothesis in *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook*.¹⁴⁴ Obeyesekere accused Sahlins of the Western imperialist assumption that indigenous populations must necessarily associate white men with Gods and proposed a more rational set of explanations. Sahlins's rejoinder, *How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, for Example* (1995), turned the tables on Obeyesekere with the counter-accusation that he was imposing the European ideology of rational thought onto traditional Hawai'ian beliefs.¹⁴⁵ Essentially, then, they denounced each other for similar reasons; as Edmond wrote, they 'mirror each other almost perfectly... each accuses the other of unloading their preconceptions on the other.'¹⁴⁶

I would add to this arena of scholarly debate two rational alternatives of my own. The first is that Cook's behaviour became more undisciplined and erratic as his naval career progressed. This has already been cited by James Watt, who we saw earlier propose that Cook suffered personality changes as a result of a parasitic infection.¹⁴⁷ Sahlins dismisses Watt's claim, as I have done, but more derisively, with the summation: 'Worms

¹⁴⁴ Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997).

¹⁴⁵ Sahlins, *How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, For Example* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996).

¹⁴⁶ Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific*, 52.

¹⁴⁷ Watt, "Medical Aspects and Consequences of Cook's Voyages", 155.

done him in.’¹⁴⁸ Like Sahlins, I do not think Cook was being remotely controlled by a roundworm, but I do think he was sick and tired, which feeds into my earlier observation that he played fast and loose with naval convention towards the end of his career, as evidenced by his behaviour on the third voyage. Thieving (which appears to have been the incitation at Kealakekua Bay) was common whenever the ships were on shore, on all three voyages. It was not unusual for Cook to respond by burning canoes, flogging natives or taking hostages. But during the third voyage his punishments became so severe as to attract criticism from his crews. At Tonga in June 1777, Cook administered lashings of four, five and six dozen and began ‘marking’ thieves with a knife, in one instance cutting off their ears.¹⁴⁹ Midshipman George Gilbert went so far as to describe his actions as ‘rather unbecoming of an European’, inviting comparisons with the “savages” of the South Seas they had encountered, rather than the royally appointed commander of a naval vessel.¹⁵⁰ A similar incident occurred the following day when Cook stripped down to his waist so that he could engage in a Tongan sacrificial ceremony, the *Inasi*. The removal of his uniform and wig must have appeared as symbolic that he was assimilating indigenous behaviour and some also saw it as a mark of disrespect: Lieutenant John Williamson wrote that he felt that Cook had ‘rather let himself down’.¹⁵¹ We should read Cook’s markings, and his desire to infiltrate indigenous ceremonies, as a desperate attempt to reinscribe his authority with a crew who had become increasingly alienated from him. Cook felt that he owned the Pacific but the reality was that the Pacific was rapidly changing under the weight of European intervention, and he struggled to retain control over it. I think that this, coupled with his health problems and exhaustion, was behind his violent outbursts and unusual

¹⁴⁸ Sahlins, *Islands of History*, 109.

¹⁴⁹ Beaglehole, *Resolution and Discovery*, 132.

¹⁵⁰ George Gilbert, *Captain Cook’s Final Voyage*, ed. Christine Holmes (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1982), 33-34.

¹⁵¹ Beaglehole, *The Journals of Captain James Cook, III, The voyage of the Resolution and Discovery*, 151.

behaviour. It is an apposite irony that the dagger used to kill him was made from iron which he had traded with the Hawaiians for supplies.

Finally, Cook's repeated failure to obtain the supplies necessary for scurvy prevention is something which has been overlooked by scholars attempting to dissect Cook's wavering authority and his puzzling behaviour. Cook was immensely proud of his low mortality rates and he modelled his authority on this and on his constant resourcefulness at obtaining food when ships were anchored. But his journal, in the days and weeks before his death, is marked by his failure to obtain these and his crew's resentment of this. His attempt to produce a beer from sugar cane had proved disastrous, and probably stemmed from the fact that he was running low on his usual supplies. His crew had sent him a 'mutinous' letter, claiming the concoction was 'injurious to their healths'; Cook defended his 'wholsom... innovation.'¹⁵² Lieutenant James King's commentary on the event is particularly revealing. He says that 'added to this [letter] was a rather scanty allowance of Vegetables and pork', a further indication of the low level of provisions at Hawaii.¹⁵³ In total there are at least six explicit references in Cook's writing to the failed trading with the Hawaiians before his death. On January 11 1779, he noted several canoes around the ships 'with not a single thing to barter, so that it appeared that this part of the island must be very poor and that we had already got all they could spare', a view not shared by James King, who noted that 'This part of Owhy'he we now have in view is equally as fruitful as what we saw of Mowee.'¹⁵⁴ George Gilbert had said that 'the Country here is one entire plantation'.¹⁵⁵ Cook's opinion was clearly contrary to that of his crews who probably struggled to comprehend his difficulty in obtaining these vital articles

¹⁵² Beaglehole, *Resolution and Discovery*, 479.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 503.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 488, 501.

¹⁵⁵ Gilbert, *Captain Cook's Final Voyage*, 128.

in a land of plenty. Some foods might have been recalled for preparation of the Makahiki festival, as Marshall Sahlins stipulates, but this would have made it all the more confusing for the crew if Cook was being taken for one of the Hawaiian gods.¹⁵⁶ Cook's journal cuts off at 17 January, approximately one month before his death, and we cannot be sure what happened to the rest of it: either Cook had stopped writing, or his editor John Douglas had done away with the remainder. But five days before it ends, on 12 January, Cook made a telling observation: 'At 9 a few Canoes came along side with a few hogs, but neither fruit nor roots, articles we most wanted.'¹⁵⁷ Roots and fruits were the essential, vitamin-rich food items for scurvy prevention and without them, Cook's authority was severely compromised. His attempt at hostage-taking at Kealakekua Bay was a further venture at regaining his authority in front of his crew, cut short by a violent dagger attack, made from the same iron he had introduced into the Pacific.

¹⁵⁶ Sahlins, *How "Natives" Think*, 43-48.

¹⁵⁷ Beaglehole, *Resolution and Discovery*, 489.

Chapter Two: Australia Revisited

Introduction: Encountering Australians, from James Cook at Botany Bay to Smallpox at Port Jackson

James Cook's voyages and the journals accompanying them marked the discrepancy between expectation and reality that underscored the relationships European crews made with Oceanic peoples, and the encounter with indigenous Australians on the *Endeavour* voyage is an interesting case in point.¹ Among Joseph Banks's entourage was the botanical draughtsman Sydney Parkinson, who would produce upwards of nine hundred drawings of plants in his capacity as botanical draughtsman on the *Endeavour* expedition, before succumbing to dysentery on the return journey in January 1771.² His surviving drawings include the representation of two indigenous Australians shown in Figure 1:

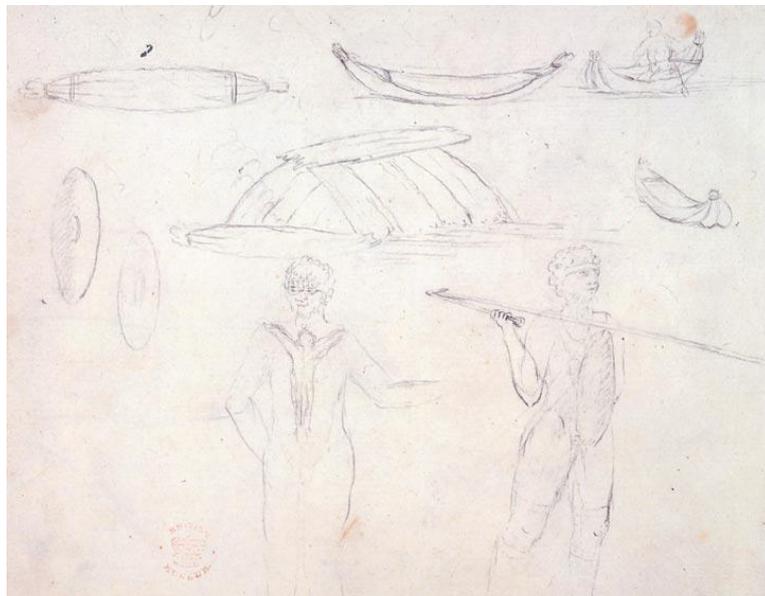


Figure 1 – Sketch of two Australian Men and artefacts. Sydney Parkinson (1770). BL Add. MS 9345, f. 14.

¹ The phrase 'expectations and reality' is taken from the title of an essay (Alan Frost and Glyndwr Williams, 'New South Wales: Expectation and Reality') in the collection *Terra Australis to Australia*, eds. Alan Frost and Glyndwr Williams (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), 160-207. The idea of expectations and realities is central to my thinking, and one which I have also interpreted from the Australian perspective later in this chapter.

² Beaglehole, *Endeavour*, 447.

-In this chapter, I assess the motives for the establishment of a convict settlement in New South Wales, and the encounters between Australians and Europeans that took place in the first few years of the settlement. I will analyse reciprocal interest in the bodies of those who travelled in the ships of the First Fleet and the indigenous Australians already living in New South Wales, with a particular focus on the smallpox epidemic of 1789. This outbreak was only reluctantly acknowledged in the journals of European officers, and my research is attentive to the effects of this disease on the indigenous communities of New South Wales. Building on my analysis of scurvy in the previous chapter, I also consider the way the disease was being thought of at home in Britain, by public and scientific communities.

I begin with an analysis of Parkinson's sketch as a way of understanding how Australians were perceived by Europeans in the late eighteenth-century, how they were thought of in comparison to other Oceanic peoples encountered on Cook's voyages, and how these perceptions were modified over the following few decades, following the establishment of the British settlement in Australia in 1788, and the introduction of smallpox the following year.

Before moving to discuss reciprocity and disease in the context of the European settlement of Australia, it is important to say a few words on the records kept by Europeans and how we might choose to interpret them over two hundred years after the events they recall. The first, and most obvious, is that they tell only one side of the story. We learn about Australians only by seeing them through the eyes of those Europeans. In Parkinson's sketch (Figure 1), which I discuss in the following paragraphs, we are given one of the first pre-settler glimpses of Australian life through European eyes. The rough, incomplete and unfocused nature of the sketch has led the prominent Pacific art historian Bernard Smith to

attribute these characteristics to the artist's shortcomings as a figure drawer.³ I will argue that although there may be some truth in this assessment, the sketch is actually a fairly logical representation of how European visitors saw the first Australians after their experiences in Polynesia. The sketch appears unfinished and incomplete because it defies a pattern of European expectations of the South Pacific. It represents an attempt to make sense of a culture that appeared incomprehensible to eighteenth-century explorers. The figures are displayed with a series of objects to which there is no attempt to connect them. I do not think the sketch represents the failure of the artist's abilities; rather, it stresses a failure to translate these fragments of a society into an intelligible whole.

Working entirely with sources from the explorers and settlers of Australia means two things: first, an awareness that the sources are limited in what they can tell us of the peoples, their habitats and especially their power structures. Second, we are necessarily speculative when we imagine, for example, how a diverse and mobile community like the Australians dealt with a European epidemic, smallpox. But I think there is strength in speculation so long as it forces us to ask questions that are borne out of gaps in the historical accounts. My analysis of Parkinson's sketch in this chapter will, I hope, offer an example of an alternative way of interpreting established representations of unfamiliar worlds.

There are around twenty surviving written accounts of life in the New South Wales colony, ranging from the larger, more polished journals of those prominent naval figures Inga Clendinnen refers to as 'the Big Five of Tench, White, Hunter, Collins and Phillip himself', whose volumes found publication in their writers' lifetimes, to the letters sent

³ Bernard Smith, "The First European Depictions," 21-22.

home to relatives and sparsely-entered journals of lowly, semi-literate officers like Marine Private John Easty.⁴ I am interested in the way these records capture the reciprocity in Australian and European relations in those early years in the colony, - the smallpox epidemic in 1789, and its repercussions for those relationships, in particular. My research into this topic has been influenced by Inga Clendinnen, who has also written a necessarily speculative – and excellent – account of these early meetings between Australians and Europeans. My own work departs from Clendinnen’s in its focus on bodies and the introduction of smallpox into Australia.

The sketch in Figure 1 is unusual in Parkinson’s collection because it depicts people, not plants, and because it was probably not something he was drawing as part of his employment by Joseph Banks. Rather, sketches such as these were probably part of his personal collection and drawn in his free time. The image shows two indigenous Australian men, one holding a spear, in the foreground, with a bark hut behind them and other ethnographic items filling up the background, including various sketches of their canoes and two images of a shield.

With the indigenous men in Figure 1 in mind, I will explain my position on how to refer to the original inhabitants of Australia. From this point on, I will be taking my cue from Inga Clendinnen in calling them, simply, Australians. The period I am discussing in this chapter – really the first few years of European settlement in Australia – allows me to avoid any ambiguity when I speak of Europeans and Australians. The word ‘Aborigine’ was already in use in the eighteenth century and remains – etymologically – an umbrella term used to describe ‘the earliest inhabitants of a country’, in Samuel Johnson’s words.⁵ It

⁴ Inga Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers: The True History of the Meeting of the British First Fleet and the Aboriginal Australians, 1778* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd, 2005), 18.

⁵ Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language*, I, 58.

was later adopted as the common term to refer all indigenous Australians. However, this homogenisation fails to capture the diversity of the Australian people. As Clendinnen explains, ‘‘Aborigine’ is anachronistic: a colonial construct crusted with later stereotypes’ which ‘smooths away that people’s variousness, and their sheer unexpectedness.’⁶ The term indigenous, while less anachronistic (and now commonplace in the postcolonial lexicon) also reduces the variety of the peoples it is applied to, as it could be used appropriately (as ‘aborigine’ was historically) in many, diverse places.⁷ Finally, I seek to avoid a trap, which Damon Salesa has written of in a recent essay, of placing ‘natives entirely into the past, as people who *were* but no longer exist’.⁸ In referring to the original inhabitants of Australia as Australians, I hope to underscore the fact that they are still a visible and present part of that country and not merely a historical entity. Similarly, and for balance, I refer to the settlers of Australia as Europeans. This was how they often represented to themselves and, with only a handful of exceptions, the vast majority of them were.⁹ A Native American seaman was the most notable exception on the First Fleet because he was the only member of the settlement to contract smallpox. I will return to him in the final section.

Returning to Parkinson’s sketch, Bernard Smith suggested that the rough nature of the image can be explained by the fact that the principal figure draughtsman, Alexander Buchan, died whilst the expedition was at Tahiti, and that Herman Spöring, who filled his

⁶ Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers*, 4.

⁷ For a classic critical postcolonial text on representations of indigeneity, see Terry Goldie, *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literatures* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993).

⁸ Damon Salesa, ‘‘The Pacific in Indigenous Time,’’ in *Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People*, eds. David Armitage and Alison Bashford (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 39.

⁹ The First Fleet also took with it eleven black convicts, some of whom were former slaves from the American colonies. See Cassandra Pybus, *Black Founders: The Unknown Story of Australia’s Black Settlers* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2006).

place, was not an accurate figure drawer.¹⁰ In other words, Parkinson was out of his depth in producing images of people and this sketch – with its disproportions and sparse assortment of objects – reflects this. I do not fully accept Smith’s theory about Parkinson’s abilities; he was able to produce finely detailed portraits of Maori men, for instance. I also think the sketch represents the Europeans’ inability to imagine Australians in social relations. In this sense there is something quite accurate in the sketch’s rendition of the way Australians were perceived by the crew of the *Endeavour*. The Europeans struggled to make meaningful contact with the Australians for several months, and the lack of detail reflects this absence of proximity. In her most recent work on Oceanic encounters, Bronwen Douglas makes an astute point about the level of contact required for successful drawing when she states:

[I]ts execution usually had to be negotiated between hosts and visitors while accurate portraiture demands protracted interpersonal contacts and some cooperation between artist and subject. In such contexts, the agency of Indigenous subjects could infiltrate voyage art.¹¹

Parkinson’s sketch embodies the absence of conditions that Douglas proposes. However, it is possible that the Australians’ refusal to engage with the kind of cooperation required for successful portraiture might constitute a different form of ‘indigenous agency’, one which resists interpersonal contacts, as Parkinson’s sketch suggests. For these reasons, it is insufficient solely to ascribe the roughness of the work to the skill of the artist.

In fact, during the voyage, Parkinson had shown himself to be an astute observer of the Oceanic peoples he encountered. He was often – as was apparent in his observations on the east coast of Australia between April and June 1770 – more attentive to language and customs than Cook or Banks. A particular comparison can be made in the vocabulary

¹⁰ Smith, “The First European Depictions,” 21-22.

¹¹ Bronwen Douglas, *Science, Voyages and Encounters in Oceania*, 24.

Parkinson assimilated during this time, which contains many revealing words omitted from Cook's. The word-lists compiled by Cook and others were products of a trend towards a more scientific and quantifiable study of peoples and objects that the *Endeavour* voyage signalled. But in their enthusiasm for collating this research, its crew made some significant oversights. To begin with, these vocabularies assumed a degree of linguistic homogeneity among the Australian people, as Cook introduces his compilation as 'a short Vocabulary of a few words in the New-Holland Language'.¹² Not only was he equating language with vocabulary, but he was attempting to make an oral language fit the European paradigms of a written one. This is one of many instances of the divide between assumption and reality, as it has since been estimated that at the time of Cook's stay on the New South Wales coast, there were around 250 distinct languages spoken by the various tribes living in Australia.¹³ One tribe inhabiting the area around Endeavour River, the Guugu-Yimithirr, were the basis for most of the *Endeavour* expedition's Australian vocabularies.¹⁴ Cook's assimilation of these words into one concise list gives the impression not of nomadic tribes, but an entire country united by a common language, which was not at all the case.

The list form itself represents the nature of the ethnographic cataloguing that accompanied these early encounters, and generic conventions attached to eighteenth-century travel writing in general, where the British subject dutifully records the physical attributes of foreign people, their language-sounds, habitations, weapons, politics, customs and – frequently – their particular degree of licentiousness. Having said that, it is remarkable that of the forty words Cook records, over half – twenty-three – are specifically

¹² Beaglehole, *Endeavour*, 398-399.

¹³ Annette Schmidt, *The Loss of Australia's Aboriginal Language Heritage* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1990), 1-5.

¹⁴ Anne Salmond, *The Trial of the Cannibal Dog*, 157-159.

anatomical: eyes, ears, teeth, hands, legs are all listed in the English-New Holland lexicon, along with ‘penis’ and ‘scrotum’.¹⁵ It is faintly amusing to picture the mirror-gesticulation that was involved in such linguistic pursuits, with Parkinson studiously taking notes, as Nicholas Thomas has done.¹⁶ That the lists should be so concerned with physiology is probably a reflection of the extent and nature of these early meetings but also functions as an expression of control – through knowledge – of the bodies of colonial subjects. As Shino Konishi explains,

New empirical sciences such as anatomy enabled closer and seemingly more sophisticated scrutiny of the human body, and recent taxonomies created ostensibly objective ways of cataloguing and ordering bodies.¹⁷

For Cook, Banks and Parkinson, cataloguing Australian bodies was a way of ordering and defining them, of rendering them in a format that was more immediately intelligible and relatable to a European readership. Bernard Smith has argued that in Parkinson’s sketches ‘drawing itself [was] a kind of assertion of European power, a pre-emptive acquisition of knowledge for the future’ and in this respect, the vocabularies with their bodily reference points are perfect accompaniments.¹⁸ As the list goes on, Cook gives ‘man’, ‘son’, ‘father’ – even ‘male turtle’ – but not mother, wife or daughter – just the all-encompassing ‘female’ and certainly no mention of female genitalia.

The vocabulary printed in Parkinson’s journal, published posthumously in 1773 by his brother after much legal wrangling with Joseph Banks over Sydney’s personal effects, is not only much more extensive, at 142 words, than Cook’s, but also includes the words for ‘woman’ and – presumably an important distinction for these voyagers – ‘female

¹⁵ Beaglehole, *Endeavour*, 398-399

¹⁶ Thomas, *Discoveries*, 124-125.

¹⁷ Shino Konishi, *The Aboriginal Male in the Enlightenment World* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), 4.

¹⁸ Smith, “The First European Depictions,” 29.

turtle'.¹⁹ The relative absence of women and female anatomies from these lists may partly be a reflection of the strained communications of the encounters, where women and children were often in hiding while men of both parties conversed; however, it also accurately reflects something of the gendered nature of early colonial encounter, as male figures were usually singled out by voyagers as mediators when attempting to gain access to resources. Cook undoubtedly relied on Parkinson for his own list but the process he went through in reducing it suggests his desire to simplify the inhabitants it pertains to even further, and it also contains much less of the native flora and fauna.

I make the comparison between the graphic and textual representations of early Australian encounters to illustrate that I think there is more to Parkinson's sketch than some contemporary descriptions admit. Although it is not as accomplished as his botanical depictions, it is in fact a telling illustration of the way that Europeans perceived the first Australians. Clearly they were disappointed by the lack of communications and bonds formed with those people compared to their experiences in Polynesia, and Parkinson's sketch depicts two people in isolation, looking away from each other. Their shields, huts and canoes are visible but there is no connection between these objects and the figures in the sketch; they are simply floating in the space around them – there is no land between the people and the huts or canoes that they inhabit. The Australians in the sketch are represented as artefacts as much as the objects that surround them. This appears unnatural, but it is a telling portrayal of the way that European voyagers perceived the relationship – or more precisely, the lack of relationship – between the people of Australia and their land. When Cook described the inhabitants of New Holland as 'appear[ing] to some to be the most wretched people upon Earth' (with echoes of William Dampier, the first Englishman

¹⁹ Sydney Parkinson, *A Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas* (London: Stanfield Parkinson, 1773), 148-152.

to explore parts of West Australia in 1688), part of that wretchedness was the perceived inability of Australians to take up agriculture and, by extension, commerce.²⁰

Although, to some extent, Parkinson's sketch demonstrates the generic conventions attached to ethnographic drawing practices, it is unusual in his collection for compressing them so much. However, the most peculiar detail in the sketch is the crucifix-like pattern that appears across the breast of the figure on the left. Smith has suggested that perhaps 'the man's breast markings when first seen reminded [Parkinson] of a crucifix', noting that it was around Easter time when the ship first landed at Botany Bay.²¹ This is a plausible explanation, but perhaps one that underplays the significance of this kind of symbolism. As Smith points out, nowhere else 'did [Parkinson] produce a work of this kind in which his imagination is allowed free rein.'²² Midshipman James Matra had written of some Australian men that, 'On their breasts were observed rude figures or men, darts, &cc.' but the positioning of the figure in Parkinson's sketch has been stretched into a pose that is more recognisably iconographic than 'rude'.²³ I would add that the apparently primitive and naked state of the Australians, compared to other Oceanic peoples, may have led Parkinson to ponder the prelapsarian state and the impending loss of innocence that would undoubtedly attend European interference in Australia. Banks would make a similar comparison in his journal for 29 April, 1770, noting that 'we had not been able to observe the least signs of Cloathing' and 'the woman did not copy our mother Eve even in the fig leaf.'²⁴ I think Banks and Parkinson were thinking along similar lines, but the overlaying of

²⁰ Beaglehole, *Endeavour*, 399; William Dampier, *A New Voyage Round the World*, ed. N. M. Penzer (London: Argonaut Press, 1927), 312-313.

²¹ Smith, "The First European Depictions," 27.

²² *Ibid.*, 28.

²³ James Matra, *A Journal of a Voyage Round the World, in His Majesty's Ship Endeavour* (London: T. Becket & P. A. De Hondt, 1771), 58.

²⁴ Beaglehole, *Journal of Banks*, II, 55.

Christian iconography is another detail within the sketch which projects European ideas onto unfamiliar bodies. The European preoccupation with Australian bodies was reciprocated by the Australians and would play an important role in the initial meetings between them in 1788, as I argue later in this chapter.

In his concluding remarks on the people of New Holland, Cook would make two observations that set them apart from other Oceanic peoples he had encountered. The first was that the Australians had no notion of agriculture: ‘these people live by hunting and fishing alone... we never saw one Inch of Cultivated land in the whole country’.²⁵ In other words, Cook felt they had not progressed as far as some of their Polynesian counterparts, and were consequently less useful to visitors. The second was ‘they do not have the least knowledge of Iron or any other Metal that we know of.’²⁶ That lack of desire for metal, which the Tahitians had bargained for so vigorously in 1767 that George Robertson could report some would prostitute themselves for as little as one spike nail, was taken by the Europeans to mean that they had no intention of progressing beyond the hunter-gatherer society that Cook was describing.²⁷ Culture and cultivation were closely related in European perceptions of Oceanic peoples and the Australians in particular were ranked very low in these terms. Being essentially hunter-gatherers and having no clearly defined concept of property (their houses were ‘mean small hovels not much bigger than an oven’), they occupied only the lower rungs of the stadial theory made popular by Enlightenment thinkers such as John Millar.²⁸ In the introduction to *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, Millar proposed that

²⁵ Beaglehole, *Endeavour*, 396.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 397.

²⁷ Robertson, *The Discovery of Tahiti*, 207-208.

²⁸ Beaglehole, *Endeavour*, 396.

[A] nation of savages, who feel the want of almost everything requisite for the support of life, must have their attention directed to a small number of objects, to the acquisition of food and clothing, or the procuring shelter from the inclemencies of the weather; and their ideas and feelings... must of course be narrow and contracted.²⁹

These were the same ‘small number of objects’ that had occupied the journals of Cook and Banks in Australia and they particularly lacked property – ‘the great source of distinction amongst individuals’ – nor did they seem much interested in acquiring any, as evidenced by their willingness to sleep out in the open.³⁰

In the Pacific Islands, Cook’s men had been irritated by the repeated thefts carried out against their ships and persons by Polynesian peoples. Having spent less than a week at Tahiti in April, 1769, Cook was already able to say that the Tahitians were ‘prodiges expert’ in the art of thieving, writing that he struggled ‘to keep them out of the ship as they clime like Munkeys’.³¹ What the Europeans believed constituted theft was, of course, defined by their own ideas of property and what appeared as theft to a European may not have looked that way to a Tahitian. As Harriet Guest has observed, ‘appropriations by islanders and voyagers that were seen to involve no legitimating exchange’ were ‘identified as theft’.³² However, despite these protestations, the journals suggest that the Europeans found something quite admirable about the propensity to theft (of tools and trinkets anyway – stealing ships and scientific equipment was always a serious crime). The curiosity and enthusiasm of the Tahitians for European ships and commodities was unmistakable. It was always greeted with the same degree of resigned annoyance but ultimately, it justified the civilising enterprise of such voyages; it was only natural to

²⁹ John Millar, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (London: J. Murray, 1779), 3.

³⁰ Beaglehole, *Endeavour*, 396; Millar, *Distinction of Ranks*, 4-5.

³¹ Beaglehole, *Endeavour*, 77.

³² Harriet Guest, “Looking at Women: Forster’s Observations in the South Pacific,” in Johan Reinhold Forster, *Observations Made During a Voyage Round the World*, eds. Nicholas Thomas, Harriet Guest, and Michael Dettelbach (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1996), xlii.

Europeans that native peoples would be rapacious for their wealth and knowledge, and that the Tahitians in particular were so curious about the material baggage of colonialism goes some way to explain why they were thought of so highly in comparison to the Australians.

In the published edition of his observations on Cook's second voyage, Johann Forster would rank the peoples of the Pacific into two main categories with subcategories for each. The Tahitians came top of the top set. Some of the characteristics he would identify with his choice were 'their strength in agriculture, fishing, paddling, building of houses and canoes', along with the status of their women, which was 'already raised to a greater equality with the men', an observation which I contrast with the treatment of convict women on the First Fleet later in this chapter.³³ These were qualities which Cook saw as lacking in the Australians, who did not covet European merchandise and were consistently incurious about Europeans in general.

The phrase that surfaces again and again in first Australian encounters, from the Endeavour River in 1770, to the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788, is 'Warra warra mai' (meaning 'go away' or 'begone').³⁴ In fact, these were the first recorded words spoken by an Australian to a European in southeast Australia. The Europeans were mildly aggravated by the repeated thefts against them in Polynesia, but they were perceptibly hurt and offended when the Australians did *not* attempt to steal from them, and worse, that they would even ignore the gifts left to them once it was clear that bartering was not on the agenda. So resolute were the Australians in having nothing to do with the Europeans that muskets were fired in an attempt to disperse their collective refusals at the arrival of the

³³ Forster, *Observations*, 154, 260.

³⁴ Parkinson, *Journal*, 134; Watkin Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, ed. L. F. Fitzhardinge (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1961), 36.

Endeavour. In the aftermath, Banks recalled seeing some children taking shelter in a bark hut:

We therefore threw into the house to them some beads, ribbands, cloths &c. as presents and went away. We however thought it no improper measure to take away with us all the lances which we could find about the houses, amounting in number to forty or fifty.³⁵

The lances Banks's party walked away with at Botany Bay were, if not a theft, certainly the result of an illegitimate exchange: they were much more important to the Australians than the beads and ribbons they had no use for. This throws light on the ambiguous attitudes towards property and theft displayed by Europeans in the late-eighteenth century, if we consider that many of the First Fleet convicts were convicted for theft, sometimes of items of relatively low value. Banks's Botany Bay exchange was about the closest the crew of the *Endeavour* came to a transaction on the east coast of Australia. The inhabitants' lack of interest in European merchandise was so incomprehensible to the visitors that they forced the Australians into a commerce they had no desire for.

After 1788, when Europeans began to settle in Australia, communications between them and the Australians remained strained, although they were somewhat more successful in establishing relationships of reciprocity than those attempts made by Cook's voyagers in 1770. Part of that reciprocation might have included the introduction of a particularly destructive disease from Europe, smallpox, into a nomadic population that had not experienced anything like that before. Exactly how smallpox came to be unleashed on the Australian population remains a strongly contested subject; however, before assessing the

³⁵ Beaglehole, *Journal of Banks*, II, 55.

relative merits of these arguments, it is necessary to consider how the decision to establish a colony in New South Wales occurred in the first place.

Proposals and motivations for an Australian settlement

In the previous chapter, I wrote about a disease – scurvy – as a consequence of European exploration. Less than two decades later, disease was also a catalyst for that exploration. The state of prisons in England was unsustainable and necessitated creative solutions in order for them to function, in terms of both their conditions and the increasing number of criminals facing jail terms. The reformer John Howard published a lengthy study of prison conditions in 1777, noting that from his own observations in the preceding years, the number of inmates who died from ‘Gaol Fever’ – an epidemic form of typhus spread by lice on humans – was higher than all deaths from public executions combined.³⁶ Such epidemics point to the crowded and unsanitary nature of eighteenth-century prisons, and the disease itself became known by a variety of names – ship, jail, army and camp fever – all of which reflect the conditions necessary for its transmission, but the limitations on movement made it all the worse in a prison.³⁷ Howard also mentions the high incidence of ‘confluent small-pox’, also endemic in eighteenth-century prisons, and which I discuss in the Australian context in some detail later in this chapter. Robert Hughes has written that ‘no one was “improved” by a spell in [gaol]. They were holes in which prisoners could be forgotten for a while.’³⁸ Australia, on the other side of the world – the geographical inverse of Britain – became a site where they could be exiled from public consciousness forever.

³⁶ John Howard, *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales* (Warrington: William Eyres, 1777), 16-17.

³⁷ Erica Charters, *Disease, War and the Imperial State*, 94.

³⁸ Robert Hughes, *Fatal Shore*, 37.

Somewhere in between prisons and exile were hulks – ships that were permanently moored along the Thames estuary at locations such as Woolwich – to ease the burden of the influx of prisoners. The conditions were no better than the prisons, and in many cases worse. The 1776 Hulks Act, proposed by Lord North, authorised convicted felons to perform hard labour around these floating prisons. Initially proposed as a temporary solution, the act would remain in place for almost a century.³⁹ The deplorable conditions of the hulks may be inferred from John Howard’s comments on a parliamentary inquiry into the *Justitia* at Woolwich, the first ship to be refitted as a hulk. Howard notes that in less than a two-year period, from August 1776, when convicts were first put on board, to March 1778, out of a total of 632 prisoners, 176 had already died.⁴⁰ Many convicted felons languished in the hulks and met their deaths while they awaited transportation.

Transportation was not a novel concept in the eighteenth century but the idea was the focus of renewed interest due to the overcrowding in prisons at home. There were also political motivations. The Transportation Act of 1717 allowed convicted felons to be dispatched to the American colonies, for seven or fourteen-year sentences for non-capital and capital felons respectively. This enabled a steady supply of labour throughout the period: over fifty thousand convicts were thought to have been sent to North America between 1718 and 1775, the second largest influx of immigrants after African slaves.⁴¹ However, the outcome of the American Revolution meant that this was no longer a viable option. And, as Hughes notes, the slave trade had ‘turned white convict labor into an economic irrelevance.’⁴² Prisons soon resumed overflowing. Furthermore, there was

³⁹ Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, 41.

⁴⁰ John Howard, *State of the Prisons* (2nd ed., Warrington: William Eyres, 1780), 428.

⁴¹ Allan Brooke and David Brandon, *Bound for Botany Bay: British Convict Voyages to Australia* (Kew: The National Archives, 2005), 22.

⁴² Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, 41.

interest in the British acquisition of new territory in the South Pacific in the second half of the eighteenth century, which suggested the possibility of a colony in that region. Brooke and Brandon also cite France and Holland's increased trading ties with the East Indies and China as further motivation for England to develop a stronghold in the Pacific, before it found itself forced out.⁴³ A recent biography of Arthur Phillip, the man appointed to lead the First Fleet and the first governor of New South Wales, adds weight to the claim that Anglo-French rivalry was a contributory factor in the establishment of a settlement at New South Wales. Michael Pembroke writes that intelligence passed to the Home Office in 1785 suggested that the French explorer, La Pérouse, was planning to establish a convict colony at New Zealand.⁴⁴ In this case, the information proved false, but part of La Pérouse's official instructions were to determine whether the English had settled there and, if so, provide a report on the extent of the settlement.⁴⁵

Another issue that puts Anglo-French rivalry at the forefront of the promotion of a New South Wales settlement was the question of whether British claims to possession of the east coast of Australia – made by Captain Cook in 1770 – were actually valid. As Pembroke explains, 'a claim [of possession] would remain conditional unless and until it was followed by occupation and settlement.'⁴⁶ This position had been set out by Emerich de Vattel in his 1758 work *The Law of Nations or the Principles of Natural Law*, in which he claimed that it was not possible to 'acknowledge the property and sovereignty of a nation over any uninhabited countries' until it had 'formed settlements, or of which it has made actual use.'⁴⁷ Australia was widely considered *terra nullius* by the British (that is,

⁴³ Brooke and Brandon, *Bound for Botany Bay*, 35; Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, 58-59.

⁴⁴ Michael Pembroke, *Arthur Phillip: Sailor, Mercenary, Governor, Spy* (Melbourne: Hardie Grant Books, 2015), 118.

⁴⁵ Dunmore, *Journal of La Pérouse*, I, cxxvii.

⁴⁶ Pembroke, *Arthur Phillip*, 130.

⁴⁷ De Vattel quoted in Pembroke, *Arthur Phillip*, 130.

land belonging to no-one), despite being obviously inhabited, so it is likely that the British were keen to consolidate whatever claims they did have to the area, especially in light of recent naval activity by the French.

The British economy was certainly reeling from the cost of wars with France when William Pitt became prime minister in 1783, the same year in which James Matra petitioned the government on the possible benefits – some financial – of an English settlement in New South Wales. Matra's proposal was couched in compensatory terms as a project that might 'atone for the loss of our American colonies', with Botany Bay as a place where 'those unfortunate American loyalists... may repair their broken fortunes'. Initially he made no mention of convicts or prisons (although the notion of exile was a component); rather, he stressed – with recourse to his maritime experience – the potential for agriculture, the soil being 'happily adapted to produce every various and valuable production of Europe'.⁴⁸ In particular, perhaps conflating his experiences with New Zealand, he cited the abundance of flax, a plant which produced the fibre used in sails, and hence important to naval operations. In this the eventual colony would prove Matra's optimism misplaced, but his proposal nonetheless serves as evidence that interest in an Australian colony was not merely as an expedient solution to the growing political problem of the state of the prisons; there were also financial ambitions at stake. Matra had the endorsement of Joseph Banks for his project, although this influence was not enough to secure its acceptance in 1783: it was passed over for the time being.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ "James Mario Matra's proposal," in *Historical Records of New South Wales*, ed. Frank M. Bladen, vol. I, pt. II (Sydney: Charles Potter, 1892), 1-6.

⁴⁹ John Gascoigne, *Science in the Service of Empire: Joseph Banks, the British State and the Uses of Science in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 39, 119.

Despite his approval of Matra's scheme, and appearance before parliament on more than one occasion to give his views on the usefulness of a distant colony, it is worth noting that in his journal from the *Endeavour* voyage, Banks was never actually particularly effusive about Botany Bay. His first impression, in April 1770, was that the land 'appeared Clifty and barren without wood' and the closest he came to a recommendation of the site was that 'a company of People who should have the misfortune of being shipwreckd upon it might support themselves, even by the resources that we have seen.'⁵⁰ He had collected interesting specimens of flora and fauna with Solander and Spöring the following month, but there was scant evidence to suggest that he thought Botany Bay particularly well-disposed for a settlement at this stage. Cook had been slightly more enthusiastic, suggesting 'most sorts of Grain, Fruit, Roots, &c^a of every kind would flourish here once they were brought hither', but Cook was not a farmer, and was considering only the amenities available to a small expeditionary crew, not an entire settlement built by convict labour.⁵¹ New Zealand was a much more attractive prospect, given the refreshments that could be obtained there, but the Maori, with their capacity for violence, made it inhospitable in the long term. The natives of New Holland on the other hand, as Matra succinctly put it, were 'only a few black inhabitants' who 'knew no other arts than such as were necessary to their mere animal existence', and were unlikely to mount a united challenge.⁵² It is probable, as with his involvement in the *Bounty* expedition at around the same time, that Banks was interested in an Australian settlement for the commercial and

⁵⁰ Beaglehole, *Journal of Banks*, II, 53, 122.

⁵¹ Beaglehole, *Endeavour*, 310-11.

⁵² 'Matra's proposal', *HRNSW*, 1-6.

scientific exploitation of botanical resources such as the flax plant. He had presented these motives to William Pitt in 1787, so that they could be included in the voyage instructions.⁵³

The Matra-Banks proposition was not the only one. Several ideas had been floated throughout the 1770s and 1780s, and destinations in West Africa, including Sierra Leone, were also considered.⁵⁴ A Committee on Transportation, under Lord Beauchamp, was convened in 1785 to hear from members of the public, including those with experience of the transportation of convicts, on the relative merits and drawbacks of various schemes and locations. It was before this committee on 9 May 1785, that James Matra would reply to questions on a revised version of his scheme that included transportation of 500 convicts as one of its main objectives. Joseph Banks was present the following day and, in response to the Committee's question on whether any of the lands he had discovered with Captain Cook could be suitably adapted to provide a settlement, he suggested that the east coast of New South Wales was 'sufficiently fertile to support a Considerable Number of Europeans who would cultivate it in the Ordinary Modes used in England'.⁵⁵ Despite these recommendations, the Committee selected an area around Das Voltas Bay on the southwest African coast for transportation. However, when the ship that was dispatched in September of that year to scope out the area returned, it was decided that Das Voltas Bay was uninhabitable, and Botany Bay again came into focus.

⁵³ Alan Frost, *Convicts and Empire: A Naval Question, 1776-1811* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 139.

⁵⁴ A detailed examination of the schemes and their proponents can be found in Frost, *Convicts and Empire*, 3-50.

⁵⁵ Minutes of House of Commons Committee respecting transportation of convicts to West Africa. Home Office (HO) 7/1. The National Archives (TNA), Kew.

The First Fleet and the Health of its Crews in England

In August 1786 the government made official its plans for a Botany Bay voyage. That it did not bother to send ships in advance to assess this distant location's suitability for permanent settlement is an indication of how desperate the situation had become in English prisons and hulks, and how quickly the government wanted a British presence established in the South Pacific. In October, Captain Arthur Phillip was given royal commission as Governor of New South Wales. Having had an extensive and varied, if not particularly distinguished naval career, Phillip was a reliable and competent choice. He was also sensitive to the health and needs of his subordinates, and of the necessity of bringing as many of the 750 or so convicts as possible to their destination in a condition fit for work.

Phillip's letters to Lord Sydney's Under-Secretary, Evan Nepean, in the early months of 1787 reveal that the ships marked for the First Fleet voyage were woefully undersupplied. He was informed by a surgeon that, on board the *Alexander* and *Lady Penrhyn* (a former slave ship which would transport only women), 'there are amongst the men several unable to help themselves' and 'no kind of surgeon's instruments have been put on board that ship or any of the transports.'⁵⁶ He asked for these issues to be promptly redressed, demonstrating an awareness of the demands of the voyage, and a personal investment in the future colony – characteristics he would display again when calamities befell the settlement at New South Wales. Phillip would send several more letters over the following weeks until outstanding deficits had been rectified. It is clear that government officials failed to grasp how far away Australia actually was, and the attendant hardships of such a long voyage. The provisioning of the ships suggests they were also unconcerned about convict welfare. Phillip pointed out to Sydney that, 'a convict has only, for forty-two

⁵⁶ Phillip to Nepean, January 11 1787, *HRNSW*, 46-47.

days, sixteen pounds of bread' for the voyage and requested 'that orders may be given for supplying both marines and convicts with fresh meat and vegetables' while they were moored at Portsmouth.⁵⁷ He was mindful that, at present, conditions were perfect for a scurvy outbreak.

Newspaper reports from the spring of 1787 indicate varying degrees of sickness on board the convict ships which had been loaded with prisoners but still lacked the essentials for their voyage out. Although reportage on the health of the convicts was generally sparse, the *Morning Herald* provided some regular updates. On 6 April 1787, it recorded that their condition was so bad 'that very few will *live* to be transported to their intended settlement' as 'a contagious fever [had] seized all the prisoners'. The report remarks that the ships had since been fumigated – suggesting a state of not total neglect – but their 'numbers continue daily to drop off'.⁵⁸ A further dispatch followed on 25 April, when the publication rhetorically asked, 'How much longer will the *humane* rulers of our state, suffer the devoted convicts to lie putrifying on board the transport vessels at Portsmouth.'⁵⁹ The deplorable conditions had clearly become a talking point. Crowds of people thronged to see the convicts in their habitat, where they became both specimen and spectacle for the general public. As one historian of the hulks has noted, 'convicts at work became recognised as among the sights of the Capital.'⁶⁰ In some cases, gatherings of sightseers became so large that walls were erected to stop them interfering with the convicts' routines. Unlike prisons, which kept felons at a safe and secure distance from the public, hulks were a permanent display.

⁵⁷ Phillip to Sydney, February 28 1787, *HRNSW*, 50-51.

⁵⁸ "The Botany Bay scheme," *Morning Herald*, April 6, 1787.

⁵⁹ "How much longer," *Morning Herald*, April 25, 1787.

⁶⁰ W. Branch Johnson, *The English Prison Hulks* (Sussex: Phillimore & Co. Ltd., 1970), 4.

Public interest was further stimulated by news reports of riots in prisons and daring escape attempts from hulks. In November 1776, for instance, five prisoners on board the *Justitia* managed to steal the arms chest, drive the warders below-deck and escape into a small boat which their friends had brought alongside.⁶¹ Later, days before the departure of the First Fleet in May 1787, a riot occurred in a Chelmsford jail when ‘the Convicts, under Sentence of Transportation, refused to go to their different Apartments, crying out, “Botany Bay or Liberty!”’⁶² News reporting of such incidents demonstrates the extent to which the general public were excited by public disturbances and curious about the sentence of transportation, this time to the more novel location of the South Seas.

The contagious fever the *Morning Herald* wrote of prior to departure of the Fleet was probably typhus but could also have been typhoid fever; the two were not differentiated in the eighteenth century but are in fact distinct diseases caused by different bacteria: *Rickettsia prowazekki* in typhus; *Salmonella typhi* in typhoid fever. Typhus is transmitted by external parasites such as lice and fleas. Symptoms develop within 1-2 weeks of infection and include ‘high fever, prostration, headache and body aches, and a widespread rash that covers the trunk and limbs of the body.’⁶³ The lice that act as disease vectors live in clothing, particularly when it is unwashed and frequently worn. As they require normal body temperature to survive, they ‘will not live in unworn clothing, and will leave a feverish or dead individual.’⁶⁴ These factors make crowded, unsanitary and cold conditions – such as the eighteenth-century prison or hulk – the perfect environment for the bacterium to thrive.

⁶¹ Johnson, *English Prison Hulks*, 6.

⁶² *St James Chronicle or the British Evening Post* (London, England), 8 May, 1787.

⁶³ Victoria A. Harden, “Typhus, Epidemic,” in *The Cambridge World History of Human Disease*, ed. Kenneth F. Kiple, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1080-84.

⁶⁴ Charters, *Disease, War and the Imperial State*, 93-94.

Typhoid fever, however, lives only in humans, in the bloodstream and intestinal tract, is shed in the faeces of infected persons, and usually passed on in contaminated food and water, or sewerage, of which there would have been a deluge on any eighteenth-century ship. Its symptomology is similar to typhus: weakness, fever and sometimes a rash.⁶⁵ The conditions of hulks and prisons would have allowed for the rapid spread of both diseases, so it is easy to see how they became conflated.

The man appointed as Surgeon General to the settlement by Lord Sydney was John White, an experienced naval surgeon. White's colourful journal, first published in 1790, is an important record, not just for its commentary on the health of the Fleet sent there and the early life of the colony – White was also interested in natural history and relations between Australians and British settlers – but because it is one of the few extant journals that details the conditions of convict ships *before* the departure of the fleet. White had met Phillip soon after his appointment in October 1786 and it is likely that he was influential in obtaining some of the medical equipment and victuals needed for the voyage: he had written to Phillip in February, 1787, pointing out that there were 'no necessaries supplied' for the marines or convicts in case of illness.⁶⁶ White's initial inspection of the *Alexander* convoy in March 1787 suggests that the newspaper reports were exaggerated, or that the convicts were no worse than could be expected. He noted there were 'several in bed with slight inflammatory complaints' and that the convicts' 'wretched clothing was but a poor defence' against the cold weather and made orders for suitable clothing and a supply of fresh provisions for the sick.⁶⁷ However, he refuted the exaggerated claims of one

⁶⁵ "Typhoid Fever," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2017, accessed June 30, 2017. http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/typhoid_fever/.

⁶⁶ White to Phillip, 7 February 1787, *HRNSW*, 48.

⁶⁷ John White, *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales*, ed. Alec H. Chisholm (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1962), 48-49.

physician on board the vessel who claimed that the convicts were all suffering from a ‘malignant disease’ and would soon perish, offering recourse to the advice of James Lind, who had been stationed just on the other side of Portsmouth Harbour, at the Royal Hospital Haslar.

In his 1757 essay on preserving the health of seamen, Lind had written about the dangers of fevers on crowded Royal Navy ships. As with his work on scurvy, he suspected that ‘[t]oo close confinement in the damp and foul Air of large ships’ was the main cause of fevers attending naval vessels.⁶⁸ Although Lind did not know the causes of typhoid fever or typhus – not discovered until 1880 and 1916 respectively – his suggested preventative methods once again followed a certain logic, and would have been effective. Lind noticed, for example, that fevers could be spread through clothing brought on board ships from diseased persons, or from prisons, and suggested that

[T]heir Old clothes may be destroyed, and new ones given them; and their Persons being well purified and cleaned, they would thus be prevented from carrying on Rags, Filth and Infection on board the King’s Ships.⁶⁹

This certainly would have stopped a typhus outbreak from spreading and Lind was especially adamant about doing this if the person had been brought in from Newgate prison, indicating his belief that ship and jail fevers shared a common origin.

The crowdedness on the *Alexander* was also a matter of concern for John White, who ordered that the convict holds be washed with quicklime to correct the ‘unwholesome dampness which usually appeared on the beams and sides of the ships, and was occasioned by the breath of the people.’⁷⁰ In this remark, White was again echoing Lind who, like

⁶⁸ James Lind, *An Essay, on the most effectual means, of preserving the health of seamen, in the Royal Navy* (London: A. Millar, 1757), ix.

⁶⁹ Lind, *An Essay*, 4.

⁷⁰ White, *Journal*, 51.

many eighteenth-century medical practitioners, believed that fever arose ‘from corrupt air, produced by crowded living situations or from putrefying matter.’⁷¹ The visibility of the breath and its noxious afterlife in the ship’s dampness also gives an indication of quite how crowded the convict ships were: Charles Bateson has estimated that that combined tonnage of the ships probably just exceeded 3,000, which meant less than three tons per passenger.⁷² After allowing for provisions, there would have been considerably less space: Phillip complained to Nepean that there was less than 1.5 tons per person, suggesting that, even by eighteenth-century standards, this was a meagre rationing of space.⁷³

The passage of the First Fleet to Australia

On 13 May, 1787, the ships of the First Fleet weighed anchor and left Portsmouth. There were six convict ships, the *Alexander*, *Charlotte*, *Friendship*, *Lady Penrhyn*, *Prince of Wales* and *Scarborough*; two naval escorts, the flagship HMS *Sirius* and the *Supply*; and three naval storeships. In total there were around 750 convicts and 16 convicts’ children who left England; the total number of passengers including officers, marines, seamen and supernumeraries was nearer 1,500.⁷⁴ John White had by this point been transferred to the *Charlotte* and was making observations throughout the eight-month passage. On 28 May, he recorded the death of convict Ishmael Colman, who ‘worn out by lowness of spirits and debility, brought on by a long and close confinement, resigned his breath without a pang.’⁷⁵ Colman had been sentenced to seven years’ transportation for stealing three

⁷¹ Charters, *Disease, War and the Imperial State*, 96.

⁷² Charles Bateson, *The Convict Ships, 1787-1868* (Glasgow: Brown, Son & Ferguson, 1985), 96-98.

⁷³ Phillip to Nepean, 18 March 1787, *HRNSW*, 58-59.

⁷⁴ Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, 69.

⁷⁵ White, *Journal*, 52.

woollen blankets.⁷⁶ The first birth since the Fleet left England came three days after the first death. On 31 May, surgeon Arthur Bowes Smyth, who travelled on the women's convict vessel, *Lady Penrhyn*, and gave a particularly dim view of its female cargo, recorded that Isabella Lawson, 33, had given birth to a baby girl.⁷⁷ Lawson had also been convicted of stealing (a waistcoat and bed curtains).⁷⁸ The vast majority of convicts were sentenced for crimes against property, the European sacrosanctity that Cook had spent three Pacific voyages trying vainly to enforce elsewhere. The parallels between the convicts and the 'natives' of the Pacific make an interesting comparison: they were both thieves of European clothes and trinkets. The difference, we might infer, is that the convicts stole to supplement their existence and the 'natives' stole from curiosity or daring. But Europeans in the Pacific were not as definitive or discerning about what constituted theft as the English courts were. Banks's acquisition of the 'forty or fifty' lances from an Australian bark hut in 1770 is a case in point. What the convicts and the Australians also shared was their being viewed as a spectacle and a display. Shackled and hungry, the prisoners of New South Wales were as much a curiosity to the Australians, as the dancing, fighting Australians were to the convicts and officers.

On 3 June, the Fleet arrived at Tenerife for refreshments, with fresh beef and a limited supply of fruit and vegetables served to the convicts.⁷⁹ The following day White drew up a sick list from the six convict ships, which Phillip sent to Lord Sydney. It comprised 74 convicts and seven marines. It is not possible to deduce with accuracy who suffered from what exactly, but the three biggest hindrances to the health of the human

⁷⁶ John Copley, *Crimes of the First Fleet Convicts* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1986), 58.

⁷⁷ Arthur Bowes Smyth, *The Journal of Arthur Bowes Smyth, surgeon: Lady Penrhyn, 1787-1789*, eds. Paul G. Fidlon and R. J. Ryan (Sydney: Australian Documents Library, 1979), 18.

⁷⁸ Copley, *Crimes*, 239.

⁷⁹ White, *Journal*, 53.

cargoes, according to White's report, were, 'Debility' (30); 'Intermittent Fever' (20); 'Venereal' (10).⁸⁰ It is highly probable that typhus sufferers were spread across the debility and fever categories, and that there were more than 10 suffering from venereal complaints. Two days after White's inventory, John Clarke, sentenced to death (commuted to 7 years' transportation) for stealing a sheep, 'died of a dropsy.'⁸¹ Clark was one of two convicts labelled under 'Dropsy' on White's report, the eighteenth-century term for oedema, a fluid build-up in the body's tissues or organs. Lind had associated dropsy with late-stage scurvy, which does not feature on White's list.⁸² This may indicate that no one was thought to be suffering from it severely enough to be recorded.

White's journal makes several references to an almost daily 'promiscuous intercourse' occurring between the female convicts and seamen and marines, although they are always framed by the 'desire of the women to be with the men' and not the other way round.⁸³ The convict women were viewed and treated as whores by their superiors, and it is a popular belief that many were prostitutes, although none were sentenced for prostitution (it did not fall under the remit for transportation).⁸⁴ For Johann Reinhold Forster, reflecting on Cook's second voyage, treatment of women was an index of how civilised a society was, or how far it had 'emerged from the state of savages'.⁸⁵ But just as attitudes towards property were handled ambiguously (if not outright hypocritically) by Europeans in Australian contexts, so too were attitudes towards women.

⁸⁰ Phillip to Sydney, 5 June 1787, *HRNSW*, 107.

⁸¹ Cobley, *Crimes*, 54; White, *Journal*, 53-54.

⁸² Lind, *A treatise* (3rd ed. London: S. Crowder, 1772), 113.

⁸³ White, *Journal*, 63.

⁸⁴ Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, 71.

⁸⁵ Forster, *Observations*, 260.

That poor women were prostitutes was a common assumption in the eighteenth century, especially for the urban poor, who made up the majority of the women bound for Botany Bay. However, as Peter Linebaugh has explained, ‘it is difficult to analyse prostitution because many eighteenth-century sources, especially those associated with criminal sources, assume rather than explain what was meant by the term.’⁸⁶ Such assumptions are clearly at work in the journals of the officers on the fleet, who had a limited knowledge of the crimes those women had committed. Arthur Bowes Smyth’s journal gives an indication of the harsh treatment women sentenced to transportation could be expected to receive, in addition to some cultural assumptions:

The greater part of them are so totally abandoned & callous’d to any sense of shame & even common decency that it frequently becomes indispensably necessary to inflict Corporal punishment upon them, and sorry I am to say that even this rigid mode or proceeding has not had the desired effect, since every day furnishes proofs of their being more hardened in their Wickedness[...]⁸⁷

Punishments included the use of ‘thumb Screws’. Whether these were operated as torture devices, as they were historically, usually to extract a confession, or simply as a means of restraint, is unclear. He is also vague about what exactly they are being punished *for* but ‘thieving’, he tells us ‘rank’d amongst the least of their crimes’. Their tendency to swearing, which was apparently so bad under punishment that they were gagged, was another. The sailors would later amuse themselves by teaching the Australians swearwords (as the letters of the *Sirius*’s surgeon George Worgan show), but they were particularly unsettled to hear European women do the same.⁸⁸ Poor women, especially those around port towns, threatened models of familial structures and politeness: they were independent,

⁸⁶ Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Penguin, 1993), 145.

⁸⁷ Smyth, *Journal*, 47.

⁸⁸ George Bouchier Worgan, letter written to his brother Richard Worgan, 12-18 June 1788. Mitchell Library (ML), Sydney. Safe 1/114.

used to forming only brief, expedient relationships, and often turned to crime in order to survive. Smyth also reports on the women's heads being shaved as a punishment, and one which 'they seemed to dislike more than any other'.⁸⁹ We can speculate that, on the surface, this was a particularly feared punishment because it made them a less attractive prospect, and this does reveal something of the nature of relationships formed by convict women on the Fleet. On a more complex level, especially in a society obsessed with hair and hairstyles, being shaved represented a loss of both femininity and self, and removed the most obvious marker of individuality amongst the convict women.

The visits between female convicts and sailors were not as simplistic as the surgeons White or Smyth made out. Relationships between poor, urban women and mariners were frequent throughout the period for more complex, interrelated reasons. As Linebaugh suggests, 'many London women had material relations with the London mariner, for he might become for her a source of maintenance and money'.⁹⁰ In Australia, money would be irrelevant, but maintenance was crucial. The women of the Fleet correctly anticipated the hardships they would have to endure: many of them already had direct experience of stealing to supplement their meagre existence, and being able to extract a few favours from a sympathetic individual (officer or convict) could mean the difference between starvation and survival. As evidence of such behaviour, we can look ahead to the criminal court held at Port Jackson in March 1789, where six marines were sentenced to death and executed for robbing the public stores. The motive for their crimes, Captain Hunter tells us, was 'occasioned by some unfortunate connections they had made with women convicts', with whom they had shared their plundered food, spirits and tobacco.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Smyth, *Journal*, 47-48.

⁹⁰ Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*, 139-140.

⁹¹ John Hunter, *An Historical Journal, 1787-1792*, ed. John Bach (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1968), 94.

On criminal partnerships, Linebaugh has observed that male thieves often worked in collaboration with women, as evidenced by the large number of women complicit in highway robbery on the Fleet.⁹² Martha Baker, who also travelled in the *Lady Penrhyn* was one example; she was convicted of robbing a silver watch on the King's Highway with her husband.⁹³ Such partnerships, some of which were forged on the voyage out, were of mutual benefit and provided a degree of protection for both parties. This is why, according to Smyth, the shaved head was a punishment 'dislike[d] more than any other' – even, apparently, the thumb screws.

On 2 July, when White visited the other ships, he recorded his surprise at the overall state of health in spite of the dampness and bad weather – Smyth took particular satisfaction in his proclamation that the *Lady Penrhyn* was the healthiest.⁹⁴ There were outbreaks of scurvy in the coming days, however – which White attributed to an insufficient supply of water – despite his liberal use of the (largely ineffective) essence of malt.⁹⁵ Once the ships reached the port of Rio de Janeiro, White reported that the large quantities of vegetables and oranges procured had restored the convicts to health. The journal of Jacob Nagle, an American seaman on the *Sirius* who had been just about everywhere in the known world, recalled how at Rio de Janeiro 'the Prisoners were Supplied with Boat Loads of Oranges.'⁹⁶ In this respect, Phillip was following the advice of James Lind more closely than James Cook, and showing himself to be ahead of current naval medical thought. Phillip's naval experience was more influential in his decision-

⁹² Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*, 145.

⁹³ Cobley, *Crimes*, 12.

⁹⁴ Smyth, *Journal*, 24.

⁹⁵ Jonathan Lamb suggests that the malt might have had slight utility in preventing other nutritional disorders such as beriberi and pellagra. See Lamb, *Scurvy*, 37, 47.

⁹⁶ Jacob Nagle, *The Nagle Journal: A Diary of the Life of Jacob Nagle, Sailor, from the Year 1775-1841*, ed. John C. Dann (New York: Wiedenfield & Nicolson, 1988), 38.

making than the tradition of ‘custom and eminent opinion’, so central to eighteenth-century medical thought, that I have written about in the previous chapter.

There is some evidence, albeit circumstantial, to suggest that Phillip had previously transported convicts, on a voyage from Portugal to Brazil, which had informed his attitudes to disease prevention. The *St James’s Chronicle* reported on 2 February, 1787, that Phillip had ‘obtained no small degree of reputation’ since he had been

[E]mployed about five Years since to carry out with him near 400 Criminals from Lisbon to the Brasils, [when] during the Course of the Voyage an epidemical Disorder broke out on board his Ship[...]⁹⁷

The article goes on to detail how Phillip overcame the sickness of his crew and successfully completed the voyage, adding that due to ‘the meritorious Conduct of the Transports’ the convicts were ‘not only emancipated from their servitude, but had small Portions of Land allotted them in that delightful Country.’ This information is not recorded elsewhere in accounts of Phillip’s activities but this is not altogether surprising. Throughout the 1780s he was employed at various times as a spy for the British government, dispatched to French port towns, ostensibly on ‘private affairs’, but in reality sending intelligence to Evan Nepean at the Home Office.⁹⁸ He had also been employed as a Captain in the Portuguese navy and served during the Spanish-Portuguese War of 1776-77, becoming well-acquainted with the viceroy of Rio de Janeiro.⁹⁹ Given Phillip’s experience and connections within the Portuguese navy, not to mention his fluency in Portuguese, I suspect there is some veracity in the *St James Chronicle’s* claim; the specificity of its details does not bear the hallmarks of a hack job, nor is there any reference to a similar voyage, led by someone else, that the writer may have confused it with mistakenly. The

⁹⁷ “Capt. Phillips,” *St James’s Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 2 February, 1787.

⁹⁸ A narrative of Phillip’s time as a spy can be found in Pembroke, *Arthur Phillip*, 109-125.

⁹⁹ Alan Frost, *Arthur Phillip 1738-1814: His Voyaging* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1987), 58-59.

conclusion to the piece – the granting of small land plots to convicts – holds striking similarities with the instructions issued to Phillip as governor of New South Wales regarding emancipation.¹⁰⁰ If the Portuguese convict voyage did happen, it is extremely likely that Evan Nepean was knowledgeable about it and it would be no surprise that Phillip should be appointed for the Botany Bay expedition, given the similarities between them. In any case, the article would have been taken at face value by the newspaper reading public and, of course, French naval intelligence working in Britain.

When the First Fleet reached Rio de Janeiro there had been a total of fifteen deaths, which Phillip reported to Sydney; a relatively small number considering the overcrowding and under-provisioning of the ships. Unsurprisingly, the largest and most crowded ship, the *Alexander*, was also the unhealthiest, accounting for ten deaths.¹⁰¹

The Fleet would make one last stop for refreshments at the Cape of Good Hope, and here the mood of the officers became more sombre. As Alan Frost has noted, ‘the officers knew when leaving the Cape of Good Hope for the Southern Indian Ocean they would leave the known world.’¹⁰² Phillip knew this too, and was busy buying as much livestock (£2,000’s worth) as possible for his colony, which he also knew would have to endure considerable hardships on small rations.¹⁰³ Some convicts were now moved between the various ships to accommodate the influx of animals. From the surviving records of the convicts’ occupations, 44 percent of the convicts were rural labourers, although it is not clear how many of these were farmers and many would have lacked the skills to breed and raise animals. That a further 12 percent of the men and 11 percent of the

¹⁰⁰ Pembroke, *Arthur Phillip*, 156-157.

¹⁰¹ Arthur Phillip, letter to Lord Sydney, 12 March 1787. Colonial Office (CO) records, CO 201/2 part 2, f. 120. The National Archives (TNA), Kew.

¹⁰² Alan Frost, *The First Fleet: The Real Story* (Victoria: Black Inc., 2012), 173.

¹⁰³ Frost, *The First Fleet*, 172.

women were unemployed gives an indication of how ill-suited many of the convicts were to the agricultural labour on which their lives would soon depend.¹⁰⁴

Watkin Tench, Captain-Lieutenant of the Marines, had also travelled in the *Charlotte*. His journals remain the most widely read of any from the First Fleet and this is due to both their readability and surprising sensitivity to the situation of the convicts and the Australians. I say surprising because most eighteenth-century journals of exploration and encounter, certainly those written by people in command of expeditions, tend to be primarily perfunctory; dealing with the day-to-day objectives and events of the voyage, with philosophising and narrative construction taking second place. Cook's journals illustrate this well: it is clear that Cook became much more conscious of his duty as a writer as his career progressed. Compare, for instance, the comparatively terse journal entries on the first voyage with the longer, anthropologically-focused writings of the third. Tench, however, is the other way round: he displays a more intuitive – and modern – understanding of the expectations of the reading public and the popularity of travel narratives. Although his narratives do not quite follow the rigid pattern of the journals of a naval explorer, they are organised in way that would have appealed to readers of Cook's voyages, and his journals also make several references and comparisons to these. Isabelle Merle has summed up his writing style well:

Both Tench's narratives are written "as if" they were journals. They are divided into chronological episodes, organised in narrative chapters describing a series of events, followed by summing-up chapters taking stock of the characteristics of the country, the progress of the settlement, and the convicts or the natives.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, 74.

¹⁰⁵ Isabelle Merle, "Watkin Tench's Fieldwork: The Journal of an "Ethnographer" in Port Jackson, 1788-1791," in *Oceanic Encounters: Exchange, Desire, Violence*, eds. Margaret Jolly, Serge Tcherkézoff and Darrell Tyron (Canberra: ANU E-Press, 2009), 204.

It is Tench's awareness of the reading public, which Merle alerts us to, in addition to his skill as a writer, which explains how his journals came to be contracted for publication before he even left England. However, his narratives were intended to satisfy the expectations of a readership familiar with the generic conventions attached to travel writing, and are also moulded around these. The gulf between expectations and reality was not a preoccupation restricted to voyagers and explorers; those with contracts for publication had the expectations of the reading public, and the reality of what they experienced in Australia, to negotiate too.

On departing the Cape, Tench summed up his opinions on the comparatively low mortality rates across the ships:

To what cause are we to attribute this unhopd for success? I wish I could answer to the liberal manner in which Government supplied the expedition. But when the reader is told, that some of the necessary articles allowed to ships on a common passage to the West Indies, were withheld from us; that portable soup, wheat, and pickled vegetables were not allowed; and that an inadequate quantity of essence of malt was the only antiscorbutic supplied, his surprise will redouble at the result of the voyage.¹⁰⁶

The question Tench asks purports to be rhetorical. It certainly approaches hyperbole when it considers the First Fleet as being worse-supplied than slave ships to the West Indies. However, the answer to Tench's 'unhopd for success' is two-fold: most importantly, it was the care and attention of the surgeons, officers and sailors that kept the ships as healthy as possible. However, we should also consider that the convicts themselves must have been, if not well-behaved, then at least compliant in some regards when it came to cleanliness and hygiene. Tench's objectivity is appealing here: he is not afraid to assign blame for the failings of those charged with the provisioning of the ships. He is almost

¹⁰⁶ Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, 32.

making an appeal to his readers here about his honesty and integrity. He would maintain a similar level of nuance throughout his reporting on the life of the colony, as we shall see.

According to White's estimates, when the ships reached Botany Bay on 20 January 1788, there had been a total of 48 deaths, including those who died before the ships sailed: '36 male convicts, 4 female convicts, 5 convicts' children, 1 marine, 1 marine's wife, and 1 marine's child', or roughly 6 percent.¹⁰⁷ The figures suggest that the convicts were looked after as well as possible, and probably better than they would have been at home in the prisons and hulks. But now they needed to survive indefinitely in Australia, to build, inhabit and farm a colony with limited skills, resources and food. They would also have to attempt to live peaceably with their neighbours, the Australians, who had already been living there for thousands of years, as yet unaltered by the strains and impacts of European civilisation.

So far this chapter has established the motives for the settlement of Australia, the expectations established by records from Cook's voyages and the lives and duties of those who sailed on the First Fleet. The remainder assesses how these were developed on arrival at New South Wales, and suggests both a continuation and a complication of the idea of Australians as artefacts (as expressed by Parkinson, in Figure 1, and his contemporaries), and how smallpox came to undermine and rewrite traditional structures within Australian society.

¹⁰⁷ White, *Journal*, 109 and n. 51.

Europeans in Australia

After the arrival of the Fleet into Botany Bay on 20 January 1788, the first meetings between Europeans and Australians since James Cook's stay in 1770 commenced. The writers on the expedition were familiar with Cook's account, so it is not surprising that they set to making immediate comparisons between what they expected about Australians from the *Endeavour* voyage and the reality of what they saw. The First Fleet writers were conducting tests in their accounts of Australia, experimenting on – or against – at least the veracity of Cook's observations, if not his credibility as an eye witness (the expedition would soon abandon Cook's preferred site of Botany Bay for Port Jackson). There are two points in particular where they are keen to contradict Cook's record. The first was that there were many more Australians than they had expected. As Tench tells us, '[w]e found the natives tolerably numerous' and 'the country more populous than Mr. Cook thought it.'¹⁰⁸ This observation, confirmed by other writers, is an important one because it was an additional complication to the settlement process. Those on the Fleet may have anticipated, as James Matra had clearly done in his 1783 proposition, that with such a sparse number of inhabitants there would be no resistance to the process of colonisation. The collective surprise at the extent of the native population is, perhaps, a tacit acknowledgement that the task of establishing a settlement would be more fraught than initially expected.

Second, Cook had portrayed the Australians as being incurious about European visitors. The earliest and most direct refutation of this comes from Captain John Hunter, the second most senior member of the expedition after Phillip, who would himself become governor in 1795. Hunter writes, with recourse to the account of the *Endeavour* voyage, that he was surprised to find the natives both numerous and curious:

¹⁰⁸ Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, 35.

I think it is observed in the account of that voyage, that at Botany-bay they had seen very few of the natives, and that they appeared a very stupid race of people, who were void of curiosity. We saw them in considerable numbers, and they appeared to be a very lively and inquisitive race... they examined us with the greatest attention, and expressed the utmost astonishment, at the different covering we had on, for they certainly considered our cloaths as so many different skins, and the hat as part of the head... they danced and sang with us, and imitated our words and motions, as we did theirs.¹⁰⁹

In this entry Hunter challenges Cook's conceptions of the Australians by asserting that they are reciprocally interested in the European visitors, particularly their bodies. The anatomical vocabularies compiled at the Endeavour River in 1770, which we may assume to be anatomical out of sheer expediency on the part of the explorers, acquire an added layer of meaning if we speculate that this process was instigated by the Australians as much as the voyagers. What we gain from such a suggestion is the implication that there was more agency among Australians in this process than previous explorers' accounts allowed, and this would be more in fitting with the curiosity the Australians displayed which surprised the journal-keepers of the Fleet. Although Hunter would later modify his opinions on Australians (writing, for instance that they were 'abominably filthy'), in this passage and in others, he is able to consider that the moment of contact can be equally strange and surprising for both parties.¹¹⁰ Whether Australians really thought that European clothing was 'so many different skins' is doubtful, but Lieutenant Philip Gidley King (who would also become a future governor of New South Wales) was equally astute at registering their surprise and curiosity, noting that they

seemed quite astonished at ye figure we cut in being clothed & I think it is very easy to conceive ye ridiculous figure we must appear to these poor creatures, who appear perfectly naked.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Hunter, *An Historical Journal*, 37.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹¹¹ Philip Gidley King, *The Journal of Philip Gidley King: Lieutenant, R. N., 1787-1790*, eds. Paul G. Fidler and R. J. Ryan (Sydney: Australian Documents Library, 1980), 32-35.

In considering the ridiculousness of first encounters from both sides of the beach, King and Hunter display an awareness that was often absent from previous explorers like Cook and Banks. King, in particular, is able to perceive how, to the Australians – nomadic tribes used to travelling great distances in intense heat – European clothing was an absurd superfluity. The interest in nakedness, which permeates European exploratory journals, was especially acute during these encounters.

From the records it appears that the Australians were in some doubt as to the sex of the European settlers: unlike the male Australians, they were shaven and clothed and, as Clendinnen has written, ‘Australians followed different protocols for the genders even more earnestly than did the British, so any ambiguity in this area was deeply embarrassing.’¹¹² The Europeans were always eager to demonstrate the superiority of their weapons to Australians: part of the civilising mission – one Cook had frequent recourse to – was to convince Oceanic peoples of the power of firearms. Tench recalls that in the first few days at Botany Bay, the party had two priorities:

Our first object was to win their affections, and our next to convince them of the superiority we possessed: for without the latter, the former we knew would be of little importance.¹¹³

John White had wasted no time on the latter: on the day of his arrival he had ordered a man’s shield to be propped up so he could fire a pistol at it, noting with satisfaction that ‘[t]he explosion frightened him’.¹¹⁴ The European men were also eager to refute any speculation among the Australians that they might be female. In Australian society, men

¹¹² Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers*, 10-11.

¹¹³ Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, 37.

¹¹⁴ White, *Journal*, 111.

were warriors, and the European men would have to be seen on equal footing if they were to ‘win the affections’ of their new comrades.

Philip Gidley King was the man to assuage the Australians’ doubt:

As they took us for women, not having our beards grown, I ordered one of the people to undeceive them in this particular when they made a great shout of Admiration...¹¹⁵

It is worth noting that those sailors on the First Fleet were not the only European men to expose their naked bodies to Australians in the hope of establishing a rapport with them. When the French explorer, Marion du Fresne, made landfall at Van Diemen’s Land (now Tasmania) in March 1772, according to his colleague Lieutenant Le Dez, he ‘made two sailors undress and go ashore, unarmed, carrying with them some small presents such as mirrors, necklaces etc.’¹¹⁶ In Le Dez’s account, the rationale for nakedness is not entirely clear but it is construed a peace gesture, something to demonstrate a respectful assimilation with Tasmanian ways of life, albeit with the ulterior motive of gaining access to their resources. The Pacific historian John Dunmore offers up another explanation, arguing that it was designed ‘so that they would not look threatening and could be seen to be normal human beings – apart from their white skin which puzzled the natives.’¹¹⁷ Dunmore’s analysis speaks to the strange, almost transcendent power of naval uniforms. But it was not just Oceanic peoples who found uniformed men hard to ‘read’. Historians of Bougainville’s circumnavigation (1766-69) will be aware of the extraordinary story of Jeanne Baret, a botanist of humble origins, who managed to successfully disguise herself as man until the expedition reached Tahiti in May 1768. It was the Tahitians who

¹¹⁵ King, *Journal*, 35.

¹¹⁶ Edward Duyker (ed.) *The Discovery of Tasmania: Journal Extracts from the Expeditions of Abel Janszoon Tasman and Marc-Joseph Marion du Fresne* (Hobart: St. David’s Park Publishing, 1992), 31.

¹¹⁷ John Dunmore, *Visions and Realities: France in the Pacific, 1695-1995* (Waikanae: Heritage Press, 1997), 82.

undeceived the French about the gender of Jean (as “he” was known), ‘making proposals that were unequivocal shouting *Ayenne* which means girl in the local tongue’; but clearly, to the officers of ship (excepting her partner, the naturalist Phillibert Commerson, whose idea it was) the uniform alone was enough of an indication of status and gender not to raise the alarm any earlier.¹¹⁸

The determination of the Tahitians to reveal the true Jeanne Baret, and the Australians’ doubt surrounding the masculinity of officers from the First Fleet hints at a more obvious question which seems to have escaped European voyagers: how was it possible that boatfuls of *only* men could show up on distant shores? In societies where women were more fully integrated – in terms of subsistence and employment, at least – it was inconceivable that not a single woman was present at those first encounters, remembering, of course, that female convicts – like Australian women – were largely kept out of sight. No doubt the Australians were just as interested by these hidden women as the Europeans were by the women of Australian tribes. Such curiosity about Australian women comes across in Hunter’s account when he writes, ‘we observed at a distance a number of women, who were peeping from their concealments’.¹¹⁹ The Australians and Europeans at least shared some common preoccupations. Incidentally, that word ‘peeping’ would assume a growing significance in the literature of European penetration of the South Pacific. Herman Melville would include it in the subtitle to debut novel *Typee* (1846), the subject of my third chapter.

Returning to the beach: having instructed one of his party to present his genitals as irrefutable proof of their sex, King records their shouts of ‘admiration’. There is a direct

¹¹⁸ John Dunmore (ed.), *The Pacific Journal of Louis-Antoine de Bougainville 1767-1768* (London: Hakluyt Society, 2002), 229.

¹¹⁹ Hunter, *An Historical Journal*, 39.

parallel here in the accounts of du Fresne's landfall at Tasmania where, following the naked sailors being sent to meet the crowd on shore, Le Dez writes that the 'Diemenlanders... put their spears on the ground and with several gestures which marked their joy and contentment, came leaping to meet [us]'.¹²⁰ However the nakedness was interpreted – whether as confirmation that visitors were mortals or men, or simply as a sign of respect, it seemed to work for Europeans, and King was drawing on such accounts as he led his men ashore that day. With the issue resolved, King notes that the women of the tribe suddenly revealed themselves, where, apparently, the Australian men 'made us understand their persons were at our service'.¹²¹ I suspect King was reading too much into the kind of gesticulation that accompanied such early encounters, applying his imagination on sexuality and the Pacific too broadly. The scene ends with King applying a 'handkerchief where Eve did y^e fig leaf' over a naked Australian woman, before the Australians set up another loud cheer. The surgeon George Worgan, whose account of the settlement takes the form of a long and lively letter to his brother in England, described this early meeting as both amicable and enjoyable, noting the Australians were

wonderfully expert at the art of Mimickry, both in their Actions and in repeating many of our Phrases, they will say-"Good Bye" after us, very distinctly. The Sailors teach them to swear.¹²²

What Worgan did not realise was that the Australian capacity for mimicry was a reflection of their frequent contact with other tribes, where they would need to quickly assimilate new vocabularies and dialects to communicate and trade; an example of the variety in their languages which escaped the crew of the *Endeavour*, with their singular lexicons.

¹²⁰ Duyker, *Discovery of Tasmania*, 31

¹²¹ King, *Journal*, 35.

¹²² Worgan, letter, ML Safe 1/114.

In King's retelling of this episode, there is a mirrored curiosity, and instant gratification at work. As soon as the Australians begin to doubt the gender of the Europeans, King orders one of his men to publish the proof. And just as the Australian women become visible, they are apparently offered to the Europeans sexually. Regardless of the accuracy of his interpretation, King was keen to prove the mutual curiosity as instantly reciprocal and to establish a kind of egalitarianism between men of both parties, which finds its outlet in camaraderie and bravado. It is interesting to note, too, the comparisons between King, Banks and Parkinson here. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the nakedness of the Australians – particularly the women – was something that had captured Banks's attention in 1770, when he noted that the women 'did not copy our mother Eve even in the fig leaf'. King, who had no doubt read Hawkesworth's publication of the *Endeavour* voyage, is establishing a rapport with Banks here, continuing a dialogue that had started almost twenty years earlier. But he is also providing one of the first instances of Europeans attempting to 'correct' – and therefore 'civilise' – Australians. However, the humour in the episode comes from the fact that the Australians dismiss his gesture as laughable, thus confirming the European's opinion of them. Like Parkinson and Banks, King was also experimenting with the possibilities of overlaying Christian images onto Australian bodies. In all cases, the image does not really fit: the man with the crucifix in Figure 1 looks out of place, while the woman with the handkerchief in King's journal becomes a source of amusement (or derision) for men of both parties.

The nakedness of the Australians highlighted other European priorities, such as the obsession with dirt and hygiene, and its implications for health and well-being. George Worgan would also comment that the Australians were 'entirely naked, scorning a veil as

big as a Fig-leaf'.¹²³ It appears this was a running obsession amongst First Fleet commentators. He ventured:

it may be said of these rude children of Nature, as of [Adam and Eve], "they are naked and not ashamed", and I may add, they are nasty and dirty and not ashamed.¹²⁴

Modifying other commentators' impressions of the Australians as being somewhat Edenic, Worgan adds the epithets 'nasty' and 'dirty'. With no intention of publishing, he could afford to be a little more acerbic in his writing. Hunter, who had perhaps the best eye for visual details of all the Fleet writers, was more specific about the 'dirt' on Australian skins:

[I]t is generally smeared with the fat of such animals as they kill, and afterwards covered by every sort of dirt; sand from the sea beach, ashes from their fires, all adhere to their greasy skin, which is never washed, except when dirt or accident, or the want of food, forces them to go into the water.¹²⁵

However, for all his powers of observation, Hunter did not realise that by covering themselves with animal fat and dirt the Australians had a practical and economical way of avoiding the myriad of insects around Sydney's harbours – an essential precaution for hunting tribes covering long distances and sleeping in the open air. Although the Europeans could sometimes be startlingly egalitarian in their treatment of the Australians, there were some prejudices which they would not attempt to overcome, and the obsession with clean and covered bodies was certainly one of those.

Tench was able to describe in intimate detail how one Australian, called Arabanoo, was appropriated (or kidnapped) in order to be useful in forging closer ties with surrounding tribes. The forced removal of Oceanic people for use as mediators was, of course, commonplace on Pacific voyages. Tupaia, on Cook's first voyage, for instance,

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Hunter, *An Historical Journal*, 41.

was used as an interpreter when it was discovered that some Polynesian islanders, such as the Tahitians and Maori, spoke similar languages.¹²⁶ However, kidnapping on land, where there were already established European settlements, would have had more sinister undertones for Arabanoo and his tribe. If we imagine the settlement through Australian eyes it must have appeared a macabre place. Alan Frost and Glyndwr Williams have drawn attention to some facets of the settlement which would have appeared most frightening to the Australians:

There were the hospital tents with their sick and dying, the floggings and less frequent but well-publicized hangings, the drunken brawls, the armed marines. To a people whose livelihood depended on their thin spacing across the land, the crowding of a thousand humans onto one site must have been at once incomprehensible and threatening.¹²⁷

I would add to this description that the Australians would have been further distressed by the sight of the convicts in shackles, including a large number of women, inexplicably enslaved by their own countrymen to perform manual labour and visibly in want of food (Hunter mentions that Arabanoo saw several convicts in shackles, ‘the cause of which he could not of course understand.’)¹²⁸

Frost and Williams have mentioned the sight of the hospital tents, and it is worth noting that in the early months of the settlement, the Europeans endured a huge bout of sickness. Famine was the most urgent issue as they struggled to negotiate their aspirations for cultivation with the harsh Australian climate and uninviting soil. There were also outbreaks of scurvy, which further reduced the convicts’ capacity for work. Watkin Tench documents its ‘usual ravages’ in the first months of the settlement.¹²⁹ However, my aim

¹²⁶ Salmond, *Two Worlds*, 252, 291-292.

¹²⁷ Frost and Williams, “New South Wales,” 181-182.

¹²⁸ Hunter, *An Historical Journal*, 93.

¹²⁹ Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, 59.

here is not to focus on a discussion of disease from the European perspective, as I did in the previous chapter, but to consider bodies and diseases within the framework of early European-Australian relationships, and to suggest how the Australians may have interpreted these encounters. The sickness and the famine would have been clear to Arabanoo; Tench's journals certainly suggest that he was astute observer of all around him, quickly learning English names and phrases.¹³⁰

The capture of Arabanoo on New Year's Eve, 1788, was part of a strategy devised by Phillip to make the Australians less hostile to the British. Phillip believed that if he could demonstrate kindness and hospitality to just one Australian in Port Jackson, it would encourage cordial relations with the others, and promote amicable interaction throughout the settlement area. It is no coincidence that, inserted immediately after the capture of Arabanoo in Judge-Advocate David Collins's account, is a 'report of the casualties' since leaving England, which lists four persons as 'killed by the natives' and a further twelve as 'missing'.¹³¹ Officials believed that by forcibly bringing strangers into the settlement and treating them with kindness, they could end the small but increasing number of acts of violence and retribution directed at them. Collins merely mentions that Arabanoo was clothed and 'a slight iron or manacle put upon his wrist.'¹³² Tench, characteristically, gives a more intimate account. Interestingly, the first thing the Europeans did with new their prisoner was shave and bathe him:

His hair, as might be supposed, was filled with vermin whose destruction seemed to afford him great triumph; nay, either revenge or pleasure prompted him to eat them! but on expressing our disgust and abhorrence he left it off.¹³³

¹³⁰ Ibid., 139-140.

¹³¹ David Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, 2 vols., ed. Brian H. Fletcher (Sydney: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1975), I, 40-41.

¹³² Collins, *An Account*, I, 40.

¹³³ Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, 141.

The European obsession with bodies and dirt, and its implications for health and cleanliness, also reveal them to be conscious spreaders of disease. Lice, in particular, were a concern. It was not yet proven that they were disease vectors, but the correlation between the presence of lice and the incidence of gaol fever (typhus) was noted by Lind and others. Cook had observed the Tahitians eating lice, a 'custom' which he found 'disagreeable to Europeans', but admitted that he 'seldom saw it done but among children and common people', highlighting his belief in Tahitian class structures.¹³⁴ Naval officers in particular were always on the lookout for lice. As N. A. M. Rodger has written, captains were likely to be blamed for an outbreak of typhus.¹³⁵

The naval enforcement of hygiene is extended here to become an act of experimentation as Arabanoo is subjected to the novelties of shaving and bathing. It should be added that, according to Tench, he willingly undertook these acts after seeing them performed on another man, which again demonstrates the reciprocal curiosity of the Australians in these early encounters, especially if we recall those initial interactions where – if King's interpretation is correct – shaved faces were viewed by Australians as markers of femininity. Interestingly, it is only after Arabanoo has been bathed that Tench feels he is able to make an accurate assertion of how black he is, adding 'they are as black as the lighter cast of African negroes.'¹³⁶ I suspect that Arabanoo's 'destruction' of the vermin – his 'revenge or pleasure', as Tench describes it – might be an assertion of power and masculinity, designed to intimidate and unnerve the Europeans, probably more as 'revenge' for his capture than mere sustenance. Tench's remarks demonstrate a conflation of dirt with blackness, comments which, like George Worgan's more candid assessment of

¹³⁴ Beaglehole, *Endeavour*, 124.

¹³⁵ N. A. M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London: Collins, 1986), 109.

¹³⁶ Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, 141.

the Australians as ‘nasty and dirty’, demonstrate an emerging preoccupation with racial classification which would develop into the race theory of the nineteenth century.¹³⁷ The European preoccupation with hygiene, however, made little difference in the event of an outbreak of smallpox around the colony, which I examine in the following section.

Smallpox in Australia

The introduction of smallpox into Australia was a momentous event in the history of that country. It decimated a large portion of the population, severely reduced the inhabitants’ capacity to resist European settlement, and fundamentally altered their traditional ways of life. In the history of European overseas expansion, the colonisation of Australia came relatively late. The smallpox epidemic of 1789 is therefore comparable in scale and newness to the destruction the virus caused when it accompanied the Spanish Conquistadors in Mexico in 1519, assisting in the collapse of the Aztec Empire, or the Incas of Peru two decades later.¹³⁸ We might reasonably expect – as the Australian epidemic occurred almost three centuries later – to have a clearer record of its impact, given the emergence of the print press, the relatively large number of people (including medical professionals) who kept or published accounts of their time there, and the burgeoning public interest in travel narratives. However, this is not the case. Nor does Australia take up much space in modern medical histories, occupying only a few brief mentions in the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) official study of the history of

¹³⁷ Banks had written in his *Endeavour* journal that the Australians were ‘enormously black’. See Beaglehole, *Journal of Banks*, II, 50. The connections between Banks and racial theory have been explored in Tim Fulford, Debbie Lee and Peter J. Kitson, *Literature, Science and Exploration in the Romantic Era: Bodies of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹³⁸ Gareth Williams, *Angel of Death: The Story of Smallpox* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 45-46.

smallpox and its eradication, for instance, compared with entire chapters on South American, Asian and African countries.¹³⁹ This is a point partly related to the lack of clear documentary evidence in Australia, but also an indication that epidemics were so fierce in the Australian context, that the virus killed itself off before it could become endemic. My aim in the last part of this chapter is therefore to restore the balance somewhat, by assessing the possible origins of the virus and questioning why it was not written about more.

As the Europeans continued their interest in Australian bodies, and as they penetrated further into the interior of the country, they began to notice an increasing number of Australian corpses which did not appear to have undergone the traditional ceremonies of cremation and burial. It became clear that they had suffered from a severe and familiar European disease. James Scott, a relatively lowly journal-keeper who had travelled as a Sergeant of Marines on the *Prince of Wales*, less confident in his prose-writing abilities than his superior officers, had taken note of the following scene while he was on duty on 15 April, 1789:

I Went With a Party to Cut Grass tree for Lt. Johnstone. found three Nativs Under A Rock, Vis. A Man & two Boy,s, (of Which One Boy Was Dead) the Governor being Acquented With it. Order'd the Man & Boy to the Hospital Under Care of the surgion the having the Small pox. the Man died. ye next day – the Boy Contineus to get. Better.—¹⁴⁰

Scott writes infrequently but when he does, it is always in the same laconic and grammatically erratic prose. He does not pontificate or philosophise, as Tench or Hunter might; and clearly he did not entertain ideas of publication. I highlight these qualities (or lack of) because I think it makes Scott an astute reporter, without a literary agenda: he

¹³⁹ Frank Fenner et al., *Smallpox and its Eradication*, 244, 361-362.

¹⁴⁰ James Scott, *Remarks on a Passage to Botany Bay, 1787-1792: A First Fleet Journal* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1963), 47.

often writes only when someone dies, or when he has been ordered to do something. With this in mind, it is significant that he should be the first person to spot signs of this distressing disease. He does not hesitate in his identification. For Scott at least, there was no question that the Australians he saw that day were infected with *variola major*. Phillip, it seems, was of the same opinion, and wasted no time in sending the survivors to the surgeon for verification.

The more literary journal-keepers of the colony – by which I mean those who were contracted for publication – identified the disease somewhat more reluctantly, and were at a loss to explain its origins. The distinction is important because some scholars have debated whether the disease – which the Europeans estimated to have killed ‘as much as half the local Aboriginal population about these harbours, which they had taken to be some 1500’ – really was smallpox after all.¹⁴¹ Even Alan Frost, who is usually eager to refute the inaccuracies and susceptibilities in historians of Australia’s accounts of the First Fleet and subsequent life in the colony, suggests, ‘it is worth asking whether the disease was in fact smallpox.’¹⁴² Although Frost reaches a different conclusion concerning the origins of the disease, he considers arguments claiming the disease may have been chickenpox to have some credibility, venturing:

[E]xtreme symptoms usually mark a disease’s opening campaign among a susceptible population, only to become uncharacteristic as the attacker modifies its behaviour so as to ensure its survival...¹⁴³

I am less inclined to entertain any doubts regarding the identification of the disease. For if the ‘extreme symptoms’ Frost writes of were the result of chickenpox, the disease as we

¹⁴¹ Alan Frost, *Botany Bay Mirages: Illusions of Australia’s Convict Beginnings* (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1994), 190.

¹⁴² Frost, *Botany Bay Mirages*, 202.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 204.

understand it would have manifested itself in a such a radically different way among the Australians compared to any other population. All of the accounts concur that it was smallpox; their differences of opinion are merely over its origins, which will be discussed shortly.

But Collins's account is probably the most confident diagnosis. He writes,

that it was the small-pox there was scarcely a doubt; for the person seized with it was affected exactly as Europeans are who have that disorder; and on many that had recovered from it we saw the traces, in some of the ravages of it on the face.¹⁴⁴

The pockmarked facial scarring Collins refers to was the hallmark characteristic of a smallpox, not chickenpox, survivor. As Judy Campbell has convincingly argued:

No one even mentioned chickenpox and, without exception, contemporaries who knew smallpox said it was the cause of extensive outbreaks in Aboriginals in the Sydney district. Lay people and professional observers were all too familiar with the disease, which was endemic in Britain at the time...¹⁴⁵

James Scott's account – being a private journal, and free of the necessity of vindicating his position before the public – suggests that he was likewise 'all too familiar' with smallpox to mistake it for anything else: most people who grew up in eighteenth-century Britain, and especially those with nautical connections, would have been. Phillip was also confident that the disease in question was smallpox; a letter written to Lord Sydney in February 1790, contains a frank admission of the effects of smallpox on local communities around Port Jackson.¹⁴⁶ However, before discussing the ramifications of smallpox for Australian communities in 1789, we should consider the symptoms of the disease and contemporary thinking about its origins and treatments.

¹⁴⁴ Collins, *An Account*, 496.

¹⁴⁵ Judy Campbell, *Invisible Invaders*, 55.

¹⁴⁶ Phillip to Sydney, 13 February 1790, *HRNSW*, 304-10.

Donald R. Hopkins, one of the physicians involved in the WHO's Smallpox Eradication Program, and who has written a history of the disease, describes the symptoms of smallpox as follows. In the first week of infection, 'the virus quietly established itself in an infected person' with no visible symptoms. Thereafter, the first symptoms appeared: 'headache, fever, chills, nausea, and backache, sometimes with convulsions or delirium. This 'prodromal' stage (the period between initial symptoms and full development of rash or fever) 'lasted up to three or four days'. At the end of this stage, the 'characteristic rash' appeared: 'flat reddish spots first on the face, [which] then spread rapidly over the arms, chest, back and finally the legs.' These flat spots 'became raised pimples, then blisters, and then pustules, after which the pustules died up and turned into crusts or scabs.' Smallpox victims were infectious from 'just before the rash appeared until the last scab dropped off about three weeks later.' There was no effective treatment for the disease and roughly 25 per cent of all those infected died.¹⁴⁷

As Campbell asserts, in 1789, smallpox was endemic in Britain 'before vaccination altered its prevalence and appearance after [Edward] Jenner's discovery in 1796.'¹⁴⁸ It became sporadically epidemic in areas with large populations, such as the port towns that many of those who sailed on the First Fleet came from: hence the certainty with which they were able to identify the disease. Hopkins's research demonstrates the 'increasing impact' of smallpox in eighteenth-century London: registers of parish burials show that between 1701 and 1800, there was 'an annual average of 300 deaths from smallpox per 100,000 persons (195,865 deaths; estimated population of 653,900 in 1750).'¹⁴⁹ Smallpox was also

¹⁴⁷ Donald R. Hopkins, *The Greatest Killer: Smallpox in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 3-4.

¹⁴⁸ Campbell, *Invisible Invaders*, 55.

¹⁴⁹ Hopkins, *The Greatest Killer*, 41-42.

widely written about by medical practitioners of the age, especially in the context of its prevention.

Thomas Sydenham's (1624-1689) ideas remained influential throughout the eighteenth century and revised earlier opinions and treatments of the disease. His most notable observations were the distinction between the more typical 'discrete' form of the virus, and the deadlier 'confluent' type, where blisters merged together to cover large areas of skin. He broke with tradition by recommending only a limited use of bleeding, and instead promoted a 'cooling' of the patient, by instructing them to remain only lightly covered in bed and encouraging a water-based diet.¹⁵⁰ Sydenham also made the interesting observation that '*few of the poorer sort die in this disease, in comparison to the rich that are destroyed thereby [emphasis in original]*', adducing 'they have not the means of injuring themselves that the rich have'.¹⁵¹ The implication is that those who could afford nostrums and physicians that practiced bleeding were making matters much worse for themselves. Sydenham was, like Lind after him, going against the grain of current medical thinking in order to promote safer treatments. The comparisons between Lind and Sydenham, and scurvy and smallpox, do not end there. As Erica Charters has recently written,

[C]ontemporary medical theory posited that lifestyle and constitution predisposed some individuals to disease more than others. Thus, laziness and intemperance, for instance, were seen to encourage scurvy and smallpox.¹⁵²

Scurvy and smallpox are an unlikely pairing, but Charters rightly considers that to medical practitioners, these were both crowd diseases where fresh air and cleanliness were thought

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Sydenham, *The entire works of Dr Thomas Sydenham, newly made English from the originals*, ed. John Swan (London: R. Cave, 1763), 124-126.

¹⁵¹ Sydenham, *The entire works*, 124.

¹⁵² Charters, *Disease, War and the Imperial State*, 19.

to be beneficial. Research into smallpox epidemics also suggests, as with scurvy, that there is a direct correlation between malnutrition and increased mortality, and a ‘positive association between fluctuations in wheat prices and deaths from epidemic disease (typhus, smallpox and fevers)’ more broadly.¹⁵³

The same research also demonstrates that the main casualties of smallpox epidemics were children, which perhaps raises more questions than it answers for Port Jackson in 1789.¹⁵⁴ We know from Scott’s entry in which he first observed smallpox victims that children were also afflicted. This was a consequential factor in the depopulation of Australians area following the outbreak of the epidemic: increased child mortality also meant the death of potential future generations. However, Alan Frost makes a valid point when he states that if smallpox was present on the First Fleet, ‘it scarcely would have spared all the 20 babies born during and still alive at the end of the voyage’.¹⁵⁵ The babies would have been too young to undergo inoculation (also known as variolation), the process by which the virus was deliberately transmitted, by ‘inserting pus or powdered scabs containing smallpox virus from a previous patient into the skin of a susceptible person’.¹⁵⁶ The resulting infection in inoculated cases was generally milder, and the procedure was gaining momentum throughout the eighteenth century. But if smallpox was *not* present on the First Fleet – and Phillip insists that ‘[i]t never appeared on board any of the ships in our passage’ – the question remains: from what source did the virus originate in New South Wales in 1789?¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ S. R. Duncan, Susan Scott and C. J. Duncan, “The Dynamics of Smallpox Epidemics in Britain, 1550-1800,” *Demography* 30 (1993): 414-418.

¹⁵⁴ Duncan, Scott and Duncan, “The Dynamics of Smallpox Epidemics,” 409.

¹⁵⁵ Frost, *Botany Bay Mirages*, 195.

¹⁵⁶ Hopkins, *The Greatest Killer*, 7.

¹⁵⁷ Phillip to Sydney, 12 February 1790, *HRNSW*, 299.

Tench, ever the inquisitive observer, listed some of the possibilities:

Is it a disease indigenous to this country? Did the French ships under Monsieur de Peyrouse introduce it? [...] Had it travelled across the continent from its western shore, where Dampier and other European voyagers had formally landed? – Was it introduced by Mr. Cook? – Did we give it birth here?¹⁵⁸

Note that his questions are all rhetorical. Tench is willing to enumerate the scenarios in which smallpox may have spread, but he does not elaborate on them. The narrative style he adopts (Merle reminds that as he writes “as if” in a journal) allows him to eschew speculation and, as a convenient consequence, avoid complicity. But we should work through his questions nonetheless. Let us start with the last possibility first.

It was, until fairly recently, popular to suggest that Europeans on the First Fleet brought smallpox to Port Jackson in 1789. Alan Frost posits this, amongst other falsehoods about European beginnings in Australia, which he debunks, in the introduction to *Botany Bay Mirages* (1994): ‘The Europeans visited that terrible scourge smallpox upon the Aborigines’.¹⁵⁹ It was an idea that had featured in the ‘fatal impact’ theory of Pacific colonisation. Alan Moorehead wrote that Australians ‘had no serious diseases before this, but it is doubtful if they guessed that the white man was the cause of their misery.’¹⁶⁰ While the ‘fatal impact’ theory raises important points about some of the more dire consequences of the European penetration of the South Pacific, it lacks nuance by viewing Oceanic peoples almost exclusively as hapless pawns in a newly-diseased Pacific, and denies them a degree of agency in cross-cultural encounters, an aspect of early relationships with Europeans which this chapter has attempted to elucidate.

¹⁵⁸ Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, 146.

¹⁵⁹ Frost, *Botany Bay Mirages*, 3.

¹⁶⁰ Alan Moorehead, *The Fatal Impact* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1985), 184.

For smallpox to have been communicated by Europeans there would need to be either a Patient X or viable source of variolous material. We know – if Phillip’s correspondence is to be believed – that it was not present on any of the ships of the First Fleet. The surgeons to the settlement would have readily identified anyone suffering from smallpox. It made for a clearer diagnosis than many of the diseases they were familiar with, including scurvy and typhus, and they had the necessary resources to both care for an infected patient and set up a quarantine. The only member of the First Fleet to contract smallpox was actually a Native American seaman – one of the handful of non-Europeans serving on the ships – and he developed the disease only after it was already established in Port Jackson. We can infer from this that a considerable portion, and possibly almost all of the Europeans, had already developed immunity to the disease, which would not be surprising considering they were descendants of populated port towns and well-travelled. Collins notes that the Native American sailor developed smallpox ‘having been to see’ infected children in the settlement, which invites scrutiny: why would an ordinary seaman, especially one at increased risk from the virus, be visiting them in the first place?¹⁶¹ Unless he went of his own volition or curiosity, there would be no logical reason to risk his life in this way. The other possibility is that he was sent to confirm, as a human guinea-pig, that the disease in question definitely was smallpox.

Regarding French intervention, La Pérouse had briefly visited Botany Bay almost as soon as the Fleet had arrived in January 1788. Judging by Tench’s narrative, the length of his stay was just under six weeks, and it was to be the last recorded landfall before the *Astrolabe* was shipwrecked on the return voyage and its crew never heard from again.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Collins, *An Account*, 54.

¹⁶² Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, 34-54.

Tench's consideration of whether the French had brought smallpox to Australia reminds me of James Cook's tacit suggestion that Bougainville may have brought venereal diseases to Tahiti during an ever shorter visit in 1768: there was a tendency amongst European rivals to blame each other for the introduction of diseases into the Pacific wherever possible.¹⁶³ But let us consider the possibility. First, there is no mention of smallpox in the journals from La Pérouse's expedition, which he was able to send back to Europe on one of the Fleet's ships, the *Alexander*. The French were just as familiar with the disease as the English, and there is likewise no reason they would not have recorded this information. Second, there is a gap of over a year between the departure of the French ships (March 1788) and the first recorded signs of smallpox amongst the Australians (April 1789). The virus would not survive that long without a human host, and it is unlikely the Europeans would have missed signs of it in the interim period, considering they were constantly expanding inland, and that tribes in the immediate vicinity of Port Jackson were not great overland travellers, compared with the tribes further out.

My evidence for the latter point is anecdotal, being taken from Tench's narrative, but merits further examination. In April 1791, shortly before quitting the colony, Tench made an expedition inland to ascertain if what he believed to be two rivers – the Nepean and the Hawkesbury – were in fact one and the same (they were). With his party – which included Phillip, Collins and White – he took two Australians who were acquainted with the colony, Colbee and Boladeree. However, Tench was surprised to learn that 'at a very short distance from Rose Hill', less than 20 miles west of the settlement, 'they were in a country completely unknown to them; so that the farther they went, the more dependent on

¹⁶³ Beaglehole, *Endeavour*, 98-99; Edmond, "Island Transactions," 254.

us they became, being absolute strangers inland.’¹⁶⁴ Although this does not rule out the possibility that smallpox spread outwards from Port Jackson (Colbee and Boladeree cannot be representative of the travel patterns *all* Australians in the vicinity of the settlement), it does add weight to other theories that suggest smallpox may have been brought in from further out. Colbee and Boladeree were strangers in the Hawkesbury area because their tribe, the Cadigal who were based around Sydney Cove, lived chiefly on fish but those living inland ventured further to catch their meals.¹⁶⁵ Along the way the party met with an Australian man from the Hawkesbury area named Gombeeree, whom Tench recalls was ‘of middle age, with an open cheerful countenance, marked with the *small pox*’.¹⁶⁶ This detail gives an indication that the disease was present at further distances than those previously explored by Europeans but it is difficult to be definitive about the implications of this.

Although Colbee and Boladeree could not provide the expedition with the valuable information they had wished for concerning the topography of land to the west of Rose Hill, Hunter’s journal contains a brief, revealing insight about how different tribes may have communicated with each other about the smallpox outbreak despite the obvious distances between them. ‘The natives informed them that this part of the country was inhabited by the *Bidjigals*’, he tells us, ‘but that most of the tribe were dead of the small-pox.’¹⁶⁷ The Europeans underestimated the extent to which knowledge about distant lands and tribes could be disseminated by Australians by word of mouth. Their settlement undoubtedly attracted more attention and traffic between tribes than there was previously and, with a time lapse of two years between the first recorded outbreak and Tench’s

¹⁶⁴ Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, 225.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁶⁷ Hunter, *An Historical Journal*, 340-41.

expedition, it is not surprising that the disease would have become a talking point.

However, Tench's encounter with the middle-aged Gombeeree does provide evidence that some Australians were surviving the epidemic. It is unfortunate that Tench did not think to question him further on his or his tribe's experiences, as such information would be useful for understanding the effects of the epidemic away from the settlement. But we should remember that European voyagers, trained to observe and record in writing, had little understanding of the intricate workings of oral cultures, in which knowledge was shared more freely, and retained collectively.

It is significant that most journal keepers, especially those with contracts for publication, were so reluctant to discuss smallpox in any detail, other than merely stating it was present in and around Port Jackson. There are two explanations for this. Either they were so desensitised to smallpox – and we might read the absence of European casualties as an indication that many had survived it – that they barely thought it worthy of record, even in distant colonies; or, and probably more likely, they did not want to draw attention to themselves as possible communicators of disease.

In spite of the lack of this information, it is possible to make two deductions about the way smallpox altered tribal customs and, eventually, tribal structures themselves. Hunter's journal is quite specific about the practices of cremation and burial that Australians underwent, noting that they are first placed in a fire 'for some time, after which they are laid at length in a grave'.¹⁶⁸ Tench's account also confirms the practice of cremation and interment being undertaken in this order.¹⁶⁹ But the bodies of those afflicted with smallpox had not undergone the traditional burial rites. They were instead found

¹⁶⁸ Hunter, *An Historical Journal*, 275.

¹⁶⁹ Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*, 51.

exposed ‘in all the coves and inlets of the harbour’, or ‘lying upon the beaches’.¹⁷⁰ Both scenarios suggest that the Australians had knowledge of the contagiousness of the disease; their bodies had either been excluded from burial for fear of the catching the virus, or, infected and anticipating death, they had exiled themselves to a suitable location away from their tribes. The latter scenario is most likely. Collins was with Arabanoo when they discovered several bodies abandoned on the coast, noting ‘some days after he learned that the few of his companions who had survived had fled up the harbour to avoid the pestilence that so dreadfully raged.’¹⁷¹ The precautions taken by Australians at this early stage suggest some familiarity with contagious diseases, if not smallpox specifically.

Collins was the only writer who was able to capture the emotional impact of smallpox for Australian tribes, and his account gives an indication of how it altered traditional kinship ties. The information he gives is crammed into the appendix to his first volume under the generically-titled heading, ‘Disease’, which demonstrates that it was not considered part of his core duties as a writer on the colony, or that he did not wish to draw attention to it in the main body of his writing. Yet in the appendix Collins is unusually frank. ‘As a proof of the numbers of those miserable people carried off by this disorder’, he writes:

Bennillong told us, that his friend Cole-be’s tribe being reduced by its effects to three persons, Cole-be, the boy Nan-bar-ray, and someone else, they found themselves compelled to unite with some other tribe, not only for their personal protection, but to prevent the extinction of their tribe.¹⁷²

Collins adds that he cannot confirm that the ‘incorporation’ ever took place, but I suspect that he is referring to a ceremonial initiation rather than the actual unification, for his

¹⁷⁰ Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, 146; Collins, *An Account*, I, 53.

¹⁷¹ Collins, *An Account*, II, 495.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 497.

journal makes clear that Colbee was often seen attended by ‘several very fine boys’ and that he was distinguished from a namesake in his new tribal group by the prefix ‘Cad-i’ (i.e. to show that he was originally a *Cadigal*). Bennelong’s testimony demonstrates the profound impact of smallpox on Australian communities, not only altering their rites and ceremonies, but completely rewriting their traditional structures of tribes and kinship. That such changes should occur concurrently with the turmoil of European settlement and expansion make it appear likely that the Europeans ‘gave it birth here’, to use Tench’s phrase, but there is compelling evidence to suggest it was little more than an unfortunate coincidence, and this possibility – that smallpox was brought to Australia without European intervention – warrants further analysis.

For the First Fleet writers, the suggestion that smallpox was indigenous to Australia was treated with the same degree of brevity as the notion that their colony was the cause of the outbreak. Collins, writing up events of April 1789, merely states, ‘it was certain they gave it a name (gal-gal-la); a circumstance which seemed to indicate a preacquaintance with it.’¹⁷³ But, as he probably realised when he came to write his lengthy appendix in 1796, this was not a very convincing deduction: Australians were just as capable of inventing names for things as anyone else. If they were pre-acquainted with smallpox, it would have only been for a very short time before the Europeans noticed it in the spring of 1789. A comparatively recent argument, and one proposed most eloquently by Judy Campbell, is that smallpox may have spread to the north coast of Australia by Macassan traders fishing for *trepang* (or sea slug, a marine animal), following outbreaks in the Indonesian archipelago. According to Campbell:

There were close economic and social ties between Aboriginal people and visiting Indonesian fisherman in trepang seasons, when smallpox could have

¹⁷³ Collins, *An Account*, I, 53.

spread to the Australians... chains of connection would have linked infectious northern Aboriginals to relatives in clans across Australia.¹⁷⁴

Campbell asserts that there was close contact between Macassans and northern Australians, as a number of modern scholars agree, and such conditions would definitely allow for the virus to spread. However, although I consider Campbell's argument regarding the introduction of smallpox to be convincing, it is still contestable that the virus would reach such an epidemic state if it was introduced solely in this way, even in a population with no previous exposure.

A recent essay by Michael J. Bennett highlights some of the more contentious arguments of the Macassan hypothesis, considering the case for an infectious chain from Indonesia to Port Jackson to be 'weak'. For example, for smallpox to successfully spread from the tip of the Northern Territory to New South Wales, it would need to travel roughly two thousand miles along the coast, finding susceptible hosts at every stopping point, allowing the virus to be further disseminated within different tribes. There is no doubt that were established networks of trade and travel along the coast but, as Bennett argues:

The transmission of the disease in Northern Australia would have required individuals labouring under the infection to walk great distances and then to be embraced rather than shunned by members of other groups.¹⁷⁵

As the incubation period for smallpox lasts between a week and twelve days, this effectively puts a time limit on the amount of travelling an infectious person can do before becoming seriously ill.¹⁷⁶ It does not rule out the Macassan theory, if there were enough trails and people to sustain the virus during incubation, but it does limit the damage that could be done: on a longer journey, with less contact, a smaller tribe would be more likely to die out than reach their destination in an infectious condition. However, Bennett's point

¹⁷⁴ Campbell, *Invisible Invaders*, 84.

¹⁷⁵ Bennett, "Smallpox and Cowpox under the Southern Cross", 46.

¹⁷⁶ Hopkins, *The Greatest Killer*, 3-4; Williams, *Angel of Death*, 20.

that transmission would rely on individuals being ‘embraced rather than shunned’ by others requires qualification. Although the tribes around the European settlement appeared to abandon smallpox cases, at least according to the evidence of Collins and Tench, this does not mean that the practice was universal. Before it had reached epidemic levels, when its fatality became clearer, it is equally possible that Australians were curious about the effects of this new, destructive disease. The crux of Bennett’s argument – he considers that variolous matter brought or acquired by surgeons in Port Jackson was probably the cause – rests on the fact that the virus can remain ‘active’ in dead tissue. Corpses were also infectious for some time after death. As Gareth Williams notes, twentieth-century doctors sometimes became unwitting smallpox victims after performing post-mortems when they had not kept their vaccinations up to date.¹⁷⁷

The early years of European settlement in Australia predate the practice of vaccination, discovered by Edward Jenner in 1796. This was the method of preventing smallpox by deliberately infecting a person with cowpox, which in turn conferred immunity to smallpox. Before this discovery, inoculation was the most widely-practiced, if still controversial, method of dealing with the disease. It generally produced an ‘illness and rash milder than usual’, as well as granting future immunity.¹⁷⁸ However, an inoculated patient could still spread the disease, so it had to be used in carefully monitored conditions.

We know that the First Fleet surgeons had a supply of variolous matter because Tench tells us so.¹⁷⁹ Bennett’s supposition is that this was the cause of the outbreak, and that the Native American who caught the disease could in fact have been deliberately infected by variolation in order to ‘confirm the diagnosis’.¹⁸⁰ However, if we are to believe

¹⁷⁷ Williams, *Angel of Death*, 18.

¹⁷⁸ Hopkins, *The Greatest Killer*, 7.

¹⁷⁹ Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, 146.

¹⁸⁰ Bennett, “Smallpox and Cowpox Under the Southern Cross,” 44.

this we would have to accept that the surgeons were both short-sighted in their application of the practice (inoculating just one man) and negligent: he was more likely to have a severe reaction than anyone else in the colony. We should also examine the possibility of whether any variolous matter could have survived the journey, or would have arrived inert regardless. There are conflicting opinions on the subject and it is difficult to be precise: since the global eradication of smallpox in 1979, tests on the potential efficacy of the virus have become obsolete. The WHO publication states that in laboratory studies, temperatures of over 35°C with relative humidity seriously reduce the infectivity of the virus.¹⁸¹ These conditions would have been present on the ships themselves, and during the Australian summers. However, the surgeons who brought the variolous matter with them would undoubtedly have made a concerted effort to store it in conditions where it would be of future use. It was unusual for it to be carried on naval ships in the first place, so it would have been looked after. Furthermore, the WHO study does make mention of incidences where smallpox scabs remained infective in ‘temperate climates’ for several years, including one instance where a mild (alastrim) form survived in scabs ‘kept in envelopes in a laboratory cupboard for over 13 years.’¹⁸² While it is unlikely that any variolous matter brought by the surgeons would be infective in 1789, it is by no means impossible, contrary to Campbell’s interpretation of the tests and observations released by the WHO in 1988.¹⁸³

The likelihood of infective variolous matter as an origin for the 1789 epidemic increases if we consider that the material may not have been brought from England. As the correspondence of Phillip and the surgeon White I referred to earlier in the chapter shows, it was a battle to get even basic medical supplies equipped for the Fleet, let alone a

¹⁸¹ Fenner et al., *Smallpox and its Eradication*, 115.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁸³ Campbell, *Invisible Invaders*, 62.

relatively esoteric item like dried smallpox virus. Bennett argues that variolous matter may have been acquired by the surgeons in Cape Town (a harbour ‘full of ships of all nations, many of them laden with exotic microbes’), which is a distinct possibility, and would dramatically increase its potential infectivity.¹⁸⁴ As Bennett suggests, it would also explain Tench’s rather odd concession that ‘no person among us had been afflicted with the disorder since we quitted the Cape of Good Hope’.¹⁸⁵ I am not proposing that anyone on the Fleet had smallpox in Cape Town – there is no evidence for this – but the fact that Tench considers that the last place at which an infection may have been acquired hints that there was some exposure to the virus there.

However, although the evidence for variolous matter as the source is more convincing than some scholars have allowed, Campbell included, I remain cautious about the crux of Bennett’s argument, which is that

[i]f it was the source of the outbreak the likelihood is, given the age and condition of the virus, that it was communicated deliberately. The surgeons need not have been involved.¹⁸⁶

What Bennett implies is that the convicts may have deliberately infected the Australians, in an act of biological warfare similar to one used by the British in the siege of Fort Pitt (1763) following the Seven Years’ War, where Native Americans were given smallpox-contaminated blankets as an expedient means to ending their resistance and occupation of surrounding villages.¹⁸⁷ Not only is there no evidence to support this, but if the surgeons had any variolous matter stolen, they would undoubtedly have reported it. Hostility between the officers and surgeons and the convicts was rife throughout the early years of

¹⁸⁴ Bennett, “Smallpox and Cowpox Under the Southern Cross,” 48.

¹⁸⁵ Tench, *Sydney’s First Four Years*, 146.

¹⁸⁶ Bennett, “Smallpox and Cowpox Under the Southern Cross,” 48.

¹⁸⁷ Alan Gallay, *Colonial Wars of North America, 1512-1763: An Encyclopedia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 190.

the colony; they were all allocated the same rations of food, which created tensions between them. The surgeons and officers would blame the convicts for the smallpox outbreak of 1789 if only they could, not least because it would make the cause so straightforward and put an end to the speculation. It would be just another crime in which the convicts were complicit. It is much more likely that the surgeons themselves would be involved in a deliberate (inoculative, not genocidal) experiment than the convicts. They were the only ones with the access and knowledge to carry out the procedure effectively.

Ultimately, we cannot be certain about the origins of the 1789 epidemic. In the preceding paragraphs, I have extrapolated some of the central arguments in what I consider to be the two most like causes, the Macassan hypothesis and the variolous matter within the colony. Yet these appear both equally plausible and remote. What is certain is that the epidemic irrevocably changed the course of the colonisation of Australia in two ways. First, as I discussed, it fundamentally altered traditional Australian ways a life and, as a result, forced at least some Australians into dependency on the British. We can look to surgeon White's adoption of one of the Australian children singled out by James Scott on that fateful day in 15 April 1789, where the first casualties were recorded, as one example.¹⁸⁸ Although several Australians became closely acquainted with the colonists, such as Arabanoo, Bennelong, Boladeree and Colbee, the number of deaths from smallpox was an obstacle to both sides in forming meaningful relationships. Despite what they managed to learn about and from each other, after the epidemic, Parkinson's sketch in Figure 1 remains an accurate depiction of the continued lack of knowledge about the original inhabitants of Australia. Smallpox made a huge number of them into ethnographic artefacts before they had the opportunity to become integrated.

¹⁸⁸ Collins, *An Account*, I, 54.

But the epidemic also highlighted other, colonial concerns and anxieties about the potentiality of life in the newly-colonised Pacific more broadly, a theme which I pick up in the following chapter. In the Mitchell Library in Sydney, there is a letter from Phillip Gidley King to Joseph Banks, dated 8 May 1792, in which King expresses his hope that Banks will soon be able to send ‘the small pox matter’ to the distant colony, for the preservation of ‘our rising generation’.¹⁸⁹ There had been hundreds more babies born within the colony at the time of his letter. Whether this means that the existing variolous matter was either used or useless by 1792 we will never know, but what it does show without doubt is that colonists were increasingly concerned and anxious about their futures in the South Seas. This anxiety was a central tenet of nineteenth-century travel writing on the Pacific, and one which I explore in the following chapter.

¹⁸⁹ Phillip King to Joseph Banks, 8 May 1792, Papers of Sir Joseph Banks, ML Safe 39/4.

Chapter Three: *Typee*: Melville in the Marquesas

After visiting the Marquesas in 1841, Herman Melville was inspired to write his first novel, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*, which was published in London in February 1846. Melville had been working for four years on this text that drew inspiration from, reworked, and built upon the kinds of travel narratives I have written about in the preceding chapters. However, as I will argue throughout this chapter, *Typee* represents a change in the writing of South Seas narratives that is commensurate with the way in which James Cook's first Pacific-bound ship, the *Endeavour*, provided a new paradigm for the execution of Pacific voyages themselves. *Typee* symbolises American intervention into two predominantly European fields: the exploration and exploitation of the Pacific region itself, and the literary market for South Seas narratives. Its author demonstrated an adept knowledge of both fields, and used them simultaneously to pursue a narrative that, in naval historian Andrew Lambert's words, 'transcended a genre dominated by the literal truth of things recorded.'¹ To understand the significance of Melville's novel in relation to these two interpositions, this introduction explores both the textual and historical influences present in *Typee*.

As I signalled at the end of the previous chapter, *Typee* expresses an increased anxiety about the potential of human life in the South Seas and the fragility and limitations of the human body. However, it is interesting that in what could be viewed primarily as a captivity narrative, the prevailing anxieties in *Typee* are less about the narrator's freedom and more about his health, state of mind and conflict with the social mores of the

¹ Lambert, *Crusoe's Island*, 189.

Marquesan Islanders. In this chapter, I will analyse three (often interrelated) recurring themes in the text: cannibalism, the limitations of and on the narrator's body, and tattooing. In doing so, I hope to show the extent to which these notions attached to the subgenre of Pacific travel writing, which are present in the historical sources I discuss, become more fully realised in Melville's text. I will also assess the relationship between Melville and earlier sources on the Marquesas Islands, bearing in mind that in Melville's discourse, his lived experience and his reading of other people's encounters and concerns are closely intertwined.

Textual introduction – The Making and Reception of Melville's Pacific Narrative

The book which John Murray published in London as part of his Home and Colonial Library first appeared under the title *Narrative of a Four Months' Residence Among the Natives of a Valley of the Marquesas Islands; or, A Peep at Polynesian Life*. The tension between the title and subtitle affirm the major conflict within the text: is it an account, or a superficial 'peep' from the shore? *Typee* is constructed in a pastiche of narrative forms – it is, in parts, diary, travelogue, captivity narrative, Robinsonade, anthropological survey, and a rebuke to imperialism and missionary endeavours in the Pacific. Melville's work appears to us as a hybrid of these forms and, strikingly, its strength lies in such hybridisation. Tommo – the novel's protagonist – oscillates between, and frequently combines, these quite distinct narrative strands with relative ease. As such, *Typee* 'peeps' at various popular literary forms as much as at Polynesia. This peeping, key to colonial encounters such as those I wrote about in the previous chapter on early Australia, reflects the author's ambivalent attitude to the central tenets of the text, with a subtitle that mockingly reflects

both the limitations of understanding in such encounters, and the questionable veracity of the text itself. Conversely, however, the ‘peep’ can also suggest an impartial, disinterested observer, since, as Hershel Parker explains, ‘that word was having a vogue in titles and subtitles of travel books’ and ‘it was [therefore] less a disclaimer than it now appears.’² By implying kinship with this subgenre of travel narratives claiming to ‘peep’, the subtitle raises questions about the nature, and authority, of travel writing itself. Anne Baker, in her work on Antebellum literary culture, effectually sums up the subtitle’s implications by stating that it ‘hints at the importance of seeing, or not seeing, in the narrative’ and claims that it demonstrates the author ‘questioning vision’s role in understanding’.³ With hindsight, of course, Melville clearly was not offering either a detached account of, or a playful ‘peep at’ Polynesia but, as Baker suggests, teasing at the meaning of both these forms of travel writing. However, as I shall demonstrate, this carefully constructed literary façade lent the novel enough authority for it to be published as if it was a factual account.

The identity of the text’s narrator, Tommo, remains unclear. We cannot be certain if the narrator is Melville, Melville writing as “Tommo”, or whether Tommo is a literary creation, transplanted to a place where the author had really been, but with a version of events entirely his own. Although the gulf between the narrator and the author is not an unusual facet of many nineteenth-century works of literature, in *Typee* the boundary between the reality of the author’s experience and his rendition of this in prose is more intensely and deliberately distorted. *Typee* does not answer these questions, but probes their possibilities. In Chapter V, as Tommo contemplates deserting his ship, we are introduced to his companion Toby, who remains with him for the first part of the novel.

² Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville: A Biography Volume I, 1819-51* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 396-97.

³ Anne Baker, *Heartless Immensity: Literature, Culture and Geography in Antebellum America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 83.

But, as Tommo tells us, Toby is not really Toby, but a moniker, merely ‘the name by which he went among us, for his real name he would never tell us’.⁴ Of course, it was not uncommon for sailors to be known by nicknames. But, as it transpired, Toby Greene *was* a real person, and in July, 1846, he wrote a piece entitled ‘Toby’s Own Story’ for the *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*, which appeared to corroborate at least the early events related in *Typee*.⁵ With its frequent recourse to real accounts and real people, the world of the novel is not clearly defined in *Typee*. The text can therefore become more or less ‘real’ depending on how we choose to interpret the contemporary sources which permeate and are appended to the story.

The work which later became known as *Typee* had been previously rejected by Harper Brothers, the major New York publishing firm, because, according to a reader for the company, ‘it was impossible that it could be true and therefore was without real value.’⁶ This detail reveals something of the tension that occupied both the composition and the reviews of the first and – together with its sequel, *Omoo* (1847) – only popular books that Melville produced in his lifetime. Modern criticism of *Typee* is also keen to interrogate the extent to which Melville’s text can be considered a factual account or a work of literary fiction. It is not my intention to rehearse these arguments in any great detail. Rather, for the purposes of setting up my own critical interrogation of *Typee*, I offer the basic documentary evidence of Melville’s visit to the Marquesas Islands.

⁴ Herman Melville, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 31.

⁵ Richard Tobias Greene, “Toby’s Own Story,” *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*, July 11, 1846.

⁶ Recollections of Frederick Sanders, reader for Messrs Harper and Bros., quoted in J. Leyda, *The Melville Log: A Documentary Life of Herman Melville, 1819-1891*, 2 vols. (New York: Gordian Press, 1969), 196.

At twenty-one years old, Melville had signed aboard the whaling ship, *Acushnet*, which departed Fairhaven, Massachusetts, in January 1841.⁷ Six months later, in July, the ship stopped for refreshments at Nuku Hiva, the largest of the Marquesas Islands. Melville deserted during its stay. One month later, he signed aboard the Australian ship *Lucy Ann*, which left for Tahiti.⁸ As Mary Edwards has pointed out, there is no evidence of Melville's actions during this time.⁹ *Typee* is therefore a highly embellished account of what was, in reality, a very brief "residence" on Nuku Hiva (four weeks, not four months) at best. Given the lack of evidence to the contrary, it is of course more than possible that the narrator's experiences are a complete fabrication.

The boundary between creative fiction and historical account is less clear in Pacific voyage texts than it is elsewhere in travel accounts. As the previous chapters show, ideas and preconceptions of the Pacific frequently became mingled with actual experiences. And even when experiences were recorded and verified, the manner in which they came to be recorded raises questions. From the second half of the eighteenth century, publishers and the reading public became increasingly aware of the generic expectations attached to voyage narratives, and particularly those bound for the Pacific Ocean. These generic expectations and conventions of travel literature pre-date the eighteenth century, but from the middle of that century onwards, there was certainly a cumulative shift in the amount, and types of knowledge about the places and peoples written about in travel narratives. Andrew Lambert has written that from the seventeenth century onwards, voyages were related in narrative styles that often approached those used in fictional texts; however, '[b]y the nineteenth century these genres had hardened to the point that such melding of

⁷ Parker, *Melville*, 188.

⁸ Andrew Delbanco, *Melville: His World and Work* (Basingstoke: Picador, 2005), 43-44.

⁹ Mary K. Bercaw Edwards, *Cannibal Old Me: Spoken Sources in Melville's Early Works* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2009), 6.

fact and fiction was increasingly contested.’¹⁰ In a related argument, Fulford, Lee and Kitson suggest that the emergence of institutional bodies of knowledge, such as the Royal Society, placed demands on the way travel narratives were written, stressing that exploration narratives ‘were accepted as valid scientific documents if they followed a ‘plain, unvarnished’ style in which the explorer’s impressions were represented as objectively observed ‘evidence’.’¹¹ This shift is partly explained by the fact that there was increased access to accounts of voyages, given the relative cheapness of books in the late eighteenth century, together with the collections of objects and specimens acquired by influential travellers like Joseph Banks. In other words, for readers of voyage publications, the boundaries of plausibility were redefined by the widespread availability of evidence in the form of books about, and objects from, places travelled to. Writers and publishers were cognisant of these changes, and adapted their styles and markets accordingly. As a result, voyage narratives do not simply describe events; rather, they perform – using these evolving expectations and conventions – a version of the events they describe. Melville wrote *Typee* at a juncture in public knowledge about the Pacific, invoking in Lambert’s words, the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ‘meldings’ of fact and fiction, but for a readership that was more likely to challenge his version of events.

To be clear, readers of travel narratives *wanted* to have their imaginations stretched, but they were increasingly unlikely to accept fantastic accounts related in earlier fictional texts such as Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) or, more recently, Poe’s *The Narrative or Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), wholesale.¹² To cite a few

¹⁰ Lambert, *Crusoe’s Island*, 156.

¹¹ Tim Fulford, Debbie Lee and Peter J. Kitson, *Literature, Science and Exploration in the Romantic Era: Bodies of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.

¹² Melville was likely aware of the press reception of Poe’s novel, which would echo his own, dividing critics over whether it was intended as a work of sensationalism, or a factual account. See Ronald C. Harvey, *The*

relevant examples, already discussed, of the ways in which travel narratives were modified to satiate reader expectations, we can look to Richard Walter's very literary account of scurvy on Anson's voyage, Hawkesworth's salacious editing of Cook's first voyage, or Watkin Tench's "as if" style of journal writing in Australia. *Typee* is an extension of the generic conventions attached to accounts of South Seas travel writing, to the extent that the performance of these conventions outweighs the experiences upon which it is based. It represents the point at which the actual events recorded in a text are less significant than the version they describe. Having used, in the preceding chapters, primarily historical sources for understanding the centrality of health and the impact of disease in South Seas narratives, I now turn to a more fictional representation in Melville's writing.

Although the events of Melville's voyage occurred some half a century after the establishment of the British colony at Port Jackson, his work is not only indebted to the voyages of eighteenth-century explorers, including James Cook, in its narrative style, but is also a composite text which utilises the tone and structure of eighteenth-century exploratory journals to present an ostensibly authoritative account. These earlier voyages also function as points of reference and comparison within the text. *Typee* was heavily influenced by and, in places, directly borrowed from some prominent authors of naval, missionary and beachcombing texts, such as Captain David Porter's *Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean* (1812-1814; published 1822). Porter cruised the Pacific during the War of 1812, capturing several British ships and claiming the Marquesas Islands for America. His detailed account of intertribal warfare – in which he assumed an active role – was the major source of information for Melville's novel.¹³ For Melville's more general

Critical History of Edgar Allan Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym: A Dialogue with Unreason (Abingdon: Routledge, 1998), 32-41.

¹³ David Porter, *Journal of a Cruise Made to the Pacific Ocean in the United States Frigate Essex in the Years 1812, 1813 and 1814* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1822).

commentary on missionary activity in the Pacific, William Ellis's *Polynesian Researches* (1829) provided the author with some background information.¹⁴ Ellis had travelled to the Society Islands with the London Missionary Society, establishing the first printing press in the region. Finally, the history of beachcombers on the Marquesas goes back even further, with Edward Robarts's *Marquesan Journal*, which begins in 1797.¹⁵ Robarts' text was not published in Melville's lifetime, but Robarts became a well-known figure in voyage accounts, including one by German naturalist G. H. von Langsdorff, from which Melville gleaned anthropological and ethnographic information.¹⁶ In writing about *Typee* I will also be referring to these texts and how they influenced Melville's writing for, as Paul Lyons neatly summarises, Melville's comments about Oceania are 'densely, multiply citational, rather than primary descriptions.'¹⁷ One of the aims of this chapter is to show how Melville interweaved a complex layer of textual sources to create an affiliated, embellished and yet persuasive account of his experiences in the Marquesas.

Melville was well-read in the earlier narratives of Captain Cook, who is referenced several times in *Typee* and, later in Melville's career, in *Moby-Dick* (1851), the novel which has subsequently become recognised as his greatest achievement, despite attracting considerably less attention than *Typee* when it was first published.¹⁸ Part of the relative commercial success of *Typee*, which Melville never bettered, owes to it being marketed on the back an already enormously popular genre.

¹⁴ William Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1833).

¹⁵ Edward Robarts, *The Marquesan Journal of Edward Robarts, 1797-1824*, ed. Greg Denning (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974).

¹⁶ G. H. Von Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels in Various Parts of the World During the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806 and 1807* (London: Henry Colburn, 1813).

¹⁷ Lyons, *American Pacificism*, 41.

¹⁸ Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick or, The Whale* eds. Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1988), xxii, 110, 460.

The novel was still a relatively new form in America in the 1840s and, due to the absence of international copyright law, American novelists were less likely to make a decent living from their work than their British counterparts, whose titles flooded the American market.¹⁹ In many ways, the market conditions in which Melville came to write *Typee* in America were not dissimilar to those in which Daniel Defoe wrote *Robinson Crusoe* in England, the preface to the latter claiming it was ‘a just history of fact; neither is there any appearance of fiction in it’.²⁰ In both cases, the success of the text depended on its ability to masquerade as truth in the absence of a literary market that was favourable to works of creative fiction, at a time when travel narratives were increasingly popular. Exotic travel narratives were a means of tempering the incredible: *Typee*’s preface anticipated questions similar to those that would have been asked of Defoe, with the author acknowledging that although some scenes may appear ‘strange, or perhaps entirely incomprehensible, to the reader’, these ‘cannot appear more so to him than they did to the author at the time’, before defensively proclaiming his ‘anxious desire to speak the unvarnished truth’.²¹ Melville was mindful of early readers who had doubted the veracity of his work and used this preface – which had worked for Defoe – to deflect these accusations. Melville knew, of course, that *Robinson Crusoe* was a work of fiction, as did most of his readers and probably all of his critics. In aligning himself with Defoe and *Crusoe* before the narrative even begins, Melville created an added sense of ambiguity around the narrative he was retailing. Lyons has outlined this eloquently, stating that the preface is ‘genuinely anxious in the way it mockingly situates itself within the cliché of asserted verisimilitude (the claim to tell a plain tale).’²² Melville’s anxiety about the critical

¹⁹ Delbanco, *Melville*, 75.

²⁰ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. John Richetti (London: Penguin, 2001), 3.

²¹ Melville, *Typee*, xiv.

²² Lyons, *America Pacificism*, 88-89.

reception of his novel was also palpable, and no doubt exacerbated by its initial rejection in New York.

Melville's defensiveness was a reflection of his own concerns about the perceived veracity of the text and its press reception. *Typee* had mixed reviews on both sides of the Atlantic, and the following examples highlight the nuances of its transatlantic appraisals. *The Spectator* (London), for instance, wrote on 28 February 1846 that, 'wherever there is a story, however slight, the book is very interesting' but 'the descriptive parts are not of so striking a character'. The *Spectator* found the strength of the book to be in its storytelling, while the ethnographic observations, arguably the more 'realistic' parts of a text feigning to be a travel narrative, boring. The article goes on to make an interesting cross-Atlantic differentiation, arguing that if the work was produced by 'an English common sailor, we should have had some doubts of its authenticity'. However, in America,

social opinion does not invest any employment with caste discredit; and it seems customary with young men of respectability to serve as common seamen, either as a probationership to the navy or as a mode of seeing life.²³

The comparison warrants further analysis. First, I suspect that the reviewer's claim that the public perception of mariners was more favourable in America than in Britain may be a veiled comment on the shift in social attitudes within American industry generally, but for maritime workers specifically, following Independence. This is something I discuss in more detail in the second part of the introduction but, for now, it is worth noting a fundamental difference in the ways in which British and American reviewers received the novel.

²³ Brian Higgins and Hershel Parker, *Herman Melville: The Contemporary Reviews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 7.

By contrast, the *Anglo American Magazine* (New York) wrote, in a brief and rather backhandedly positive review on 21 March 1844, that the book was ‘truly a novelty in Travels’ and that it ‘purports to be the relation of “a four months’ residence in a valley of Marquesas” [my emphasis].’²⁴ Another New York publication, *Spirit of the Times*, wrote on the same day that even Melville’s name ‘looks a little like a *nom de plume*’, while *Simmond’s Colonial Magazine and Foreign Miscellany* (London) detected a ‘laboured attempt at embellishment in the text’, adding ‘we very much doubt the reality of many of the descriptions.’²⁵ The adjective that crops up most frequently in the reviews is ‘interesting’, which, used in the nineteenth-century sense of ‘adapted to excite interest’ is a fitting, if slightly muted, description of the text, which emphasised the process of adaptation. As these reviews demonstrate, the American press was primarily concerned with whether or not *Typee* was a true account. However, in London, as Jason Berger notes, reviews focused more ‘on the apparent gap between the quality of the writing and the advertised fact of the author’s identity as a sailor.’²⁶ This apparent discrepancy can be explained in two ways: first, by the differences between British and (emerging) American maritime culture, which I discuss in the next section and, second, by the fact that the British public were much more familiar with voyage narratives.

The British reading public were well-acquainted with fantastical tales from far-fetched lands, given their earlier encounters with the Pacific. They were aware, for instance, of recent debates about cannibalism – arguably the central theme in *Typee* – from encounters with the Maori on Cook’s second voyage, so it was not beyond the realm of possibility that such practices occurred in the Marquesas too, and Melville uses this

²⁴ Higgins and Parker, *Reviews*, 20.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 21, 34.

²⁶ Jason Berger, *Antebellum at Sea: Maritime Fantasies in Nineteenth-Century America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 32.

knowledge, which was quite specifically restricted to New Zealand on the Cook voyages, to his advantage in *Typee*. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, knowledge about exotic places had shifted and travel narratives had a broader and more diverse market. This shift was partly the result of a change in the ambitions of those recording voyages and the governments directing them. For Cook and his predecessors, Pacific voyages were primarily concerned with the business of exploration. One of things that marked Cook out from previous British explorers was his interest and sometimes investment in the futures of the peoples and places he encounters. We see this in his careful attention to the business of planting gardens, or the importance he attaches to tools and metalwork in trading exchanges. What subsequent narratives, such as those of the First Fleet, demonstrated was an increased interest in colonisation, for commercial purposes, as opposed to exploration, for curiosity.

It was not improbable, by the time that Melville was writing, that some of his readers might visit the Marquesas themselves: the islands were deemed ‘an important stopping point on the route from Chile to China’, amongst other trans-Pacific routes, where there was the option of refreshment as well as ‘possibilities for fishing and the exploitation of sandalwood’.²⁷ Furthermore, the fact that Cook had spent only three days at the Marquesas meant that readers on both sides of the Atlantic were probably more likely to accept tall tales from these islands, as opposed to those which had already been written about in great detail, such as Tahiti or New Zealand.²⁸ We should remember that there were no recorded landfalls at the Marquesas between Mendaña’s voyage in 1595, and Cook’s in 1774, and that some of the northern islands were not visited by Europeans and

²⁷ Robert Aldrich, *The French Presence in the South Pacific, 1842-1940* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), 21.

²⁸ Beaglehole, *The Exploration of the Pacific*, 275-277.

Americans until 1791.²⁹ By the turn of the nineteenth century, these were still relatively ‘undiscovered’ islands in the colonial imagination, no doubt the subject of frequent dialogue between sailors, but less the focus of printed texts. Melville used this lack of knowledge by applying familiar narrative conventions to an unfamiliar location. While his narrative was not factually authoritative, it was also not much contradicted by the few previous accounts of the Marquesas.

Melville’s writing in *Typee* was somewhere between the tones of embellished sailors’ yarns and studious ethnographic enquiry; there was no doubt he was a sophisticated writer, on the back of an autodidactic education at least, but reviewers in Britain and America were still cautious in their appraisals of the veracity of the text, despite its commercial success. The next section explains where Melville’s experience fits in the broader context of American maritime exploration in the nineteenth-century Pacific.

Historical introduction – The Emergence of an American Literary Maritime Empire, and Historical Influence in *Typee*

As Lyons notes in the introduction to *American Pacificism* (2006), although a wealth of material continues to be written about the relationship between Europe and the South Pacific in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, ‘only a fraction of such attention has been given to U.S. relations in Oceania’, despite America’s long and varied involvement in the region.³⁰ The aim of this section is to explore the rise of a literary maritime empire in

²⁹ Ibid., 275.

³⁰ Lyons, *American Pacificism*, 4-5.

the U.S., as well as Melville's position and influences in relation to the broader history of Oceanic encounter.

The *Spectator* review which I cited earlier implies that it is less rare to see works by a literary and 'respectable' common sailor of American rather than British origin, and we should consider why this appeared to be the case for the London press. During the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), those with maritime occupations had played an especially active role in conflicts against the British and, as Paul A. Gilje explains, '[t]his participation infused the revolution with an egalitarianism it might otherwise not have had.'³¹ Gilje's argument is a slightly circular one, in that it is unclear whether the emphasis is on egalitarianism as a cause or effect of the Independence struggles. However, it is certainly the case that following the War's conclusion, the spirit of independence left its mark on American industries, which began to view themselves in contradistinction to their new rivals across the Atlantic. This gives some credence to *The Spectator* reviewer's inference that it is less surprising to see a 'respectable' American sailor in a lowly rank than a British one, if we consider that some American sailors shared an instinctive bond over Independence that united them in spite of class structures or entrenched naval hierarchy. This is not to suggest that such hierarchies were less present or enforced than they were in Britain, but it is certainly true that the American navy was, naturally, a younger institution and – at least in the public perception – less anachronistic than its British counterpart.

Gilje argues that sailors were often united in common causes, against dominant modes of thinking at the time, claiming that 'seamen rejected two fundamental tenets of

³¹ Paul A. Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), xii-xiii.

society, hierarchy in the eighteenth century and the acquisitive values of the middle class in the nineteenth century.³² In a related argument, but one that focuses on the democratising effect of education in the maritime workforce, Brian Rouleau has observed that historians of maritime culture have ‘stressed fraternal bonds between shipmates beyond the polarizing proclivities of race and nation’, while acknowledging that such claims are sometimes ‘overstressed’.³³ While there is a degree of over-simplification in Gilje’s suggestion that sailors rejected dominant societal values, it does merit consideration, especially as much of what Melville criticises about American society in *Typee*, which I discuss later, could be summarised as values belonging to an emerging middle class. However, all colonial endeavours were naturally concerned with acquisition on some level. It is hard to read Cook’s journals without acknowledging that there was an acquisitive spirit – whether in the form of trade, souvenirs or knowledge – and that nascent colonialism, exotic objects and economic gain went hand-in-hand. But it would be fair to suggest that such acquisition resulted more from the direction of the state than the individual. The explosion of certain American industries in the nineteenth century brought exploration and economic gain closer to working people. Whaling in particular presented opportunities where ‘the private venture for the common seaman benefited both the merchant and sailor by cementing everyone’s interest in the successful outcome of the enterprise.’³⁴ In some cases, whaling offered lucrative rewards for even ordinary sailors, and it was common for sailors to change careers within the maritime establishment.³⁵

³² Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront*, 12.

³³ Brian Rouleau, *With Sails Whitening Every Sea: Mariners and the Making of an American Maritime Empire* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2014), 25.

³⁴ Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront*, 22.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 24, 70.

By the time Melville wrote *Typee*, whaling was preponderantly an American industry, ‘the first international industry dominated by the United States’, according to Melville biographer Andrew Delbanco, with more than two-thirds of whaleships worldwide listed as belonging to America in a survey conducted in 1849.³⁶ From the 1830s, America had begun to surpass Britain in its whaling activity, due in part to the fact that Britain had become more reliant on coal gas, which the American market was slower to embrace.³⁷ Whaling offered more excitement, and was more of a gamble for those involved, than the average merchantman or man-of-war. Whalers also provided sailors with paid room and board.³⁸ The success of a whaling voyage, which was measured in variously appointed “lays” (portions of profit) paid to its crew, was entirely dependent on how many whales could be slaughtered for the lucrative oil their bodies contained. Although hierarchies were present on whaleships, just as they were on merchantmen or man-of-wars, the collaboration between different classes of sailor was necessarily more intimate, and more essential to their economic success, than in other maritime occupations; in other words, the whaleship could sometimes appear a more democratised workplace than other vessels. A literary example of this closeness and co-operation appears in Chapter 94 of *Moby-Dick*, where the sailors’ delight in removing the sperm oil from a whale carcass is recalled with homoerotic intimacy by the narrator Ishmael, who describes himself ‘unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers’ hands’ in the mass of oil, ‘mistaking their hands for the gentle globules.’³⁹ However, while the whaleship could appear a democratic space during periods of intense activity, as Melville’s fictional account shows, it is important to remember that its living quarters were sometimes separated along racial lines.⁴⁰ Whaling was seen not just

³⁶ Delbanco, *Melville*, 40.

³⁷ Lambert, *Crusoe’s Island*, 139.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁹ Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 416.

⁴⁰ Rouleau, *With Sails Whitening Every Sea*, 131.

as a more intensely collaborative form of maritime work, but readers of whaling accounts – particularly those in America – were, as *The Spectator* review suggests, becoming more receptive to whalers as reputable social commentators on American international affairs. Whalers who published narratives or gave accounts of their experiences were seen as interlocutors in a dialogue, as Rouleau argues, ‘between the United States and the wider world.’⁴¹ Whalers were able to educate the reading public about life at sea, and the connectedness of a global maritime empire.

The second point to consider in response to the suggestion that American sailors had a more favourable reputation, and reception, than their British counterparts, turns on their narratives’ respective audiences, and there a few issues to consider here. In assessing the changing attitudes of, and towards, sailors in the early nineteenth century, Rouleau agrees with Gilje that there was a movement towards egalitarianism following Independence. Significantly though, Rouleau stresses that the movement towards egalitarian attitudes was partly sustained by readers at home, noting that ‘[t]he antebellum era’s sea ports were also its largest producers of print and sailors were, for a variety of reasons, the most literate cohort of working men in the United States.’⁴² In fact, Rouleau estimates that ‘by the mid-nineteenth century, somewhere between 80 to 90 percent of the nation’s citizen-mariners had at least rudimentary reading and writing skills.’⁴³ As Melville’s experience also demonstrates, American sailors sometimes engaged in maritime pursuits at a later stage in their education or working lives: Melville was already nineteen years old when he signed aboard his first ship, the *St. Lawrence*, occupying the lowly position of “boy”, or cabin boy, on its passage to England.⁴⁴ However, this is not to suggest

⁴¹ Ibid., 17.

⁴² Ibid., 11.

⁴³ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁴ Delbanco, *Melville*, 28.

that sailors were necessarily literate, or educated, before they joined ships. Rather, as Rouleau explains, it was a combination of the ‘New England origin of many of these men, ‘arguably the most literate society in the Atlantic world’, together with the ‘collective educational dimension of shipboard life’ that combined to make American sailors a surprisingly literate group of workers.⁴⁵

On British naval voyages, officers were more likely to be literate than ordinary seaman. In America, however, the heightened egalitarian spirit of the maritime workforce in the nineteenth century meant that education was an important part of every sailor’s training, and Rouleau gives ample examples of sailors being educated on board, in disciplines as varied as reading, arithmetic, religion and geography.⁴⁶ As Ishmael famously states in *Moby-Dick*, considering whether his ‘executors, or more properly my creditors should find any precious MSS. in my desk’ after his death, then the credit would be to whaling, ‘for a whaleship was my Yale College and my Harvard.’⁴⁷ Education was seen as a duty and an expectation on some American naval vessels. Although Melville was undoubtedly an exception for the quality of the prose he could produce, in contrast to his position on the naval vessels which carried him, the pedagogical associations with American maritime activity certainly helped to make Melville’s account of the Marquesas appear slightly less incredible to the reading public.

A further point to consider regarding the credibility of both the author and the narrative was that the Marquesas had still not been written about in great detail by 1844: David Porter’s account and the observations by naturalist G. H. Von Langsdorff on Krusenstern’s voyage of 1803-07 were the only sustained commentaries available. James

⁴⁵ Rouleau, *With Sails Whitening Every Sea*, 26.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁴⁷ Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 112.

Cook's three days at the Marquesas (on Tahuata) were, at least by the standards of his own voyage encounters, uneventful. Cook made the interesting, if superficial observation, considering the brevity of his visit, that the Marquesan Islanders were 'without exception the finest race of people in this Sea.'⁴⁸ But he did not stay long enough to form any knowledge of Marquesan rites or customs, such as alleged incidents of anthropophagy on the islands which had begun to captivate readers from the beginning of the nineteenth century. That such a physically refined race of people – according to Cook – could participate, as later travellers would discover, in an act as seemingly barbaric and uncouth as cannibalism no doubt complemented Melville's idea, if not experience, of Nuku Hiva as an island of pleasure with a hidden secret. It was one of many apparent contradictions about the Marquesan islanders that preoccupied nineteenth century travellers and writers.

Cannibalism and Pacific Travel Narratives

Cannibalism has a long history in travel writing and Pacific texts specifically. It was a particularly apposite discourse for Melville to explore because, as Peter Hulme explains, cannibalism was so 'intimately connected with imperial and colonial ventures – as part of the experience and mythology of Europeans.'⁴⁹ As I have argued in this introduction, *Typee* deliberately unsettled ideas about experience and representation in travel writing, and Melville used cannibalism to underscore this displacement. With this in mind, this section establishes how cannibalism came to be such a prominent preoccupation for

⁴⁸ Beaglehole, *Resolution and Adventure*, 374.

⁴⁹ Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen, *Cannibalism and the Colonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 24.

European writers and why it had particular significance for Melville's writing within the subgenre of Pacific travel writing.

Sailors on Columbus's first voyage of 1492-93 were among the first Europeans to describe cannibals. The noun is etymologically derived from 'Canibales', the name given to a group of Carib people whom Columbus's men claimed ate human flesh.⁵⁰ Following Columbus's voyages, the opening up of trade routes in Renaissance Europe, the beginning of European Pacific exploration in the sixteenth century and, later, the establishment of British overseas colonies, there was increased contact with exotic goods and people. This stirred the cultural imagination to fantastic ideas about the difference and otherness of foreigners. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, to cite a familiar early example, the protagonist recounts some of the more fabulous escapades of his military career as follows:

It was my hint to speak – such was my process –
And of the cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads,
Do grow beneath their shoulders.⁵¹

What Othello refers to here is a conflation of mythical and alleged human groups of people, such as those depicted in Sebastian Munster's *Cosmographia* (first published 1544), which retold which retold the cannibal encounters of Columbus's voyage and revisited earlier mythical accounts of humanoid peoples who dwelt in the southern hemisphere.⁵² The people whose heads grew on their chest, described by Herodotus (c.

⁵⁰ Neil Rennie, *Far-Fetched Facts: The Literature of Travel and the Idea of the South Seas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 19.

⁵¹ William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann (London: Arden, 1996), 140.

⁵² Joan Pong Linton, *The Romance of the New World: Gender and the Literary Formations of English Colonialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 104-106.

484-425 BC) and called Blemmyae, were rumoured to live in parts of North Africa, and mythical humanoids such as these resurfaced in the Renaissance era.⁵³ In the fifteenth and sixteenth-century geographical imagination, continental Africa was not separated from the southern landmass which became known as *Terra Australis*; on the Ptolemaic world map of 1482, for example, the continents simply flow into each other, and we can see how such images became transplanted into the Pacific imagination during the age of discovery, when the boundaries between lands and oceans were not yet defined in the Pacific Ocean.⁵⁴

The kinds of mythical creatures described in the *Cosmographia* are not far removed from the Patagonian giants of Magellan's 1519-22 voyage. Indeed, the Sciopod (a creature with an abnormally large single foot) was probably an earlier version of the South American giants described by Antonio Pigafetta, who sailed on Magellan's circumnavigation, and named them 'Patagons' for their large feet.⁵⁵ They were allegedly so tall that the Spanish men only came up to their waistline, a myth which became rewritten on John Byron's voyage when he visited in 1764 and claimed that his Lieutenant, James Cummings, 'tho' very tall himself' was 'a mere shrimp' by comparison.⁵⁶ These claims were compounded by the fact that the French and English 'used different standards of measurement' with 'six French feet being equal to six feet, four and one-half inches, by English measure', a difference which European translators of voyage texts overlooked.⁵⁷ The Patagons were therefore even taller to readers of French translations of Byron's

⁵³ Bill Leadbetter, "The Roman South," in *European Perceptions of Terra Australis*, ed. Anne M. Scott, Alfred Hiatt, Claire McIlroy and Christopher Wortham (London: Routledge, 2011), 53.

⁵⁴ Glyndwr Williams and Alan Frost, "Terra Australis: Theory and Speculation" in *Terra Australis to Australia*, 1-37.

⁵⁵ Antonio Pigafetta, *Magellan's Voyage: A Narrative Account of the First Circumnavigation*, trans. R. A. Skelton (London: Yale University Press, 1969), 46-47, 50.

⁵⁶ John Byron, *Byron's Journal of his Circumnavigation, 1764-1766*, ed. Robert E. Gallagher (London: Hakluyt Society, 1964), 46-48.

⁵⁷ Percy G. Adams, *Travelers and Travel Liars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 36.

voyage. However, even allowing for the extra height difference, at nine English feet the Patagonians were fantastically tall to begin with.⁵⁸ The conflation of humanoid people with physical abnormalities such as gigantism, and cannibalism, which Shakespeare posits in *Othello*, filtered down into colonial imagination in the eighteenth century, and prompted explorers and publishers to produce exaggerated versions of the people and events they met with, even in ‘official’ eyewitness accounts.

In defining the noun ‘cannibal’ in the mid-eighteenth century, Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary* used the above excerpt from *Othello*, as well as passages from texts such as Francis Bacon’s *Natural History*.⁵⁹ The very definition of ‘cannibal’ was therefore already indebted to fictional as well as philosophical representations by the time British Pacific exploration began in earnest. The Pacific Ocean became a site onto which ideas like gigantism and anthropophagy continued to be projected and promulgated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Mary Edwards argues, situating the cannibals of Pacific voyages in the broader historical contexts of the ‘exotic Others’ resurrected from classical traditions from the Renaissance onwards, ‘Europeans expected to find cannibals and Amazons – and therefore they found them.’⁶⁰ Cannibalism had a particularly enduring currency because, in isolated incidents, it was apparently true.⁶¹ The more it was said to occur, the greater the European determination to find it.

During James Cook’s second voyage, his crew had the opportunity of testing whether the Maori of New Zealand were in fact man-eaters, as had often been reported (including by themselves). It was known that the Maori kept trophies from their battles

⁵⁸ Adams, *Travelers and Travel Liars*, 36.

⁵⁹ Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary*, I, 335.

⁶⁰ Edwards, *Cannibal Old Me*, 61.

⁶¹ Dening, *Islands and Beaches*, 247-249.

with enemy tribes. According to midshipman John Elliott, Lieutenant John Pickersgill had ‘found the head of a young Man of about 20 or 22 years old’ in a canoe, which he purchased and brought on board the *Resolution*. Eliot writes that ‘it was pretty certain that those people were Cannibals, and Capt. Cook had told them so in his former voyage, yet he was doubted.’⁶² In purchasing the head, Pickersgill was re-enacting a series of events that occurred on Cook’s first voyage, and scholars have tended to overlook the connection between these. The incidents Eliot refers to when he says Cook was ‘doubted’ over his assertion that the Maori were cannibals occurred in January 1769, at Queen Charlotte Sound. Cook had found an earth oven at a nearby cove with some recently gnawed bones which, upon inspection, he concluded might be human. This set off a chain of events where the Maori were interviewed, first by Cook and then by his Polynesian interpreter, Tupaia, about their motives for cannibalisation.⁶³ Tupaia asked a local chief whether they ate the skulls kept as war trophies, and received the reply that the brains were eaten but the skulls themselves preserved. A few days later, the chief reluctantly sold one of the heads to Joseph Banks.⁶⁴ In doing so, the chief unwittingly initiated a trade in exotic bodies which Banks would develop later in his career, aiding the emergent field of race theory by facilitating the supply of body parts for anatomical study.⁶⁵ While the severed heads, and even the casual admission of cannibalism, did not amount to documentary evidence of the fact, Cook’s officers had effectively put two and two together.⁶⁶ Using the framework of commerce, which the Europeans understood more clearly than the significance and

⁶² John Elliot, *Captain Cook’s Second Voyage: The Journals of John Elliott and Richard Pickersgill*, ed. Christine Holmes (London: Caliban Books, 1984), 22.

⁶³ Beaglehole, *Journal of Banks*, I, 455.

⁶⁴ Salmond, *Trial of the Cannibal Dog*, 145.

⁶⁵ Fulford, Lee and Kitson, *Literature, Science and Exploration*, 14, 127-148.

⁶⁶ Beaglehole, *Journal of Banks*, I, 456-459.

symbolism of war trophies, they projected onto the severed heads the more functional assumption that they were evidence of cannibalism.

On board the *Resolution* in November 1773, in an incident that has been much chewed over by anthropologists and historians of the Cook voyages and European relations with Polynesian peoples in general, Pickersgill picked up where Banks left off. With another recently acquired human head, sensing that this would be ‘a very good opportunity’ to settle the debate, Pickersgill told two of the ‘principal [Maori] Men’ on board that he did not believe they would eat human flesh:

They said, Yes, they always eat their Enemies. He then asked them if they would eat part of the Man’s head before them; they said Yes, only let it be broiled on the fire. For this purpose two slices were cut from the lower part of the Cheeks (for the Lower Jaw had been taken out to decorate the inside of their War Canoes) and just broiled on a grid-iron. When ready, it was brought to the two Men, who instantly eat it with all the avidity of a Beef Steak, to the utmost horror of the whole Quarter deck...⁶⁷

This passage is closely retold in other journals from the voyage (including Cook’s, which repeats the ‘avidity’ with which the flesh was eaten). It does provide evidence of cannibalism, but fails to contextualise it properly. The two ‘principal Men’, presumably chiefs, had effectively been dared to eat human flesh. It was a display which Pickersgill and others staged to test the Maori chiefs on board. If they were to refuse, they would be seen as less ferocious than both they and the Europeans had asserted. I further suspect that the men’s affirmative ‘Yes, they always eat their Enemies’ was probably intended as a threat to the *Resolution*’s crew. The Maori would have quickly realised, with the incessant questioning, that cannibalism was a particularly feared and reviled practice to the

⁶⁷ Elliot, *Captain Cook’s Second Voyage*, 22.

Europeans, and they were utilising this threat to warn against hostile behaviour. As

Gananath Obeyesekere suggests in *Cannibal Talk* (2004),

[t]he Maori were fully aware after Cook's [first] visit of the European dread of body dismemberment such that everyone in this area was trained to repeat the very discourse that appalled Cook and to reenact their famed "war dance", the *haka*, in parodic form.⁶⁸

The Maori therefore became increasingly alert to the fears and vulnerabilities of European visitors, and were able to exploit these – using what Obeyesekere aptly terms 'fear-knowledge' – to assert a degree of power over them in their rehearsal of this act.⁶⁹ In other words, the suggestion of cannibalism was a defensive as well as offensive (in both senses of the word) act. It was, 'an employment of one form of terror against another' according to Obeyesekere, who points out that the threat of cannibalism had kept Europeans out of New Zealand for forty years after Cook's first voyage.⁷⁰ In the previous chapter I considered the reasons that Australia was chosen as the destination for the First Fleet, suggesting that the Maori capacity for violence, and the perception of Maori as a more war-like people than the Australians in general might have been a deciding factor. Cannibalism was the most threatening example of that violence, and I suggest that it was one important factor among many in deciding the location of the colony. Matra's proposition for the New South Wales colony was clearly keen to establish the minimal threat posed by the Australians in this regard, which would have contrasted with popular perceptions of the Maori as 'fierce warriors'.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Gananath Obeyesekere, *Cannibal Talk: The Man-Eating Myth and Human Sacrifice in the South Seas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 66.

⁶⁹ Obeyesekere, *Cannibal Talk*, 35-36.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁷¹ Matra, *HRNSW*, 1-6; Michelle Keown, *Postcolonial Pacific Writing: Representations of the Body* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 2-3.

The result of this increased discussion about cannibalism, from islanders and Europeans, was that it appeared to be more ubiquitous for travellers than it probably was, particularly in the light of increasing incidents of violence on both sides of the beach. Cook and his men had shot at Maori on the first voyage and, later, in Furneaux's ship the *Adventure*, a party of European men were killed in an ambush at Grass Cove. James Burney, who discovered the remains of his shipmates, was handed a piece of fresh meat. 'I still doubted their being Cannibals', he wrote,

but we were Soon convinced by most horrid & undeniable proofs – a great many baskets (about 20) laying on the beach tied up, we cut them open, some were full of roasted flesh & some of fern root which serves them for bread...⁷²

But, like Pickersgill, Burney did not register the significance or symbolism of what he had witnessed. If the Maori were hungry devourers of human flesh, why did they leave so much of it behind in neatly tied, easily discoverable bundles along the shore?

As Nicholas Thomas suggests, 'Maori social life has always been, and still is, replete with rituals of defiance,' and his interpretation is that the Maori were using this to frighten the Europeans, to make them aware of their capacity for ferocity, having been dared to do so.⁷³ I would add that this display of power was also intended as a warning to Cook's men. Writing up the events of Grass Cove, Burney stressed that he was 'not inclined to think this was any premeditated plan of these Savages', admitting 'it might probably happen from Some quarrel... our people being so very incautious'.⁷⁴ Anne Salmond's interpretation of the episode is revealing in this regard. She argues that the massacre at Grass Cove was a direct retaliation to the scenes witnessed on board the

⁷² James Burney, *With Captain James Cook in the Antarctic and Pacific*, ed. Beverley Hooper (Canberra, National Library of Australia, 1975), 96-97

⁷³ Thomas, *Discoveries*, 211.

⁷⁴ Burney, *With Captain James Cook*, 99.

Resolution: the ‘mock barbecue had infuriated the family of the young man who had been killed, and there may have been other offences, unreported in the journals.’⁷⁵ Burney’s account of the ‘incautious’ men certainly supports this chain of events, suggesting that the displays of power on the *Resolution* and later at Grass Cove were not just evidence of Maori cannibalism, but of defiance and retribution for European acts of violence.

One of the debates that interested Cook’s men was whether the Maori were cannibals from custom, or if they ate only the flesh of their enemies slain in battle, which was more palatable to Europeans. In Geoffrey Sanborn’s analysis of the events, he terms the former option ‘lustful cannibalism’, observing that accounts of this type of anthropophagy ‘were generally accompanied by images of humane horror’ with “humane” meaning ‘experiencing an involuntary physical revulsion when confronted with the spectacle of savagery and disavowing any participation in the production of that spectacle.’⁷⁶ We can see this in Burney’s reaction when he recalls ‘we remained almost stupefied on this spot’ and, although he is open to the idea of a fracas being the cause of the slaughter, he demonstrates a lack of awareness about the meaning of his own position as a European and absents himself from the performance he has witnessed.⁷⁷ As Sanborne points out, it was perhaps Oedidee, a native of the Society Islands, whose reaction to the scene best encapsulates the humane play of sensibility attached to cannibalistic revulsion: while all around him the *Resolution*’s officers were vomiting, Oedidee was by turns crying and scolding Cook’s men.⁷⁸ He seemed to realise that Cook’s men were complicit in bringing this scene to fruition, even if they could not. Cook made several corrections to

⁷⁵ Salmond, *Trial of the Cannibal Dog*, 227.

⁷⁶ Geoffrey Sanborn, *The Sign of the Cannibal: Melville and the Making of a Postcolonial Reader* (London: Duke University Press, 1998), 24.

⁷⁷ Burney, *With Captain James Cook*, 97-98.

⁷⁸ Sanborn, *Sign of the Cannibal*, 24-25.

this passage in his journal as he was aware it would be of particular interest once it was published. He gives an uncharacteristically sentimental and literary description of Oedidee's revulsion, going so far as to say it was 'utterly impossible for Art to depict that passion with half the force that it appeared in his Countenance when roused from this state by some of us'.⁷⁹ The passage is noteworthy in transplanting the near impossibility of transcribing the act of cannibalism itself in literature back onto the observer's response to it, a trope that Melville would use again in *Typee*.

Sanborn breaks down European rationales for cannibalism into lust, denial, vengeance, famine, and superstition, some of which we see journal writers deliberating in their versions of events. He points out that the notion of famine as a plausible catalyst for cannibalism, which had some traction in the early eighteenth century, 'very quickly fell from favour' following the publication of accounts of Cook's voyages, where New Zealand was represented as quite fertile.⁸⁰ The astronomer William Wales, who accompanied the second voyage and also wrote about the events that Elliot relates, decided that revenge was not necessarily a motive either; as 'those who eat part of the head on board, could not know whether it belonged to a friend or Enemy.'⁸¹ My own reading of the event is that the head probably *did* belong to an enemy, as Elliot tells us that the lower jaw had been removed to 'decorate the inside of their War Canoes', but this detail does not alter the overall significance of the event, which Wales cannot adequately explain.⁸² Wales's final observation, after he has discounted lust (in his words, 'the Impulse of that wild Frenzy into which they have shewn us they can & do work themselves'), revenge, and hunger/famine ('It cannot be from want of Annimal food'), is the most convincing. He

⁷⁹ Beaglehole, *Resolution and Adventure*, 293, n. 3.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 819.

⁸² Elliot, *Captain Cook's Second Voyage*, 22.

concludes, by process of deduction, that ‘this horrid action is from Choice’. However, in this instance at least, the choice is less about ‘the liking which they have for this kind of food’, as he calls it, and more about choosing to outdo the Europeans at their power games.⁸³ While *Typee* does not explicitly reference these incidents from the Cook voyages, Melville frequently invokes Cook when discussing cannibalism, cementing the associations between the acts of exploration and anthropophagy that keep Tommo in constant anxiety about his fate.⁸⁴ In doing so Melville hints, as Paul Lyons astutely observes, at ‘the pressures cite places on sight, the way that citationality confesses a moment of contingency in perception, or the difficulty of maintaining distance from a heritage of fear.’⁸⁵ Throughout *Typee*, Melville reminds his readers of the cultural legacy of cannibalism as his narrator, Tommo, attempts to navigate between what he has heard and the reality of what he has seen.

‘Unnatural gourmands’: Hunger in *Typee*

The hunger which Europeans attempted, and failed, to posit as a rationale for cannibalism, is also the prominent theme in *Typee*, if we interpret this feeling both literally and figuratively. Tommo’s survival on the island, his fears of being cannibalised and his longing for fresh experience drive the action of the narrative and ultimately force its conclusion. The opening passages of *Typee*, which take place on board the *Dolly* (the fictionalised *Acushnet*) give an impression of hunger and bodily privations even before Tommo makes his transition across the beach. Tommo mentions, ‘there is not a sweet

⁸³ Beaglehole, *Resolution and Adventure*, 819.

⁸⁴ Melville, *Typee*, 95, 234.

⁸⁵ Lyons, *American Pacificism*, 89.

potato left; not a single yam' before lamenting the loss of the 'glorious bunches of bananas' and 'delicious oranges', which once 'decorated' the ship. The adjectives ascribed to these articles elevate them in the author's memory, compounding the sense of shipboard hunger. The 'captain's pig' has even 'gnawed off and devoured' the bark on the wood and, in turn, 'the pig himself has been devoured.'⁸⁶ The scenes Tommo relates in these passages are scenes of cyclical consumption, which are embodied by Captain Vangs, who, as his homophonic name (fangs) suggests, has effectively exsanguinated the ship, being charged with 'inhumanely' treating the sick, dishing out 'scantly allowances' of provisions and conducting 'unreasonably protracted' cruises.⁸⁷ Melville accurately depicts the fear and deprivations induced by hunger, and their effects on the bodies and minds of a ship's crew, early on in Tommo's narrative. While the references to literal cannibalism are frequent in the early chapters, Melville also interprets cannibalism more figuratively as the consumption of the self by an alien culture as Tommo awaits landfall.

American readers were conversant with these tropes of hunger and desperation. By the 1840s, the connection between shipboard hunger and cannibalism – on predominantly white ships – had been made explicit in a number of popular narratives. The most prominent occurrence, which Melville had read about and which would later inspire him to write *Moby-Dick*, occurred on the *Essex*, a whaleship which sailed out of Nantucket in August 1819.⁸⁸ First mate Owen Chase published his account of the events in 1821.⁸⁹ In it, he recalls that the ship was sunk after being attacked by a particularly aggressive whale. The twenty-one men on board were forced to abandon the wreck and take flight in *Essex*'s

⁸⁶ Melville, *Typee*, 3-4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸⁸ Delbanco, *Melville*, 167-168.

⁸⁹ Owen Chase, *Narrative of the Most Extraordinary and Distressing Shipwreck of the Whale-ship Essex* (New York: W. B. Gilley, 1821).

three whaleboats. These were very light, open craft, designed to be capable of travelling at great speeds and therefore not robustly built. After their boats became separated during a storm, the longest of these open-topped voyages took the sailors on a journey of over 4,500 miles, a nautical feat which bore striking similarities in its duration and conditions to that performed by William Bligh after he was deserted by the *Bounty* mutineers.⁹⁰

The major irony of the open-boat voyage is that the men of the *Essex* chose not to sail for the Marquesas, which was the nearest landfall at about 1,200 miles away, because they knew of David Porter's account of the islands, in which ideas about Marquesan cannibalism were much discussed.⁹¹ Such was their fear of being eaten, that they instead set sail for the coast of South America, roughly 3,000 miles distant.⁹² Had they not made this fateful decision, they might not have had to resort to cannibalism themselves. Sick and starving, the sailors began dying in their boats, and were dropped overboard. However, their want of food soon became so desperate that when Isaac Cole died in the night with, Chase tells us, 'the most horrid and frightful convulsions I ever witnessed', the men decided to keep his body for food:

We now first commenced to satisfy the immediate craving of nature from the heart, which we eagerly devoured, and then eat sparingly of a few pieces of the flesh; after which, we hung up the remainder, cut in thin strips about the boat, to dry in the sun: we made a fire and roasted some of it, to serve us during the next day.⁹³

The recollection of this particular scene, which Chase recalls brought to mind 'the most disagreeable and revolting ideas', had traction for sailors in the nineteenth-century as it was evidence that in certain conditions, anyone can 'turn' cannibal. And, perhaps equally

⁹⁰ Salmond, *Bligh*, 20.

⁹¹ Nathaniel Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex* (London: Harper Collins, 2005), 95.

⁹² Owen Chase, *The Loss of the Ship Essex, Sunk by a Whale: First Person Accounts*, eds. Nathaniel Philbrick and Thomas Philbrick (New York: Penguin, 2000), 34.

⁹³ Chase, *The Loss of the Ship Essex*, 67.

worrying for voyagers with binary conceptions of civilised and savage societies, respectable sailors could become as ‘uncivilised’ as the cannibals of the South Seas. Their strange decision to consume Cole’s heart first suggests that, starving and probably scorbutic, they were desperately trying to get to the source of life itself; a metaphor repeated, more commonly, in the desire of sick sailors for landfall ‘refreshments’.⁹⁴ We can ponder how many common sailors, including Melville, deserted under the influence of scorbutic desire, only to find that in evading a cannibal fate they had gone, to use a culinary trope, from frying pan to fire.

Setting these narratives aside, food and hunger have always had a special significance in narratives of the Marquesas. The position of the islands relative to trade winds means that, unlike those in Western Polynesia, the Marquesas Islands frequently experience prolonged droughts. As anthropologist Alfred Gell has noted food was ‘kept by an élite of wealthy men for their own security’ and used as political currency in times of famine.⁹⁵ Edward Robarts’s journal contains an illustration of the importance of food being stored in this way in the Marquesas, and the consequences of breaching its intended purpose. He relates that, around 1801, ‘a woman of the enemys tribe [who] had been gathering wild chesnutts’ was caught, bound and put to death. Her body was laid before a ‘Prophet’ who ‘took a stone and broke the skull and took the Brains out and eat them raw.’⁹⁶ Robarts’s journal underscores the uncomfortably close relationship between the scarcity of food and cannibalism in the Marquesas. Melville may not have known this explicitly, as Robarts’s journal was not published in his lifetime, but Robarts was studied in Langsdorff’s account of the Marquesas on his 1803-1807 voyage as a beachcomber who

⁹⁴ Lamb, *Preserving the Self*, 123.

⁹⁵ Gell, *Wrapping in Images*, 165-166.

⁹⁶ Robarts, *Marquesan Journal*, 116.

had become assimilated into Marquesan culture, and such stories were undoubtedly recounted from one sailor to another, as the *Essex* men's knowledge of David Porter's account demonstrates.

Melville was familiar enough with Marquesas narratives to realise the political significance of food for both visiting ships and the islanders more generally. There can be no question that he had read the journals of Captain Porter and the missionary William Ellis; *Typee* makes explicit reference to both, the first directly and the second without acknowledgement.⁹⁷ Beyond these published texts, sailors and whalers talked amongst themselves about visits to the Marquesas. The early chapters of *Typee* demonstrate the oral transmission of such stories in its composition; the frequent exclamations and reminiscences addressed to the reader are representative of the sailors' yarn, while later chapters adopt the more ethnographic tone of late-eighteenth century voyagers. Part of the difficulty in getting *Typee* published was that it felt rehearsed. John Murray had found it unusual that Melville, ostensibly a common sailor, should read, in his words, so much like a 'practised writer' but, as Mary Edwards argues, that "'practised" element that Murray sensed in *Typee* may have come from Melville's years of repeating the story orally, first to his shipmates and then to his family.'⁹⁸ Edwards's argument is convincing, especially when we consider that the novel's first chapter is written in the style of a sailor's 'yarn', but I suggest that *Typee* may have felt "practised" for the extent it mimicked contemporary voyage accounts, such as Porter's. Melville also had an influence closer to home: his cousin Thomas had sailed on a South Seas voyage, which included a stop in the Marquesas, as a midshipman in 1827, when the author was only eight years old.⁹⁹ *Typee*

⁹⁷ Delbanco, *Melville*, 78.

⁹⁸ Edwards, *Cannibal Old Me*, 2.

⁹⁹ Parker, *Herman Melville*, 75.

was both moulded after its various retellings, and itself a composition of other voyagers' accounts. In retelling *Typee*, Melville was refining it to the point where it became both story-like and persuasive.

Melville's indebtedness to previous authors and voyages is a complex knot to untangle. While Porter's *Journal of a Cruise to the Pacific* is referred to in *Typee*, the author disingenuously claims it is 'a work, however, which I have never happened to meet with' but one which 'is said to contain some interesting particulars concerning the islanders.'¹⁰⁰ Captain David Porter had sailed from New York during the War of 1812 on an expedition that would see him capture British ships and take several British sailors prisoner, before arriving at the Marquesas Islands in October 1813 and claiming them for the United States. 'In less than two days', Porter tells us, he was able to strike a peace agreement with all the tribes of the island 'with the exception only of the warlike tribes of *Typees*' who scorned his offer, calling his men 'white lizards, mere dirt' and the even more 'contemptible epithet... the posteriors and the privates of [rival tribe] the Taeehs.'¹⁰¹ Although Porter makes much of the antagonism and ferocity of the Taipi, he remains relatively judicious on the subject of cannibalism, not jumping to conclusions as some of those who accompanied Cook in New Zealand did.¹⁰²

Porter points out that he was 'informed' by local beachcombers and white men generally that the islanders were cannibals but, in language closely echoing Cook and his officers, adds:

¹⁰⁰ Melville, *Typee*, 6.

¹⁰¹ Porter, *Journal of a Cruise*, 56, 69.

¹⁰² I follow Nicholas Thomas, among others, in using the anthropologically accepted 'Taipi' to refer to the valley and the culture which Melville describes, as opposed to the 'Typee' of his novel. See Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), 98.

[O]n the strictest inquiry, I could not learn that either of them had seen them in the act of eating human flesh. I was desirous of having this point put beyond a doubt, though the assurances they had given me, that they really were cannibals, had strongly inclined me to believe that it was the case.¹⁰³

The desire to put ‘the point beyond a doubt’, even in the absence of eyewitness accounts, is common among texts that report, or claim to report on, cannibalism. Cook was ‘desirous of becoming an eye witness to a fact which many people had their doubts about’ in New Zealand in 1773.¹⁰⁴ The relationship between Melville and Porter is intricate but has been most eloquently attempted by John Bryant in his work *Melville Unfolding* (2008).¹⁰⁵ Through a detailed study of Melville and Porter in juxtaposition, Bryant locates precisely when and how Melville borrows and deviates from Porter. On the subject of cannibalism, Bryant alerts us to the way in which Porter quite arbitrarily casts his own doubts over the allegations of anthropophagy from local beachcombers and even the islanders themselves. Attempting to navigate another apparent contradiction in Taipi ways of life and behaviour, Porter suggests that their general good hygiene would be at odds with cannibalism:

[T]heir caution in avoiding the touch of the blood or the dead carcasses, greatly staggered my belief of their being cannibals, although they did not deny that they sometimes eat their enemies, at least so we understood them; but it is possible we may have misunderstood.¹⁰⁶

However, Porter conflates cleanliness with the complex set of *tapu* rituals governing Marquesan life, which involved special precautions for touching the dead.¹⁰⁷ Leaving little room for interpretation, he projects a Western maritime preoccupation with hygiene onto Taipi behaviour to assuage his own anxieties and doubts about a Marquesan custom. His admission that he may have completely misunderstood the islanders in this exchange left

¹⁰³ Ibid., 42.

¹⁰⁴ Beaglehole, *Resolution and Adventure*, 293.

¹⁰⁵ John Bryant, *Melville Unfolding: Sexuality, Politics and the Versions of Typee* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 232-248.

¹⁰⁶ Porter, *Journal of a Cruise*, 45.

¹⁰⁷ Denning, *Islands and Beaches*, 51-54.

ample room for a writer like Melville to creatively compose his own ideas on Marquesan cannibalism.

Melville's gift was in suspending the state of anticipation about cannibalism *ex ante* into a novel-length discourse that framed it within broader anxieties about the possibility of life in the Pacific for white sailors. Before Tommo has even made landfall in the Nuku Hiva, among the 'strangely jumbled anticipations' the author lays out in the first chapter, in a heavily punctuated, percussive and exclamatory passage, are the 'Naked houris – cannibal banquets – groves of cocoa-nut – coral reefs – tattooed chiefs...*heathenish rites and human sacrifices* [emphasis in original]'.¹⁰⁸ Melville rewrites Porter so that the Marquesans do not just 'sometimes eat their enemies' but have particular 'appetites, edged perhaps by the air of so elevated a region' which 'might prompt them to devour one.'¹⁰⁹ By associating the 'air' of the region with the inhabitants' behaviour, Melville is casually referencing philosophical theories that connected particular climates with different human characteristics.

The French naturalist and racial historiographer Buffon, for example, had argued that mankind was not 'composed of species essentially different from each other' but 'underwent divers[e] changes, from the influence of the climate, from the difference of food, and of the mode of living'.¹¹⁰ Buffon's theories on climate and evolution were more expansive than a short quotation allows for but among the key claims he made, and one which received much attention, was the idea that 'old-world species became weaker, less fertile, and in general "shrink and diminish" upon transposition to the New World.'¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Melville, *Typee*, 5.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹¹⁰ Buffon, *Barr's Buffon: Buffon's Natural History*, 10 vols. (London: J. S. Barr, 1792), IV, 351.

¹¹¹ Jennifer L. Roberts, *Transporting Visions: The Movement of Images in Early America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 104.

Buffon was referring specifically to the movement of livestock from Europe to America but the idea that newer climates had a debilitating and limiting effect on those who entered them was certainly an idea to which Melville was attuned. But the author is also making a point about the Marquesas Islands being markedly different from the rest of Polynesia, about which there was a larger and more popular body of literature. Mary Edwards argues that the Marquesas were an arresting sight for travellers, because they appeared visually very distinct from other Polynesian islands. Many Pacific islands were formed by volcanoes and have ‘bone-white sand beaches and sapphire-blue water’.¹¹² Although Tahiti, by contrast, is known for its black sand beaches, the beach presented open and expansive views to those who visited them. I suggest that while beaches could be scenes of calamitous action, there was also sense of security in being able to see what was happening on the beach. The Marquesas, by contrast, were ‘tall, grim, and dark sided.’¹¹³ Describing their topography, Dening writes that all of the Marquesas Islands ‘are without coastal plains’, their shores meeting the sea ‘in giant cliffs which are broken by the deep rifts of valleys’.¹¹⁴ This presented a stark contrast for Euro-American travellers who had visited Western Polynesia and witnessed extensive coastlines. Such descriptions are closely echoed in Tommo’s first glimpse of the bay of Nuku Hiva. He tells us that for first-time visitors ‘the reality is very different’ from their imagination; instead of the Pacific island tropes of ‘enamelled and softly swelling plains, shaded over with delicious groves’ are ‘bold rock-bound coasts’ and ‘thickly-wooded valleys’.¹¹⁵ Melville was able to capitalise on the idea that the Marquesas were different from perceptions of Polynesia invoked in

¹¹² Edwards, *Cannibal Old Me*, 66.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹¹⁴ Dening, *Islands and Beaches*, 45.

¹¹⁵ Melville, *Typee*, 12.

late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century travel narratives, with an insular topography, occluded by trees, that resists enquiry.

David Farrier considers the possibility that Melville may be ‘deliberately representing the geography of Nuku Hiva as inaccessible to the Western gaze’, an idea I share, and one which I suggest gives the more imaginative features of Melville’s narrative the illusion of authority.¹¹⁶ Perhaps more significant though, is the connection between the veiled landscape and the islanders, who also resist cultural enquiry. When Tommo is first taken in to a native hut and examined by its inhabitants, he recalls

Never before had I been subjected to so strange and steady a glance; it revealed nothing of the mind of the savage, but it appeared to be reading my own.¹¹⁷

With the gaze reflected back onto Tommo (and vicariously, the reader) Melville depicts the inscrutability of Taipi expression, onto which he is able to project his own ideas as he writes over previous historical accounts to construct his narrator’s view of the Taipi people.

In addition to inverting the colonial gaze, a trope of encounter narratives I discussed in the previous chapter in the Australian context, Melville also played with the fragments of local dialect, and their perceived meanings, that made their way into Porter’s journal. Bryant unpacks Porter’s linguistic observation that in the Nuku Hiva language one word often has multiple meanings, suggesting that the phrase ‘*kie-kie*’ which Porter understands ‘signifies *to eat*’, could ‘have many other significations, with which we are unacquainted...it may signify *to cut up, to divide, to sacrifice, to keep as trophies.*’¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ David Farrier, *Unsettled Narratives: The Pacific writings of Stevenson, Ellis, Melville and London* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 134.

¹¹⁷ Melville, *Typee*, 71.

¹¹⁸ Porter, *Journal of a Cruise*, 46; Bryant, *Melville Unfolding*, 240-41.

Porter uses this example to imply he may have misinterpreted the islanders when they told him they were cannibals. As Bryant suggests, ‘Porter relies upon this singular linguistic deconstruction to derive the untenable (and anthropologically false) conclusion that the Taipis are not cannibals’.¹¹⁹ Melville deconstructs the linguistic dualities in Porter’s text, as closely as he can without belying his claim never to have read his journal. In Chapter 12, Tommo and Toby are offered food by Mehevi with the instruction “‘Tommo, Toby, ki ki!’”. “‘Ki ki! Is it?’”, wonders Toby, before suggesting that what they are eating is in fact “‘A baked baby, by the soul of Captain Cook!’”¹²⁰ The invocation of Captain Cook is significant here and later in the text, when Melville resurrects the myth that the explorer’s body was eaten by the Hawaiians, having Tommo recount a story about an old chief on ‘Mowee’ who ate Captain Cook’s big toe.¹²¹ Recalling Lyons’s argument that cite places pressure on sight, such references provide a framework for the reader to anticipate – through the narrator – the cannibal dénouement towards the end of the text. However, Melville is also providing a literary parodying of cannibalism as, in Lyons words, ‘a hackneyed theme... productive of blockages in perception, while itself becoming an absurd form of literary tourism.’¹²² Melville was of course conscious of the great lengths explorers went to prove its existence.

In a further example of this intertextuality, Melville reverses Porter’s claim – that the double meanings inherent in Taipi vocabulary might be responsible for miscommunicating the notion of cannibalism – by suggesting the word *ki ki* solely describes the act of eating. Bryant concludes that ‘[u]nlike Porter, Tommo does not use this problem of language to dismantle the problem of cannibalism’; as Chapter 12 shows,

¹¹⁹ Bryant, *Melville Unfolding*, 240.

¹²⁰ Melville, *Typee*, 95.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹²² Lyons, *American Pacificism*, 77.

Melville deliberately has Tommo make the opposite assumption.¹²³ Melville's deserters are afraid that they may unwittingly be made cannibals by proxy. The fear in this case is that cannibalism – like tattooing – is an irredeemable act; in Edwards's words, 'the boundary beyond which we cannot stray and remain fully human.'¹²⁴ In the earliest mention of cannibalism in the text, Melville describes the Taipis as 'irreclaimable cannibals'. But, as Edwards points out, to call someone a cannibal is also 'a way to gain power over them and to control them.'¹²⁵ David Farrier has also alluded to the taxonomic practices which Pacific travellers used to group indigenous peoples together and apart, suggesting that the idea of cannibalism originated in the explorer's desire for classification.¹²⁶ Melville's use of this label serves to restore the balance of power once Tommo is taken captive. However, being ultimately unable, like the sources he relies on, to affirm the practice either way, Melville holds Tommo in a state of anxious suspense during his time in the valley.

Yet Melville is also ambivalent about what it means to be labelled a 'cannibal'. There are two passages in particular which illustrate a shift in the narrator's conception of this term, in Chapters 17 and 27. In the first, Tommo considers that cannibalism, and the attendant notions of violence and barbarity, are perhaps not so unfamiliar to a Western 'enlightened' readership as might be assumed:

But it will be urged that these shocking unprincipled wretches are cannibals. Very true; and a rather bad trait in their character it must be allowed. But they are such only when they seek to gratify the passion of revenge upon their enemies; and I ask whether the mere eating of human flesh so very far exceeds in barbarity that custom which only a few years since was practiced in enlightened England: – a convicted traitor, perhaps a man found guilty of honesty, patriotism and suchlike heinous crimes, had his head lopped off with a huge axe, his bowels dragged out and thrown into a fire; while his body, carved

¹²³ Bryant, *Melville Unfolding*, 241.

¹²⁴ Edwards, *Cannibal Old Me*, 61.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹²⁶ Farrier, *Unsettled Narratives*, 124.

into four quarters, was with his head exposed upon pikes, and permitted to rot and fester among the public haunts of men!¹²⁷

By making the claim that all Marquesan cannibalism is revenge cannibalism, Tommo is able to liken its violence to capital punishment, as a display of power that is designed to punish an enemy and publicly deter future criminality. Hanging, drawing and quartering was a punishment usually reserved for political crimes like treason.¹²⁸ The comparison is significant as this passage is part of broader argument, which occasionally appears in the text, that civilization, as imagined by European cultures, is not always civil. In the preceding paragraph Tommo argues that

In a primitive state of society, the enjoyments of life, though few and simple, are spread over a great extent, and are unalloyed; but Civilization, for every advantage she imparts, holds a hundred evils in reserve.

At certain points in the narrative, Tommo places the values of Taipi society in a higher regard than American culture, but this passage stands out for its direct placement of supposedly ‘advanced’ civilization alongside its ‘evils’. It is one of the most direct reproaches of Western culture found in the novel, and Melville’s coded complaints against Western principles are more striking when we consider that Tommo views himself as a captive in the valley; even as a prisoner, the narrator is able to appreciate the ‘freedoms’ granted by Taipi life in binary opposition to the supposedly widespread freedoms promised to enlightened Americans.

These claims are repeated in Chapter 27, one of the ostensibly ethnographic chapters, when Tommo considers that the reality of cannibalism ‘is not half so horrible as it is usually described’ in ‘popular fictions’.¹²⁹ Melville is undoubtedly aware of the irony

¹²⁷ Melville, *Typee*, 125.

¹²⁸ Frank McLynn, *Crime and Punishment in Eighteenth-Century England* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1989), 159.

¹²⁹ Melville, *Typee*, 205.

of setting this chapter just before the cannibal dénouement of Chapter 32, where the allegedly human remains he discovers induce a horror in the narrator which is analogous to that recorded in travel narratives, or more precisely the discussion and speculation surrounding those narratives, the yarns and rumours told by sailors which turned them into ‘popular fictions’.¹³⁰ In fact, his description of ‘unfortunate voyagers [who] are lured into smiling and treacherous bays, knocked in the head with outlandish war-clubs; and served up without any preliminary dressings’ bears striking similarities to the fate of Marion du Fresne, whose expedition I mentioned in the previous chapter, and the popular misconception that Cook was cannibalized, part of broader mythology about the fate of Cook which is augmented in Melville’s *Typee* and later in Robert Louis Stevenson’s Pacific writings.¹³¹

So Tommo oscillates between fear of and admiration for the Taipis. In a fitting metaphor for the construction of *Typee*, he adds, on the veracity of cannibalism, that ‘Truth, who loves to be centrally located, is again found between the two extremes’.¹³² These extremes – supposition and evidence – are the two sides of *Typee*; the fictional tales and yarns of travel narratives and sailors, and a more objective ethnographic enquiry. Tommo concludes this passage by stating that cannibalism is ‘moderately’ practised by certain ‘primitive tribes’ but ‘upon the bodies of slain enemies alone’ and ‘those who indulge in it are in other respects humane and virtuous.’ Thus while Tommo asserts that the Taipis do engage in cannibalism (it is ‘chargeable’), he mollifies this claim by stating that it is only practised on slain enemies and that it is their sole defect, as they are otherwise ‘humane and virtuous’, so not barbaric. However, it should be added that Tommo only

¹³⁰ Ibid., 232.

¹³¹ Ibid., 205.

¹³² Ibid., 205.

considers Taipi practices in dialectical relation to Western culture, and only when it suits him. Tommo abandons his defence of cannibalism in Chapter 32 when he discovers the three shrunken heads in Marheyo's house, expressing his 'horror' on seeing that one of them 'was that of a white man.'¹³³ His defence had rested on the assumption that the Taipi only consumed their enemies and – although the heads are not evidence – they are enough to make Tommo think that white men may be enemies. It is at this point in the narrative that Tommo chooses to believe that the Taipis may be cannibals simply because they enjoy being cannibals. As Mitchell Breitwieser has written in an essay on the presentation of sympathy in *Typee*, 'when [Tommo] recognizes that cannibalism is a ritual recognition of man as meat, and so expresses an indifference to the sort of freedom he seeks, he will call the Polynesians demons.'¹³⁴ In other words, once Tommo realises that his impression of Taipi culture as a rejection of the 'evils' of civilization cannot be sustained, he goes from admitting that cannibalism is the 'only enormity in their character' to insisting it is beyond reproach.¹³⁵ Ultimately, of course, it is Tommo who displays barbarism, in the form of colonial violence, striking Mow-Mow with a boat-hook from the safety of the whaleboat onto which he escapes.¹³⁶

Earlier explorers to Nuku Hiva were keen to point out the ways in which cannibalism was a marker of barbarism and desperation, and Tommo's narrative flits from defending the Taipis against these charges to simply labelling them 'savages' in the final chapter.¹³⁷ G. H. Von Langsdorff, who spent time with the beachcombers Edward Robarts and the famously tattooed and well-assimilated Frenchman Jean Cabri, provided some

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 233.

¹³⁴ Mitchell Breitwieser, "False Sympathy in Melville's *Typee*," *American Quarterly* 34 (1982): 406.

¹³⁵ Melville, *Typee*, 205.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 252.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 252.

insights into the conditions and cultural associations of cannibalism. In an interesting passage on Marquesan music, for instance, in which Langsdorff recalls the ‘droning and humming, mournful and melancholy’ music of Nuku Hiva, he suggests that it ‘concludes in the manner of our choral music’. But he claims that cannibals, ‘having no traces of music or any other species of cultivation,’ prefer only the sounds of ‘the minor third’.¹³⁸ Langsdorff does not meet with any cannibals first-hand in his account, so his assumption reveals only an attempt to separate them from the rest of the more ‘cultivated’ islanders in the ethnographic imagination; a false binary designed to make the practise appear further removed from mainstream Marquesan life.

Langsdorff, like many explorers, was fond of list-making as a means of explaining indigenous practices, recalling David Farrier’s notion of the ‘anxious desire to classify and differentiate’.¹³⁹ In his list of motives for cannibalism he placed ‘extreme scarcity’ first, and viewed this as ‘the most general one’ and ‘the most excusable, especially if dead corpses are eaten; for it must be pretty indifferent to a lump of clay; whether it be devoured by worms, animals, or by its fellow-creatures.’¹⁴⁰ While some earlier accounts of the Marquesas suggest that scarcity was a contributing factor, Melville does not. Robarts had recorded the effects of famine in 1802, writing, ‘the Bread fruit on the trees began to be very scanty, and the poor people had no food in store.’¹⁴¹ There is an argument to suggest that, like Tommo, Robarts had become more fully integrated into Polynesian life precisely because he realised that he could keep himself fed this way: shortly after describing the scarcity of 1802, Robarts married a ‘younger sister to the King’ who had been gifted a

¹³⁸ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 160-161.

¹³⁹ Farrier, *Unsettled Narratives*, 109.

¹⁴⁰ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 142.

¹⁴¹ Robarts, *Marquesan Journal*, 18.

plantation 'in the time of famine to Keep her alive.'¹⁴² Robarts also accepted a tattoo on his chest in order to become initiated into a feasting society where he could eat at the king's expense. According to Langsdorff, Robarts 'assured us that he would never have submitted to the operation, if he had not been constrained by the scarcity in the preceding year.'¹⁴³ In Langsdorff's account of his interviews with Robarts, there was a direct correlation between famine and cannibalism for, according to Langsdorff, 'men of Nukahiwa... will, in times of scarcity, kill and eat their wives and children, but not unless pressed to it by the utmost necessity.'¹⁴⁴ He goes on to point out that those who are tattooed members of the feasting society 'appear exempted from being made the sacrifice of such a calamity'. Robarts does not disclose any such knowledge of this in his journal, although it certainly would have been advantageous if true. Langsdorff even suggests that feasting societies, and the tattoos accompanying them, may have been established to 'suppress this horrid and unnatural practice.'¹⁴⁵ There was certainly a connection between tattooing and membership of feasting societies, as Gell and Thomas make clear, but there is little to support Langsdorff's claims that tattooing directly prevented cannibalism.¹⁴⁶

Melville, however, does not associate famine and tattooing as being specifically related to cannibalism in this way, although Langsdorff's account was an important textual influence when he was writing *Typee*. Not only did it provide visual depictions of Marquesan tattooing but included accounts from beachcombers who had actually lived there, which is exactly what Melville was attempting to emulate. The hunger in *Typee*, however, is always Tommo's. The early chapters display a preoccupation with the

¹⁴² Ibid., 122-123.

¹⁴³ Gell, *Wrapping in Images*, 207-209; Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 122.

¹⁴⁴ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 144.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 144.

¹⁴⁶ Gell, *Wrapping in Images*, 207-209; Nicholas Thomas, *Marquesan Societies: Inequality and Political Transformation in East Polynesia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 59.

acquisition of food which is transferred from the domains of the ship to the shore. Tommo brings his preconceptions about the Pacific Islands with him to the valleys of Nuku Hiva and, predictably, these often centre on food and leisure. The tension in the narrative surfaces when he is unable to reconcile these ideas with the reality he sees before him. The narrator undergoes a slow realisation that such stereotypes are deceptive. When Tommo first enters the valley with Toby in Chapter 9, he states that '[h]ow to obtain the fruit which we felt convinced must be near at hand was our first thought.' However, on trying the 'delicious fruit', he realises it is 'much decayed' and when they are finally brought in to the valley, Tommo lets Mehevi know that 'we were in need of food and sleep.'¹⁴⁷ Melville's writing in this passage anticipates a tonal shift from the eighteenth-century imagination's concept of the Pacific islands as sites of profundity and leisure, to the darker, diseased reality that Stevenson would describe at the end of the nineteenth century.

Later in the narrative, Tommo is at pains to depict the grandiose feasts that he partakes in because they compound his fear that he is sometimes being too well-fed, with the suggestion he is being 'fattened up' for ritual consumption.¹⁴⁸ 'They continually invited me to partake of food', Tommo complains at the beginning of Chapter 14, as he describes the islanders going on excursions to bring him 'rare sea-weed' and other exotic victuals. The Taipi valley – a valley of pleasure with a hidden secret – is a duplicitous site that reflects changing perceptions of the Pacific over the course of the nineteenth century, and *Typee* evinces how European fascination with cannibalism was a catalyst for this change.

Langsdorff's insistence that cannibalism involving a corpse is somehow more acceptable is interesting. Presumably he means that consuming the corpse of one who has

¹⁴⁷ Melville, *Typee*, 72.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

died a natural death is preferable to murder with intent to cannibalise. However, he does not make this explicit, and there is the tacit suggestion that those who are cannibalised may be eaten, or at least cooked, alive, a suggestion Melville makes in Chapter 27, although ascribing it to ‘popular fictions’ where crews are ‘eaten alive like so many joints by the uncivil inhabitants.’¹⁴⁹ In Chapter 23, ‘The Feast of the Calabashes’ – one of the outwardly ethnographic chapters – Tommo watches with interest the ‘carved canoe-shaped vessels’ stuffed with breadfruit and ‘the meat of numerous hogs’.¹⁵⁰ Canoes are closely associated with food in Melville’s version of Nuku Hiva, being used to store food for feasting ceremonies. They are the same canoes that, in Chapter 32, he becomes convinced contain the remains of a cannibal feast, making the connection between eating and eating people complete. But it is interesting that in the latter example the narrator sees one anew as a ‘curiously carved vessel of wood’, without the ‘canoe-shape’ he previously describes it by. He is unable – or afraid – to recognise it for its original purpose, if indeed it does contain human remains. The only discernible difference is that this canoe has ‘a cover placed over it’. In what is a fitting metaphor for the valley itself – shrouded and concealed from sight – the covering alone is enough to persuade Tommo that he has witnessed a ‘horrid revelation’ and must leave the island.¹⁵¹ Melville portrays the curiosity of the explorer, on a quest to uncover the truth about his surroundings, as an obstacle and a barrier to integration, suggesting Tommo’s experiences are generalizable.

The canoes appear in Porter’s *Journal*, where their function is also ceremonial, but Melville rewrites their signification. In a chapter titled ‘Religious Ceremonies, Customs &c.’, Porter describes finding a canoe containing the remains of several men:

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 205.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 163-164.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 163-164, 238.

Their heads were placed toward the mountain, and in the stern of each was a figure of a man with a paddle steering, in full dress, ornamented with plumes, earrings made to represent those formed of whales' teeth, and every other ornament of the fashion of the country.¹⁵²

On enquiring to some locals about the meaning of this custom, Porter is offered the brilliantly simple reply that 'they were going to heaven, and it is impossible to get there without canoes.' Although Porter probably did not comprehend the full religious or funerary significance of this display (he is conversing through an interpreter), he was aware that it meant something and that it had been tabooed. But for Tommo, the Taipis lack religious conviction. Although 'hardly a day passed' where he 'did not witness some religious ceremony or other', he concludes that 'the islanders in the Pacific have no fixed and definite ideas whatever on the subject of religion.'¹⁵³ In appropriating the body-laden canoe laden from Porter, Melville divests the image of its religious signification, and replaces it with the narrator's assumption of cannibal practices. In the anagnorisis at the end of the novel, when Tommo finds what he believes are 'disordered members of a human skeleton', Tommo effectively discovers – and the discovery is his alone – that the only true devotion of the Taipis, is cannibalism itself.¹⁵⁴

Using, or abusing, Porter's account in this way to create his version of Taipi cannibalism, Melville – in Lyons's words – 'build[s] his witness around references'.¹⁵⁵ Although, as Lyons claims, the author may be demonstrating how 'the market-conscious and phobic nineteenth-century discourse of cannibalism absorbs, conflates, and refigures' the various genres describing it, such intertextuality no doubt lent his highly embellished

¹⁵² Porter, *Journal of a Cruise*, 110-111.

¹⁵³ Melville, *Typee*, 177.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹⁵⁵ Lyons, *American Pacificism*, 91.

account a degree of authority.¹⁵⁶ The next section suggests how Melville also achieved this in his commentary on the physiological limitations of exploration in exotic locations.

‘Mysterious disease’: The Exploring Body in *Typee*

So far this chapter has demonstrated how Tommo portrays the Marquesas Islands as a decaying version of eighteenth-century notions of the South Pacific. As examples, I discussed the decaying fruit in Chapter 9, and the larger explication of the decayed social mores of the Taipis regarding their apparent predilection for human flesh. Melville gives plenty of hints throughout *Typee* to suggest that the Pacific has become a site for the two-way traffic of disease, corruption and decay, a theme adopted by Stevenson in more detail towards the end of the nineteenth century. In Chapter 26, in largely descriptive and ethnographic prose, Tommo explains:

The vices and diseases introduced among these unhappy people annually swell the ordinary mortality of the islands, while, from the same cause, the originally small number of births is proportionally decreased. Thus the progress of the Hawaiians [*sic*] and Tahitians to utter extinction is accelerated in a sort of compound ration.¹⁵⁷

Tommo makes two points of interest here in relation to perceptions of the South Sea islands. The first is that however distinct they may be from one another, they continue to intermingle in the colonial imagination. This was something that would continue right into the twentieth century. Preparing to board the *Casco* with her husband in 1888, one hundred years after the British colonisation of Australia, Fanny Stevenson would write that they were off to the ‘Gallivantings’, a mock-collective that gives an indication of how a hugely

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁵⁷ Melville, *Typee*, 193.

diverse set of islands was reduced to a single geographical notion, and of how popular Pacific travel had become.¹⁵⁸ Thus Tommo's arguments about Tahiti and Hawaii, which are unlike the Marquesas both topographically, as I have already explained, and in the extent to which they had become integrated into colonial projects, are applied to Nuku Hiva too.

Second is Tommo's observation about depopulation and the progress towards 'utter extinction' of the inhabitants of the islands of Polynesia. Already in the 1840s, this writing approaches the habit of 'placing natives entirely into the past', to borrow Damon Salesa's phrase once more and echoes fatal impact theories of the Pacific.¹⁵⁹ While introduced diseases and vices occupied the journals of early explorers and settlers such as Cook and those of the First Fleet, *Typee* begins to establish this as a two-way process. The missionary William Ellis had written of the introduction of diseases to Polynesia through increased trade in his *Polynesian Researches* but did not make the missionaries themselves complicit, claiming that such diseases were either 'originating in licentiousness', or 'nurtured by the vicious habits of the people' or 'first brought among them by European vessels'.¹⁶⁰ Melville used Ellis against Ellis by placing the blame largely on these Christian travellers in *Typee*. Tommo broadly references the 'scrofulous affections' on the Sandwich Islands to which the islanders are 'indebted to their foreign benefactors' (Chapter 23), the more sweeping 'contaminating contact with the white man' (Chapter 2), and the 'disease, vice and premature death' (Chapter 26).¹⁶¹ In his view, these inevitably follow missionary

¹⁵⁸ Claire Harman, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography* (London: HarperCollins, 2005), 352.

¹⁵⁹ Salesa, "The Pacific in Indigenous Time," 39.

¹⁶⁰ William Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, II, 63-64.

¹⁶¹ Melville, *Typee*, 165, 15, 195-196.

enterprise, but the narrator is himself the victim of a ‘mysterious disease’ in his leg which appears to be exclusive to his travels in the Taipi valley.¹⁶²

There are a few particular points of interest with regards to Tommo’s affliction, which frames his activity in the valley and becomes an integral part of the narrative as a pathology of disease that follows from ship to shore. It is worth noting that Tommo’s leg ailment is the only part of Melville’s real-life visit to Nuku Hiva that can actually be corroborated. We know that Melville was treated for an injured leg when he was incarcerated at Tahiti for being involved in a mutiny on board the *Lucy Ann*, the ship which took him from Nuku Hiva to Tahiti.¹⁶³ The extent of his participation, if any, we do not know. A Dr. Johnstone later made prescriptions for Melville’s leg, but as Mary Edwards points out:

If we accept both that he was in the valley of the Taipi and that his leg was injured early on, the scant four weeks’ residence with limited mobility would have afforded him small opportunity for the sorts of interactions and observations he describes in *Typee*.¹⁶⁴

The question then is the extent to which Tommo’s leg injury might be a plot device, and to what purpose it is deployed. After all, it is Tommo’s ‘mysterious disease’ which informs his decision not to accompany his companion, Toby, when he leaves for the bay. It is possible that Melville chose this particular disease – almost arbitrarily – as the catalyst which establishes the captivity tone for the rest of the narrative, and affords Tommo an introspection and poetic license over his writing up of Marquesan culture, which would be difficult to arrive at if he was still accompanied by Toby in the latter part of the narrative and able to leave of his own volition.

¹⁶² Ibid., 118-119.

¹⁶³ Delbanco, *Melville*, 44.

¹⁶⁴ Edwards, *Cannibal Old Me*, 13.

In *Typee*, illness has a function which goes beyond the content of the narrative and changes its direction. From the very outset, as soon as Tommo enters the valley, he is afflicted by this physical ailment which exposes his body's limitations and one which, like his state of mind in the proceeding chapters, will drastically alter his perception of his body's capacity for freedom of movement:

I began to feel symptoms which I at once attributed to the exposure of the proceeding night. Cold shivering and a burning fever succeeded one another at intervals, while one of my legs was swelled to such a degree, and pained me so acutely, that I half suspected I had been bitten by some venomous reptile [...]¹⁶⁵

Those familiar with Porter will know that the captain found no snakes on Nuku Hiva and Tommo himself states in a later chapter that '[t]here are no venomous reptiles, and no snakes of any description to be found in any of the valleys.'¹⁶⁶ A later passage in Porter's *Journal* does, however, contain references to several men being afflicted with inexplicable leg injuries:

On visiting the New Zealander this day, lieut. Gamble found several of her crew attacked with an unusual and strange swelling in the legs. Upon inquiry, it appeared that some had suffered with this novel complaint nearly two weeks. In every case the inflammation seated itself at the second joint of the leg, and in one or two, the knees were swollen to the size of the body.¹⁶⁷

It is unlikely that Melville injured his leg in any 'mysterious' way and probable that he was influenced by this description from Porter when he created the *Typee* narrative through Tommo's eyes. Porter notes that 'powerful poultices' applied the limbs eventually returned them to their normal size, and this is exactly what happens to Tommo in Chapter 11, although it is a Taipi, Mehevi, who administers the treatment, applying herbs to the injury to make a 'leafy bandage' after pulverising Tommo's leg to the point where it resembles a

¹⁶⁵ Melville, *Typee*, 48.

¹⁶⁶ Bryant, *Melville Unfolding*, 238; Melville, *Typee*, 212.

¹⁶⁷ Porter, *Journal of a Cruise*, 183-184.

‘rump-steak after undergoing the castigating process’ – another image with cannibal undertones.¹⁶⁸

By disavowing any knowledge of the origins of the injury, Tommo defers its pathology onto the environment in which he finds himself. Edwards argues that the injured leg ‘may have been the inspiration for Melville once again to take the ordinary and make it dramatic.’¹⁶⁹ The dramatic elements of the injury can be seen in the way that Tommo collocates this physical illness with his state of mind. When his illness flares up in Chapter 16 under the subheading ‘Melancholy condition’, Tommo describes himself as ‘almost a cripple’ and considers that his ‘disabled condition’ prohibits him visiting the beach where there are reports that boats have been sighted. In this passage melancholia is juxtaposed with the narrator’s restricted movement, to the point where he reflects:

It was at this moment, when fifty savage countenances were glaring upon me, that I first truly experienced I was indeed a captive in the valley. The conviction rushed upon me with staggering force, and I was overwhelmed by this confirmation of my worst fears. I saw at once that it was useless for me to resist, and sick at heart, I resealed myself upon the mats, and for the moment abandoned myself to despair.¹⁷⁰

Here sadness and sickness, mental and physical are linked – Tommo is ‘sick at heart’; his psychological distress becomes located at roughly the centre of his body. He is literally overcome with a sadness which has transferred from his mind to his body and restricts his movement. Tommo is now a prisoner in a double capacity: captive to the Taipis but more significantly, captive in his own body and resigned to any notion of escape.

The connection Melville makes between physical and mental states is underscored only one chapter later, where Tommo finds that he is able to ‘ramble about the valley’ and

¹⁶⁸ Melville, *Typee*, 80.

¹⁶⁹ Edwards, *Cannibal Old Me*, 20.

¹⁷⁰ Melville, *Typee*, 118-120.

experiences ‘an elasticity of mind, which placed me beyond the reach of those dismal forebodings to which I had so lately been a prey.’¹⁷¹ Although Tommo’s health improves and deteriorates at certain important points in the narrative, it is always connected to a revival in his spirits which, in turn, is reflected in how he views the valley at that particular time. In this dramatic tonal shift, once Tommo is able to walk again, he considers that he was ‘[r]eceived wherever I went with the most deferential kindness; regaled perpetually with the most delightful fruits’ and that ‘if ever disagreeable thoughts arose in my mind, I drove them away.’¹⁷² On the surface, this relationship between Tommo’s legs and his sense of wellbeing is perhaps not so unusual if we consider that, from a purely physiological standpoint, the legs are the most vital part of the explorer’s body. With a working pair of legs, the explorer is able to keep moving, to keep experiencing and potentially, if need be, to outrun or escape their enemies. Tommo, crucially, cannot do this. In approaching *Typee* from an angle that considers the relationship between mental and physical ‘sicknesses’, Tommo’s swollen leg represents the planting of the seeds of inescapability which dominate the narrative’s mood after Toby’s departure from the text. Tommo will become the helpless subject of the Taipis, dependent on them for survival while simultaneously lamenting his status as their prisoner.

The language Melville uses to describe Tommo’s leg is significant too. Initially, in fleeing from the *Dolly* and taking in the topography of the valley with its steep cliffs and descents, Tommo describes his illness using the symptoms of tropical diseases – ‘cold shiverings and a burning fever’, the suspected bite from a ‘venomous reptile’ (which he will later claim does not exist) and ‘the alternate sensations’ that would be associated with

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 123.

¹⁷² Ibid., 123-24.

tropical diseases like malaria.¹⁷³ In other words, while Tommo is approaching the valley, he suggests his disease is related to the unique climate, flora and fauna of Nuku Hiva. However, in later chapters, especially once he is ‘taken in’ by the Taipis, the language of the illness changes from climate-based or virological to one of disability. In later chapters, Tommo writes of his ‘disabled condition’ and ‘severe lameness’ and in Chapter 16, mid-way through the narrative, he considers himself ‘almost a cripple’.¹⁷⁴ Melville’s novel contains the hallmark tropes of the disability narrative suggested by Mitchell and Snyder, who propose that ‘disability pervades literary narrative, first, as a stock feature of characterization and, second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device.’¹⁷⁵ Tommo opportunistically becomes an observer of Taipi rites and customs precisely because of the restrictions placed on his body by his illness. As Mitchell and Snyder state, disability narratives are often an ‘artistic contrivance’ which ‘reveals the pervasive dependency of artistic, cultural, and philosophical discourses upon the powerful alterity assigned to people with disabilities.’¹⁷⁶ This alterity, borne out in Tommo’s philosophising on, and ultimately rejection of Taipi society, is the driving force of *Typee*. However, I suggest that Tommo’s ‘mysterious illness’ is one of adaptable pathology, an amalgamation of disease and disability, which changes in aetiology and severity in proportion to his assessment of his capacity for personal freedom. The language employed by Melville to describe Tommo’s symptoms, while resembling those of tropical diseases, also has much in common with venereal diseases, particularly syphilis. The connection is worth pursuing.

¹⁷³ Melville, *Typee*, 48-52; Randall M. Packard, *The Making of a Tropical Disease: A Short History of Malaria* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 21.

¹⁷⁴ Melville, *Typee*, 61, 97-98, 188.

¹⁷⁵ Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 49.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

In the eighteenth century it was widely believed that the syphilis epidemic which had gripped Europe since 1495 had its origins in the return of Christopher Columbus's ships from the New World, where it was assumed his sailors were infected by indigenous women.¹⁷⁷ One way of reading *Typee*, and the hidden valley in which the narrator resides specifically, is as a kind of Edenic microcosm in the throes of contaminating contact from voyagers, missionaries and beachcombers alike. Melville's leg - which he refers to as his 'member' - functions as a site for the physical expression of the contagious contamination commonly associated with European voyages in pristine locations. Writing about the arrival of Europeans to the Pacific in the eighteenth century, Rod Edmond reminds us that, 'according to the constructions of the time an untouched geography rapidly became a pathogenic one.'¹⁷⁸ Tommo's symptoms - fevers, swellings that erupt and dissipate - mimic those of syphilis, and the narrator attributes these to both 'exposure' and a 'venomous reptile', both Edenic images. Syphilis was also known as the 'French disease' in Britain and, during Tommo's residence in the valley, the French navy is especially active on Nuku Hiva.¹⁷⁹

Melville extends the metaphor about contamination and contact as the narrative progresses: the more Tommo becomes integrated into Taipi culture, the worse his ailment becomes. Using Tommo's injured leg as a metaphor for the capacity of prolonged contact to bring sickness, Melville proposes that there is something inherently immoral, and unhealthy, about colonialism. Tommo's symptoms therefore disappear as mysteriously as they arrive in Chapter 17, when he is permitted to walk freely in the valley and experiences

¹⁷⁷ Mahala Yates Stripling, *Bioethics and Medical Issues in Literature* (San Francisco: University of California Press, 2013), 59-60.

¹⁷⁸ Edmond, "Island Transactions," 251.

¹⁷⁹ Melville, *Typee*, 7-8, 79; Linda E. Merians (ed.), "Introduction," in *The Secret Malady: Venereal Disease in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 8.

his 'elasticity of mind', before resurfacing in Chapter 32, at the crucial juncture between the Taipis requesting that Tommo be tattooed, and his discovery of the alleged 'cannibal feast'.

By linking settlement with sickness and degeneration in this way, Melville once again invokes the writings of French philosophers like Buffon and later, the Abbé Raynal, who judged that old world species became enfeebled in New World environments. In his multi-volume *Histoire Naturelle* (1749-1788), Buffon observed that 'all the animals which have been transplanted from Europe' gradually 'became less' in America; and that many species of animal now living in America were 'shrivelled and diminished' copies of those in Europe.¹⁸⁰ This declension, which Buffon termed 'degeneration', was attributed not only to the different climate of America, but to man's dominion over the animal kingdom, which he called 'slavery'. Buffon argued that this combination had the capacity to 'degrade and disfigure Nature', rendering animals weaker.¹⁸¹ Buffon further proposed that the differing complexions and dispositions of humans could be explained along similar lines, stating that '[w]hen man began to disperse himself from climate to climate, his nature underwent several alterations'.¹⁸² In doing so, Buffon helped to initiate a discourse about race and difference which would last well into the nineteenth century. Although Buffon did not state directly that the degeneration he observed in animals would also affect transplanted Europeans, subsequent writers such as Raynal made the connection more explicit. These later arguments had a particular relevance for Americans, who were of course descended from Europeans, and Melville's narrator undergoes a degeneration by exposure during his stay on Nuku Hiva. The 'freemen' of English America were 'visibly

¹⁸⁰ Buffon, *Barr's Buffon*, VII, 38.

¹⁸¹ Buffon, *Barr's Buffon*, IX, 322.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 315.

degenerated' according to Raynal, while the Hispanic Creoles 'though habituated to the climate from their cradle, are not so robust and fit for labour as Europeans.'¹⁸³ Crucially, Raynal had suggested that climate was not the sole factor for degeneration as American immigrants were used to it from birth, while using sexually charged language to establish 'epidemic disorders' that affected colonisers as another consideration.¹⁸⁴ With Melville's implicit evocations of environmental and contagious pathogens, Tommo's 'mysterious disease' shares all the characteristics of degeneration as described by Buffon and Raynal, as well as incorporating aspects of diseases familiar to sea travel.

The linking of physical and psychological distress which Tommo relates was acute for sailors on Pacific voyages and something Melville would have been familiar with from his real life experiences on various ships. The physician Thomas Trotter's work on scurvy makes reference to both the despondent states of mind of its sufferers and their longings. Trotter found that 'persons of melancholic temperament' were especially susceptible to the disease, and that 'depressing passions of the mind' could even produce symptoms.¹⁸⁵ Trotter further observed that the disease frequently manifested itself in a 'longing desire' that every sailor had experienced and, in the second edition, coined the term 'scorbutic nostalgia' to describe a particularly incapacitating desire for all things 'fresh', including vegetables, fields and streams.¹⁸⁶ I make the comparison because, while I would not suggest that *Typee* is a scurvy narrative, it is worth pointing out that Tommo's 'mysterious illness' has several scorbutic markers; the desires I refer to above, but also the vague rheumatism and pains in the lower limbs that were a hallmark of the disease on Bligh's

¹⁸³ Guillaume Raynal, *A Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*, trans. J. Justamond, 5 vols. (London: T. Cadell, 1776), IV, 342.

¹⁸⁴ Raynal, *Philosophical and Political History*, IV, 331.

¹⁸⁵ Thomas Trotter, *Observations on the scurvy: with a review of the theories lately advanced on that disease* (Edinburgh: Charles Elliot, 1786), 23, 37.

¹⁸⁶ Trotter, *Observations on the scurvy*, 2nd ed. (London: T. Longman, 1792), 43-45.

Bounty voyage.¹⁸⁷ It is the same longing desire for fresh experience that drives Tommo toward the Taipi valley in the first place, and one which eventually overpowers him. It is my belief that Tommo's leg illness is, like the text he narrates, a composite, with parts borrowed from ship sicknesses like scurvy, others being attributable venereal disease like syphilis or the more vague 'elevated air' or climate of the Marquesas Islands. Together they function a literary plot device to keep the narrator in a constantly observational, but not participatory state.

The most unusual description of Tommo's leg comes in Chapter 17, when he receives medical attention from an elderly Taipi. Tommo writes:

After diligently observing the ailing member, he commenced manipulating it; and on the supposition probably that the complaint had deprived the leg of all sensation, began to pinch and hammer it in such a manner that I absolutely roared with pain.¹⁸⁸

Melville's description of his limb as an 'ailing member' has obvious sexual connotations. I have assessed the possibility that Melville may be reading syphilis into Tommo's injury, while other scholars have argued that the leg may be a broader phallic symbol in the text. Mitchell Breitwieser, for instance, has put forward the notion that the swollen leg,

if the swelling is a symbol at all [...] probably signifies his attraction to Typee, that dim, half-conscious part of himself that holds him captive through captivation and has to be curbed with the repulsive visions of cannibalism and tattooing.¹⁸⁹

This argument can be partly sustained if we consider that Melville is attracted to certain aspects of Taipi life, albeit only as a counterpoint to Western culture, as my analysis of Chapters 17 and 27 shows, and if we consider his relationship to Fayaway, the stereotyped

¹⁸⁷ Rutter, *Log of the Bounty*, I, 361-363.

¹⁸⁸ Melville, *Typee*, 79-80.

¹⁸⁹ Breitwieser, "False Sympathy in Melville's *Typee*," 416-417.

exotic island woman of the text who, incidentally, is also the least tattooed. However, I think the symbolism makes more sense if we consider that Tommo is impotent, in the literal sense of the word, at this point of the narrative, as he has become reliant on the Taipis for his wellbeing and survival. His ‘ailing member’ is displayed in juxtaposition with the able-bodied Taipis, an example of which (‘a superb-looking warrior’) he has described in detail only a few pages earlier as ‘having elaborate tattooing displayed on every noble limb’.¹⁹⁰ The ‘physical excellence’ of the Marquesas Islanders (Melville was undoubtedly influenced by Cook and Langsdorff’s descriptions) is held up as an intimidating counterpoint to the frailty and limitations of the explorer’s body. The narrator observes in Chapter 25 that ‘there was not a single instance of natural deformity’ among the Taipis, stressing their physical prowess just before his own ailment returns. However, it is not just the stout Marquesan limbs but the tattoos which adorn them that unsettle Tommo to the point where he decides he must escape the valley.

‘Pricking in straight marks’: Tattooing in *Typee*

Tommo’s ambivalent reportage on the Marquesan practice of tattooing oscillates in much the same way as his writing on cannibalism, from a defence and even understanding of the process, to horror and revulsion. As with cannibalism, Tommo obliquely proposes that tattooing is ‘connected with their religion’ despite professing throughout the text his ‘almost entire inability to gratify any curiosity that may be felt with regard to the theology of the valley’ and admitting he ‘hardly knew what to make of the religion’ of the Taipis.¹⁹¹ Although in the narrative of *Typee*, Tommo’s fears of being tattooed and eaten respectively

¹⁹⁰ Melville, *Typee*, 78

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 220, 171, 177.

inform his decision to escape from Chapter 30 onwards, his commentary on the nature of the tattoos themselves is best exemplified in a series of three observations of tattooed Taipis in Chapter 11.

In his first sustained observations on the subject, Tommo describes the ‘elaborated tattooing displayed on every noble limb’ of Mehevi as follows:

All imaginable lines and curves and figures were delineated over his whole body, and in their grotesque variety and infinite profusion I could only compare them to the crowded groupings of quaint patterns we sometimes see in costly pieces of lacework.¹⁹²

With a mixture of pejorative and appreciative language, Tommo expresses both admiration and distaste for the designs on Mehevi’s body. Although he refers to them as ‘grotesque’ his later comparison is to ‘costly’, so well-made, patterns of lacework. The textiles analogy had also been made by Langsdorff, whose descriptions and accompanying engravings of Marquesan tattoos were important source materials for Melville.¹⁹³ Langsdorff had written that Nuku Hivans sought to ‘obtain distinction by the symmetry and regularity with which they are tattooed, as among us by the elegant manner in which they are dressed’ and that tattoo artists are ‘as much sought after as among us a particularly good tailor.’¹⁹⁴ Although Langsdorff suggested that ‘no real elevation of rank is designated by the greater superiority of these decorations’, he concluded that as only persons of rank could afford superior designs, it was, in effect, a ‘badge of distinction.’¹⁹⁵ William Ellis made a similar observation in *Polynesian Researches*, remarking that he had ‘frequently thought the tatauing on a man’s person might serve as an index to his disposition and character.’¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Ibid, 78.

¹⁹³ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 116-122.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 117.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 116-118.

¹⁹⁶ Ellis, *Polynesian Researches*, I, 208.

This interpretation of tattoos as a ‘badge’ is certainly apparent in Tommo’s evaluation of Mehevi and his initial apprehensiveness can be read as his awe at the intricacy of the designs with their ‘infinite profusions’; he projects his inability to comprehend the level of detail involved back on to the artistic process. He goes on to observe the tattoos on Mehevi’s face:

Two broad stripes of tattooing, diverging from the centre of his shaven crown, obliquely crossed both eyes – staining the lids – to a little below either ear, where they united with another stripe which swept in a straight line along the lips and formed the base of the triangle. The warrior, from the excellence of his physical proportions, might certainly have been regarded as one of Nature’s noblemen, and the lines drawn upon his face may possibly have denoted his exalted rank.¹⁹⁷

As well as giving a description of the geometric proportions of Mehevi’s facial tattoos, Tommo is following them visually, from the centre of his head, down through the eyes, below the ears and across the jaw. It is after undergoing this visual tracing that Tommo deduces that Mehevi’s facial tattoos may be a marker of his status and decides that he should ‘secure, if possible, the good will of this individual’ because of his ‘great authority in his tribe’.¹⁹⁸

Melville speaks to the appearance of tattooed persons as being transformed.

Tommo becomes swept up in the visual power of the tattoos, conflating them with the power of the individual they adorn. Melville uses tattoos in *Typee*, as he would later in *Moby-Dick*, to emphasise their captivating but ultimately enigmatic power as markers of difference. In *Moby-Dick*, for example, the harpooner, Queequeg (the son of a South Sea island chief) has tattoos described as ‘hieroglyphic marks... whose mysteries not even himself could read’.¹⁹⁹ Melville suggests that tattoos demonstrate a form of knowledge

¹⁹⁷ Melville, *Typee*, 78.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁹⁹ Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 480-481.

which is more powerful to the observer for its unknowability. These power dynamics are explained by Alfred Gell, who has written that:

Marked, patterned, or scarred skin draws in the gaze of the onlooker, exercises the power of fascination, and lowers certain defences. The eye isolates and follows the mazy pathways of the design and eventually, so to speak, enters the body of the other, because the peculiarity of tattooing is that it is inside the skin rather than on its surface. Thus to view a tattoo is already to be in a position of seduction...²⁰⁰

While in *Typee* Tommo is unnerved by the designs, he is also, like Ishmael in *Moby-Dick*, seduced by their power. Samuel Otter, in his work *Melville's Anatomies* (1999), stresses that 'Queequeg cannot read himself, yet he demands to be interpreted.'²⁰¹ Tommo, unable to read the tattoos as he looks at Mehevi, instead interprets their broad power to deduce that he must be an important person. Tommo undergoes the lowering of his defences that Gell writes of in the process; his initial viewing of the tattoos was that their designs were 'grotesque', but this becomes translated into exaltation for the subject they adorn.

Only a few pages later, however, Tommo reverses this process when he studies the tattoos of his 'faithful valet' and minder in the valley, Kory-Kory. By contrast, Kory-Kory is described as 'a hideous object' as Tommo suggests that he

[h]ad seen fit to embellish his face with three broad longitudinal stripes of tattooing, which, like those country roads that go straight forward in defiance of all obstacles, crossed his nasal organ, descended into the hollow of his eyes, and even skirted the borders of his mouth. Each completely spanned his physiognomy; one extending in a line with his eyes, crossing the face in the vicinity of the nose, and the third sweeping along his lips from ear to ear.²⁰²

However, although the lines marking Kory-Kory's face run vertically as opposed to the triangular shape on Mehevi's, the tattoos are not very dissimilar anatomically. Like

²⁰⁰ Gell, *Wrapping in Images*, 36.

²⁰¹ Samuel Otter, *Melville's Anatomies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 164.

²⁰² Melville, *Typee*, 83.

Mehevi's tattoos, Kory-Kory's also accentuate his eyes, ears and mouth. The difference, it would seem, is that Tommo's eyes are unable to 'follow' these tattoos in the same way, as they are more geometrically distinct than the triangular pattern on Mehevi. Tommo does not undergo the same process of 'seduction' when reading Kory-Kory's tattoos, and this is connected to Kory-Kory's social position: as a 'faithful valet', Kory-Kory lacks the authority that Tommo invests Mehevi with as 'the greatest of the chiefs – the head of his clan'.²⁰³ Furthermore, Tommo states the vertical structure of these tattoos 'always reminded me of those unhappy wretches sometimes observed gazing out sentimentally from behind the grated bars of a prison window'.²⁰⁴ Here Melville is making the popular link between tattooing and criminality, which was particularly acute for Pacific voyagers, since Bligh had identified the *Bounty* mutineers during his open-boat voyage by their distinctive tattooing in a letter to the Admiralty in 1789.²⁰⁵

Gell has written of the high incidence of tattoos among criminals. Referring to the works of Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), an Italian physician and pioneering criminologist who viewed criminality as a product of 'poor breeding' and the desire to be tattooed as the manifestation of a biological predisposition to criminal atavism, Gell suggests that 'Lombroso's criminals appear to have played deliberately into his hand. They have biologized their criminality, stigmatized themselves, just as [Lombroso] is prepared to biologize them and stigmatize them.'²⁰⁶ Although Lombroso's work post-dates *Typee* by a few decades, it is the Western, and predominantly middle-class association, between

²⁰³ Ibid., 79.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 83.

²⁰⁵ Salmond, *Bligh*, 233-234.

²⁰⁶ Gell, *Wrapping in Images*, 12-13.

tattoos and degeneration that Tommo alludes to in Chapter 30 after witnessing the artist Karky in practice, writing that

This incident opened my eyes to a new danger; and I now felt convinced that in some luckless hour I should be disfigured in such a manner as never more to have the *face* to return to my countrymen, even should the opportunity offer.²⁰⁷

Here Tommo both biologises and stigmatises the tattooing process, considering it a bodily disfigurement which would preclude his ability to re-enter American society. Tommo is unable to accept a permanent reminder of his time in the Taipi valley, to have that story permanently inscribed onto, and over, his body as a white American.

The point about inscription is of particular interest if we consider the boom in ethnological sciences that was taking place in America in the mid-nineteenth century, especially with regards to phrenology. Textbooks on the subject included illustrations with parts of the brain ‘mapped out’ in lines and segments across the head, with each section representing a set of intellectual characteristics or emotions. As Samuel Otter points out, the boom in American ethnology was ‘[a]ligned with the justifications for African American slavery, and Native American “removal”’ to the point where, by the mid-century, ‘the claim that American racial groups were inherently unequal, the result of separate and hierarchical divine creations, was approaching the status of “fact”.’²⁰⁸ Melville is not overtly complicit in this project, but his narrator’s sustained comparison of enlightened and ‘savage’ societies throughout the novel is clearly indebted to this burgeoning discourse. The use of this science in colonial endeavours is an extension of the work done by Cook and his voyagers in the late eighteenth-century, where a control-by-knowledge approach was adopted in meticulously detailing the anatomies of Oceanic

²⁰⁷ Melville, *Typee*, 219.

²⁰⁸ Otter, *Melville’s Anatomies*, 34.

people in voyage glossaries. The acute fear of being tattooed makes sense if we consider, as Otter has done, the idea that in *Typee*, tattooing is ‘ethnology as revenge’: ‘Marquesan tattooing is so disturbing because, in the mid-nineteenth century imagination of *Typee*, it represents a native artistic retribution for the Western science of racial ethnography.’²⁰⁹ Tommo is therefore not just afraid that he will be marked in a way that prevents his reintegration into American society, he is fearful that he will lose the illusion of colonial control granted to him by the scientific surety of ethnology.

As a further illustration of this point, we should look to the final tattooed object of Tommo’s attention in Chapter 11, Fayaway. The stereotyped island woman, Fayaway seems to be a composite of the carefree, unashamed and lascivious Western Polynesian women described by Cook’s voyagers. She is also the only Taipi whom Tommo will explicitly admit his attraction towards, his ‘peculiar favourite’. However, with her complexion of ‘mantling olive’, ‘hair of the deepest brown’, ‘strange blue eyes’ and hands ‘soft and delicate of any countess’, the only thing peculiar about Fayaway is her lack of authenticity and discernible difference to other Taipis. This is something Melville is acutely aware of, hence his need to defend it. ‘This picture is no fancy sketch;’ he assures the reader, ‘it is drawn from the most vivid recollections of the person delineated.’ Her ‘general loveliness and appearance’ Tommo claims he ‘will not attempt to describe’, although he has used the preceding paragraph to do exactly that.²¹⁰

But it is Fayaway’s tattoos which reveal the most about her character. Tommo states she is ‘not free from the hideous blemish of tattooing’:

Three minute dots, no bigger than pin-heads, decorated either lip, and at a little distance were not at all discernible. Just upon the fall of the shoulder were drawn

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 45.

²¹⁰ Melville, *Typee*, 86.

two parallel lines half an inch apart, the interval being filled with delicately executed figures.²¹¹

Fayaway's tattoos, being so discreet as to be almost invisible, do not require Tommo's interpretation or revision, as Kory-Kory or Mehevi's do; instead, it is her bare flesh which seduces him. It is hard to be certain how realistic such minimal tattooing was. For instance, Gell has written that while Marquesan tattooing could be remarkably detailed: 'both sexes were tattooed, though only men were tattooed from head to foot, and women's tattoos, though extensive, were mainly confined to the upper and lower limbs, genitalia, and buttocks.'²¹² Langsdorff, in a more contemporaneous but less astutely observed commentary, and one which Melville relied on, suggests that 'the women of Nukakiwa are very little tattooed,' noting the designs on the hands were the most common manifestation but that 'some had their ears and lips tattooed.'²¹³ While Tommo may be seduced by the intricate and extensive designs on Marquesan men, he is more attracted to Fayaway's exposed skin, with her impossibly small lip tattoos, and this is one early indicator of his subconscious rejection of Marquesan culture, which erupts in his violent escape from the valley in the novel's conclusion.

The permanence and inescapability of the tattoo is biologised by Melville in the closing chapters of the book, which seal Tommo's decision to escape the valley. As Nicholas Thomas has claimed, tattoos operate with the paradox of being 'at once permanent and skin deep.'²¹⁴ But the tattoos in Melville's writing transcend external and cosmetic characteristics. As Tommo writes of Karky's instruments in Chapter 30:

Some presented their points disposed in small figures, and being placed upon the body, were, by a single blow of the hammer, made to leave their indelible

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

²¹² Gell, *Wrapping in Images*, 163.

²¹³ Langsdorff, *Voyages and Travels*, 120-121.

²¹⁴ Nicholas Thomas, "The Age of Empire in the Pacific," 94.

impression. I observed a few handles of which were mysteriously curved, as if intended to be introduced into the orifice of the ear, with a view perhaps of beating the tattoo upon the tympanum.²¹⁵

Tommo imagines that the tattoo may be so indelible that it is placed, with surgical precision, directly into the subject's head, almost as if it is 'writing over' the brain itself. This is closest textual example of the kind of reverse-ethnology described by Samuel Otter. The 'assault' of the tattoo no longer occurs just on the surface, but becomes a more internalised, auricular assault. In doing so, Melville anticipates Gell's later writing about Marquesan tattooing, with reference to anthropologist Dan Sperber's work linking anthropology to psychology, that the Marquesas Islands were the setting of 'a virulent local epidemic of this cultural 'disease''.²¹⁶ In Sperber's opinion, just as the epidemiology of disease requires an understanding of pathogens, an epidemiology of cultural representations must be rooted in psychology.²¹⁷ Tattooing arguably occupies the space between biological pathogen and cultural representation.

Although viewing the tattoo as being associated with disease runs the risk of inviting comparisons with the older, ethnographic claims of degeneracy Gell refers to, it is useful to view its application and procedure – as many voyagers would have done – as a physiological process, where a foreign body is inserted under the skin and into the anatomy of the subject. In this sense, tattooing from the Western perspective was seen partly as an infection or corruption of the skin. Ironically though, in Western Polynesia at least, as tattooing was seen as means of tempering a kind of 'contagious sacredness' and was closely associated with certain rituals, particularly the *amo'a*, which involved parents letting blood from their heads following childbirth. Tattoos, Gell suggests, were another

²¹⁵ Melville, *Typee*, 218.

²¹⁶ Gell, *Wrapping in Images*, 163.

²¹⁷ Dan Sperber, "Anthropology and Psychology: Towards an Epidemiology of Representations," in *Man* 20 (1985): 73-89.

method of acquiring such ‘ritual immunity’.²¹⁸ Tattoos could be seen as protective in this sense, as well having apotropaic effects through their designs, ‘ensnaring the gaze’ of the viewer by diverting his attention across ‘so many conflicting pathways of visual interpretation that the will is paralysed.’²¹⁹ However, although the novel sees Tommo either paralysed through illness (his leg) or fear (cannibalism, tattooing), the cumulative effect of his experiences results in a desire that rejects paralysis and chooses flight.

In the end, tattooing becomes another aspect of life on Nuku Hiva that Tommo associates with degeneration and disease. He notes that ‘from the time of my casual encounter with Karky the artist, my life was one of absolute wretchedness’ and it is at this point of potentially permanent cultural contact that his ‘painful malady’ returns ‘with symptoms as violent as ever’, establishing the link between colonial contact and disease.²²⁰ Melville transforms the long-established custom of Polynesian tattooing of the skin into a form of violence that is no longer just ‘skin deep’ but has the potential to ruin life. Along with other Marquesan customs he cannot comprehend, the alleged but uncorroborated assertions of cannibalism, the climate of the valley and its effect on his physical and mental wellbeing, Melville paints of a picture of the Marquesas Islands that have begun a process of transformation into the kind of diseased, corrupt and hopeless landscapes that Robert Louis Stevenson would write about forty years later, as he travelled in the author’s footsteps.

²¹⁸ Gell, *Wrapping in Images*, 131-135.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 189.

²²⁰ Melville, *Typee*, 231-232.

Conclusion

The series of moments in the history of early European and North American encounters with the Pacific that this thesis has discussed can be summarised as a shift from perceptions of the Pacific as a site offering relief to sickly voyagers to a site threatening intruders with disease. The Pacific writings of Robert Louis Stevenson from 1888-94 encapsulate both sides of this image, from pre-conception to diseased reality. In this conclusion, I turn briefly to some of Stevenson's writing in the years before his death at Samoa to recapitulate the themes outlined in this dissertation and to reveal more of the apparent dichotomy between Stevenson's motivations for his travels and his representation of the Pacific Islands as virulent sites of exposure and decay.

The opening paragraph of *In the South Seas* (first published in 1896) offers a succinct account of the salvation from ill-health which Stevenson sought from his travels. He frankly confessed that having 'only the nurse and undertaker to expect', he was attempting to find respite in the South Seas climate.¹ His ambition was therefore both a physical and literary rejuvenation, a personal and professional reparative project. Writing from his yacht, the *Casco*, to friend Charles Baxter, Stevenson outlined his idea for 'a fine book of travels' and one which 'will tell you more of the South Seas after a very few months than any other writer has done – except Herman Melville perhaps'.² That Stevenson would cite Melville as an expert on the South Seas, although Melville's accounts in *Typee* and *Omoo* describe only one Marquesan Island and Tahiti respectively,

¹ Robert Louis Stevenson, *In the South Seas* (London: Hogarth Press, 1987), 5.

² Stevenson, Letter to Charles Baxter, 6 September 1888 in Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Meheew (eds.), *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), VI, 207.

speaks to the American author's continued influence on popular perceptions of the Pacific. Melville's status as a writer of creative fiction contributes to the enduring trope of Pacific travel narratives as fantasy which I examined earlier.

However, over the course of a voyage that would last the remaining six years of his life, Stevenson began to doubt the veracity of Melville's witness, stating in a letter to his American publisher Edward Burlingame in 1890, for example, that Melville 'had no ear for languages whatever'.³ Although Stevenson was not explicit in debunking Melville's account, the extent of his own travels had probably revealed that Melville relied heavily on previous accounts rather than his own experience of the Pacific, which was in any case much more limited than Stevenson's.

In this conclusion, I want to address three specific points that link the previous chapters, and suggest how Stevenson's writings added to a growing body of knowledge about the South Seas. These are the location of the Pacific as a site of disease and exposure; the extended influence of Captain Cook as a recurring character in popular fiction; and the continued penetration of American commercial interest into the Pacific. I turn to one of Stevenson's short stories, 'The Bottle Imp' (first published in 1891) to suggest that the themes of the story neatly summarise the shift from salvation to sickness which this thesis traces.

'The Bottle Imp' tells the story of a Hawaiian sailor, Keawe, who purchases a mysterious bottle from the owner of a large mansion in San Francisco for fifty dollars. Inside the bottle lives an imp, who will grant its owner's wishes. But there is a catch: the bottle must be sold for less than its purchasing price, or it simply returns – 'like a homing

³ Stevenson, Letter to Edward L. Burlingame [February 1890], in Booth and Ernest, *Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, VI, 365-367.

pigeon' – to its owner.⁴ Vanessa Smith's reading of the story as 'a tale of fluctuating value' is powerful and forms the basis of my own, although I use the story's commentary on the detrimental effects of colonial commerce and exploitation to argue that it functions as a conclusion to the century of European and North American contact in the Pacific which has been discussed.⁵ As an example, before selling the bottle to Keawe, its current owner cautions that if subsequent possessors die with the bottle in their possession, they will 'burn in hell forever', thus establishing the bottle as an object that must be constantly traded, for less and less money. Stevenson's conception of the bottle as an ostensibly innocuous item with devastating consequences recalls the extent to which trade and venereal disease operated concurrently on late eighteenth-century voyages, and the source of the smallpox virus supposedly introduced to Australia by British colonisers, thought to be housed in a glass container. The bottle operates as a metaphor for commercial exploitation, where the cheaper an item is sold, the more terrible the consequences.

The thematic trajectory of the previous chapters – from the initiation of inter-island trade in European goods with Cook's voyages, to the establishment of a colonial outpost in New South Wales misguidedly motivated by commercial ambitions, to the frenzy of the American whaling industry which Melville has written of – can be viewed through the lens of increasing Euro-American interest in the South Pacific as a fertile trading ground. The fact that 'The Bottle Imp' was, as Stevenson claims, 'designed and written for a Polynesian audience [which] may lend it some extraneous interest nearer home'.⁶ Stevenson was attempting to locate its message within a framework that was relatable to both Anglophone

⁴ Robert Louis Stevenson, "The Bottle Imp," in *South Sea Tales*, ed. Roslyn Jolly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 75.

⁵ Vanessa Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific: Nineteenth-century Textual Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 179.

⁶ Stevenson, "The Bottle Imp," 72.

and Polynesian cultures. In doing so, Stevenson alerts his readers to a growing recognition of the destructive aspects of colonialism from both European and Polynesian perspectives. However, like *Typee*, 'The Bottle Imp' also distorts the boundaries of fantasy and reality through its channelling of Captain Cook, who had by now achieved mythical status in popular culture.

An example of the story's commentary on Cook's influence occurs as the bottle is being sold to Keawe. The man from San Francisco explains that, along with Napoleon, Captain Cook was one of its prepossessors and 'by it he found his way to so many islands; but he, too, sold it, and was slain upon Hawaii.'⁷ The figure of Cook becomes located within a network of exchange and corruption, for having sold the bottle, as the man explains, his 'protection' was ended. As I suggested earlier in the thesis, Cook's increasing demands for produce were certainly a factor in his death, but Stevenson attributes its causes to a supernatural rather than earthly chain of events, adding fantasy elements to his mythology to which, he suggests, a Polynesian audience would be susceptible. But the story also connects increased contact and exchange with disease specifically, and has particular significance for the Hawaiian islands which, by the end of the nineteenth century, were simultaneously the object of US annexation for commercial reasons and, in the case of Molokai, a site of exile for those infected with leprosy.

As Rod Edmond explains, leprosy was identified in the Hawaiian Islands around the mid-nineteenth century 'and it was believed that the disease had been introduced by Chinese indentured labours brought in to work on the newly established sugar plantations'.⁸ The introduction of leprosy coincides with the period between Melville and

⁷ Stevenson, "The Bottle Imp," 75.

⁸ Edmond, *Leprosy and Empire*, 146.

Stevenson's Pacific experiences, and it compounded anxieties about disease in the Pacific, particularly, in the case of Hawaii, for 'the white settler population of Honolulu', as Edmond states.⁹ Leprosy had been observed on eighteenth-century Pacific voyages too but as with many observations on disease in that century, this was a misdiagnosis and leprosy remained a particularly flexible disease category.¹⁰ George Forster was keen to describe cases of leprosy whenever he believed he encountered them. At Tahiti in 1773, in one of the best examples of a muddled diagnosis I have seen, he claimed there were 'several sorts of leprosy complaints existing among the inhabitants, such as the elephantiasis, which resembles the yaws', demonstrating leprosy as an umbrella term for a number of skin diseases.¹¹ By the late nineteenth-century, however, advances in germ theory and microbiology had stirred anxiety about the contagiousness of the disease for white populations too. As Alison Bashford suggests, leprosy was 'newly 'an imperial danger': white people were contracting the disease.'¹² Leprosy became a more tangible version of the vague tropical illnesses and notions of degeneration described by Melville. 'The Bottle Imp' stresses the stigma and segregation associated with the disease. What was an observational opportunity for eighteenth-century voyagers like Cook and Forster became an institutional concern for white Pacific settlers a century later, particularly on Hawaii.

The moment of crisis in 'The Bottle Imp' occurs when Keawe has sold the bottle on, but realises he is in the early stages of a leprosy infection:

[a]s Keawe undressed for his bath, he spied upon his flesh a patch like a patch of lichen on a rock... and knew that he was fallen in the Chinese Evil [...] it

⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁰ John Miles, *Infectious Diseases: Colonising the Pacific?* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1997), 37-52.

¹¹ George Forster, *A Voyage Round the World*, eds. Nicholas Thomas and Oliver Berghof, 2 vols. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), I, 202.

¹² Alison Bashford, *Imperial Hygiene: A Critical History of Colonialism, Nationalism and Public Health* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 81.

would be sad thing for anyone to leave a house so beautiful and commodious, and depart from all his friends to the north coast of Molokai between the mighty cliff and the sea-breakers.¹³

Stevenson, with his gift – at least compared to Melville – for understanding Polynesian languages likely knew that the Hawaiian name for leprosy was *mai ho'okawale*, or the separating sickness, and his protagonist's first thoughts are on his impending exile.¹⁴ Keawe realises he must get the bottle back to cure himself but after tracking it down, he finds its value has fallen to just one cent. Fortunately, he realises he can dispose of the bottle in Tahiti, where the French centime is worth only a fraction of the American cent, and is able to sell it, finally, to an 'old brutal Haole' whaler who is characteristically insouciant about the prospect of eternal damnation, telling Keawe, 'I reckon I'm going anyway.'¹⁵ The figuring of the hardened sailor as an inveterate sinner owes much to the manner in which mariners were represented during the exploration of the Pacific, particularly as harbingers of disease.

As one of the bottle's previous owners, Cook can be seen – as fatal impact theorists would later claim – as a progenitor of disease in the Pacific and the bottle and its imp, Cook's guide to the Pacific, also suggests something of the nature of the affliction it brings Keawe. The bottle is described variously as being 'white like milk', 'milky', 'milky white' and 'milk-white', emphasising the whiteness of the skin which was characteristic of literary descriptions of the disease, and perhaps the anxiety that the disease caused among white settlers in particular, with segregation enforced along racial lines.¹⁶ The imp's

¹³ Stevenson, "The Bottle Imp," 85.

¹⁴ Edmond, *Leprosy and Empire*, 147; Stevenson, "The Bottle Imp," 74, 76, 77, 99.

¹⁵ Stevenson, "The Bottle Imp," 98, 102.

¹⁶ Edmond, *Leprosy and Empire*, 30-31, 157, 165.

movements are said to be ‘swift as a lizard’, which recollect the scaled skin often associated with leprosy.

Edmond suggests that imp is ‘a figure for the disease itself and the destruction it causes.’¹⁷ I would add that the imp is also a metaphor for capitalism or, more specifically, increasing US commercial interest in and arguably exploitation of Hawaiian resources, especially sugar. Unlike raw (cane) sugar, refined sugar is white, and the plantations and refineries on Hawaii, and their commercial prospects, were a major motivation for the annexation of the islands by the US at the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁸

Stevenson’s Pacific writings encapsulate the major themes of this thesis; the development of anxieties about disease in the Pacific, Cook’s continued influence in popular culture and expanding US commercial activity from the nineteenth century. The Pacific was, as Hau’ofa wrote in 1993, frequently represented as a remote location, which allowed the melding of fantasy and reality recorded by the scurvy-stricken explorers of the eighteenth-century through to the popular fictions of Melville and Stevenson. By the time of Stevenson’s death in 1894, the images of leisure and profusion which characterised early explorative writing in the region gave way to the diseased reality made explicit in ‘The Bottle Imp’ and elsewhere in his later work. The ghost of Cook, the inaugural figure in this transition, continued to haunt popular writing until the end of the century and beyond.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹⁸ William Michael Morgon, *Pacific Gibraltar: U.S.-Japanese rivalry over the annexation of Hawai’i, 1885-1898* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2011), 32.

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